

**MINUTES OF THE
PARKS & RECREATION COMMITTEE
DESTIN CITY HALL BOARDROOM
SEPTEMBER 23, 2025, - 4:00 PM**

1. CALL TO ORDER:

Chairwoman Weidenhamer called the Parks & Recreation Meeting to order at 4:03 p.m. on Tuesday, September 23, 2025, in the Destin City Hall Boardroom immediately followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. ROLL CALL:

Members Present

Autumn Weidenhamer
Jessica Jullian
Andrea Ansley
Alison Stephens
Jan McGraw

Members Absent

Aubrey Santucci
Matthew Sweetser

Staff Present

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

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

A. August 26, 2025, Parks & Recreation Minutes

Chairwoman Autumn Weidenhamer asked for approval of minutes or for any changes to the agenda.

Committee members Alison Stephens and Jessica Jullian mentioned their names were misspelled and asked for corrections to the minutes.

Motion made by Chairwoman Weidenhamer to approve the minutes with corrections, committee member Jessica Jullian provided the second.

Motion passed 5-0. Committee members Sweetser and Santucci were absent from the meeting.

4. OLD BUSINESS:

1. Artificial Turf- Jeff Cozadd Projects/Grants/Contracts Manager

Jeff Cozadd provided a detailed update regarding the progress and funding strategy for the installation of artificial turf fields at Dalton Threadgill Little League Park. He reported that City staff had visited the park approximately two weeks prior to evaluate the site. The City is currently developing a drainage design to be installed beneath the artificial turf. This design is a critical first step in the project's construction sequence. It was noted that the Little League organization is taking the lead in ordering artificial turf material from the vendor.

Mr. Cozadd also stated he is preparing an application for the FRDRP (Florida Recreational Department Assistance Program) which is due by the end of the month.

He anticipates submitting the application by the end of the week or early next week, noting that a few elements still need to be finalized before submission.

Discussion continued regarding the total cost of the turf installation which is estimated to be in the range of \$180,000 to \$190,000, with the Little League committing to fund half of the turf expenses. The City will cover the remaining half, partially through in-kind services primarily from the Parks and Recreation and Public Works Departments.

Mr. Cozadd emphasized that this approach would support the City's eligibility for matching grant funds without requiring additional cash expenditures. He also explained the City would be submitting a retroactive application to the grant program. This means the City will proceed with project implementation ahead of grant approval. If the grant is later approved, the City will be reimbursed for its eligible expenses, assuming all compliance requirements are met.

The rationale for the retroactive approach was summarized as follows:

- The state will not finalize its fiscal budget—and thus the grant funding decisions—until July of the next calendar year.
- Mr. Cozadd stressed that waiting until July to begin the project would delay completion beyond the start of the next Little League season.
- To avoid this, the City has opted to proceed proactively with construction, accepting the risk that grant funding is not guaranteed.
- It was noted that none of the FRDAP applications from the previous year were funded due to budget constraints.
- Mr. Cozadd pointed out that funding availability varies year to year, and the City will submit the application regardless, in hopes of securing partial reimbursement.

Discussion between committee members and Mr. Cozadd regarding if this project had been budgeted, and if not, whether funding this project meant another project would be deferred. Mr. Cozadd responded, confirming that the project was not originally budgeted, but was added during final adjustments to the current fiscal year budget. The project was a last-minute addition but has been fully encumbered and will be funded in the upcoming fiscal year.

Mr. Cozadd concluded by reiterating that the project is moving forward as scheduled and committed to providing further updates as developments occur.

OLD BUSINESS CONT'D:

B) Update on Christmas Parade Float-

It was discussed that creating a float with committee participation would be problematic under Sunshine Law. The concern is that committee members working together on a float project could inadvertently be considered a meeting outside of public notice requirements, particularly if City-related business were discussed in the process. While participation is not prohibited, the legal and procedural barriers make a collective float project very difficult. It was mentioned that members could instead walk in the parade together with family, friends, or pets, without creating a formal float. This would be comparable to attending a public event simultaneously without violating Sunshine Law provisions.

Alternate ways members could contribute included the following:

- Wearing matching Parks and Recreation volunteer t-shirts during the parade.
- Assisting with event operations, such as parking management, cleanup, or general logistics.

C) Park Inspections: Deputy Director Ryan Reed

Deputy Director Ryan Reed opened the discussion by mentioning that during a prior meeting, it had been suggested that the committee might consider conducting more than two inspections per person. Although there was no consensus or specific number agreed upon during that previous discussion, the idea of increasing the number of inspections was generally well received. Deputy Director Reed reminded members to email him if they had preferences for specific parks to inspect. Members were encouraged to visit any parks they wanted to at any time, and to document their observations.

Chairwoman Weidenhamer inquired if there was a current system in place to track updates or improvements made as a result of the park inspections. Deputy Director Reed confirmed that improvements are being tracked. He explained that after receiving inspection reports, any noted issues-especially serious ones-are communicated to Recreation Supervisor Bryan Kellar for follow-up action. He noted that while some actions are taken swiftly, they admitted that they could improve communication back to the committee about what issues have been addressed. As a solution, he proposed creating a summary report to improve transparency and accountability.

5. NEW BUSINESS:

Parks & Recreation Director Lisa Firth announced the Grand Marshals for this year's Christmas parade will be the 3 remaining wives that originally started the first Destin Seafood Festival. These women initiated the event many years ago as a way to raise funds while their husbands were out working on the water during the month of October. The women had begun their fundraising efforts at the Village Cheese Shop, located on the hill where the Emerald Grande current parking lot is located. This grassroots effort eventually evolved into what became the long-standing Destin Seafood Festival.

6. COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS/QUESTIONS

A) Autumn Weidenhamer-Annual Report Presentation Draft

Chairwoman Weidenhamer initiated the discussion by noting that the annual report had been a recurring topic of conversation. She expressed optimism that progress was being made, stating that there does appear to be a formal format for the report, which would provide needed structure. She also mentioned that she had drafted a PowerPoint presentation to accompany the report, though it couldn't be shared at the meeting since it wasn't included in the meeting packet.

The draft included the following:

- An introduction to the committee
- The committee's work plan
- A record of motions passed
- Documentation of progress achieved, such as the number of updates resulting from park inspections.

Chairwoman Weidenhamer proposed that this presentation could be delivered to City Council along with the written report. She encouraged participation from other members so the presentation would feel like a committee initiative rather than being delivered by one individual. She suggested making the presentation engaging and fresh.

Committee member Andrea Ansley asked whether the Adopt-a-Park Program falls under the committee's work plan, specifically raising concern about the minimum age requirement. The current guideline requires participants to be at least 12 years old with parental permission. Director Firth clarified that the guideline was likely intended to ensure accountability when multiple children are involved, remarking that if large groups of nine-year-olds participated, questions of responsibility would arise. Committee member Ansley continued that her concern was primarily about family participation, not large unsupervised groups and she wanted to ensure families adopting a park would not feel excluded if they wanted to involve younger children in the work. Deputy Director Reed confirmed that updates to the program guidelines were already pending and that this adjustment could be included.

Chairwoman Weidenhamer shifted the conversation to the annual report, noting that work plans (such as Adopt-a-Park and Arbor Day) should be included. She encouraged the committee members to take ownership of specific programs, particularly since a previous member was still listed as the lead on many of them. Deputy Director Reed instructed the committee members to send the updated plans directly to him and he would ensure they were included in the agenda for the next meeting, provided it had not already been approved. He emphasized the importance of timely submissions so items can be properly published and included on the agenda.

B) Alison Stephens- No comments.

C) Jessica Jullian- E-bike workshop and Destin Forward Class Projects.

Committee member Jullian shared information from a recent Destin Forward class session where Captain Jason Fulghum of the Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office spoke about an upcoming e-bike workshop scheduled for October 1st in Niceville, and it also offered an online participation option.

Key items discussed:

- **E-Bike workshop:** Committee members were encouraged to attend or tune in to the October 1st e-bike workshop, hosted by the Okaloosa Sheriff's Office, either in person or online.
- **Information Sharing:** Deputy Director Reed will distribute the workshop link to committee members once it is available.
- **Potential Project- E-Bike Park:** The idea of exploring an e-bike park was flagged as a possible long-term initiative, with committee member Aubrey Santucci noted as a key advocate.
- **Destin Forward Partnership:** Opportunities with the Destin Forward class were discussed, including potential improvements to Clement Taylor Park (pavilion and schoolhouse). Committee members were encouraged to keep these prospects in mind for collaboration.

Councilwoman Sandy Trammell approached the microphone and shared updates from a recent Parks Foundation meeting regarding Clement Taylor Park

- Fundraising for the Clement Taylor Park pavilion/schoolhouse project is ongoing.
- Current funds total \$15,000, expected to increase to \$22,000, but significantly more is needed.
- A schematic rendering is the next essential step; once completed, fundraising and donor engagement can accelerate.
- Jay Howard is coordinating with the architect to produce the rendering.
- The timeline may not align with the Destin Forward class project window, though the class remains interested in participating.
- Potential for additional features, such as bronze statues, is under consideration depending on funding levels.

D) Jan McGraw- No comments.

E) Aubrey Santucci- Absent

F) Matthew Sweetser-Absent

G) Andrea Ansley-

1) Grant for Bike Helmets:

Committee member Ansley recalled a program from approximately 12-13 years ago when she previously served on the Public Works and Public Safety Committee. At that time, the Florida Department of Transportation offered grants to communities for the distribution of free bicycle helmets.

The following points were discussed among the committee members and staff:

- Revisiting the FDOT bicycle helmet grant program to secure helmets for community distribution.
- Potential partnership with the Parks Department to mirror the successful structure of the prior initiative.
- Committee members to consider supporting a joint grant application and event, possibly aligned with future parades, Friday Night Bites, or community celebrations.
- Follow-up research is needed to confirm whether current grant funding for helmet programs is available.
- Presenting the idea to the Public Works/Public Safety Committee meeting for cross-collaboration.
- Explore corporate grant opportunities (e.g., Walmart, Target) for interim or supplemental funding.
- Include this initiative in the work plan for continuity.

Andrea Ansley-

2) Volleyball nets at the Elementary School/Football Fields:

Committee member Ansley inquired about the net set up at the end of the football field by the track at Destin Elementary School. She inquired if it might be possible to install a permanent net at that location and raised concerns about whether it would interfere with school operations, landscaping, or the football field itself.

Deputy Director Reed responded, explaining that the issue would first need to be discussed directly with the school administration. He noted that while technically possible, a permanent net could cause damage to the landscaping and field turf. He pointed out potential conflicts with school athletics, particularly football, since the proposed location was behind the goalposts. He suggested that while a permanent net would likely require frequent replacement it should ultimately be a decision for the school, and the City could facilitate a discussion with the school to determine feasibility and interest.

Andrea Ansley-

3) Construction fence at Clement Taylor Park:

Committee member Ansley reported that someone had approached her regarding the fence at Clement Taylor Park, suggesting it be moved approximately two feet back from the sidewalk to avoid obstruction.

Parks and Recreation Director Lisa Firth clarified that the issue had been the subject of discussion. While shifting the fence may not be feasible, they acknowledged that the sidewalk access is blocked and noted the need for a temporary crosswalk to direct pedestrians safely across the street. She stated they had already forwarded the concern to Public Works and would follow up at a scheduled meeting the next evening.

Committee member Ansley also praised the staff's presence and support during the soccer game held on Friday. She reported that everything ran smoothly, staff were visible and actively helping attendees navigate the fields, and the event was well organized.

7. STAFF REPORTS: Update on tree plantings from grant.

Deputy Director Reed gave the following summary of discussion:

- Trees from the grant awarded in March are finally being received and will be planted starting tomorrow.
- A total of 12 trees is being installed: 4 at the dog park and 8 at the Kel-Aire South park per the grant's distribution requirements.
- Tree types include oak, willow, maple, and holly.
- The planting aims to restore shade and improve aesthetics in the designated areas.
- Photos and updates will be shared with the committee once planting is complete.

Fall Festival-

Beatrice Miller Labrada - Recreation Supervisor announced the Fall Festival is scheduled for October 27th from 5pm-8pm at the Community Center. Volunteers are needed, particularly to assist with concessions and committee members were invited to participate and to coordinate with the event organizers.

City of Destin Open House-

Director Lisa Firth announced the open house will be October 22nd from 11am-1pm, and the Parks and Recreation department will have a table at this event. Committee members were invited to attend this free event at the Community Center.

Updates to various projects:

Director Lisa Firth gave a summary of the ongoing park projects:

- Clement Taylor Park: Construction work has officially started.
- Norriego Point: Project nearing completion.
- Annex Pickleball Courts: Construction has begun.
- Morgans Sports Complex: A new batting cage has been installed.
- Buck Destin Park: The basketball court is being resealed; a long-requested improvement.

Upcoming events:

Recreation Supervisor Bryan Kellar gave a summary of upcoming Parks and Recreation Events and Registrations:

- Friday Night Soccer: Games are scheduled for this Friday afternoon.
- Football: Home football games scheduled for Friday.
- Youth Flag Football: Registration begins Friday.
- Basketball: Registration opens October 2nd with events beginning October 8th.
- Parking for Friday night soccer: spectators will use the east parking lot at Morgans, coordinated with the school district, and there will be a shuttle available for people to ride to the Destin Seafood Festival.

8. PUBLIC COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE:

Councilwoman Sandy Trammell introduced Neil Bawa, her mentee from the Collegiate High School, who is learning about city government through attending various public meetings.

She also suggested involving the Parks and Recreation Committee in upcoming events, such as walking alongside floats during parades to interact with the audience, similar to the Rotary Club's role. Director Firth also added that the Rotary sponsors parade candy distribution and noted this could be a good opportunity for committee members to participate while representing Parks and Recreation.

Councilwoman Trammell also shared that the Escambia County Sheriff's Department recently received a safety grant for installing streetlights in Pensacola. She encouraged the committee to connect with the Sheriff's Office for potential funding opportunities to support helmets or other safety initiatives. She then spoke on the subject of an E-Bike Seminar she attended at the League of Cities conference. Key points included the following:

- E-bikes are increasingly viewed as a mode of transportation for lower-income residents and the homeless.
- Cities cannot restrict e-bikes, though speed limits may be applied.
- Enforcement is challenging because e-bikes cannot be easily tracked by radar.
- Some models travel up to 40 mph creating hazards on sidewalks.
- Larger cities can create dedicated bike/e-bike paths, but Destin lacks the land for such infrastructure.

She suggested more bicycle safety education, recalling hands-on classes held in the past with cones, stops, and intersections. She concluded by expressing support for the committee's ongoing work on goals and objectives.

9. NEXT MEETING DATE:

Chairwoman Weidenhamer announced the next meeting date is October 28, 2025

10. ADJOURNMENT:

Having no further discussion, the meeting was adjourned at 5:04 PM

Adopted this 28th day of October 2025

Autumn Weidenhamer
Autumn Weidenhamer, Chairwoman

Sharon A. Gardner
Sharon Gardner, Records Mgmt. Specialist