

MINUTES  
PARKS AND RECREATION ADVISORY BOARD MEETING  
CITY COMMISSION ROOM  
March 9, 2026 - 5:30 P.M.

Present were the following members of the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board: Mr. Nick Lander, Mr. Joe Knopp, Ms. Sue Maes, Mr. Greg Hoyt, Mr. Matt Enoch, Mr. Bruce Snead, Mr. Lew Faust, and Mr. Jerry Lawrence.

Absent: None.

Employees present: Mr. Aaron Stewart, Director of Parks and Recreation; Mr. Casey Smithson, Parks Superintendent; Mr. Alfonso Leyva, Park Planner II, Ms. Sydni De Hart, Recreation Superintendent; and Mr. Eli Fort, Aquatics Supervisor, Tyler Burroughs, Athletics Supervisor; TJ Micheals, Instructional Programs Supervisor.

INTRODUCTION OF NEW BOARD MEMBERS

Mr. Lander introduced two new Board members, Lew Faust, and Jerry Lawrence. Mr. Lawrence shared he was a desert storm vet and came to Manhattan about 6 years ago. Mr. Faust shared he is a representative from USD 383, has been in education for 43 years, and has been in Manhattan since 2009. The rest of the Board members went around and introduced themselves to the new members.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS

Mr. Snead commented the City Commission tabled the update for the Parks and Recreation Master Plan and asked if it was scheduled for tomorrow's work session meeting. Mr. Stewart answered it is not scheduled as of yet, but more information will come on that particular item.

Mr. Knopp shared he's aware of fundraising at the Zoo which is making good progress but needs additional items from the technical side to raise the last few million and thought maybe it was behind schedule. Mr. Stewart answered he wouldn't suggest it is behind schedule, the process has changed to construction manager at risk and are working on final documentation.

Mr. Hoyt shared he drove by CiCo Park recently and stated the ballpark looks spectacular. Mr. Stewart shared the Board should be getting an invite soon for a Grand Opening on March 28<sup>th</sup>. Mr. Faust commented the lights around the fields are different and that they don't illuminate out into the neighboring areas. Mr. Stewart shared the hooded and LED lights have less of a light bleed and is the future of ballfield lighting.

MINUTES

It was moved and seconded to approve the minutes of the regular meeting held on February 9, 2026. On vote, motion carried 8-0.

STAFF REPORTS

Mr. Stewart commented the Monthly Report did not get uploaded. Staff uses a system called ClearPoint and was having trouble uploading the data into that system. Staff will hopefully have that by next month.

Mr. Knopp asked how to know whether the month to date versus year-to-date budget compared to last year is on point. Mr. Stewart stated Staff spends a lot more in March-May in preparation for Summer so tracking the year-to-date is a better comparison than monthly.

## NEW BUSINESS

1. Ms. Marcia Rozell, Executive Director of Visit Manhattan, presented a Huddle Up Sports Tourism report to the Board. She shared some data from the past couple of years and had 91 events in 2025. Visit Manhattan did a Strategic Plan which included a Sports Tourism Assessment. Worked with Huddle Up Group in May 2025, who interviewed leaders in the community to get data and information. Ms. Rozell shared information on the Sports Tourism Index to include destination strengths, opportunities, and competitive analysis, facilities, organization structure, and events. Facility Recommendations National Best Practices to include facility type, tournament friendly, and current Visit Manhattan inventory. Index Benchmarking to include facilities, destination strength, organization structure, and events. Market Potential Index to include a 30-minute radius rating by sport. Initial Themes to include sports tourism, regional competition, geographic location, tournament capacity, opportunity to develop facilities, and to build stakeholder relationships. Swot Analysis to include natural assets, collegiate event history leadership, facilities/access, communication, hotel inventory, non-traditional sports, marquee and secondary sports, regional competition, finances, and value proposition. Primary Recommendations to include enhancing human capital, stakeholder engagement, and marketing. Secondary Recommendations to include developing new indoor multi-use facilities, enhance existing venues, and create a regional facility master plan. King for a Day to include deepening K-State engagement, form a Sports Advisory Board, and define a sustainable funding model. Next step is to get a Sports Tourism Director hired.

Mr. Knopp commented to get a big tournament here seems like an impossible pull when there are other places that seem more realistic. Mr. Stewart shared that Manhattan has the ability to attract teams, it just depends on the level of play. Mr. Knopp asked who we would benchmark for this. Ms. Rozell stated in the state of Kansas, we benchmark with Salina and a little bit of Lawrence. She also commented that when a facility in the community closes due to a tournament, that it shouldn't have a negative impact, and the community should understand it is bringing in outside dollars.

Mr. Enoch commented it's implied that this group can add facilities and make facilities better and asked what Parks and Recreation could do specifically to help Visit Manhattan. Ms. Rozell shared there is no ask tonight, this is just an informative report to let the Board know a study was done and that Visit Manhattan is moving forward with their steps. Mr. Stewart shared there was a Steering Committee that was set up to review this report and make a recommendation. The agreement is to partner tighter on the tournaments Parks and Rec is hosting to see if they can be expanded.

Mr. Lander asked if part of the role of the Sports Tourism Director to help connect tournament planners with places in town that want to work with them. Ms. Rozell stated Visit Manhattan does already do that but can always be improved. Staff tries hard to make sure people know about and can access places when in town for tournaments.

2. Mr. Leyva presented a 2027-2031 Capital Improvement Program Update to the Board. He stated this started last year, but Staff will start incorporating what was discussed in the Master Plan into future CIPs. He shared the definition of the Capital Improvement Program as well as some potential projects that needs identification. The 2026 CIP Projects that are funded or under construction include Steel and Pipe Supply Ballpark, Warner Park Trailhead and Loop, Goodnow Park Playground and Surfacing, Blue Earth Water Feature Renovation, Flint Hills Discovery Center Outdoor Classroom, and Sunset Zoo Lemur and Americas Exhibits.

Mr. Enoch asked if direct capital improvement funding for the City, grants, sponsorships, and external sources of funding encompass all the funding sources for CIPs. Mr. Leyva stated that is correct, however, there is no funding from the General Fund from the City. Mr. Knopp asked if Goodnow Park is a higher priority in replacing the playground equipment than Sojourner Park. Mr. Leyva answered yes, Goodnow is the second oldest after Northview in terms of playground equipment.

Mr. Leyva also presented Proposed CIP Projects for 2027-2031. He commented in 2029 is when Staff will start to get into the Renewed Quality of Life Sales Tax. He shared he hasn't heard any definitive dates for CIP Committee or City Administration but Staff wants to be ready for those conversations and have those project identified.

Mr. Knopp asked if all of the 2026 projects have been approved by City Commission. Mr. Leyva shared Staff is in the process of getting City Commission approval for the Goodnow Park, Blue Earth Water Feature, Flint Hills Discovery Center, and Sunset Zoo projects. Ms. Maes asked when the current bond will be finished. Mr. Leyva shared it should end in 2027 but the City will get proceeds from it until April 2028. Mr. Stewart wanted to clarify it is not bonded, the sales tax will end at the end of 2027. Ms. Maes asked how Staff is planning to involve the Board and potentially go on a tour to see what a potential project in the future could be. Mr. Stewart commented Staff will be at a City Commission work session on March 23<sup>rd</sup> to get their reaction and what they want to do on the street tax renewal and how Parks and Rec fits into that. Once Staff has guidance and direction, it will be brought back to this Board. Mr. Enoch asked why there are only a few projects listed and not all the projects Staff thinks they would potentially need. Mr. Stewart stated what will happen in the next 5 years as Staff has received direction from City Management is to put on the list what Staff thinks can reasonably be accomplished. Staff has been asked to do projects for Move MHK! that can actually be accomplished and that is how Staff built that list. Ms. Maes commented the community needs to be invested in helping with Move MHK! as there's such a grand plan in there.

3. Ms. De Hart presented a Summer Recreation Programs Preview for Aquatics. She introduced Eli Fort, who is the new Aquatics Supervisor who took over when she was promoted to Recreation Superintendent. She shared a Staff Update to include that recruitment began in January, and the Lifeguard age restriction increased to 16. Returning Programs to include Aquatic Exercise classes, Junior Lifeguarding, and swimming lessons. New for 2026 includes a 4<sup>th</sup> session of swimming lessons, morning lap swimming at CiCo, two time slots for Little Apple Day Camp swimming lessons, and Dive-In Movies.

Mr. Burroughs presented a Summer Recreation Programs Preview for Athletics. He shared information on upcoming programs for Youth Athletics to include Baseball/Softball, Optimist T-Ball, Flint Hills Volleyball, 3v3 Basketball, and My First T-Ball. He also shared information on programs for Adult Athletics to include Sand Volleyball and Pickleball.

Ms. Maes commented she heard of someone buying land and putting sand volleyball courts in and asked how it would connect with Parks and Recreation. Ms. De Hart answered it was a private company that put those in but doesn't know if they will run leagues out of it. Mr. Lander shared he thinks they will run leagues but maybe not organized in the same way as Parks and Rec.

Mr. Enoch wanted to commend Mr. Burroughs and his staff on the Youth Basketball League that just finished and shared the best part is seeing the improvement from week 1 to the last week and he's looking forward to seeing all the youth programs continue to get better.

Ms. Micheals presented a Summer Recreation Programs Preview for Summer Camps. She shared information on Little Apple Day Camp and stated there were additional week-long sessions added this year to offer more flexibility. She also shared information on the Little Apple Theater and new camps for 2026.

Ms. De Hart presented a Summer Recreation Programs Preview for Douglass Center. She shared information on Special Populations to include some new programs and Staff updates, Senior Trips, and Douglass programs to include Total Body Strong and Total Body Fitness.

Ms. De Hart also presented a Summer Recreation Programs Preview for the Flint Hills Discovery Center. She shared information on returning programs to include Early Childhood, School Age, Family, and Adult

activities as well as new programs including Putts & Pints and a Can You Dig It Summer Library outreach program.

Mr. Enoch commented he thinks Recreation Staff does a great job at evaluating programs to see what works and what doesn't and listening the community and making adjustments when needed. Ms. De Hart stated the focus has been on cost recovery and Staff has done a great job on working on cost recovery models and looking at programs more intensely than in the past.

#### UPCOMING MEETING TOPICS

Mr. Lander stated the upcoming meeting topics include a Park Planner Projects Update, a Winter Recreation Programs Review, and a 2026 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter Goal Review.

Meeting adjourned.