

**MINUTES OF THE
PARKS & RECREATION COMMITTEE
MEETING DESTIN CITY HALL BOARDROOM
May 27, 2025, - 4:00 PM**

1. CALL TO ORDER:

Chairwoman Weidenhamer called the Parks & Recreation Committee meeting to order at 4:00 p.m. on Tuesday, May 27, 2025, in the Destin City Hall Boardroom.

2. ROLL CALL:

Members Present

Autumn Weidenhamer
Allison Stephens
Aubrey Santucci
Jessica Julian
Jan McGraw

Members Absent

Bryan Otto

Staff Present

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

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

A.) April 22, 2025, Parks and Recreation Committee Meeting Minutes.

Motion made by Committee member Jessica Julian and seconded by Committee member Jan McGraw to approve the minutes as written from April 22, 2025. The motion passed 5-0. Committee member Bryan Otto was absent from this meeting.

4. NEW BUSINESS

A.) Artificial Turf Options for Nancy Weidenhamer Dog Park-

Austin Tipton from Forever Lawn Emerald Coast initiated the discussion by presenting various turf samples for evaluation. Attendees were encouraged to pass the samples around while Tipton described their features, construction, and backing materials. Questions were raised regarding:

- Individual Sample pricing
- Warranty applicability and labor
- Installation base and additional features like rebar-reinforced Nailer board.

Mr. Tipton offered areas they could go for site visits for real-world product use and performance. Later in the meeting the discussion briefly returned to the idea of installing artificial turf in the dog park areas. The consensus was to keep the artificial turf concept in active discussion with further exploration and planning to continue, possibly launching efforts in the fall.

B. John Stephens-Work Plan-Breakwater Snorkeling/Oyster Gardening

John Stephens, Chairman of the Harbor CRA Board Committee, addressed the members with a detailed presentation regarding two initiatives focused on marine habitat restoration and community engagement through sustainable practices. Mr. Stephens noted that the genesis of these ideas originated from a directive from former Parks and Recreation Chairwoman, Sandy Trammell, who expressed a desire for committee-led initiatives rather than staff-proposed plans. These proposals were developed in alignment with the City's Strategic Plan, prioritizing:

1. Destin residents
2. Destin businesses
3. Visitors

Project overview: Breakwater & Oyster Gardening Work Plan

Phase I. Vertical Oyster Gardening

- **Objective:** Install vertical oyster gardens under docks at city bayfront parks to support water filtration and shoreline restoration.
- **Method:** Recycled oyster shells are strung and submerged to attract oyster spat and oysters are relocated annually to build living shorelines.
- **Partnership:** Led in collaboration with Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance (CBA).
- **Potential Expansion:** Encourage participation from waterfront business with docks.
- **Target Locations:** Joe's Bayou, Clement Taylor Park, Leonard Destin Park, Harborview Park, and Main Street Park dock.
- **Community Engagement:** Opportunities for volunteer involvement and student service hours.

Phase 2. Marine Habitat Restoration at Clement Taylor Park

- **Objective: Construct a breakwater/living shoreline to:**
 1. Enhance water quality and marine biodiversity.
 2. Provide erosion control and climate resiliency.
 3. Improve swimmer safety and create a beginner snorkeling area.
- **Rationale:** Current snorkeling locations are unsafe or inaccessible: this initiative addresses those gaps.
- **Design Considerations:** Includes options like rock-bound reefs or rock rope structures: estimated cost ~\$60,000 for shallow water builds.

Committee members expressed enthusiasm but acknowledged limited familiarity with the concept. Questions focused on site selection, shell sourcing, responsibilities for signage, safety, legal issues, and property permissions.

Motion made by Committee member Aubrey Santucci, with Chairwoman Weidenhamer providing the second to support the initiative presented by Mr. Stephens. The motion passed 5-0, Committee Member Otto was absent from this meeting.

C. John Stephens- Work Plan-Christmas Decorations:

Mr. Stephens introduced Work Plan #2, a proposal focused on enhancing holiday spirit and decorations within the Harbor CRA District and potentially the Town Center CRA District. This initiative was also inspired by a previous suggestion from former Parks & Recreation Chairwoman, Sandy Trammell to introduce more festive activities around the Christmas Season. Mr. Stephens proposed a variety of ideas to increase holiday visibility and community engagement during the Christmas season, emphasizing that these were brainstorming concepts, not formal proposals. The key goal is for both Harbor and Town Center CRA districts to participate, showcasing community-wide holiday celebrations. Discussion centered on expanding the event to include the local middle and high school bands and choirs to encourage family attendance and community participation. The work plan includes outreach to property and businesses along the Harbor to encourage participation in decorating, potentially sponsoring or donating funds towards the initiative.

Challenges and potential solutions revolved around inconsistent lighting, strategic budgeting, exploring the option of solar-powered decorations and utilizing light pole plugs along the harbor boardwalk.

Committee member Jessica Julian made the motion to support further development and exploration of Work Plan #2- Holiday Decorations & Community Engagement. Chairwoman Weidenhamer provided the second. Motion passed 5-0.

D. Morgan’s Children’s Park Ribbon Cutting

Parks & Recreation Deputy Director Ryan Reed discussed availability for the ribbon cutting ceremony at Morgan’s Children’s Park, with June 16th at 10a.m. being selected as the date. Committee members discussed ideas for fun and practical giveaways for the children attending the celebration. The consensus was that the preferred items were beach balls, sunglasses, and possibly frisbees. The committee members were encouraged to submit final item suggestions within the week to ensure timely ordering and customization.

The deputy director stated that he would send invitations to Destin City Council Members, Destin Chamber of Commerce, and possible outreach to Silver Sands School or families of children with disabilities to participate and represent the inclusive mission of the park.

5. OLD BUSINESS

A.) Park Inspection Assignments

Chairwoman Autumn Weidenhamer opened the discussion on park inspection assignments, confirming that the assignments previously distributed were still accurate unless any members had concerns or changes to request. No objections were raised, and assignments were reaffirmed. The Mattie Kelly Nature Walk was acknowledged as being in poor condition but is slated for complete replacement under a future redevelopment plan.

The committee members discussed the anticipated closure of Joe’s Bayou for approximately one year during park-wide renovation. Members discussed the potential impact on boat launch access and alternative sites. There was a proposal to allow Destin

residents exclusive access with controlled launch policies and parking arrangements. Additional discussions included logistics of limited boat ramp availability in the event of a storm, or hurricane. It was noted that ramp closure timing and phasing will need to be planned carefully to reduce disruptions.

Continuing the discussion on parks, the committee members expressed positive feedback on the recovery of the live oak trees at Captain Royal Melvin Heritage park following storm impacts and treatment. Noted improvements attributed to staff efforts and regular watering with appreciation extended to those maintaining the trees and to those who observed and acknowledged the effort. Recognition was also given to the successful planting and upkeep of a new tree at Kell-Aire park. The committee members remarked on the continued community engagement, such as public observations and care for the park greenery.

6. COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS/QUESTIONS

A.) Chairwoman Weidenhamer proposed a Little Free Library Work Plan to promote literacy by placing book-sharing boxes in public parks, starting with one park per year (beginning with the Dog Park, then Morgan's Children's Park). Concerns were raised about weather damage to books in outdoor boxes; members recommended selecting durable, waterproof models. Mildew was noted as a concern by Committee member Jessica Julian, and it was suggested to use a selection of composite or waterproof library boxes.

Brian Kellar, Recreation Supervisor, introduced the possibility of a United Way Partnership. The committee discussed a parallel opportunity with United Way to:

- Install a Learning Trail (approx. 10 interactive educational stations) spaced throughout Morgan's Children's Park and surrounding areas.
- Donate and maintain a Little Free Library at no cost to the city.
- Maintain the structure with annual repainting through their "Day of Caring" volunteer event.
- Trail details would include the first few stations to be installed near Children's Park sidewalks, with the remainder extending around the softball and soccer fields.
- Signs to include educational prompts with United Way branding.

Motion made by Committee member Aubrey Santucci, seconded by Committee member Allison Stephens to approve the Little Free Library Work Plan as presented and move forward with implementation, including United Way's donation of a library unit.

Chairwoman Weidenhamer mentioned having a ribbon cutting ceremony and possibly a tournament for when the pickleball courts are finally built. Committee member Jessica Julian spoke about knowing some people that may want to get involved as they have had experience running a pickleball tournament.

The next item that Chairwoman Weidenhamer proposed was exploring the potential installation of a volleyball net at Tarpon Beach Access, noting that there wasn't much available around our area.

Parks & Recreation Director Lisa Firth pointed out that Clement Taylor Park and Morgan Sports Center already have sand volleyball courts, but they're underutilized. Deputy Director Ryan Reed mentioned they could look into one at Tarpon Beach and speak with the county on it as they are the ones that rake and maintain that area of the beach. The suggestion was left open-ended with agreement to look into the feasibility of installing a volleyball net at Tarpon Beach, and to consider the costs, permitting, usage trends, and location logistics.

- B.) Allison Stephens- Dog Park Monthly Responsibility Rotation:** Discussion centered around the monthly oversight or maintenance responsibilities at the dog park. Clarification by Deputy Director Ryan Reed stated that after some personnel changes, the rotation became unclear. He committed to locating the original form used for scheduling, re-circulating it, and re-establishing the rotation to prevent redundant efforts.

Committee member Allison Stephens mentioned that she had prepared a work plan but noted the need to make changes and updates to it and present the revised version in the upcoming weeks.

- C.) Aubrey Santucci-E-Bike Safety and Potential Partnership Project.**

Committee member Aubrey Santucci shared that a local citizen has expressed interest in helping to allocate funds and possibly assist in securing a location for a new project, potentially through a public-private partnership model similar to the one used for the dog park. It was suggested that the City of Destin could consider matching private funds, emphasizing this approach as a viable way to move forward if the necessary details and support from the city could be arranged. The issue of safety regarding increased e-bike usage among youth was discussed as was also the idea of developing a dedicated e-bike track or course to provide a safe riding environment and potentially mitigate complaints. A brief group discussion followed regarding whether schools currently provide bike safety instruction. It was confirmed by multiple participants, both staff and committee members, that bike safety and home safety were recently included in PE classes. Committee member Jessica Julian confirmed that bike safety was being conducted up through the previous school year.

- D.) Jessica Julian- Nothing tonight.**

- E.) Jan Mc Graw-Nothing tonight.**

7. STAFF REPORTS

- A.) Ryan Reed- Deputy Director Parks and Recreation-Master Plan Update-**

1. Project overview and Phase 1 Status

Deputy Director Reed reported that three meetings have occurred so far, including a kickoff meeting and two meetings as part of Phase 1 of the Parks Master Plan development. The current work includes:

- Inventory collection of all park facilities and amenities across Destin.
- Initiating a needs assessment based on the inventory.
- Development of a public survey (currently in draft stage)
- Work on branding associated with the plan.

2. Phase 2 & Public Engagement Timeline

Phase 2 will mark the beginning of community and committee engagement. The exact dates for this engagement are not yet determined and will depend on the completion of the inventory and internal assessments.

More discussion ensued regarding the Parks Master Plan Community Survey including how it will be distributed online and by mail. The project remains in the early stages, with more detailed updates to come as it transitions into Phase 2, which will include broader community engagement.

The staff members discussed the City's financial current cost recovery model, established in 2014, which guides how much of program costs are recouped through fees:

- Parks themselves remain free to the public.
- Children's and senior programs recover 25% of costs.
- Higher recovery targets apply to adult and non-resident programs.

Staff emphasized that Destin meets its cost recovery goals but acknowledged the potential need to revisit this structure in the near future.

The forthcoming financial review (as part of the Master Plan) is expected to:

- Validate the need to keep fees low for residents, especially for youth programs.
- Clarify that residents are financially supporting recreation services, even though facilities appear "free"
- Highlight the City's role in offering inclusive recreational opportunities-not just elite travel programs.

B. July-Parks and Recreation Month Proclamation

Parks and Recreation Director Lisa Firth announced that Parks and Recreation representatives and the members of this committee are invited to attend the first City Council meeting in July to be formally recognized during the reading of the proclamation. The meeting is scheduled for July 7th, and a follow-up reminder will be sent out.

- 8. COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE** – John Stephens recommended that the committee reach out to Lance Johnson the former City Manager, and former Parks and

Recreation Director, as they are both on the board of the Destin Library Guild. They could possibly help with financial support for the items they discussed today.

9. **CLOSING REMARKS & ADJOURNMENT-** Chairwoman Weidenhamer announced the next meeting is scheduled for June 24th.

ADJOURNMENT:

Having no further discussions, the meeting adjourned at 5:48 PM

Adopted and approved this 7th day of August 2025.

Autumn Weidenhamer
Autumn Weidenhamer, Chairwoman

Sharon J. Gardner
Sharon Gardner Records Mgmt. Specialist