



**Meeting of the Parks and Recreation
Commission
Held at the Elk River City Hall
Wednesday, July 8, 2026**

Members Present:

Chair Stewart, Commissioners Anderson, Niziolek, Loidolt, Varty and Councilmember Grupa

Members Absent:

Commissioners Fermoye and Goodwin

Staff Present:

Assistant City Administrator/Business Services Director Joe Stremcha, Parks and Recreation Manager Jeff Shelby, and Senior Administrative Assistant Dawn Larson

I. CALL MEETING TO ORDER

Pursuant to due call and notice thereof, the meeting of the Elk River Parks and Recreation Commission was called to order at 6:30 p.m. by Chair Stewart.

2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

3. CONSIDER AGENDA

Moved by Commissioner Varty and seconded by Commissioner Loidolt to approve the July 8, 2026, agenda. Motion carried 5-0.

4. CONSIDER MINUTES

4.1 06-10-2026 Parks and Recreation Commission Meeting Minutes

Moved by Commissioner Loidolt and seconded by Commissioner Anderson to approve June 10, 2026, Parks and Recreation Commission minutes. Motion carried 5-0.

5. OPEN FORUM

6. ACTION ITEMS

6.1 2027 Capital Improvement Plan

Mr. Shelby presented his report. Mr. Shelby pointed out the “transfer in” fund column, which was discussed at length at the last meeting. Mr. Stremcha said at the recent City Council retreat they discussed a tax levy vs a tax referendum and decided not to do it this November but will consider a tax referendum in 2027 with bonding for construction in 2028. He shared the request from the parks and

recreation commission for an increase from the liquor fund did not receive support from the City Council. Councilmember Grupa said having the school district on the ballot this year pushed them to decide to wait because they believed it might fail. Chair Stewart asked Mr. Stremcha what the status was regarding the school district moving Ivan Sands school. Mr. Stremcha said there is a complex discussion going on with the school district regarding land and there is not a definitive decision on where alternative sites may be. He said that it would be best to discuss that subject in the joint session with the City Council on July 20 because there may be information that is not public knowledge yet. Mr. Stremcha said they do realize that time is of the essence though on these. Commissioner Anderson said they need a viable plan, or they need to create a new one. Chair Stewart asked if the other commissioners had concerns about the document in front of them tonight. Commissioner Niziolek asked if they could go through the park dedication fund first. He asked the staff about the line item listing a campground. Mr. Stremcha explained the city is considering the pursuit of Wapiti Park as a potential land acquisition to be a campground.

Commissioner Niziolek said the line item for Oakwater Ridge Park is listed for 500,000 dollars and Bradford Park is listed for 250,000 dollars but is pushed out to 2031. Mr. Stremcha explained that the improvements will be made as the park dedication money comes in. He also said Capstone would like Oakwater Ridge Park completed earlier since the development will be land locked. Commissioner Niziolek asked if they would have \$500,000 from the developer in 2027 for the project. Chair Stewart asked if this information is from planning conversations.

Commissioner Anderson asked about the status of the trails at Bradford Park. Mr. Stremcha said he is not sure but thinks the roads should be completed in September, but he doesn't know about the trails. Commissioner Niziolek asked Mr. Stremcha about seeking grants for the trails for both parks. Mr. Stremcha said there are many opportunities for grants for these projects. Commissioner Niziolek asked if staff are writing grants now for next year. Mr. Stremcha said there are windows of opportunities that they are adding to their schedules, so they don't miss them. Commissioner Niziolek said he is aware of the grant process and would like the developer to keep them in the loop on the process of development so they can work with them on the grant application process. He also said that if they are going to put in the trail next year, they should have applied for the grant already this year. Mr. Shelby said that defining items in this document will help them plan for what projects and grant opportunities they can apply for. Commissioner Niziolek said that he is just concerned they have missed the window and would like to push that budget line item to 2028 so they can apply for grants. Mr. Stremcha said the commission could make a motion to move that item to 2028 if they wanted to. Commissioner Niziolek said he would like to finish reviewing the document and then add that to the motion.

Commissioner Anderson said this is the time they should be discussing the Hillside parking lot. Mr. Stremcha said that the park dedication fund can't be used for new parking lots. He said franchise fees are the funding source. Commissioner Anderson is asking how to pay for the parking lots. Chair Stewart said he personally thinks it would be nice to have a paved parking lot at Hillside, but he doesn't feel like they have to have it now for people to use the park. Commissioner Anderson said that he isn't sure where this line item came from. Mr. Stremcha and Mr. Shelby said it has been on the CIP calendar, and it just keeps getting pushed out repeatedly. Commissioner Anderson thinks they should push it to 2028 and then have Mr. Burchill, the Hillside Park Steward, present to discuss whether they need it or not.

Commissioner Loidolt agreed that they need input from the people that use that area. Commissioner Niziolek asked what the Mississippi Regional Trail line item was referring to. Mr. Stremcha said it is the connection between downtown Elk River and the Oakwater Ridge development. Commissioner

Anderson said he thinks it could be pushed out and discussed more since the amount currently listed in the budget would only get that trail started. Mr. Stremcha said they might have the trail in sections. Commissioner Loidolt thinks they should push the Hillside parking lot to 2028. He thinks Oakwater Ridge can stay where it is in the budget, and he understands Commissioner Niziolek's concern but also understands the need to get it in. Commissioner Anderson thinks they should push the Hillside Parking lot and Oakwater Ridge Park to 2028, so they have more time to discuss details and grant opportunities. Commissioner Niziolek said they need to look at the Bradford Park grant opportunities. Commissioner Anderson asked about the Tiller property line item. Mr. Shelby explained that it is a placeholder for money coming in that will be held until the Tiller property is developed.

Moved by Chair Stewart and seconded by Commissioner Niziolek to move the Hillside parking lot and Oakwater Ridge Regional Park buildout from fiscal year 2027 to 2028 pending grant investigation and community input. Motion carried 5-0.

Moved by Chair Stewart and seconded by Commissioner Anderson to recommend that City Council approve the 2027-2031 Capital Improvement Plan for the Park Dedication fund as amended with the prior motion. Motion carried 5-0.

Commissioner Niziolek asked if the actual price of the Parks and Recreation Framework plan was more than what was listed in the spreadsheet. Mr. Shelby confirmed that it was \$110,000 and Mr. Stremcha explained the numbers in the spreadsheet are just estimates.

Commissioner Niziolek said that it is imperative that they have data related to the number of users for all the facilities for the future projections of these budget numbers to make sure they are investing properly. He said he doesn't feel comfortable approving the years following 2027 and 2028 because he thinks they need to have a much lengthier discussion about how to spend such a large amount of money, such as 14 million dollars. Commissioner Loidolt also asked if they could just approve for the next two years. Mr. Stremcha said these numbers are all estimates to provide a framework for the staff and commission to form a plan and use as goals to find funding, such as a referendum.

Chair Stewart asked Mr. Shelby if the items listed in the Park Improvement Fund for 2027 were the ones that will need to be replaced soon. Mr. Shelby confirmed the budget was set up that way. Commissioner Anderson said if the Oak Knoll component changes a lot or significantly changes, they will have to relook at the plan since it was a lot of shuffling from one place to another. He said otherwise it would be good for a premier baseball field and that is about it.

Commissioner Anderson shared that a former commissioner and volunteer at Woodland Trails Regional Park, Dave Kallemeyn, was attending the meeting tonight to inquire about the status of the equipment he requested at a previous parks and recreation commission meeting. Mr. Stremcha said parks maintenance will be presenting their budget this month and once that is approved, they will know the status of the request for the ski trail grooming machine. He pointed out that in previous conversations it was determined that the grooming machine was going to come out of the general fund and if the commission wanted to change that status to have the money come out of the park improvement fund, then this would be the time. Commissioner Anderson pointed out that the Parks and Recreation Commission has approved a field lining tank for fields and other equipment for Hillside Park so he feels they should be able to approve this item for Woodland Trails Regional Park.

He said that if it didn't make it into the general budget, then they could add it to the parks and recreation budget. Mr. Kallemeyn shared that the initial proposal was about \$14,000 for the groomer

when he presented it at a previous meeting. Chair Stewart asked if they would need it for this coming winter. Mr. Kallemeyn said if they ordered it soon, they would be able to use it for the 2027-2028 season. Commissioner Niziolek said it would be an appropriate move assuming the funds aren't available from another source.

Moved by Commissioner Niziolek and seconded by Commissioner Varty to add a line item to the Park Improvement Fund requesting the purchase of a Ginzugroomer at \$14,000 for 2027. Motion carried 5-0.

Councilmember Grupa asked if Commissioner Niziolek was still able to get free shipping for the groomer and Commissioner Niziolek said that he was not able to do that. Commissioner Loidolt asked if the money could come out of the park dedication fund and Mr. Stremcha said no. Chair Stewart asked if there was anything else anyone wanted to bring forward. Commissioner Niziolek asked if they would be discussing the sales tax bond soon. Mr. Shelby said that the best time and place for that would be at the July joint work session with City Council. He thinks that would be the time for the commission to express the monetary concerns they have had over the past couple of months. He said that was the intent of getting both groups together, so both groups can express the budget concerns that have been discussed over the past couple of months.

Commissioner Niziolek asked about the framework plan and said he thinks when the community input has been done, linear recreation will come in number one like it has in previous years, and they will have to look at some money going in that direction beyond the ballfield complexes. Mr. Stremcha pointed out that in the park dedication budget there are two regional trails that they would be applying for grant funding for, and he added if there are additional park and recreation amenities Commissioner Niziolek would like to add, now is the time to do so.

Commissioner Anderson said he thinks it will all work out during the process of the framework plan. Commissioner Niziolek said his concern is that the plan will come after it goes to the voters for the sales tax. Mr. Stremcha pointed out that the referendum will be on the 2027 ballot, not this year. Commissioner Niziolek said he just wants to make sure they have adequate time to discuss what will be on the ballot and gather information from the community engagement that will occur through the framework plan process. Chair Stewart said next spring when they approach the end of the plan, they will have a good idea of what types of questions to ask the public on the referendum based on the feedback they have gathered during the plan process.

Mr. Stremcha pointed out that having a red fund balance in the future years is not good, so whether it is the commission recommending additional funding or cutting and removing funding in later years, something needs to happen to ideally make a balanced budget. Commissioner Niziolek said that he thinks they should just approve the 2027 budget for the park improvement fund and not include the following years. Mr. Stremcha said they need to have several years approved at a time so they can create a plan to apply for grant applications. He said they can't do just one year at a time. Mr. Stremcha pointed out that in 2028 the ending balance is 346,524 dollars in the red and staff recommend that number be at least zero, so they either need to ask for more money or push a project to a later year.

Chair Stewart asked how they came to the number of 14 million. Mr. Stremcha said that the number for bonding is a project estimate. Chair Stewart asked if they should ask for more since they are going into the sales tax referendum with a deficit and haven't added inflation to the project estimate. Commissioner Niziolek said he thinks they should ask for 17 million so they can cover the red rather than cutting. Commissioner Anderson said that they need to decrease the spending side as well. Chair

Stewart said that in 2028 most of the total will be shown in the athletic plan. Commissioner Anderson said that they need to challenge themselves to control their spending. Commissioner Niziolek said that they need to ask for more money from the liquor store fund. Commissioner Anderson said that kind of money is not there. Mr. Stremcha said the city is building a new store there and there isn't extra money available right now. He explained that there may need to be budget cuts as far as project size and scope, delays, and multiple factors, but there is a net deficit of 1.25 million that needs to be figured out.

Commissioner Niziolek said if they got 14 million, that fund would provide a million dollars a year in 2029 but it would probably not be enough to maintain the facilities for the long term. He said that money coming in from that transfer fund will not maintain those new facilities unless they are increased. Commissioner Anderson also pointed out that park maintenance comes from a different budget. Commissioner Niziolek said that there would be a lot of items to fix in 25 years, and then they would be back at doing another sales tax referendum. He said they need to have amenities that they can refurbish and maintain without going to the voters for another big chunk of change. He said if parks and recreation had already been getting a million dollars a year over the past several years, they could have been strategic and already built a Hales Field and some of these planned facilities. Commissioner Anderson said that a lot of money was overspent back in 2004, 2005, and 2006 which partially got them where they are at.

Commissioner Niziolek explained again that if they had a million dollars every year for the next couple of years, they could take care of some of these things. Commissioner Anderson asked what the other commissioners' recommendations were to take the red out. Chair Stewart said he doesn't have enough information about these numbers to take the red out. He said if they could take out other expenditures from 2028, that would be the option that would be obvious, but the athletic plan is the largest item in the budget for 2028. Commissioner Niziolek said that 14 million is a huge chunk of money, and it should take them days if not weeks to figure out how to effectively utilize it.

Commissioner Anderson said they approved the framework athletic facilities plan because it was a "framework" and they need to be realistic and do more with less. Commissioner Varty said she agreed that they should subtract a million from the budget and add a million to the sales tax referendum. Mr. Shelby pulled up the slides that showed phase one and phase two of the Athletic Facilities Framework Plan. Chair Stewart said they could start reducing portions of the plan to reduce the anticipated cost. Mr. Stremcha suggested one option would be to move paving of the fields out to future phases.

Commissioner Niziolek said he thinks that ISD 728 would be kicking in some money, for example, a million dollars towards Hales Field and then they could reduce the referendum request. Mr. Stremcha explained that he does not know what that total will be for sure for the sales tax referendum. Commissioner Loidolt said that in 2028 the prices on the athletic facilities project will be even higher than originally projected due to inflation. Commissioner Loidolt said he thinks they need to increase the referendum request to 17 million to cover the red. Mr. Stremcha said that when the numbers were projected for the athletic facilities' construction, inflation was considered and added into the equation. Commissioner Niziolek said he supports Commissioner Loidolt's idea of 17 million. Commissioner Anderson asked if they thought asking for more would be risky rather than cutting. Commissioner Niziolek said it is all risky.

Mr. Stremcha said the athletic facilities plan was recommended and approved and therefore is on the books with the plan to execute the project. Mr. Stremcha said the commission can recommend whatever number they want to get out of the red. Commissioner Anderson pointed out that a recession like the one in 2008 could drop the numbers as well. Chair Stewart suggested they ask for 15

million to put them back in the black, and then they will know more as time goes on. Commissioner Anderson said they can push the paving at no risk. Chair Stewart said they need to ask what things they would love to have, but they simply can't afford them right now.

Commissioner Anderson said they may need to push for ways to save versus ways to spend. Mr. Stremcha pointed out that the City Council discussed at length ways to fund the athletic facilities plan at the council retreat and decided not to push for the sales tax referendum this year. Commissioner Niziolek asked if these numbers were discussed at the meeting and Councilmember Grupa and Mr. Stremcha said yes, they were, and the council did not feel it would pass as is right now as a property tax levy, but would potentially pass in the future as a sales tax referendum. He said that it would be dependent upon what the legislature allows them to do in the future, such as a special session, etc. He said there is the Governor's election and potentially a senate seat in the future. He said there are a lot of dominoes that could affect the referendum.

Mr. Stremcha explained that based on community engagement activities during the Parks and Recreation Framework plan process, they would gauge what the comfort level would be for the public to approve the referendum and at what amount. Mr. Stremcha said the 14-million-dollar total was based on the numbers in the plan. Commissioner Niziolek asked how they would change the numbers in the budget.

Commissioner Niziolek said that he thinks that having a consensus among this group is imperative to move ahead before they walk out of the room. He thinks they need to be unformed. Commissioner Varty said they are also missing two members tonight, so it is impossible to have a complete consensus. Chair Stewart asked when they needed to have this done. Mr. Stremcha said they need to either ask for more money or cut something and reiterated that there is hesitation on the council's side to increase the liquor store fund. He advises that they look at the expenses. Mr. Stremcha pointed out that staff had put together a plan to prioritize projects at the previous commission meeting. Commissioner Anderson said that they should push the paving. Commissioner Niziolek said they shouldn't be so specific and just reduce the sales tax referendum, so they aren't talking about specific amenities.

Commissioner Loidolt said that they don't even know the specifics of what the parking lots will be for the fields, so he disagrees with removing the money slated for those. Mr. Stremcha said that they need to cut because there is no additional money in this budget cycle to ask for funding projects. Commissioner Niziolek said he thinks they should take it out of Hales Field. Commissioner Loidolt said for 2027 and 2028 he doesn't think they even know if they are going to get the extra liquor store fund money, so they just need to get the numbers out of the negative. He said that taking the parking lot away today won't help them at all when they don't know if the liquor store fund will grow and they will still be in the red. Commissioner Niziolek said that he thinks they should just approve the budget staff presented tonight. Mr. Stremcha said that the budget presented by staff at the last commission meeting had a balanced spreadsheet due to projects being removed and that the commission asked for the projects to be added back in and then the liquor store fund to be increased. He said that is reflected in this spreadsheet tonight. Mr. Stremcha said that right now is not a good climate to ask Council for more money.

Chair Stewart asked about moving the Hales Field project. Mr. Stremcha said the athletic facilities project is set up in phases and staff are working based off the recommendations of the commission to secure the agreements and funding for those. He said if the athletic facilities plan changes, then the plan needs to be amended to reflect the budget and the goals of council and staff. Mr. Stremcha said that staff moved off the recommendations of the commission. Commissioner Loidolt asked if they could

reduce both projects' phases one and two by 10%. Commissioner Niziolek said he would like to have a work session in the future. Councilmember Grupa left by 8:11.

Moved by Commissioner Loidolt and seconded by Commissioner Anderson to amend the Athletic Facilities Framework Plan by recommending phase one and two be reduced by 10 percent equally across all categories. Motion carried 5-0.

Moved by Commissioner Anderson and seconded by Commissioner Varty to reduce both phase one and two line items in the Park Improvement Fund by 10% in 2028. Motion carried 5-0.

Moved by Commissioner Loidolt and seconded by Commissioner Varty to approve the 2027-2031 Capital Improvement Plan for the Park Improvement Fund with the changes made. Motion carried 5-0.

7. DISCUSSION ITEMS

8. PARKS AND RECREATION MANAGER UPDATE

8.1 Parks and Recreation Manager Update

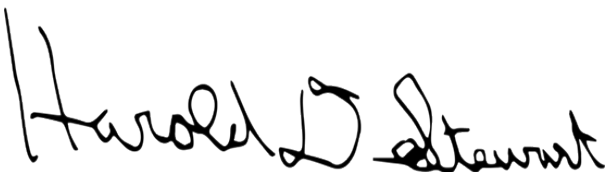
Mr. Shelby presented his report.

9. ANNOUNCEMENTS

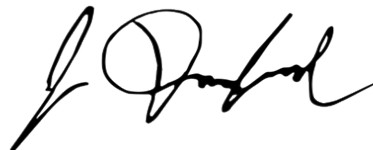
Chair Stewart said they need to take the time to get their point across on July 20. Commissioner Niziolek asked about the status of the trail signs for the Great Northern Trail. Mr. Shelby said that the signs have been delayed due to printing issues.

10. MOTION TO ADJOURN

Moved by Commissioner Anderson and seconded by Commissioner Loidolt to adjourn the Parks and Recreation Commission meeting at 8:17 pm. Motion carried 5-0.



Harold Stewart, Chair



Justin Dunford, City Clerk