

EAST GRAND RAPIDS
PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION MEETING
EGR COMMUNITY CENTER
COMMISSION CHAMBERS
6:00 PM
Monday, February 23, 2026

The regular meeting of the Parks and Recreation Commission was held in the City Commission Chambers in the East Grand Rapids Community Center.

Patrick Parkes called the meeting to order 6:00 pm.

Present in Person: Paul Bratt, Michelle Brown, Ryan Burdick, Lauren Jacoby, Ben Smith, Lan Le and Patrick Parkes

Absent: Larry Fisher and Steve Krogman

Also Present: Parks and Recreation Director, Derek Melville and Sara Coffey

Guests: None

Public Comment:

None

Report of Commissioners:

Michelle Brown – Attended the Parks and Recreation GR Gold game, it was great to see the Parks and Rec staff there!

Paul Bratt – The community is excited about the grant and the upcoming art fair.

Ben Smith – Robotics teams from Lakeside and the middle school will move onto the national competition. Anticipate June groundbreaking for the school construction.

Ryan Burdick – The Department of Public Works (DPW) will be removing redundant water lines that are under the track.

Lauren Jacoby, Patrick Parkes and Lan Le – Nothing.

Review of minutes:

Minutes of January 26, 2026, Parks and Recreation Commission meeting were presented for approval.

MOTION to approve: Brown

SUPPORT: Jacoby

YES: Bratt, Brown, Burdick, Jacoby, Le, Parkes and Smith (7)

NO: (0)

MINUTES APPROVED

Special Event Calendar – FYI

Consider request to approve Special Events Permits:

a. 2026 Reeds Lake Run

Director Melville presented the Reeds Lake Run. This event is being held by the Parks and Recreation Department in June. Courses are out and back, which help reduce the amount of road closures, public safety members and volunteers.

Burdick: Is there an established alternative route for the 10K course, if it is flooded like it is now?

Bratt: This event is a fun organized event. Likes that it is family oriented and appreciates it being stroller friendly.

MOTION to approve: Bratt

SUPPORT: Parkes

YES: Bratt, Brown, Burdick, Jacoby, Le, Parkes and Smith (7)

NO: (0)

2026 Reeds Lake Run is Approved

b. 2026 Rhoades McKee Reeds Lake Triathlon

Director Melville reviewed the course map for the swim, bike and run courses. 700 plus participants are expected. The post-race celebration will be moved from Wege Plaza to Gerken Plaza. Alcohol will not be served this year, and awards will be in the same place as where the post-race food is served. The location change will not impact the racecourse.

Bratt: Will the school construction interfere with the race?

Melville: No.

MOTION to approve: Brown

SUPPORT: Parkes

YES: Bratt, Brown, Burdick, Jacoby, Le, Parkes and Smith (7)

NO: (0)

2026 Rhoades McKee Reeds Lake Triathlon is Approved

Middle School Athletics Registration Fee Discussion:

Director Melville presented this agenda item and is requesting feedback. In 2011 the city took oversight of Middle School athletics. The Parks and Recreation Department handles registration, organization and

budgeting of middle school sports. Vertical Alignment has made staff look at all areas, including pay for coaches. They are paid a flat fee of \$1,000-\$1,800, with the higher range being for sports that have more intensive time needs. Compared to other local schools we are on the low end of pay. Fall of 2026 coaches' stipends will be increased by \$1,000.

When budgeting for the following year, each program has their own budget within Parks and Recreation. Since 2011 we have always tried to break even in the end for Middle School sports. Having less participants in boys swim increases the cost per student dramatically when the added coaches' pay was factored in. Having a flat rate for all Middle School sports has its pros and cons as well. The extra money that comes in from track would help offset the higher cost of boy's swim.

Parkes: Asked if there is anticipation of salary increase to be based on intensive needs or sliding scale?

Melville: This will start with a one-time, big pay bump then increase by increments of so much per year as coaches continue to work for us.

Bratt: Prices of programs could decrease if the number of participants increases?

Melville: Yes.

Burdick: Would like to see the price even across the board. Doesn't want to see sports getting more or less participants due to cost.

Jacoby: Agrees with the increase in coaches stipend.

Brown: Where does the \$150 average come in?

Melville: It's weighted; some sports have significantly more athletes than other sports.

Jacoby: Where do gate fees go?

Melville: Back to the sport that brings it in.

Jacoby: Where do scholarships come from?

Melville: The school coordinates scholarships, not exactly sure where the money comes from.

Le: Is the city able to pass costs onto the families?

Burdick: Suggested the city could subsidize this cost. Noted \$250 is the same amount each high school athlete pays for sports.

Melville: In 2011 breaking even was agreed upon by the city and school. The City Commission would need to agree to subsidize additional costs.

Burdick: For consistency, it might be beneficial to fundraise each year, to cover these higher costs.

Le: Everything is getting too expensive; can the city work this out?

Jacoby: Has had conversations with parents, \$250 is far less than the cost of any club sport. Gate fees should be spread evenly over all sports.

Smith: Looking at the district, other schools are on scale option 2, which is one lever we can actually pull and doesn't promote lower participation in sports and prevent new sports from beginning.

Bratt: Agrees.

Parke: Wondered if we would lose athletes if some of the sports with higher participation, increase their cost?

Melville: Unsure, but there is a possibility that student would try other sports that they might not have before because the sports are all the same price.

Smith: Suggested keeping the current method for the next school year and educating families about the change to \$250 per sport that will come in the future.

Brown: Likes the idea that middle school and high school sports cost would be the same.

Jacoby: Asked if other middle schools have the same structure?

Melville: Was unable to find another school that runs their middle school sports through a municipality. EGR is very unique. One point from Commissioner Burdick about scholarships and fundraising to help offset the higher costs.

Burdick: It would benefit everyone.

Parke: Fundraising for sports to offset participation barriers, if there was extra it could go back to the sport that did the fundraising.

Melville: Some team members have experience with fundraising.

Smith: Suggested having a gap year and sending a survey to families to get their thoughts.

Burdick: Suggested advertising the cost change early and supports a year ramp up to the change.

Parke: Noted that nobody is excited about change and supports sending a survey out to families.

Le: Asked if we didn't increase the participation fees for 2026 would that impact the coaches?

Melville: We just finished the 2026/27 budget, and we are working in alignment for Commission approval in June of 2026. Ideally, we would like to secure higher quality coaches that could bypass us and go to better paying schools. We are lucky to have great coaches with so much experience.

Parke: Wonders if students don't participate in the high school sports because of the \$250 fee.

Melville: Families are paying more than that for all other sports.

Brown: When does a decision need to be made by?

Melville: Ideally in the next month or so, since some middle school sport signups are in the summer brochure.

Smith: Does middle school track have the same contract with GR Christian?

Melville: No, they don't have room for us.

Smith: Because track will need to be going elsewhere for practice, he would like to see cost subsidized specifically for track.

Jacoby: Will busing be provided for track? Will this cost be estimated too?

Melville: Unsure, at this time. Hoping to find out by spring break.

Parke: Is track the only sport impacted by the school construction?

Melville: Football and track are both impacted.

Smith: Has anyone reached out to Aquinas?

Melville: Yes, they have a long-term rental with other groups. We are on a waiting list.

Smith: Can we rent a track?

Melville: Yes, by the season or an annual fee.

Smith: Is the rental cost reflected in the cost of the sport?

Melville: No.

Le: Communicating costs to the community is important, so they know why costs are increasing.

Melville: The plan is to have proactive communication. Recruiting qualified coaches is important.

Jacoby: The Middle School Athletic Director Shannyn is at the school during registration and she is very helpful. She's great at communicating.

Smith: When track information is communicated to families it would be nice if the exact same information was provided to middle school and high school.

Melville: Yes, this is part of Vertical Alignment.

Parke: Wondered if it was possible to get feedback from the community about this?

Melville: Today has provided good feedback and the finance committee suggested some great talking points. This information can be consolidated into a page or 2 of information. Any questions or comments can be directed to Input@eastgrmi.gov, all submissions are viewed and directed to the correct area. Thanked the Commission for their feedback.

Bratt: Supports stipend and likes the second option regarding middle school sports, feels it fits into vertical alignment.

Parke: Would like to see simplicity and predictability. High school parents are already familiar with paying a flat fee for sports.

Smith: Agrees.

Report of Director: Director Melville reported on the Parks and Recreation Department attending Parks and Rec night at the GR Gold Basketball night, EGR sold 70 tickets. Some Parks and Recreation staff had a booth at the Women's Expo at Devos as well. The department will look for unique ways to get out into the community.

Digital payments for middle school games is going well. It's nice to have an additional form of payment available to spectators. Another card reader will be purchased this year to get ready for fall sports.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:11 pm

Next Meeting: March 23, 2026