

**MINUTES OF THE
PARKS & RECREATION COMMITTEE
DESTIN CITY HALL BOARDROOM
FEBRUARY 24, 2026 - 4:00 PM**

1. CALL TO ORDER:

Chairwoman Weidenhamer called the Parks & Recreation Meeting to order at 4:00 p.m. on Tuesday, February 24, 2026, in the Destin City Hall Boardroom immediately followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. ROLL CALL AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:

Members Present

Autumn Weidenhamer
Jessica Jullian
Andrea Ansley
Alison Stephens
Jan McGraw

Members Absent

Aubrey Santucci

Staff Present

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

3. AGENDA APPROVAL: Motion made by Chairwoman Weidenhamer to amend the Agenda to add the Design Concept created by John Stephens of the Harbor and Waterways Board. Committee member Jullian provided the second. Motion passed 5-0. Committee member Santucci was absent from the meeting.

4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES: Chairwoman Weidenhamer asked for approval or for any changes to the minutes. Committee member Stephens requested correction of the spelling of her name.

Motion made by committee member Ansley to approve the minutes with the correction. Committee member Jullian provided the second. Motion passed 5-0. Committee member Santucci was absent from the meeting.

5. OLD BUSINESS: NONE

6. NEW BUSINESS:

A) ELECTION OF VICE CHAIRMAN: Chairwoman Weidenhamer mentioned that Vice Chairman Matthew Sweetser has resigned from the committee and asked if anyone was interested in the position. Committee member Jullian stated she was interested.

Motion made by committee member Ansley to nominate committee member Jullian for Vice Chairman. Committee member Stephens provided the second. Motion passed 5-0. Committee member Santucci was absent from the meeting.

B) YOUTH COUNCIL PRESENTATION: No one from the Youth Council was in attendance.

C) OPENING DAY CEREMONIES DALTON THREADGILL PARK:

Parks & Recreation Deputy Director Ryan Reed discussed the opening day for Little League Baseball, which will be on Saturday March 7. The parade will start at 9am at Destin Elementary and proceed to Dalton Threadgill Park with the ceremonies starting at 10am. He encouraged all committee members to attend.

7. COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS/QUESTIONS:

A) Chairwoman Weidenhamer: Top 3-5 Priorities for Parks and Recreation 2026

Parks & Recreation priorities discussed were:

- 1. Adding a storage bay to the Public Works building** to protect parks equipment from weather exposure.
- 2. Construct/install a prefab metal shop building at Morgan's** to replace existing sheds and proper house equipment.
- 3. Proceed with Community Center roof replacement (RFP/bid process underway)** as an urgent facility repair, independent of longer-term recreation center planning.
- 4. Bathroom facility at the parks site** acknowledged as needed but secondary to the two urgent storage/equipment projects.

Motion was made by Chairwoman Weidenhamer for the committee to support the priorities of adding a bay to the existing Public Works building to protect the equipment, the installation of a prefab shop at Morgans Sports Center, and the new roof to be installed at the Community Center. Vice Chair Jullian provided the second. Motion passed 5-0.

- 1) Ongoing Work Plan Updates:** Vice Chair Jullian mentioned that the items that were previously under Matthew Sweetser's name would need to be absorbed by other members. Committee member Ansley volunteered to take the Adopt a Bench/Adopt a Park program.
- 2) Pooch Palooza Update:** Chairwoman Weidenhamer announced April 11th 10am to 2 pm as the date and times for the Pooch Palooza, with the following additional information provided:
 - **Planning** is underway, with organizers currently soliciting vendors and raffle prizes. They already have some commitments but are seeking more, and members were encouraged to share ideas or contacts.
 - **Vendor outreach:** There is a vendor form that is being sent out for more participation.
 - **Booth fees/donations:** Vendor booths are set as a \$35 donation to the Dog Park, and \$25 for nonprofits groups that participate.

- **Use of proceeds:** Funds are expected to go to the Parks Foundation again, and the group noted they have a little over \$1,000 remaining from last year. After this year's proceeds are known, they will need to decide what dog-park-related improvement(s) to spend the combined funds on. Members were invited to bring forward ideas for dog park spending priorities, based on community feedback or their own suggestions. The group referenced last year's event as having a great turnout and expressed hope for similar attendance this year.

B.) Committee member Stephens: Advised that at the next meeting she will have a recreational calendar that she will present to the members for their input.

C.) Vice Chair Jullian- Nothing tonight. It was already covered during the meeting.

D.) Committee member McGraw-Nothing tonight, everything has been covered and anything else will be in the updates.

E.) Committee member Ansley- Discussion regarding pay to park at Crystal Beach park. Clarification was provided that parking in the Crystal Beach "Shores" park parking lot is free (for residents and non-residents), but street parking is pay to park. The group noted the Shores lot has very limited capacity (about six spaces), which is likely to force overflow vehicles to park on the street (where fees apply).

Members discussed whether a citywide non-resident pass might be considered, but the sentiment was that it was unlikely—especially since beach parking is viewed as a significant revenue source.

A new parking program was referenced as going into effect around March 1st. that would include changes to how parking fees are collected at Joe's Bayour Boat Ramp.

8. STAFF REPORTS: Parks & Recreation Director Lisa Firth:

A. Draft Educational Design by John Stephens Vice Chairman of Harbor and Waterways Committee.

The committee was asked to begin reviewing an early concept (not the final version) for a large sticker-style graphic intended to be placed on harbor trash cans to encourage proper disposal and reduce litter/pollution.

- **Suggested enhancements:** Members recommended adding a QR code/link so the graphic can be smaller while still directing people to a webpage with more information, including "all the ways you could learn more" and guidance on proper disposal.

- **Fishing line disposal:** There was emphasis on making sure the design includes information about fishing line collection and where it can be dropped off, potentially via the QR code and/or a callout on the graphic.

- **Program/partners noted:** Participants referenced that CBA (Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance) helps manage or support the initiative and said this information should be shared back with John Stephens as part of the design/content plan.

- **Feasibility concerns (sticker durability):** Members questioned whether stickers would adhere well to the existing harbor trash cans (described as stone/rock base with a plastic top/lid) and raised concerns that stickers may peel over time. An alternative suggestion was a more durable option such as an etched metal sign/plate or otherwise permanent marking.

- **Content additions and compliance:** One member suggested adding a clear message such as “glass not allowed on the boardwalk.” Others confirmed there is an ordinance related to glass and noted that rule signage already states this, though members were unsure whether additional signage is posted widely.

- **Design review comments:** Members generally liked the design but suggested:

- Taking it “one step further” with educational guidance and clearer calls to action.
- Ensuring the graphics are proofread before printing.
- Clarifying/adjusting certain icons or wording (e.g., one icon did not clearly read as a “plastic straw”).

Motion made by Vice Chair Jullian to tentatively support the design concept from Mr. Stevens, of the Harbor and Waterways Committee with some possible additions, including a QR code to direct people to where they can dispose of fishing line and various plastic items. Also, possible varying designs beyond just a sticker that might be longer lasting. Committee member McGraw provided the second. Motion passed 5-0.

B. Recreation Updates: Recreation Supervisor Bryan Kellar:

Introduction of new employee Bentley Estell as the new Assistant Recreation Supervisor.

Spring Soccer: Staff indicated this spring is expected to be the last season of spring soccer, with the intent to shift soccer to a single primary fall season going forward.

- **Background and growth:** Spring soccer originally was run by the YMCA and later taken over by the City/department when participation was around 60 kids. It has since grown so that the spring season is now as large as the fall season.

- **Reason for change:** The parks calendar has become “jam-packed” with spring soccer plus other activities, leaving no window to try new programs. Eliminating spring soccer is intended to relieve that congestion.

- **Expansion of other seasons:** By consolidating soccer into fall, the department anticipates being able to add more games and make the fall soccer season bigger and to expand the basketball programming as well.

- **Potential shift for flag football:** Staff discussed moving flag football to late spring, noting it has historically been scheduled in a “bad window.” The goal is to create better gaps in the calendar and make the season stronger.
- **New spring opportunities:** With spring freed up, staff discussed adding community activities such as movies in the park, and informal/teen programming like pickup kickball, along with other new ideas.
- **Alignment with national sports seasons:** The restructuring was described as aligning local programming more closely with the “real seasons” for sports nationwide, starting next year after getting through the current year.
- **Baseball/softball question:** A committee member asked whether the City has ever offered community baseball/softball beyond what is provided through Little League. Staff indicated softball exists in some form (including adult softball), and noted broader youth baseball/softball participation is complicated by travel teams and overlapping commitments.
- **Spring tournaments and rentals:** The group noted that March brings multiple tournaments (soccer and baseball) and spring rentals, which contributes to the crowded spring schedule.

C. Parks Update: Ryan Reed- Parks & Recreation Deputy Director

Staff reported that Parks/Public Works crews have spent significant time at Dalton Threadgill park, including installing about 20 pounds of sod the prior week. After Public Works excavated and removed dirt, crews also redid substantial irrigation, described as a critical fix.

- In addition to the work at Dalton Threadgill Park , crews completed routine and facility improvement projects, including painting—notably repainting the exterior of “Buck Destin Park,” which was reported to look significantly improved.
- The batting cage at Morgans was described as mostly complete and operational, with only a few remaining components pending.
- Maintenance and turf work is underway citywide: crews have begun de-thatching grass and aerifying using a new aerifier, noted as an important equipment upgrade they previously lacked.
- Ongoing and upcoming grounds work includes tree pruning, resuming oversight and turf improvements at the dog park (adding more Bahia grass), and continued work at the beaches including painting, repairing showers, and addressing bathroom-related work.
- Future scheduled tasks include grading all baseball fields and installing mulch and pine straw across the city.

Arbor Day: Ryan Reed Parks & Recreation Deputy Director

Deputy Director Reed announced the Arbor Day Ceremony is April 24th at 10a.m. and the committee members can decide where they would like to have the tree planting ceremony. He

noted that it was preferable to not have it at Morgans Sports Center or Captain Leonard Destin Park. He asked the members to come up with a different location, and it would be decided at the next meeting.

Vice Chair Jullian asked about the timeline for the Pickleball Courts. Parks & Recreation Director Lisa Firth provided the following timelines for various projects in the city.

- **Norriego Park dredging/sand placement:** The Harbor dredging and placement of sand at Norriego Park is currently complete. Boats involved in the work were expected to be pulled out the next day, and sand-moving operations were expected to wrap up next week.
- **Expected reopening of Norriego Park:** The anticipated reopening of Norriego Park is by Friday of next week, barring unexpected delays (equipment issues were mentioned as a potential risk, though a new boat had been brought in).
- **Parking changes at Norriego Park:** Beginning on Monday, Norriego Park was expected to have new parking signs posted throughout (participants expressed displeasure about the signage).
- **Pickleball timeline:** Pickleball courts/project completion was discussed as targeting April, but several speakers expressed a more realistic expectation of May and emphasized it “needs to be May.”
- **Clement Taylor Park timeline:** Staff agreed the project would not be done by August and it would likely take the remainder of the year to finish. The expectation shared was that it would be open by the end of the year, with progress described as positive and active work occurring on-site.
- **Other projects:** Joe’s Bayou Park was described as still a couple of years out and not happening this year. The outfall project was said to be scheduled for completion by March 1, tied to the need to get overflow parking cleaned out. It was mentioned that construction signs may be removed around Monday.

Vice Chair Julian mentioned the condition of the grass at the Dog Park and asked for an update on repairs or replacement of turf.

According to Deputy Parks & Recreation Director Ryan Reed, Scotty Atkins, (Parks Supervisor) has experience with multiple turf types and has ideas for addressing high-traffic areas at the dog park. Rather than committing to a full turf installation, the approach discussed was to build consensus on targeted improvements—possibly patching specific worn spots and/or adding improvements around benches and gathering areas where visitors tend to congregate.

Discussion moved to the ribbon cutting ceremonies for the opening of the Pickleball Courts and for Norriego Park, and that committee members would be notified when those ceremonies would be held. Parks & Recreation Director Lisa Firth also mentioned there

are still pickleball courts available at the Community Center but with the summer camps starting soon people will need to call to schedule a time to play.

9. COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE: Sandy Trammell Parks Foundation President

Parks Foundation Update: Ms. Trammell mentioned a recent Daily News article highlighting how youth participation in city recreation and activities helps build future community leadership and strengthens community support. She went on to say it was a great article and it had nothing to do with individual entities here, but it had to do with the fact that if we bring our kids up doing recreational things and participating in things in the city, they grow up to be city leaders no matter where they go, and that cities now need to plan more of those to build community support around town.

Clement Taylor Park Pavilion Fundraising: The Parks Foundation is working to refurbish the pavilion at the park and is selling engraved commemorative bricks for \$500 each. The price point was intentional to avoid an overwhelming number of bricks and to keep the installation readable and manageable. The Parks Foundation's first fundraiser generated close to \$4,000, though the final total was still being calculated. It was also noted that the Parks Foundation meets at 9 am on the third Friday of every month at the Local Market located on Gulf Shore Drive.

Support for Pooch Palooza and Parks & Recreation events: The Parks Foundation board voted to actively support Pooch Palooza and other Parks & Recreation efforts by helping recruit vendors, posting ticket/vendor information on the Foundation's Facebook page and website, and providing broader marketing assistance.

Fundraising revenue staying with Parks & Recreation Department: Ms. Trammell explained the Parks Foundation has been working with the Finance Manager, the City Manager, and staff on a process where City Council can adopt a resolution stating that funds raised by the Parks & Recreation Department remain with them rather than going to the general fund (as happened in the past). She further noted that other committees have had similar resolutions attached to their work plan, but because this wasn't attached when the Parks & Recreation Committee presented their work plans to City Council, it can be requested and voted on.

Strategic fundraising message: Ms. Trammell recommended that when promoting Pooch Palooza (and similar events), it helps to specify a clear purpose for the funds as the Foundation did with the Pavilion. She also explained that Foundation connections (engineers, contractors, architects working at a reduced cost) can significantly reduce total project costs, making fundraising dollars go further.

Norriego Point management/conservation concerns: Discussion turned to the management of the four acres at the end of Norriego Point. It was stated that the City's position is true conservation, while the county's definition would allow vendors, sales, and boat-slip rentals.

Indoor batting cages proposal: An update was given by Ms. Trammell regarding a private entity exploring indoor batting cages inside a building west of the Fire Department. The main obstacle is parking, but the group is working with nearby businesses to use weekend parking since many are closed on weekends. It was noted that this could benefit our Little League.

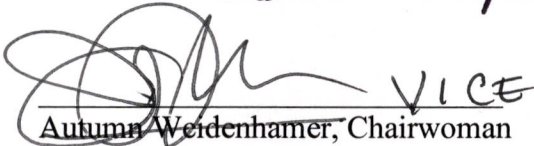
The subject of Cardboard Boat Races was mentioned, but that has been postponed until 2027 until Clement Taylor Park is finished. The Association of Architects is looking to sponsor a project where you build things, and this could be something they could be involved in.

In closing, Ms. Trammell offered continued hands-on-support, attendance at meetings/events and mobilizing Foundation members and their networks- to make the Parks & Recreation initiatives “bigger and better” more quickly through collaboration.

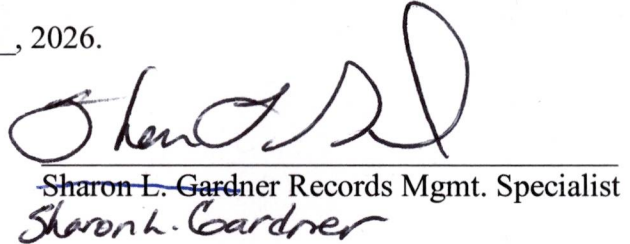
10. NEXT MEETING DATE: MARCH 24, 2026

11. ADJOURNMENT: Having no further discussion, the meeting was adjourned at 5:32 PM.

Adopted this 26th day of April, 2026.


Autumn Weidenhamer, Chairwoman

JESSICA JULIAN


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