

**MINUTES OF THE
PARKS & RECREATION COMMITTEE
DESTIN CITY HALL BOARDROOM
MAY 26, 2026 - 4:00 PM**

1. CALL TO ORDER:

Chairwoman Weidenhamer called the Parks & Recreation Meeting to order at 4:03 p.m. on Tuesday, May 26, 2026, in the Destin City Hall Boardroom immediately followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. ROLL CALL AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:

<u>Members Present</u>	<u>Members Absent</u>	<u>Staff Present</u>
Autumn Weidenhamer	Jessica Jullian	Lisa Firth P&R Director
Aubrey Santucci		Ryan Reed P&R Deputy Director
Andrea Ansley		Bryan Kellar Recreation Supervisor
Alison Stephens		Sharon Gardner Records Mgmt. Specialist
Jan McGraw		

3. AGENDA APPROVAL: Motion made by Chairwoman Weidenhamer for approval of the agenda. Committee member McGraw provided the second. Motion passed 5-0. Vice Chairwoman Jullian was absent from the meeting.

4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES: APRIL 28, 2026- Chairwoman Weidenhamer asked for approval of the minutes of the April 28, 2026, meeting. Committee member Santucci asked for the word “Firefighters” to be changed to “Fireworks” on the last paragraph of page one.

Motion made by Committee member Stephens to approve the minutes of April 28, 2026, with the correction from “Firefighters” to Fireworks”. Committee member Ansley provided the second. Motion passed 5-0. Vice Chairwoman Jullian was absent from the meeting.

5. OLD BUSINESS: NONE

Vice Chairwoman Jullian joined the meeting at 4:15.

6. NEW BUSINESS:

A. Independence Day Bike Parade- Parks & Recreation Deputy Director Ryan Reed

Deputy Director Reed announced the Independence Day Bike Parade activities will take place July 1, 2026, beginning at 4pm at Destin Elementary School. The actual parade will start at 6pm, and there will be food trucks on site. He encouraged the committee members to attend, and if they wanted to volunteer to help out or participate as a parade judge to let him know.

B. Upcoming Parks and Recreation Meeting Schedule: Deputy Director Ryan Reed

Deputy Director Reed discussed the possibility of not having a meeting in July due to it being such a busy month for events for the Parks and Recreation team, and possibly not having meetings in November and December due to the holidays. He advised the committee members that Pierce from the DEP will possibly be coming to the June meeting to present to this committee the plans for Joe's Bayou, which he's hoping to do before he presents them to city council.

Several committee members stated they were unsure about being available for the July Parks and Recreation meeting due to possible upcoming travel plans.

C. Parks and Recreation Budget: Deputy Director Ryan Reed

Committee members and staff discussed the upcoming operating and capital budget planning process. Staff reported that the operating budget was substantially complete and would next proceed to review by the Finance Director and the City Manager's office before moving into capital budget discussions. It was noted that additional time remained for capital planning efforts.

Staff referenced the committee's previous motion concerning the building project, stating that the motion would serve as a primary point of support moving forward during budget consideration discussions. Staff emphasized that current budget priorities continue to center on renovations and improvements at Morgans facilities, particularly those associated with ball field expenses and related infrastructure improvements. Chairwoman Weidenhamer asked whether additional requests had been added to this year's budget proposal. Deputy Director Reed responded that most requests remained consistent with prior years, particularly those associated with Morgans facilities.

Current requests include:

- Playground lighting improvements
- Fencing upgrades
- Sod replacement
- Additional shade structures at the dog park
- Safety netting
- Dugout renovations
- Batting cage lighting improvements.

Deputy Director Reed explained that these items have been packaged together and presented to the Finance Director, the City Manager, and City Council.

Additional discussion addressed long-term renewal and replacement planning for other park facilities. Staff further reported that installation of lighting at the Morgans batting cages was already underway, and that fencing improvements remain an important budget priority despite anticipated funding challenges.

Additional facility needs discussed included:

- Restroom improvements at Buck Destin
- Funding efforts for restroom upgrades

- Construction of a cemetery shed
- Continued pursuit of safety netting improvements.

Committee member Ansley asked for clarification regarding fencing improvements at the dog park, specifically whether improvements would apply to one or both dog park areas.

Deputy Director Reed confirmed that both the large and the small dog park fencing areas would be included, along with replacement gates matching the current configuration. Estimated project costs were \$59,000 and would include double maintenance gates, switch screws and related hardware. It was emphasized that these elements were necessary components of the project and wouldn't be removed from the proposal.

D. 4th of JULY CELEBRATION: Deputy Director Ryan Reed

Staff and committee members conducted an extensive discussion regarding the City's 2026 Fourth of July celebration plans, specifically the ongoing debate concerning the use of traditional fireworks, drone shows, or a combination of both. Staff opened the discussion by acknowledging significant public reaction and online commentary following the recent City Council meeting regarding the proposed Fourth of July event format. Committee members referenced Council's recent vote related to a drone show proposal and discussed confusion among residents concerning whether fireworks had officially been canceled.

Staff clarified that no final contract had yet been approved or signed for either fireworks or drone services. It was explained that the City's existing fireworks agreement with Pyro Shows remains structured as a continuing annual contract requiring yearly council approval. Staff stated that Parks and Recreation had originally planned to:

- Continue the traditional fireworks display;
- Request an additional \$10,000 allocation for an expanded "grand finale" in honor of the 250th anniversary, and
- Potentially supplement the celebration with additional features.

Discussion centered heavily on public response to the proposal. Committee members noted that many residents strongly support maintaining the traditional fireworks display, while others expressed interest in incorporating newer technologies such as drones. Several committee members emphasized that the primary concern was not necessarily the idea of a drone show itself, but rather the process by which the proposal was introduced without prior discussion with the Parks and Recreation committee. Further discussion addressed environmental permitting and operational requirements associated with the fireworks display. Following extensive discussion, it was determined to make the following motion:

Motion made by Chairwoman Weidenhamer that the Parks and Recreation Committee propose keeping the fireworks for the 250th anniversary on the 4th of July and adding a supplemental drone show from an alternate location. Committee member Ansley provided the second. Motion passed 6-0

It was further discussed among the committee members and staff that they would present this motion to City Council at the June 1st meeting.

7. COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS/QUESTIONS

A. Chairwoman Weidenhamer- Pooch Palooza Recap

Chairwoman Weidenhamer reported that the Pooch Palooza event was another successful community event and fundraiser. It was announced that the event generated approximately \$1041 in proceeds, which was noted to be comparable to the previous year's fundraising total. Numerous vendors expressed satisfaction with the event's turnout and reported strong participation and sales during the event. Several vendors also indicated interest in returning for next year's event. Discussion followed regarding possible future uses for the accumulated funds and it was noted that previous recommendations had included the potential installation of agility course equipment in both the small and large dog park areas.

Staff also mentioned ongoing concerns related to turf conditions and associated replacement costs, noting that current available funds wouldn't be sufficient to address larger turf improvement projects at this time. Committee members discussed whether to utilize the currently available funds for a smaller improvement project or continue saving proceeds from further Pooch Palooza events in order to fund a larger capital improvement item for the dog parks.

Deputy Director Reed provided an update regarding recent improvements at the dog park facilities, specifically addressing bench replacement efforts. Staff explained that attempts had been made to refurbish several existing benches; however, the rehabilitation process was ultimately unsuccessful.

As a result, staff reported that new benches have been ordered for the dog park. Committee members expressed appreciation for staff's quick response to public concerns regarding the condition of the benches. Additional positive feedback was shared regarding recent reseeding and turf improvements at the dog park, specifically recognizing Lawrence "Scotty" Atkins, Parks Supervisor for the successful grass restoration efforts and the improved appearance of the facility.

Committee members and staff also discussed future shade structure possibilities for the dog park, along with ideas for improving the drinking fountains for the dogs.

Chairwoman Weidenhamer discussed the anticipated completion of the new pickleball courts and the potential ribbon-cutting ceremony to commemorate the project. Discussion turned to event planning and promotional items for the ceremony, along with the completion date of the project. Staff provided a project update, explaining that several components on the project remain incomplete. While irrigation work has been installed, the contractor has completed sod placement and tree installation, and some remaining items still require attention. Staff noted that court surfacing work had been scheduled but was delayed due to wet weather conditions. Additional utility-related issues also remain under review before the project can be fully completed. Committee members agreed that it would be acceptable if the courts became operational prior to the formal ribbon-cutting ceremony.

and they discussed waiting until the next meeting to review project status and determine whether a ceremony date could be established at that time.

B. Committee member Stephens-

Committee member Stephens recognized the City and the American Legion for their efforts in organizing the recent Memorial Day service. The member complimented the event, describing it as a beautiful presentation and specifically praised the decision to relocate the ceremony to the Community Center due to the weather conditions. Appreciation was expressed for the successful coordination of the event and the respectful manner in which the observance was conducted.

Committee member Stephens inquired about the progress of obtaining and installing the fishing line disposal unit for the Norriego Point Park area. Director Firth indicated that they didn't have a current update available but would contact the individual coordinating the effort to determine the status of the project and whether an additional fishing line recycling station had been secured. It was agreed to follow up and provide an update at a future meeting.

C. Vice Chair Jullian-

The Vice Chairwoman inquired whether the City planned to recognize National Parks Month in July, and asked whether any special activities, events, or recognitions were traditionally conducted in conjunction with National Parks Month. Director Firth explained that the city typically recognizes National Parks month through a proclamation presented by City Council. It was noted that members of the Parks and Recreation Committee are generally invited to attend the Council meeting and participate in the proclamation presentation and acceptance.

D. Committee member McGraw- Nothing today.

E. Committee member Santucci-

Committee member Santucci inquired about possibly having a special boat parade for the upcoming 250th anniversary celebration. Committee members discussed the concept and recognized its appeal as a community event; however, concerns were raised regarding safety and navigation challenges associated with hosting a boat parade during the Fourth of July holiday period. It was noted that nighttime navigation on local waterways can already be difficult due to increased vessel traffic, including rented pontoon boats and recreational boaters who may be unfamiliar with the area's waterways. Members agreed that adding another large-scale marine event on the same day could present operational and safety challenges. Discussion concluded by acknowledging the boat parade concept as a positive idea for future consideration and community engagement opportunities.

Committee member Santucci raised concerns regarding conditions at a city waterway access site near ongoing private construction activity in the area of 731 Bayou Drive. It was noted that construction-related storage materials and a dumpster were situated on City property or within the public right-of-way. Committee member Santucci discussed vegetation management needs at the same waterway access location and advised that a

local contractor had volunteered to assist with clearing the area by bush hogging the overgrowth and removing debris at no cost to the City. Staff expressed appreciation for the volunteer offer and agreed that an on-site meeting would be beneficial to evaluate the location and determine the appropriate course of action.

F. Committee member Ansley-

Committee member Ansley noted that their primary comments regarding the Fourth of July had already been addressed earlier in the meeting but wished to recognize recent improvements completed at Buck Destin Park. Residents had expressed appreciation to her for the newly installed fencing at the park. Committee member Ansley stated she had personally observed the fencing and felt it was a significant improvement in the facility. Additional compliments were offered regarding the appearance of recent decorative enhancements and landscaping improvements within the park system. Staff expressed appreciation for the recognition.

8. PUBLIC COMMENTS: NONE

9. NEXT MEETING JUNE 23, 2026

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

Adopted this 28th day of July, 2026.

Autumn Weidenhamer
Autumn Weidenhamer, Chairwoman

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