

**MINUTES OF THE
PARKS & RECREATION COMMITTEE
MEETING DESTIN CITY HALL BOARDROOM
APRIL 22, 2025, - 4:00 PM**

1. CALL TO ORDER:

Chairwoman Weidenhamer called the Parks & Recreation Committee meeting to order at 4:07 p.m. on Tuesday, April 22, 2025, in the Destin City Hall Boardroom.

2. ROLL CALL:

Members Present

Autumn Weidenhamer
Aubrey Santucci
Jessica Julian
Jan McGraw

Members Absent

Allison Stephens
Bryan Otto

Staff Present

Ryan Reed P&R Deputy Director
Bryan Kellar Recreation Supervisor
Sharon Gardner Records Mgmt. Specialist

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

A.) March 25, 2025, Parks and Recreation Committee Meeting Minutes.

Motion made by Chairwoman Weidenhamer and seconded by Committee member Jessica Julian to approve the minutes from March 25, 2025. The motion passed 4-0.

Chairwoman Weidenhamer announced the new member of the committee, Aubrey Santucci, and made a motion to add the introduction to the Agenda. Committee member Jessica Jullian provided the second. The motion passed 4-0.

4. NEW BUSINESS

A.) Norriego Point Entrance Sign

Parks & Recreation Deputy Director Ryan Reed directed the committee members to the photo in their packet showing the new sign to be erected at the entrance to Norriego Point Recreation area. Members and staff all agreed that the rendition of the sign looked very nice, and all were excited to see it installed.

B.) Morgan Sport Center-Information only

Deputy Director Reed gave the following update on the status of the Morgan Sports Center Project.

- A new three-bay maintenance building will replace the existing shed.
- A new bathroom facility will be built, featuring additional space for indoor equipment storage and use as a fieldhouse.
- Batting cage renovation is included, with updated nets, lighting, and power.
- The project plans were included in a 160-page packet and were previously discussed about a year ago.
- The development order was recently approved by the city council, and this update was for informational purposes only.
- Final decisions on details such as colors and internal layouts are still pending and will be brought back for review.

Discussion between committee members and Deputy Director Reed continued regarding the length of the lease between the city and Destin Water Users and the timeline for how long before the project was completed. Deputy Director Reed explained that the timeline will become clearer once the project is put out for public bidding.

5. OLD BUSINESS

A.) Park Inspection Assignments

Deputy Director Reed explained that each committee member will be assigned to specific parks to evaluate using a standard form. It was mentioned that parks haven't been assigned yet due to turnover and delays. Previously, members of the committee took 4-5 parks based on preferences (sports vs trails, etc.). Evaluation submissions are expected twice a year-spring and fall- with summer being optional due to high activity. Deputy Director Reed offered to help any committee member unfamiliar with park locations, referencing the map that was included in their packet.

Chairwoman Weidenhamer reminded members about the committee's dog park adoption effort, explaining that each month a different member visits the dog park to inspect, clean, and report issues. It was noted that the plan is to send forms and finalize assignments before the next meeting and to accommodate changes if needed.

B.) Arbor Day 04/25/2025

Deputy Director Reed introduced the upcoming event: April 25th at Kell-Air Nature Walk Park where they will plant a Bald Cypress Tree. He noted that the start time is 10AM, with staff arriving earlier to prepare, and he invited members to attend if available. Discussion ensued regarding the tree grant that the city received which included 12 trees to be planted at various parks.

6. COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS/QUESTIONS

Chairwoman Weidenhamer mentioned that they didn't make a motion regarding approving the Norriego Point Entrance Sign.

Committee member Jessica Julian made the motion to approve the sign, second was provided by Jan McGraw. Motion passed 4-0.

Chairwoman Weidenhamer brought up an issue related to park inspection assignments. She noted that Councilwoman Trammell had previously raised concerns that while committee recommendations were being implemented, there was no formal record linking those actions to the committee. The importance of documentation was emphasized, particularly for accountability and to demonstrate to the City Council that the committee is making tangible contributions. Suggestions were made that committee members should submit recommendations in writing to city staff and to ensure that staff provide follow-up once actions are completed. It was stressed that this is the way to track progress and validate the committee's impact.

Chairwoman Weidenhamer then shifted the conversation to a new member introduction that she had forgotten to cover earlier in the agenda. Committee member Aubrey Santucci introduced herself as a long-term Destin resident of 37-38 years, mentioning her previous service as a past chairperson for the Parks & Recreation Committee. Having more time in her schedule due to changes in family and work commitments, she expressed enthusiasm to return and contribute to the committee again.

A.) Chairwoman Weidenhamer

Pooch Palooza Recap-

Chairwoman Weidenhamer provided a recap of the pooch palooza and announced how successful the event was. The event more than doubled its fundraising goal and saw more than double or triple the expected attendance. Appreciation was expressed for the committee's support, with a desire to continue growing the event annually. Discussion followed regarding the potential to establish the first Saturday in April as the recurring date for the Pooch Palooza. Several committee members raised awareness that Easter may fall on the first weekend of some years, potentially conflicting with event planning. Deputy Director Reed added that with proper advanced notice and coordination with the scheduling team, including Recreation Supervisor Bryan Kellar, who oversees tournaments, the committee should be able to reserve the preserved weekend when possible.

Chairwoman Weidenhamer continued the discussion by informing the committee members that over \$1000 was raised from the recent event, emphasizing the importance of using the funds in a way that results in visible improvements to the park. Suggestions included upgrading drinking fountains, with Committee member Jessica Julian raising the idea of a dog shampoo/washing station. Chairwoman Weidenhamer invited committee members to reflect on alternative ideas and suggested visiting the topic at the next meeting, clarifying that since funds were raised through the Parks Foundation, they should go toward "Wish List" items- enhancements beyond routine maintenance that aren't covered under the general Parks and Recreation budget. Various committee members supported taking more time to evaluate and brainstorm ideas with several of

the members expressing gathering input from park visitors and revisiting the discussion at the next meeting.

Artificial Turf

Chairwoman Weidenhamer initiated the discussion on artificial turf as a potential improvement to the dog park, referencing a vendor, Forever Lawn Emerald Coast, who showed interest during Pooch Palooza. It was noted that the vendor's quote was prohibitively expensive, and the suggestion from Chairwoman Weidenhamer was perhaps installing artificial turf in smaller sections as a possible solution and offered to invite the vendor to present to the committee at a future meeting. Committee member Jessica Julian compared the issue to the earlier discussion on dog wash stations-highlighting that artificial turf has both advocates and critics. She supported the idea of learning more and suggested that having an expert speak to the group could help the committee make a more informed and balanced decision. Committee member Jan McGraw supported bringing in a knowledgeable vendor, emphasizing that expert insight could benefit the entire community and help in weighing the pros and cons effectively. Committee member Aubrey Santucci who works in landscaping, cautioned against artificial turf, citing experience with odor and sanitation issues in both commercial and residential settings. Deputy Director Reed, from a maintenance and operations perspective, offered extensive insight. He noted that the city has re-sodded the dog park multiple times, even using high-grade Bermuda grass for durability. Deputy Director Reed supported the idea of sectional artificial turf to help preserve park conditions while still maintaining a blend of grass and other surfaces like sand. Chairwoman Weidenhamer concluded the discussion by reiterating that artificial turf technology has evolved, with some versions allowing better drainage and odor control. She offered to follow up with the vendor to see if they are still interested in presenting to the committee.

Little Free Library Work Plan

Chairwoman Weidenhamer reintroduced the idea of installing Little Free Libraries in public parks, an initiative that had been previously discussed but was delayed due to Pooch Palooza and other events. The proposal was a phased implementation, beginning with one park per year, with the goal of promoting literacy and community engagement through book exchanges. Chairwoman Weidenhamer mentioned that they already have boxes available in storage and suggested seeking sponsorship to cover installation costs, which could also offer a small advertising opportunity for donors. Committee member Santucci asked for clarification on how existing Little Free Libraries around town are maintained, wondering whether they were managed by individuals or through a formal organization. Chairwoman Weidenhamer confirmed that many are on private property, often maintained by homeowners. Deputy Director Reed contributed that the Boy Scouts were responsible for the ones at beach access points, and there was potential to engage the Girl Scouts for similar projects, which could even qualify as a badge-earning activity. Bryan Kellar, Recreation Supervisor, mentioned expanding the Little Free Library concept to the dog park, by installing small boxes filled with dog toys, tennis balls, frisbees, and other pet-friendly items for public use and exchange. Chairwoman Weidenhamer concluded the discussion by promising to draft a work plan

and asked for feedback or additional ideas emphasizing the visibility and accessibility benefits of placing these libraires in public areas, especially given the city's tourist traffic. It was also noted that by partnering with the official Little Free Library organization, the locations can be registered on a national map, which appeals to people who enjoy tracking or visiting these installations.

Children's Park Grand Re-Opening/Ribbon Cutting

Chairwoman Weidenhamer initiated the conversation by asking if the committee should be responsible for planning a grand re-opening for the Children's Park, or if the city staff handle that. Deputy Director Reed responded, explaining that the park is nearing completion, with only fencing and final site work left to be completed. He confirmed the city had not yet made any event plans but welcomed the idea of the committee taking charge stating that the completion date is by the end of May, and once the final construction timeline is clearer, they can coordinate on a grand re-opening date. He acknowledged the tight timeframe especially with the next official meeting not scheduled until May 27th but expressed confidence that collaboration through email could keep things on track, emphasizing the importance of planning now due to the short window before the park opens.

B.) Jessica Julian

Mentioned how she had contacted Deputy Director Reed regarding nets at Buck Destin park, and some other things that people in the community had brought to her attention. Commented how fun it was to volunteer at the Easter Egg hunt at Morgan Sport Center and how excited the parents and kids were.

C.) Jan Mc Graw

Expressed concerns about specific sidewalk areas at Dalton Threadgill park that needed addressing as there were safety issues with people tripping and falling.

D.) Aubrey Santucci

Expressed a desire to bring up a topic for the next meeting-the need for a safe place for e-bike riders, particularly for youth. Local chatter in the community had increasingly focused on how unsafe the current situation is for young e-bike riders. She concluded by reiterating that the current lack of space leads to conflict and community friction, and that a city-led solution could both mitigate danger and restore a sense of order and inclusion for local families.

7. STAFF REPORTS

A.) Park Updates

Deputy Director Reed revisited the topic of the Master Plan. He emphasized that this will be a major upcoming focus, mentioning that he will keep everyone updated as small meetings occur and outreach efforts ramp up that would involve surveys, both mailed and online. He encouraged the team to spread the word to friends and families, underlining that community feedback will be essential for assessing existing conditions and identifying areas for improvement. He elaborated that the master plan would help guide decisions about underutilized spaces, like pocket parks, referencing Jewel Melvin Park specifically.

8. COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE -None

9. CLOSING REMARKS & ADJOURNMENT

10. PUBLIC COMMENTS- None

11. NEXT MEETING DATE:

Chairwoman Weidenhamer announced the next meeting will be May 27th.

ADJOURNMENT:

Having no further discussions, the meeting adjourned at 4:57 PM

Adopted and approved this 27th day of May 2025.

Autumn Weidenhamer
Autumn Weidenhamer, Chairwoman

Sharon Gardner
Sharon Gardner Records Mgmt. Specialist