

**MINUTES OF THE
PARKS & RECREATION COMMITTEE
DESTIN CITY HALL BOARDROOM
AUGUST 7, 2025, - 4:00 PM**

1. CALL TO ORDER:

Chairwoman Weidenhamer called the Parks & Recreation Meeting to order at 4:03 p.m. on Thursday, August 7, 2025, in the Destin City Hall Boardroom immediately followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. ROLL CALL:

Members Present

Autumn Weidenhamer
Jessica Julian
Jan McGraw
Allison Stephens
Aubrey Santucci
Matthew Sweetser
Andrea Ansley

Staff Present

Lisa Firth Parks & Recreation Director
Ryan Reed P&R Deputy Director
Bryan Kellar Recreation Supervisor
Lawrence Atkins Parks Supervisor
Jeff Cozadd Projects/Grants/Contracts Mgr.
Sharon Gardner Records Mgmt. Specialist

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

1. May 27, 2025, Parks & Recreation Minutes

Motion made by Committee member Jessica Julian and seconded by Committee member Aubrey Santucci to approve the minutes as written. Motion passed 7-0.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

2. June 24, 2025, Parks & Recreation Workshop Minutes

Motion made by Committee member Jessica Julian and seconded by Committee member Jan McGraw to approve the minutes as written. Motion passed 7-0.

4. NEW BUSINESS

1. Perez Planning and Design: Parks & Recreation Masterplan Presentation

Chairwoman Weidenhamer introduced Carlos Perez of Perez Planning and Design to present the Parks & Recreation Masterplan to the committee members.

Mr. Perez opened by expressing enthusiasm about working with the City of Destin. The goal of the session was to provide a brief project overview-covering the purpose, approach, and schedule-followed by interactive exercises to gather participant input. The same activities would later be conducted with the public to allow for pattern analysis in responses across different engagement formats. Mr. Perez then presented the following information:

Process Outline for the Meeting:

1. Skip formal introductions and go straight into:
 - Project purpose, scope, and schedule.
 - Interactive exercises.
 - Next steps.
2. Reconvene for open discussion after exercises to address missed points or emphasize important issues.

Project Purpose: To create a comprehensive guidebook or blueprint for the City's parks and recreation system, including:

- Parks and facilities.
- Programs and staffing.
- Potential development of a Capitol Improvements Plan and implementation strategy. (pending future Council approval).
- Significant emphasis on public engagement.

Project Scope & Phases: Approved Phases (1 & 2)**Phase 1-Context Analysis**

- Immersion into the community
- Review of recently completed city plans to build on existing work.
- Demographic study: current population and projected growth (5-10 years)
- Systematic evaluation of all city parks using a standardized assessment tool.
- Field visits: began yesterday, continued today, will conclude tomorrow.

Phase 2-Needs & Priorities Assessment

- Use a variety of community engagement techniques to identify needs and priorities.

Pending Phases (Requires Council Approval):**Phase 3-Vision Development**

- Collaborate with staff and stakeholders to determine appropriate and feasible responses to identified needs.
- Recognize that some needs may require partnerships rather than direct city action.

Phase 4-Implementation Strategy (Requires Council Approval)

- Identify realistic funding sources for both capital and operational needs.
- Create a phased implementation plan for the next 5-10 years.

Chairwoman Weidenhamer and other committee members had questions regarding the surveys and if they were open to only Destin residents and if they were random. Other questions centered around how the residents would be made aware of the online surveys, and if this information would be presented to the Parks Foundation. Mr. Perez advised that the first question of the survey would ask that specific question as to whether they were residents or not, and how long they had been a resident. He then explained that the survey has different

questions relating to demographics. Notification of the online survey would be announced on the city's website, email blasts, QR codes, and the City of Destin social media platform. The surveys will be from August to September with the plan to share the findings with this group in November, and then with the City Council.

The committee members were invited to share any final thoughts or priorities not yet discussed, explaining this "Catch-all" step ensures all important points are documented.

Multiple potential sources for funding were noted to include:

- Capitol Improvement Program (general fund)
- Bonds
- Sales tax (including contributions from visitors)
- Hotel/tourism tax
- Grants, partnerships, and sponsorships.

The Parks Foundation was highlighted as a valuable new nonprofit partner for supplemental park funding with Mr. Perez noting that many cities lack such resources. He then confirmed the same process will be conducted with the public, with findings expected to be shared with the committee around November. The presentation concluded with thanks for participation and the transition to the next agenda item.

5. COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS/QUESTIONS

Chairwoman Weidenhamer asked the two newest members to the committee to introduce themselves.

- Matthew Sweetser – Local resident: previous City Councilman; previously served on the Parks & Recreation Committee in 2018, stepped away for health reasons; now returning to the committee.
- Andrea Ansley-Resident of Destin for 22 years; prior service on the Public Works Public Safety Committee; expressed eagerness to get involved.

6. DISCUSSION- CHRISTMAS PARADE FLOAT

In a prior meeting, it was noted there was insufficient time last year to organize a Parks and Recreation float for the Christmas parade. A suggestion was raised to begin planning earlier, potentially starting in July, to ensure participation in the upcoming year's parade.

Points raised:

- Previous floats have been successful but challenging to coordinate under Sunshine Law requirements.
- A trailer is available for use, though past equipment changes were noted.
- Logistical concerns include aligning with the parade's official theme, which is typically announced in late October, leaving a short preparation window.
- Recommended to prepare a base structure ahead of time, then adapt decorations to match the theme once announced.
- Possibility to involve community groups, children, parents, and volunteers in float preparation.
- Agreement that one committee member should serve as designated coordinator to communicate with staff and manage float planning.

7. COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE

Councilwoman Sandy Trammel emphasized the need for the Parks and Recreation committee to finalize and submit its goals and objectives along with the annual report to City Council before initiating events like the Christmas float. She reminded the committee that budget items must be submitted by April to be considered as staff begins work in May and approval occurs the following month. Follow-up park evaluations were stressed, noting past issues where reported problems weren't tracked to completion. She suggested either assigning one person to oversee all evaluations or having each member track issues for their assigned parks and bringing updates to meetings. Examples included damage to park benches and safety hazards that required prompt attention.

She concluded by noting that the City Council members are evaluating committee effectiveness and that timely submission of reports and objectives is essential to justify the committee's role.

John Stephens of the Harbor and Waterways Board, and the Harbor CRA, informed the committee he would soon present several plans to City Council, including a Christmas work plan previously shared with the group. He expressed hope that, if approved, the committee would take the lead, as he believes they would handle it better than the Harbor CRA.

A discussion followed on how committees can coordinate under Sunshine Law rules: one designated member can liaise with another committee and bring back updates, but members cannot discuss the project among themselves outside official meetings. Councilwoman Trammel clarified that the number of assigned tasks is flexible, and transparency between committees is key. She also suggested "Volunteers working hard for the city" as the theme for the float. Mr. Stephens volunteered to assist with the Christmas project.

8. NEXT MEETING DATE:

Chairwoman Weidenhamer announced the next meeting date is August 26, 2025.

9. PUBLIC COMMENTS- None

10. ADJOURNMENT:

Having no further discussion, the meeting was adjourned at 5:05 PM

Adopted this 26th day of August 2025

Autumn Weidenhamer
Autumn Weidenhamer, Chairwoman

Sharon Gardner
Sharon Gardner, Records Mgmt. Specialist