



PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION MEETING

March 2, 2026

Recreation Center

12:00 Noon

Members in Attendance: B. Combo, T. Deane, M. Hill, J. Walker, N. Birch, C. White, B. Nitschke, P. Holm, and four citizen guests.

Members Not in Attendance: T. Hobson

Call to Order

B. Combo called the meeting to order at 12:02 p.m.

Approval of Minutes

C. White moved to approve the February 2nd meeting minutes. B. Nitschke seconded. All were in favor.

Director's Report – P. Holm

P. Holm reported the following:

- He asked if anyone had any questions regarding his director's report he sent out prior to the meeting. B. Nitschke stated he had some questions about an interdepartmental loan relating to the Tautphaus Park Zoological Society (TPZS) and whether there is any oversight of this group. P. Holm explained they are considering an interdepartmental loan as an option to keep up with inflation costs on zoo construction projects. He also stated that the Parks Department has regular meetings with members of the TPZS regarding all zoo infrastructure design and construction.
- P. Holm, in answer to B. Nitschke's question about shelter designs at Heritage Park, reported that he signed off on the shelter specs from the design team, and that after the shelters are completed and stained, they will look great.
- P. Holm reported on the passing of Deb Jensen, an administrative assistant at the zoo for twenty years.
- There has been recent vandalism at Esquire Park and tagging in the underpass south of the Japanese Friendship Garden. Following this report, there was discussion on the number, placement, and effectiveness of security cameras in the park system.

Tubing Hill Report

P. Holm gave a presentation to the commissioners on the timeline and events pertaining to the Gateway to Kelly Canyon Tubing Hill at Ryder Park Project.

- July 2022 – P. Holm was invited to meet at Heritage Park, with Councilwoman Burthenshaw, Eric Isom (Ball Ventures), Mike Vansteenkiste (owner of Kelly Canyon), and Doug Swanson (facility manager), to hear the group's proposal for a tubing hill. P. Holm

did not like the idea because he didn't think it would work in Heritage Park, and he wasn't interested in stopping the momentum they had going in the park. Over the next several months, they looked at a couple of other locations and agreed on Ryder Park.

- January 2023 – City Council and Mayor Casper visit the Gateway tubing hill in Eagle. They loved the idea and encouraged P&R to work with Gateway.
- February 2023 – P&R staff and Gateway management met with City Council, to propose their idea.
- June 2023 – Gateway had to complete a Conditional Use Permit, meaning they had to present their proposal and site plan to the Board of Adjustments with requested variances. This is when they promised to work with P&R staff to make improvements to Ryder Park that would be beneficial to the entire community, not just them.
- September 2023 – Concession agreement was signed by City Council, with the understanding that they would continue to build permanent amenities.
- October 2023 – Hill is created and 25,000 sq. ft. of sod is laid. The City is told that irrigation would be installed in early 2024.
- December 2023 – Gateway holds a ribbon cutting and grand opening event.
- December 2023-March 2024 – the Tubing hill operates and we deal with several complaints from the neighbors. These complaints dealt with light and sound disturbances.
- July 2024 – The City receives its first financial report, showing that the facility saw roughly 17,000 paying customers.
- All through 2024, the City reiterated to Gateway that they **MUST** install irrigation on the hill, get street trees in, and expand the parking lot, before they open again.
- July 2024 – Asphalt millings are rolled out in the parking area.
- November 2024 – the City is told that the trees will be planted before they open.
- April 2025 – The City informs Gateway that there was severe damage to the turf, from their team removing equipment.
- May 2025 – Gateway informs us that Ryan Neptune has been arrested and is being investigated for embezzlement, by the FBI. Gateway says that we probably won't see a financial report anytime soon because of this, but they are still intending to open in the winter.
- August 2025 – Gateway is reminded that we still need financials for 2024, they must replace all dead trees, and they must complete the landscaping on the backside of the hill, before they open.
- December 2025 – The City received a "Termination of Agreement" letter from Kelly Canyon Management.
- In the end, we never saw financials for 2024/25, they never constructed a restroom, they never replaced the trees that died from lack of an irrigation system, the parking lot is no better than it was before this partnership, they never paid Rock Solid for landscaping the backside of the hill. On the other hand, we now have a promontory point in Ryder Park that can be used as a community sledding hill and will be a cool feature along the river.

Facility Allocation Policy Discussion

- P. Holm and staff met with several user groups who were mostly in agreement with the initial draft of the Facility Allocation Policy.
- Following the meeting with the user groups, P. Holm received a revised policy draft from B. Combo and some thoughts on the policy from B. Nitschke.
- Following extensive discussion on the policy, it was decided that P. Holm will bring a revised final draft to the next meeting for consideration and a vote.

Commission Reports

Golf Advisory – T. Deane

Troy Dean reported the following:

- Mother Nature has allowed the courses to open early, which is generating revenue from green fees, season passes, and pro shop inventory. It's been a great start for the courses.
- The golf maintenance crews have been focusing on improving the landscape and removing diseased, damaged or dying trees.
- The new driving range ball machines are very popular and have been generating a big boost in revenue.

Shade Tree - M. Hill

M. Hill reported the following:

- Arbor Day is officially planned for May 20th at 10 am on the Riverwalk east of the S. Utah Avenue roundabout. Kids from the Career Technical Education Center's horticulture program will be participating along with 5th and 6th graders from another area school. They plan to plant thirty-one trees.
- Idaho Falls received the Legacy of Leaves award. (This was in last month's meeting minutes)
- Revisions to the Idaho Falls Tree Ordinance will be presented to the March City Council Work Session for their consideration.
- Parks employee Brandon Proctor has become the newest city arborist, and Eric Nigg will soon become the next city arborist.

Bonneville County – J. Walker

No Updates

School District 91 – N. Birch

N. Birch referred to T. Hobson's report that was e-mailed to the director.

School District 93 – T. Hobson (absent) Report e-mailed to the Director

T. Hobson reported the following

- Winter sports in District 93 have come to an end.

- Bonneville Boys Basketball was the lone State Qualifier. Thunder Ridge Girls Wrestling Team took 2nd place in the State Tournament.
- Spring sports have started with tryouts the week of May 2nd.
- The district hosted the Dance and Cheer State Championships at the Mountain America Center the last weekend of February. It was a success with an estimated 13,000 participants. The event attendees filled the area restaurants and hotels.

National Trends on Aging – C. White

C. White reported the following:

1. Idaho's senior population is growing very quickly

- Idaho's 65+ population has grown about 68% since 2010, making it one of the fastest-growing age groups in the state.
- About 16% of Idaho residents are now age 65 or older (over 300,000 people).
- Projections show the 65+ population could grow another 30% by 2031, far faster than younger age groups.

Implication: Communities will see growing demand for accessible parks, walking paths, and low-impact recreation.

2. Rural Idaho is aging even faster than cities

- In rural Idaho counties, about 21% of residents are already age 65+, significantly higher than the statewide share.
- Many retirees choose smaller Idaho communities for lifestyle and cost of living.

Implication: Smaller communities need age-friendly outdoor spaces, trails, and social recreation opportunities.

3. More Idaho seniors are living independently with family support

- About 73,000 family caregivers provide support for older adults in Idaho.
- Approximately 30,000 Idaho seniors are living with Alzheimer's disease, highlighting growing health and mobility challenges.

Implication: Parks and recreation programs can support healthy aging, social connections and physical activity for seniors and caregivers.

Sports Tourism – B. Combo

B. Combo reported the following:

- In response to the report by C. White, B. Combo suggested we consider a marketing campaign on area fitness opportunities for senior citizen snowbirds returning to Idaho Falls.

Park Conditions and Needs – B. Nitschke

B. Nitschke reported the following:

- B. Nitschke reminded the Commissioners of his concerns about the adequacy of the AZA final review regarding worker safety that he briefly discussed last month and the need for a discussion and a decision on how best to proceed. To make this happen and to

allow for any public input, he thought it would be best to add a specific action item to the April meeting agenda. All were in favor.

Adjournment at 1:45pm.

Next meeting – April 6, 2026

Recorded by:

*Tracy Sessions, Executive Assistant
Parks & Recreation Dept.*