



**CITY OF ALBERT LEA
PARKS AND RECREATION ADVISORY BOARD**

*April 2026 Meeting
4/20/2026, 5:30 pm
Senior Center*

1. CALL TO ORDER:
 - Roll Call
 - Adopt Agenda
2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES:
 - February 23, 2026 Meeting Minutes (March 2026 meeting cancelled)
3. PUBLIC ITEMS:
 - Welcome new City Council Ex-Officio – Ted Herman
4. OLD BUSINESS:
 - Update on Splashpad bathrooms, Bridge Ave dock, new fountains and Frank Hall Bike Shelter
 - Status of Senior Center relocation
5. NEW BUSINESS:
6. STAFF REPORT DISCUSSION:
7. BOARD MEMBER ITEMS:
8. ADJOURNMENT:

Members who will be absent: Amy Leach, Therese Salazar

MISSION STATEMENT

“To provide quality recreational opportunities and to plan, acquire, develop and maintain attractive and safe parks and facilities that enhance the quality of life in the community of Albert Lea.”

PARKS & RECREATION
ADVISORY BOARD
MEETING MINUTES

February 23, 2026 5:30 pm
City Arena

Members Present:

Amy Leach
Kent Rahn
Wende Taylor
Tom Jones
Joe Staloch

Members Absent:

Whitney Sauer
Therese Salazar
Ted Herman (ex-officio) City Council Meeting

Staff in Attendance:

Ryan Hajek, Assistant Director of Public Works
Cathy Malakowsky, Engagement and Enrichment Director
Ben Bangert, Parks Superintendent
Afton Wacholz, Recreation Office Manager

Others in Attendance:

Jill Bangert

Call to Order:

The meeting was called to order by Amy Leach at 6:00pm.

Adopt Agenda:

Wende Taylor made the motion to approve the agenda for tonight's meeting and Kent Rahn seconded the motion. The board voted in favor of said motion 5-0. Motion declared passed.

Approval of the Minutes:

Kent Rahn made the motion to approve the minutes from the December 15, 2025 (January 2026 meeting was cancelled) meeting and Amy Leach seconded the motion. The board voted in favor of said motion 5-0. Motion declared passed.

Public Items:

None

Old Business Items:

Bridge Avenue Dock – Ryan Hajek

The dock is scheduled to ship early March and we have already received the kayak launcher. Tom Jones asked about the lake bottom near the new dock area and Amy Leach discussed the rocks that could be an issue near the bumper rail.

Splash Pad Bathrooms

It is getting close to being finished. Staff are waiting on the bathroom partitions and the possibility of an epoxy flooring install. The goal is to finish by April 1st. Staff discussed the locking situation for the bathrooms to avoid vandalism. The doors will lock and unlock automatically like the Lakeview Park public bathroom.

There will also be security cameras installed and staff are deciding on the best line of sight. The internet will come from the theater.

New Business Items:

Welcome new board members – Tom Jones and Joe Staloch

Election of board chair and vice-chair

Amy Leach voiced her interest in the chair position for 2026. Kent Rahn made the motion to appoint Amy Leach as the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board Chair for 2026 and Tom Jones seconded the motion. The board voted in favor of said motion 5-0. Motion declared passed.

Wende Taylor voiced her interest in the vice-chair position for 2026. Joe Staloch made the motion to appoint Wende Taylor as the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board Vice-Chair for 2026 and Kent Rahn seconded the motion. The board voted in favor of the said motion 5-0. Motion declared passed.

2026 Parks and Recreation Advisory Board Priority Project Discussion

Cathy Malakowsky discussed as part of a Board Development effort a few years ago, the Board set its top 5 priorities to focus on: 1) Restrooms by the Splash Pad. 2) Upgrading aging facilities including the Arena and Aquatic Center. 3) Indoor off-season fieldhouse. 4) Developing the trail along the former UP rail line. 5) Upgrading Snyder Fields.

The restrooms near the Splash Pad will open this year. The upgrades to the Arena and Aquatic Center will be done this year. Developing the UP rail line – named the Songbird Trail – is starting this year. The trail and upgrades to Snyder Fields are part of the proposal to fund with a local sales tax.

With so much progress on its priorities, the Board decided in December to reviews its priorities and perhaps set new ones.

Setting priorities helps staff and the Council focus their resources to move projects forward. While some projects are moving forward, the Board may decide to keep them as priorities to help ensure they keep progressing. Or the Board may decide its confident in the plan for the projects and decide on different priorities. There are numerous ideas. While all may be worthwhile, which ones should move forward first? What will help the Board achieve its mission?

The **Top 5** projects the board voted on to set for the 2026 are as follows:

6 votes – Songbird Trail

4 votes – Miracle Field

4 votes – Mini Golf Course – possibly at the 300 Broadway block location

4 votes – City Beach marina

3 votes – Security cameras at City facilities and parks

Other projects were voted on as follows:

2 votes – Outside patio City Arena

2 votes – Channel Rehab

2 votes – Trail from New Denmark Parks to Blazing Star Trail

1 vote – Edgewater Bay Pavilion enhancement (outside patio, A/V equipment, etc)

1 vote- Teen Programming

1 vote – Replace portable toilets with use of park buildings as public bathrooms

Presented projects from staff:

- Developing the Songbird Trail (sales tax proposal)
- Snyder Field upgrades (sales tax proposal)
- Pickleball courts (sales tax proposal)
- Building the Miracle Field next to the Inclusive Playground (sales tax proposal)
- Flume speed slide at Aquatic Center (CIP)
- Outside seating area at Arena entry such as benches around a firepit (CIP)
- Channel rehab with Watershed District (CIP)
- Trail from City Beach to New Denmark Park (CIP)
- Trail from New Denmark Park to Blazing Star Trail (CIP)
- City Beach marina (CIP)
- Security cameras for parks and facilities
- Developing an area for teen programming
- Sports areas for other cultures like caneball
- Replacing portable toilets with restrooms (Brookside boat landing as example)
- Creating a park space from the vacant lots on the 300 block of Broadway Avenue (mini golf course, cornhole, teen space)
- Mini Golf Course (very popular with staff)
- Hayek Field back stop netting/reconstruction of press box and bleachers
- Outdoor archery range
- ADA accessibility to warming houses/play park buildings from street or parking area
- Indoor off-season field house
- Enhancements to Edgewater Bay Pavilion:
 - Keycard system
 - Patio area
 - Gas fireplace
 - AV equipment
- Mountain biking course
- Skate Park Replacement – just equipment at current location or moving skate park completely; some funding in CIP

- Long term plan for Aquatic Center

Staff Report Discussion:

Recreation Manager Position Update –

Cathy reported that there were approximately 41 applications and the interview committee decided to offer an interview to eight candidates. Six of those eight accepted an interview. The top two candidates will go through a second round of interviews next week with the hopes of having an advisory board member included in the interview committee.

Staff Updates:

Recreation: Report provided by Afton Wacholz and Dani Bakken;

- Young Athletes will wrap up on Tuesday, February 24. There are 17 kids registered for this program
 - Young Athletes is an inclusive recreation program for kids ages 4-6
- Adult fitness classes with Annie – Weights and Pilates will run through Wednesday, March 11. There are currently 25 people signed up.
- Adult women’s volleyball completed their winter season on Monday, February 16. Adult co-ed volleyball will run through mid-March.
- The candle light walk at the Myre-Big Island State Park was held on Friday February 13, in conjunction with the Big Freeze weekend event. It was a beautiful night for the event, with roughly 325 people participating.
- Warming houses closed for the season on February 17. There was a total of 1,923 visitors in the 34 days that we were open.
 - Hawthorne- 151
 - Hayek- 765
 - Academy-138
 - Lakeview- 869
- Summer jobs are now posted on the City’s website. The Recreation department will be hiring for Rec Assistants, Lifeguards, Play Park Leaders, Pool Attendants, Pool Managers and Adult Volleyball Supervisors.
- Community dock and garden renewal applications for the 2026 season will be mailed out February 25. Renters from 2025 will have until March 31st at 4p to return their renewal applications and pay appropriate fees to secure their locations.
- Rock on Ice will be making a return again on Friday, March 6 from 7-9p at the City Arena. There will be a glow in the dark theme. This is a family friendly event with DJ Abrego bringing the tunes appropriate for all ages. Cost is \$5 per skater, with free skate rentals while supplies last.

Parks: Report provided by Ryan Hajek and Ben Bangert;

- Emerald Ash Borer List #4- Annual treatment program is compiled and will be edited and submitted for spring treatment.
- Kayak Launcher for Fountain Lake Dock addition has been delivered, awaiting hardware and assembly instructions.
- Splash Pad Bathrooms Project- Collected estimates for epoxy floor sealing, awaiting approval for project addition.

- Kelly Plumbing will follow up with sinks, and stool installation.
- Parking bollards will be added to prevent cars from parking over sidewalk and safety
- Seeking estimates for back stop net replacement at Hayek Fields. Looking into internet connection for improved Live Game Reporting.
- Several pieces of equipment were approved to be replaced. Mower, woodchipper, Toro ball field vehicles/ drags, F-350 Ford Pickup
- Christmas Pole Decorations- Refurbishment materials delivered and assembly continues. Candy Canes and Stockings.
- City of Hartland – Proceeding with purchasing older- unused decorations and trailer.
- New Banners for Broadway and Bridge Ave are in and will be installed this spring. CVB paid for half of the expense.

City Arena: Report provided by Afton Wacholz and Josh Heilman;

- Facility updates –
 - See Facilities Project Update below
 - Updating HSEM Tier II reporting with Ethylene Glycol, Ammonia, and Chemical Map
 - Working on CIP vehicle purchases and Zamboni quotes
- Events -
 - C Peewee Youth Tournament Feb 6-8
 - ALHS Girls Section Semi-Final game vs Simley Feb 7
 - Albert Lea hosted the U12 Girls District tournament Feb 13-15
 - Albert Lea will be host to the MCH Regional Hockey tournament Feb 20-22
 - Rock on Ice March 6 7-9p
 - Albert Lea Figure Skating Club annual show will be March 28-29
- Other events –
 - Weekday public skate and stick and puck calendar can be found on our website or Facebook page. Special skating schedule for during Spring Break will be available.
 - Game 7 Industries from Mankato will be putting on a mini hockey camp March 8, 10 and 12. This will be open for ages Mites to high school. Registration can be found on their website:
<https://frontofficehockey.com/program/1770316444094x749043852330664000>
 - Ducks Unlimited Banquet April 11 on Colstrup rink floor

Aquatic Center: Report provided by Josh Heilman;

- Surge pit repair will begin early spring
- Final construction will resume shortly on completion of the ticketing building and other project items needing to be completed such as fencing, gates, concrete work, etc.
- Staff is working on 2026 budget purchases as preparation for the summer 2026 season are underway.

Senior Center: Report provided by Dani Bakken;

- Trips -

- Treasure Island Casino Day Trip will be held on March 24.
- Programs/Events –
 - Valentine’s Day Dance and Luncheon was held on Feb. 13. 25 people attended the event. Dale Peterson played the electric guitar and there was lasagna served for lunch.
 - Art with Emelia - Feb. 25

Marion Ross Theater: Report provided by Afton Wacholz;

- **Facility Updates –**
 - See Rec facilities update below.
- **Upcoming events –**
 - Nunsense runs Feb 19, 20, 21, 22(m), 25, 26, 27 and 28(M).

Other: Report provided by Cathy Malakowsky;

- The Albert Lea City Council is voting tonight, Feb. 23, on ordering bids for the first construction phases of the Songbird Trail: From Fountain Street to Highway 13; from Sunset Street to roughly County Road 74; and repair or rebuild of four bridges. Note there will be a gap across the highway until determining a crossing acceptable to MnDOT.
- The City received 41 applications for the Recreation Manager position and is interviewing 6 candidates this week. If a member of the Parks and Recreation Board would like to participate in the second interviews, likely to be held the week of March 2, please let Cathy know.

Referendum Project Updates

City Arena

Lobby and office area

- Staff are continuing work on furniture for the skate office, new lobby and Rec office.
- Glass is expected to be ready in the next week for the Rec Window. Southern Lock and Glass will be creating a custom sliding glass service window for that space.

Refrigeration and arena floor

- 90% complete with insulation for the mechanical room and refrigeration lines for the new cooling system
- 90% complete with electrical for the new cooling system
- Ahern is designing a new sprinkler head layout for the mechanical room
- Cedar Creek is completing the communication panel for the Solar System Feb. 18-19
- Rink Systems will start dasher board installation Feb. 23
- Harris Mechanical finished the duct sock and heater installation in Colstrup Arena Feb. 9-11
- Service Master deep cleaned Colstrup Arena Feb. 9-14
- Total Mechanical filled the new cooling system with Ethylene Glycol Feb. 16-18
- Total Mechanical will fill Ammonia for the new cooling System Mar. 2-3
- Total Mechanical will do a test start up on the new cooling system Mar. 3

- Jet Ice and R&R Specialties will complete updates for the new RO system Feb.25
- Working with Jim and Dudes & Harris Mechanical on HVAC programming for the City Arena and Marion Ross Theater

Aquatic Center

- Work will resume early April on the new ticket building as well as fencing, and finishing concrete work around the new building.

Marion Ross Theater

- Final punch list items are being completed, including finishing paint in lobby, touch up areas around thermostats, window cleaning, replacement of lights around the front arched windows, etc.

**** Top 5 Project Updates:**

Restrooms by Splash Pad –

- Update under Parks updates

Develop the Union Pacific rail to trail –

- No new updates

Develop an off-season field house –

- Status of the non-city group working on this idea?

Upgrade Snyder Fields –

- No new update

Update aging facilities, including the City Arena and Aquatic Center –

- See update under Referendum Project Updates

Board Member Items:

Tom Jones –

- Has interest in seeing an adult softball pick-up game option available, possibly on Sundays at Snyder Fields

Adjournment: Wende Taylor made a motion to adjourn the Park Board meeting and Kent Rahn seconded the motion. The board voted in favor of said motion 5-0. Motion declared passed. Meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Afton Wacholz

Parks and Recreation Advisory Board Secretary

Approved:

Amy Leach
Park & Recreation Advisory Board Chair

April Parks and Recreation Department Updates from Staff

Recreation: Report provided by Afton Wacholz and Dani Bakken;

- The Easter Bunny Deliveries were on Friday April 3, with 25 participants.
- Easter Egg Hunt was held on April 4. There were roughly 200 kids participate in the egg hunt.
 - Due to the weather, the hunt was held at the Albert Lea High School Gym.
- Learn to Skate started on Sunday April 12. It will run for 6 sessions and concluding on May 17. There are 68 registered for the program. This program is designed for skaters ages 3 and older.
- Hiring has begun for summer recreation positions, including neighborhood park leaders, lifeguards, pool attendants and rec assistants.
- Summer Fun Guides are at the printers and will be mailed out the last week of April.
- Registration for swim lessons and other summer programming will begin on May 4 at 7:45 am either online or at the Recreation Office.
- Recreation and the library are partnering for an open house on Monday, May 4 from 3-6pm at the Albert Lea Public Library.
- Summer sand volleyball league will start the week of May 11. Registrations are due by May 4.
- Neighborhood park programming will begin on Monday, June 1.
- Aquatic Center will open for the 2026 season on Friday, June 5.
- Partnering with Blue Zones to offer a children's bike rodeo on Thursday, May 7 at the Edgewater Bay Pavilion from 4-6pm.
- There are several available garden plots available for rent at both Brookside and Spark Ave gardens.
- Dock permits on Fountain Lake are available for rent for the 2026 season. List of available dock spaces is at the Recreation Office.

Parks: Report provided by Ryan Hajek and Ben Bangert;

- Splash Pad bathroom flooring complete. Waiting on Kelly's Plumbing to install sinks, stools, and urinals. As time allows, will add parking bollards to protect building.
- Fountain Lake dock has been delivered. Have requested Brody Page of 3,2,1 Outdoors to assist with installation. Sections will be hauled from Humane society parking lot to beach when we have staff available. Then dock and kayak launcher can be installed in due season.
- EAB list for treatment program has been submitted for bids for 2026 injection program.
- Merrick Building Site leveled and seeded with clover.
- Spring fertilizer is being applied.
- Two new Toro MDX utility vehicles have been delivered and will be used for summer baseball season.
- Anticipating new Vermeer woodchipper to be ready by the end of the month.
- Summer/ Seasonal Job Applications are being collected. Most staff will begin later in May, with exception of lawn mowing crew.
- Annual Arbor Day Event will distribute 385 tree seedlings to the majority of 3rd grade students in Freeborn County. Only students missing are St. Theodore's Catholic School. The contact has changed and just couldn't confirm by ordering deadline. 150 additional seedlings are going to

Mower County- Spruce Up program. Same/ similar program- donations from Cargill Foods in Albert Lea.

City Arena: Report provided by Afton Wacholz and Josh Heilman;

- Facility updates –
 - See Facilities Project Update below
- Events -
 - Albert Lea Figure Skating Club annual show was held March 28 at 7p and March 29 at 2p.
 - Youth hockey began a spring league for mites through Squirts on Tuesday and Thursday evenings.
 - Learn to Skate began on Sunday, April 12 and will run on Sundays for 6 weeks.
 - Adult Open Hockey will run for two more Tuesdays, on April 21 and 28 at 7:45p.
- Other events –
 - Weekday public skate and stick and puck calendar can be found on our website or Facebook page. Special skating schedule for during Spring Break will be available.
 - Ducks Unlimited Banquet was held on April 11 on Colstrup rink floor.

Aquatic Center: Report provided by staff;

- Aquatic Center will open for the 2026 season on Friday, June 5.
- Family and individual passes are currently available for purchase online or with the Recreation Office.
- The City Council recently approved \$140,000 of work on the pool that is needed prior to opening. Three different companies will sandblast, patch concrete and paint both pools and bordering deck area due to the premature weathering of the latest painting done in 2024.

Senior Center: Report provided by Dani Bakken;

- Trips -
 - Birthday Candles - Theater Day Trip will be April 27.
- Programs/Events –
 - Tech Tuesday will be held on April 14.

Marion Ross Theater: Report provided by Afton Wacholz;

- Facility Updates –
 - See Rec facilities update below.
- Upcoming events –
 - Father of the Bride will run April 23-26, 29-30 and May 1-2. Get your tickets now at www.actonbroadway.com.
 - Auditions for My Fair Lady will be held on April 27 and 28 from 7-8p.
 - ACT will be holding a summer Theater Camp July 6-10. Camp is for ages 8-13.

Other: Report provided by Cathy Malakowsky;

Aquatic Center repairs

The council also voted to repair the paint in both pools and the surrounding deck at the Albert Lea Aquatic Center. The surfaces were last scraped, acid-etched and painted in 2024 with a touchup in 2025. The paint deteriorated over the winter to the point that immediate repairs are needed for the Aquatic Center to open this season.

After studying several options, the Recreation Department recommended contracting three different service providers to sandblast, make concrete repairs, and paint the surfaces at a total cost of \$140,000. The other two options totaled \$326,000 and \$223,000. The council voted to accept the recommendation.

Senior Center design proposal

In addition, the council voted to approve a \$14,000 proposal to design a new Senior Center within the Jim and Dude's building at 1705 S.E. Broadway Ave., the former HealthReach building. Two local business owners have each donated \$5,000 for the design, resulting in a net cost to the city of \$4,000 or less. The Recreation Department needs an architectural design to seek construction estimates for remodeling part of Jim and Dude's into a Senior Center.

A community-based team conducted a holistic assessment of the Senior Center in 2025, using standards set by the National Council on Aging and National Institute of Senior Centers. The Senior Center meets all standards except for the facility, housed within the Skyline Plaza. The main issue is lack of accessibility for people with disabilities. The current facility also has recurring roof leaks and sewer issues plus the parking lot is in poor condition.

The Senior Center sought proposals for its location last year and received three: 1) The current location; 2) Albert Lea Healthcare Coalition in the former Herberger's building; and 3) Jim and Dude's. The Senior Center Board voted in December 2025 to recommend the council move the center to Jim and Dude's.

After the design phase, the move would require council approval for construction and a long-term lease.

Referendum Project Updates

City Arena

Lobby and office area

- Staff are continuing work on furniture for the skate office, new lobby and Rec office.

Refrigeration and Colstrup Arena

- Nystrom is now being cooled by the new refrigeration system as of March 30.
- Work continues on the geothermal system and should wrap up the first week in May.

Aquatic Center

- Concrete was poured around the new ticket building
- Roofers should be completing roof on ticket building on April 18.

- Ticket building windows, rolling service window, doors and counters will be completed in the next two weeks.

Marion Ross Theater

- Staff is working on finalizing new window lights for the front arched windows of the lobby.
- ACT window decals will be replaced soon.

**** 2026 Top 5 Project Updates:**

Developing the Songbird Trail –

Freeborn County and the City of Albert Lea report more continued success at securing grant money to build the Songbird Trail along 15 miles of a former rail line between Albert Lea and Hartland.

The county will receive nearly \$2.6 million toward building a pedestrian bridge over Minnesota Highway 13, estimated to cost \$4.5 million total:

- \$1.15 million in a federal Transportation Alternatives Grant administered by the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT)
- \$1.41 million in a MnDOT Local Partnership Program grant



The Songbird Trail bridge will likely cross Highway 13 in the vicinity of Shoff Park.

The city and county requested that MnDOT support several options for crossing Minnesota Highway 13, but MnDOT determined the pedestrian bridge to be the most safe and feasible crossing for the four-lane highway.

Bridge construction is scheduled for 2029 or 2030 to align with grant funding.

Trail construction begins this year with paving two segments and converting existing rail bridges to pedestrian bridges.

So far, the project has received \$4.1 million in grants toward an estimated \$8 million total. Strong community support continues, with 89% of residents in a recent survey backing the trail.

The long-term vision is to connect the Songbird Trail to the Sakatah Singing Hills State Trail near Waterville via New Richland and Waseca for a 50-mile regional trail system.

See [Freeborn County's website](#) for more project information.

Completing the Miracle Field – no update

Mini Golf Course – no update

City Beach marina – no update

Security Cameras for Parks and Facilities – no update