

**MINUTES OF THE  
PARKS & RECREATION COMMITTEE  
DESTIN CITY HALL BOARDROOM  
DECEMBER 11, 2025, - 4:00 PM**

**1. CALL TO ORDER:**

Chairwoman Weidenhamer called the Parks & Recreation Meeting to order at 4:00 p.m. on Tuesday, December 11, 2025, in the Destin City Hall Boardroom immediately followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

**2. ROLL CALL:**

**Members Present**

Autumn Weidenhamer  
Jessica Jullian  
Aubrey Santucci  
Alison Stephens  
Jan McGraw  
Matthew Sweetser

**Members Absent**

Andrea Ansley

**Staff Present**

Lisa Firth P&R Director  
Bryan Kellar Recreation Supervisor  
Kimberly Montgomery Deputy City Clerk

- 3. Motion made by Chairwoman Weidenhamer to amend the agenda for Perez Planning to present their presentation first. Committee member Julian provided the second. Motion to approve the amended agenda passed 6-0. Committee member Ansley was absent from the meeting.**

**4. NEW BUSINESS**

**A. Perez Planning and Design Draft Report.**

**Draft Parks & Recreation Master Plan – Context Analysis, Needs & Priorities Assessment**

Carlos Perez, President of Perez Planning and Design, presented draft findings from the Context Analysis and Needs & Priorities Assessment phase of the Parks & Recreation Master Plan. He was joined by Philip Parnin (Associate Principal with PROS Consulting Inc.) and Nick Stephens (Planner with Perez Planning and Design).

Mr. Perez explained that the purpose of the project is to establish a roadmap for the City's Parks and Recreation system aligned with the Comprehensive Plan. The work completed to date reflects Phases 1 and 2 of the project, which include system inventory, context analysis, and needs and priorities assessment. Future phases would require additional approval by Mayor and Council.

Key engagement efforts included a statistically valid resident survey, an online survey, public meetings, committee input, leadership interviews, and park site evaluations. Overall engagement included more than 450 survey responses and over 21,000 individual question responses.

**Key Themes Identified:**

Mr. Perez summarized the overarching themes emerging from the analysis as **Modernize, Integrate, and Optimize** the Parks and Recreation system.

**Context and Demographics-**

The presentation reviewed existing City plans, demographic trends, and recreation participation data. Destin has experienced population growth over the last decade, with significant seasonal population increases. The age distribution reflects a predominantly active adult population, highlighting the need for multi-generational and multi-purpose facilities. Demographic and income data suggest the importance of offering programs across a range of price points.

**Survey and Community Feedback Findings-**

Survey results showed strong resident use and appreciation of parks, with 87% of respondents reporting park use in the last year. Beach access, sports complexes, and neighborhood parks were among the most frequently used facilities. Primary barriers to park use included lack of parking and concerns regarding facility maintenance.

When asked to allocate funding, residents consistently prioritized improved maintenance of existing parks and facilities, followed by new partnerships and strategic development of new facilities. Respondents also indicated a willingness to pay modest annual fees to support system improvements.

**Park Conditions and Maintenance Assessment-**

Site evaluations identified opportunities to improve amenities and facility conditions across the system, particularly where aging infrastructure requires replacement rather than routine maintenance alone.

Philip Parnin presented findings related to maintenance operations, noting challenges associated with aging equipment, fragmented asset life-cycle planning, inconsistent work order tracking, and limited preventative maintenance. Opportunities were identified to modernize maintenance management systems, improve staffing capacity during peak seasons, standardize procedures, and implement performance metrics.

**Facilities and Program Priorities**

High-priority facility needs identified through the statistically valid survey and supported by other engagement methods included beach access, natural areas, multipurpose trails, walking and hiking trails, and large community parks.

High-priority program areas included adult fitness and wellness, nature and environmental education programs, community special events, and recreational and educational offerings such as water fitness, arts, music, and safety classes.

Mr. Parnin also reviewed program assessment findings, noting that while offerings are strong for youth, adults, and older adults, teens and young adults are underserved. A significant portion of programs are in saturated or declining stages, indicating a need for program modernization, diversification, and alignment with current recreation trends.

#### **Level of Service and Funding Analysis-**

The level-of-service analysis reviewed park acreage, access, indoor facility capacity, and funding levels. Destin's acreage per capita is below the national median when considering only City-controlled land. Indoor facility space is also slightly below industry standards, indicating capacity constraints.

Operational funding per capita was found to be adequate during the off-season but significantly lower during peak tourist seasons, creating operational challenges. Capital investment in parks over the past several years was noted as substantial and commendable, with a majority of funding directed toward land acquisition. Opportunities were identified to rebalance future investments toward maintenance, repairs, and system modernization.

#### **Next Steps-**

Mr. Perez outlined next steps, including further feedback from advisory boards and elected officials, followed by a presentation to City Council. Completion of Phase 1 would conclude the current scope of work. Advancement to future phases would involve visioning, scenario planning, and development of an implementation strategy, subject to Mayor and Council approval.

Following discussion, the committee members considered providing feedback to City Council regarding the draft Parks & Recreation Master Plan findings and the next phases of work.

**Motion: Vice Chairman Sweetser made a motion to recommend to the City Council that the City move forward with Perez Planning and Design's draft Context Analysis and Needs & Priorities Assessment report, support its presentation to Destin City Council, and endorse proceeding with Phases 3, 4, and 5 of the Parks & Recreation Master Plan, including visioning, implementation strategy, and final plan adoption. Committee member Julian provided the second. Motion passed 6-0. Committee member Ansley was absent from the meeting.**

#### **5. APPROVAL OF MINUTES:**

##### **A. October 28, 2025, Parks & Recreation Minutes**

**Chairwoman Autumn Weidenhamer asked for approval of the October 28, 2025, minutes as written.**

**Motion made by Committee member Julian to approve the minutes as written. Vice-Chairman Sweetser provided the second. Motion passed 6-0. Committee member Ansley was absent from the meeting.**

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

**A. Autumn Weidenhamer-** Reported on the draft Annual Report presentation, noting that it had been updated to incorporate suggestions and feedback provided at the previous meeting. The updated version was being finalized and forwarded to staff for inclusion in the City Council agenda packet. Committee members provided feedback on the layout and content and offered minor corrections and clarifications.

Discussion followed regarding the process of presenting the Annual Report to City Council. It was noted that the report would be placed on a future Council agenda, and committee members would be available to present highlights and respond to questions, rather than reading directly from the slides. Members discussed a collaborative presentation format in which multiple committee members would each present a slide or topic area.

The committee members discussed potential timing for the City Council presentation, with consideration given to scheduling conflicts, other committee presentations, and upcoming holiday-related agenda items. Consensus emerged to coordinate with staff and City scheduling to determine an appropriate meeting date, potentially in late January or February.

#### **7. STAFF REPORTS- PARKS AND RECREATION DIRECTOR LISA FIRTH**

Parks and Recreation Director Lisa Firth discussed scheduling for January, and the committee members agreed to cancel the regular January Parks & Recreation meeting, as the committee would instead convene for the City Council presentation on or about January 20th and participate in Arbor Day activities later in the month. Members confirmed that these engagements would provide sufficient opportunities to meet, and Director Firth stated that staff would send reminders and confirm dates.

Discussion followed regarding Arbor Day planning, including planting a tree with a plaque and optional informal participation by committee members rather than a formal ceremony. Potential tree planting sites were discussed, including coordination with the Planning and Public Works Departments on previously identified sites related to development conditions.

Additional updates included discussion of:

- Upcoming special events, including the holiday parade, Holly Jolly on the Harbor, and volunteer coordination.
- Holiday decorating judging, including scheduling, judging logistics, and communication to committee members.
- Consideration of a future fall or seasonal decorating contest, with direction to explore neutral or inclusive terminology.

- Updates on park projects and facilities, including Clement Taylor Park construction oversight, restroom repairs, Norriego Point facilities, athletic field improvements, and other ongoing maintenance activities.
- Members discussed event logistics for Holly Jolly on the Harbor, including volunteer support with Recreation Supervisor Beatriz Miller Labrada, oyster shell and cookie painting activities for children (noted to begin mid-afternoon), and vendor/craft setup.
- Event operations were reviewed at a high level, including staging of activities at Royal Melvin, coordination around parking and unloading, and preparations in advance of the boat parade (including an emcee location and anticipated parade route/flow).

**8. COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE: No one in the audience to provide any comments.**

**9. NEXT MEETING DATE: FEBURARY 24, 2026.**

Chairwoman Weidenhamer along with the committee members and staff expressed appreciation for committee member involvement and extended holiday well-wishes.

**10. ADJOURNMENT:**

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

Adopted this 24<sup>th</sup> day of February 2026

Autumn Weidenhamer  
Autumn Weidenhamer, Chairwoman

Sharon L. Gardner  
Sharon L. Gardner Records Mgmt. Specialist