

**MINUTES OF THE  
PARKS & RECREATION COMMITTEE  
DESTIN CITY HALL BOARDROOM  
OCTOBER 28, 2025, - 4:00 PM**

**1. CALL TO ORDER:**

Chairwoman Weidenhamer called the Parks & Recreation Meeting to order at 4:00 p.m. on Tuesday, October 28, 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  
Matthew Sweetser

**Members Absent**

Aubrey Santucci

**Staff Present**

Ryan Reed P&R Deputy Director  
Sharon Gardner Records Mgmt. Specialist

**3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES:**

**A. September 23, 2025, Parks & Recreation Minutes**

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

**Motion made by Committee Member Ansley to approve the minutes as written, Committee member Jullian provided the second.**

**Motion passed 6-0. Committee member Aubrey Santucci was absent.**

**4. OLD BUSINESS:**

**1. Park Inspections List: Parks & Recreation Deputy Director Ryan Reed**

Deputy Director Reed discussed the distribution of assignments stating that he had attempted to accommodate various participant requests, and he expressed a strong intent to distribute the workload fairly. He also acknowledged that some members had submitted their inspections already, which was appreciated, and he and Parks Supervisor Lawrence Atkins had already begun reviewing those submissions. The committee members were encouraged to review their assignments and suggest changes if needed. The suggested deadline for final submissions will be the end of November.

Vice Chairman Sweetser mentioned the damage to the fence at Clement Taylor Park, and Deputy Director Reed advised he would investigate it.

## **5. NEW BUSINESS:**

### **A) Online Survey for the Master Plan**

Deputy Director Reed provided an update regarding ongoing public engagement efforts on the Master Plan Online Survey encouraging all members to complete the survey themselves and to share it widely with others in the community. He reported that as of this meeting approximately two focus groups had been completed, with a total of six to seven planned. The expected timeline for completion and presentation of the final report to City Council is early January pending holiday scheduling. If approved by Council, next steps would move into the visioning phase (Phase 3) of the Master Plan process.

## **6. COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS/QUESTIONS**

### **A) Autumn Weidenhamer-Annual Report Template Discussion**

Chairwoman Weidenhamer shared that she had taken the initiative to draft a presentation template to showcase the committee's role and accomplishments clearly and professionally.

Details of the draft included the following items:

- Items highlighted in yellow that are still in development or require edits.
- A mission statement.
- A proposed agenda for the council presentation.
- A section on ongoing work plan items, such as Adopt-a-Park program and park inspections which are intended to be framed as continuous improvement efforts.

Committee members were invited to review the draft and provide feedback. Committee member Jullian raised a question about the scope of the committee's advocacy responsibilities, especially regarding infrastructure needs and capital projects that affect the Parks and Recreation staff directly (e.g., work sheds at Morgans).

Deputy Director Reed explained that these are considered part of the Renewal & Replacement (R& R) or Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) and are included in the annual budget process and aren't necessarily tied directly to the committee's work plans in a. However, the committee can and should be involved in supporting those needs where appropriate. It was agreed by the committee members that exploring ways to integrate some capital project needs into the committee's work plan is a worthwhile step, and this deeper involvement could enhance project outcomes and better reflect public needs.

Committee member Ansley volunteered to sponsor the Adopt-a-Park initiative, offering to take the lead on behalf of the committee. She is also exploring the revival of a bicycle helmet safety program and a road safety summer camp focused on youth education around bicycles and motorized scooters.

Committee member Stephens agreed to take the Park Inspection Work Plans. Vice chairman Sweetser volunteered to take the lead on the Adopt-a-Tree and Adopt-a-Bench programs. It was discussed that he would work on compiling a list of names for those items that have already been dedicated in order to ensure the records were current.

The discussion then focused on integrating ADA-compliant (Americans with Disabilities Act) playground equipment into city parks to improve accessibility for children with disabilities. It was agreed that the ADA-compliant equipment initiative would be organized as a separate work plan to ensure clear focus and planning for both accessibility and broader park improvements.

Deputy Director Reed announced that the annual plan is intended to align the committee's work plans with the city's budgeting process to ensure that the committee recommendations can influence budget planning, allowing for proactive resource allocation based on proposed or upcoming projects. He noted that holding planning sessions in both January and November might help keep the committee on track and up to date.

The committee members discussed how to effectively document and showcase the committee's impact within the annual plan. This includes both tangible outcomes (e.g., improvements made through committee recommendations) and intangible contributions (e.g., community engagement, volunteering). It was emphasized that committee members' volunteer work is a significant and often under-recognized part of their impact, and that visible volunteerism helps inspire others to get involved, increasing overall community engagement and awareness.

Chairwoman Weidenhamer and members of the committee then discussed the following:  
**Key Points Summary-Committee Role, Council Interaction, and Decision-Making.**

**Committee's Gatekeeping & Public Guidance Role-**

- The committee often serves as a filter or pre-review step before projects are escalated to City Council.
- This is not to reject ideas, but to help guide proposals to the appropriate board or committee, ensuring only matters appropriate for Council consideration are brought forward.
- This helps manage Council's limited time and ensures that community-driven ideas follow the right path.

**What the Committee needs from Council-**

- Request for mutual support: if the Council expects support or validation from the committee, the committee also needs Council's support and respect in decision making.
- Committee members want to be empowered to make informed recommendations and help Council make decisions that are truly beneficial for the community.
- There is a desire to diplomatically communicate the need for genuine engagement, not just performative approval.
- There is concern about how the committee can meaningfully provide input or push back when Council appears to have already made their decision.
- Members reiterated that they take their responsibilities seriously and want to act in the community's best interest, even when it's uncomfortable or unpopular.

**6 B) Ali Stephens-**

**1) Dog Park Monthly Inspection**

Committee member Stephens shared her experience during their assigned month for the dog park upkeep, stating she visited at least once a week. The condition of the park was horrible,

particularly due to unpleasant waste cleanup and general maintenance needs. The need for full perimeter cleaning and overgrown vegetation maintenance was also noted along with the deteriorating condition of park tools and structures including the following:

- Missing or broken dog waste scoopers
- Mold or grime build up on the wooden part of the rakes.
- Some equipment likely needs yearly replacement due to wear and weathering.

**Community engagement:**

- While cleaning, Committee member Stephens was approached by several park users, curious about what she was doing. After explaining the Parks & Recreation "Adopt-a-Park" rotation, many residents expressed genuine appreciation and thanked committee members for volunteering their time to keep the park clean and accessible.
- The interaction with the public served as a great opportunity to educate residents on the committee's role and efforts. Such visible acts of volunteerism not only keep the parks clean but also build public trust and appreciation.

**B) Ali Stephens**

**2) Crystal Beach Access Inspection**

Committee member Stephens spoke with a regular park user named "Static" who provided positive feedback specifically about the city staff responsible for trash pickup and park maintenance. It was emphasized that this staff member (believed to be Tim Mahar) and the entire maintenance team are consistently responsive, effective, and professional.

**C) Jessica Jullian- Upcoming Community Center Events**

Committee member Jullian shared that there are numerous upcoming events at the community center, especially around the holiday season. She mentioned that she is in regular contact with Beatriz Miller, who runs the center, and mentioned efforts to improve communication or volunteer needs by having Deputy Director Reed send out event updates to committee members. She also encouraged committee members to volunteer when possible, highlighting that extra help is always appreciated, particularly for family-friendly and holiday events. She mentioned particularly the "Holly Jolly" & Boat Parade events and that committee members and volunteers will be involved in craft activities, including painting ornaments. Discussion included possibly partnering with the CBS (Community Beautification Alliance) to create oyster shell or seashell ornaments, aligning with the city's Christmas parade theme of Seashells and Sleigh bells.

**D) Jan McGraw-Nothing else to add to the discussion as quite a few things had already been mentioned and covered.**

**E) Matthew Sweetser- Tree Lighting event December 4<sup>th</sup>**

Vice Chairman Sweetser reminded every one of the Tree Lighting event being held December 4<sup>th</sup> at the Community Center and asked everyone that could to please volunteer to help with handing out refreshments.

**F) Andrea Ansley- Fall Festival**

Committee member Ansley noted she had attended the Fall Festival at the Community Center the night before the meeting and described it as a huge success. She praised the city staff and event organizers for their hard work and professionalism.

**7. STAFF REPORTS: Deputy Director Ryan Reed-  
Pinfish Classic, Holiday Craft Fair, Clement Taylor Park update, Batting Cage at Morgans Sports Complex**

1) Announcement regarding the Pinfish Classic will be held Saturday November 1<sup>st</sup> starting at 7:30a.m. at Al's Restaurant on the dock. He would appreciate any volunteers for this event and the others that are upcoming.

2) The Holiday Craft Fair is scheduled for November 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> at the Community Center.

**3) Clement Taylor Park Update:**

Demolition has begun at Clement Taylor Park. The bathroom and playground have been removed, marking the official start of the renovation project. Deputy Director Reed expressed excitement about the project's progress despite the current empty lot appearance. Committee members commented on the unusual sight of the bathroom being gone, acknowledging it as a positive development. Staff had hoped to notify the committee to witness the demolition, but it happened without prior notice.

**4) Batting Cage at Morgans Sports Complex:**

The batting cage project is well underway. The concrete pad has been poured, and interior work has started. The installation crew worked quickly, completing most of the work in about a week.

**8. PUBLIC COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE: None**

**9. NEXT MEETING DATE:**

Chairwoman Weidenhamer and staff members discussed the availability of meeting in November but would likely be pushed to December due to committee members being out of town. Deputy Director Reed agreed to send out an email to confirm the date of the next meeting.

**10. ADJOURNMENT:**

Having no further discussion, the meeting was adjourned at 5:14 PM

Adopted this 11<sup>th</sup> day of December 2025

Autumn Weidenhamer  
Autumn Weidenhamer, Chairwoman

Sharon Gardner  
Sharon Gardner, Records Mgmt. Specialist