



**Meeting of the Parks and Recreation
Commission
Held at the Elk River City Hall
Wednesday, July 9, 2025**

Members Present: Commissioner Dave Anderson, Commissioner Mike Niziolek, Commissioner Jill Varty, Commissioner Joy Goodwin, Commissioner Greg Loidolt, Commissioner Hal Stewart, Commissioner Melissa Fermoye

Members Absent:

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

1. CALL MEETING TO ORDER

Pursuant to due call and notice thereof, the meeting was called to order at 06:30 PM.

2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

3. CONSIDER AGENDA

Moved by Commissioner Fermoye and seconded by Commissioner Stewart to approve the July 9, 2025, agenda. Motion carried 7-0.

4. CONSIDER MINUTES

4.1 06-11-2025 Parks and Recreation Commission Meeting Minutes

Moved by Commissioner Loidolt and seconded by Commissioner Varty to approve June 11, 2025, Parks and Recreation Commission Minutes. Motion carried 7-0.

5. OPEN FORUM

6. PRESENTATIONS, AWARDS, AND RECOGNITION

7. ACTION ITEMS

7.1 Torchlight Theatre Outdoor Performance

Mr. Shelby presented his report. Anita Douglas from Torchlight Theatre presented her PowerPoint. The PowerPoint presentation will be included with the publication of the minutes. Spectators may bring their own chairs and blankets to the event for seating. Ms. Douglas explained they will be running ticket sales for the event through their fiscal sponsor, Stories Foundation, while they await the approval of their 501(c)(3) status which they filed earlier this summer.

Commissioner Goodwin asked how they will handle inclement weather. Ms. Douglas said they would continue the performance during drizzle but cancel if there were unsafe weather conditions.

Moved by Commissioner Goodwin and seconded by Commissioner Fermoye to approve the Torchlight Theatre Outdoor Performance at Woodland Trails Regional Park as presented from July 31 to August 3, 2025. Motion carried 7-0.

7.2 Neighborhood Playground Survey

Mr. Shelby presented his report. Chair Anderson shared that adding Orono Park to the survey should be considered. Mr. Stremcha said the key point of this survey is the focus on neighborhood parks, not regional or destination ones with larger amenities. Chair Anderson said if the feedback from the survey showed that most of the people are using Orono it would show the Commissioners they aren't using the other parks. Mr. Shelby said he thinks it is already assumed that people are using Orono Park more than other parks and it might dilute the responses to the survey.

Commissioner Niziolek said having the Orono Park information would be valuable because if the users state that they are going to Orono six days a week but only one of the other parks one day a week it could help the commission consider whether it is valuable to invest in the smaller parks.

Commission Stewart asked if it would be helpful to give those taking the survey the option to write in the park they go to. The other commissioners said they would like to keep the survey questions related to parks within the region.

Commissioner Goodwin said that in her experience it is important to ask the questions in a way that gets the answers sought after and these questions keep the focus on these three parks. She is concerned with the language in the introduction using the word "improvements" versus "changes" because they may have to remove some of these parks, playgrounds, and amenities. She is concerned that being too upbeat about the changes will not convey the fact that they may need to remove features. Chair Anderson and Commissioner Varty both said that if they include Orono it will show that Orono is being used the most and make it clearer that the other parks aren't being used. Mr. Shelby said that if they include Orono Park in the survey they would have to look at changing the title of the survey since it would include different types of parks.

Commissioner Loidolt said he thinks that adding a regional park does skew the information if they are just trying to filter the responses to neighborhood parks. He agreed with Commissioner Goodwin that they need to be honest with the residents that part of the reason they are doing this is because they don't have the money to maintain all these parks.

The commissioners agreed that they need to be more open and honest about the fact that some of these parks may have amenities removed. Commissioner Varty said it is important to let people know that the funds are limited. Mr. Stremcha suggested using language regarding the sustainability of these parks with limited funds.

Councilmember Grupa said that these parks are important to the communities that live there. He said that stating they are going to eliminate one of them will be tough. He said that he would like to see improvements to all three. Commissioner Goodwin said they are at a crossroads where they can't maintain all these playground structures and they must plan for the future.

Commissioner Goodwin shared that she thinks the culture has changed where people are not just sending their kids out to play in the neighborhood they live in. She thinks they need to invite people into the decision-making process and be honest with them about not having the finances to upgrade and

maintain every playground. She thinks that if they can communicate that well, the City of Elk River can get support from the community. She thinks they have an opportunity to reframe what parks mean to people in this community.

Commissioner Niziolek said that they should change the title to a Regional Park Survey. He said that without having the Orono Park information, they cannot move forward with making good decisions. Chair Anderson said he wants to see the difference of a survey example between neighborhood parks and Orono. He said that if most users say they use Orono, that will show the information they need to know the value of a neighborhood park versus a destination park. Councilmember Grupa pointed out that everyone already knows that Orono Park is a destination park, so no matter what survey it is on, people are going to select it. Commissioner Niziolek shared that he talked to parents that chose to leave Orono because it was so busy, they went to another park, and he felt that it is important to know as well.

Commissioner Loidolt asked if they should explain to those participating in the survey that they are part of a certain region, for example one of four, and then do the whole City at the same time. That way, one region won't think it is just their parks being changed. Chair Anderson said they are only surveying region one right now. Commissioner Goodwin said there is urgency with these three parks right now because they are next on the list for playground replacement. She said that they need to focus on them because they need to solve the immediate issue of how they distribute finances for this region and these three parks. She asked staff if the survey would be conducted in just this region, and Mr. Stremcha and Mr. Shelby confirmed it would be limited to this area.

Commissioner Fermoye asked if the goal is to prioritize these three parks right now and decide what to do with them based on the money they have. She asked if they could close all three parks. Chair Anderson said that they would not be closing them but eliminating or reducing amenities. Commissioner Niziolek said they want to phrase it differently and say they are removing recreational facilities or changing them within the park.

Mr. Stremcha explained how the reported park usage would be reflected in the survey results. For example, high park usage would make the park a high priority for the budget and low park usage would make it a low priority.

Commissioner Goodwin shared that she goes to destination parks with her kids, primarily Orono Park because of the amenities. Commissioner Stewart feels like the survey isn't going to tell them anything they don't already know as far as the fact that the three parks mentioned in the survey aren't being used. Commissioner Goodwin asked what everyone thought the response rate would be to the survey. She wants to know how many responses they need to help them make the decisions they need to make.

Councilmember Grupa said that she is making a good point and doesn't believe the residents around Fresno Park will give much feedback. He thinks Country Crossing and Mississippi Oaks will have more feedback but regardless, if they are torn down, they will hear comments about it. Secretary Larson explained in more detail how the Trott Brook Park Playground survey was dispersed to the public, the return on investment, and how the marketing team was able to accurately respond to social media when comments were made about the specific pieces of equipment.

Mr. Stremcha shared that questions 3 and 4 need to be under each individual park, include a map for context to show the location of the park, and show the regions that are being surveyed.

Councilmember Grupa also suggested adding the age group. Commissioner Goodwin suggested adding a question such as “Select all age groups below that use the park.”

Commissioner Niziolek asked staff what the cost of the survey would be. Mr. Stremcha said about \$2 per resident and about 400 residents in the neighborhood. Secretary Larson explained the process of address selection for the mailers.

Chair Anderson said that he wants to know usage by park. He would like a map included in the survey. Commissioner Goodwin asked if Orono Park was included in the survey, would it have the same structure of questions? Mr. Stremcha confirmed it would. Commissioner Loidolt suggested to remove the words “don’t know” under section 3 “park specific feedback” and replace with the word “unsure” instead and to include the age groups.

Commissioner Niziolek pointed out that there are cameras in several of the parks and questioned whether the cameras could help capture usage of the parks. Mr. Stremcha said the highly vandalized parks have cameras and the areas in them are very prone to vandalism, not necessarily the areas Commission Niziolek is thinking of.

Commissioner Loidolt said staff should bring the survey back in August after the edits are done. Mr. Shelby said that what he is hearing from the Commission is that they are going to include Orono in the survey. Commissioner Goodwin said she will send her notes to Mr. Shelby. Councilmember Grupa suggested using the word “changes” versus improvements.

Commissioner Fermoye said that she does not think that Orono Park should be included because it may encourage people to think that Orono is due for changes. Commissioner Varty suggested adding verbiage such as “these are the parks that are in immediate need of decisions.” She agreed that including Orono may cause people to question what we will be doing there next. Commissioner Loidolt said that it may open them up to problems if patrons think that improvements and changes will be happening to Orono soon when they won’t be.

Commissioner Niziolek said if they get the surveys back and find that the users that visit the smaller parks one day a week and Orono 6 days a week then they will feel confident making the changes to the smaller parks knowing users have Orono Park to go to.

Commissioner Goodwin suggested doing two versions of the survey, one with Orono and one without. Chair Anderson said it should include usage by park. In summary, it should include a title change, recommendations per Commissioner Goodwin, usage by park, and return to review with the Commission in August.

8. PARKS AND RECREATION MANAGER UPDATE

8.1 Parks and Recreation Manager Update

Mr. Shelby presented his report.

9. ANNOUNCEMENTS

10. MOTION TO ADJOURN REGULAR MEETING

Moved by Commissioner Goodwin and seconded by Commissioner Niziolek to adjourn the regular meeting of the Parks and Recreation Commission at 7:30pm. Motion carried 7-0.

11. WORK SESSION

11.1 Elk River Parks and Recreation Framework Plan - Table of Contents and Scope of Work

Pursuant to due call and notice thereof, the meeting of the Elk River Parks and Recreation Commission was called to order at 7:37 p.m. by Chair Anderson.

Moved by Commissioner Fermoyle and seconded by Commissioner Varty to approve the July 9, 2025, work session agenda. Motion carried 6-0.

Commissioners Fermoyle and Varty left the meeting at 8:45pm.

Commissioner Niziolek suggested that they discuss limiting the time of these work sessions in consideration of the member's time. Commissioner Varty questioned the effectiveness of the meetings after a couple of hours. Chair Anderson said people can leave whenever they must. Commissioner Goodwin pointed out that some of the meetings are learning based and require a certain amount of conversation but hopefully they can be more efficient every time. Mr. Stremcha pointed out that anyone can call the question to adjourn and the majority will agree if it is late.

Mr. Shelby shared his report. Mr. Stremcha asked the Commissioners if they had any objections to the Introduction and Overview sections.

Commissioner Niziolek questioned what type of users will read the plan when it is finished and design it accordingly. He believes that how they design the document will be influenced by who the users will be.

Mr. Stremcha said users could include current residents, future residents, staff, Commissioners, City Council members, and any potential decision maker, etc. He thinks that any resident would see the value of knowing what is going to happen in their community just like staff will need to know how to prioritize to execute the plan.

Commissioner Niziolek asked how many residents will look at the plan. Mr. Stremcha said it might be similar to a survey, maybe 5% of the community. It would be available for anyone in the community to see what is happening in the parks. He also said the newspaper might read the plan because it highlights areas in the community. Commissioner Niziolek said he thinks that user groups should guide the table of contents and how it is set up. Mr. Stremcha said that 10 different user groups could want 10 different tables of content based on their areas of focus. Chair Anderson asked what Mr. Stremcha had in mind for mission and values. Mr. Stremcha shared that the City Council has established mission value statements that could be expanded upon. He suggested not deviating from that very much since the City has already established what they want to guide them.

Commissioner Niziolek said he thinks a flow chart for the users with links to guide them through the plan would be beneficial. He thinks they could get their information quickly that way. He thinks it would be state-of-the-art, user friendly, and welcoming to the community.

Commissioner Goodwin asked if he wanted the flowchart reflected in the intro and overview. She asked staff if the table of contents will be an interactive pdf. Mr. Stremcha said it could be. She said she thinks a table of contents is still very user friendly. She thinks that users will be intuitive enough to be able to find what they want in the table of contents themselves.

Commissioner Niziolek said that it would be more user friendly to have them be able to click directly on the link they want. Commissioner Goodwin said that she thinks he is describing a document with hyperlinks. Mr. Stremcha explained that the document could be hyperlinked like municode where the City's ordinances are located. Commissioner Niziolek said that he likes that idea. Mr. Shelby pulled up the municode on the website to show the Commissioners what it looks like. Mr. Stremcha said that they can make an interactive website document or a flip through page document. Commissioner Niziolek said they need to build something that is more up to the current standard of technology. Mr. Stremcha said they could do both if they wanted. It could be an online document that users could download as a pdf.

Commissioner Fermoye asked what "trends" meant. Mr. Stremcha trending in the parks and the recreation world, for example, neighborhood parks are shrinking and other amenities growing.

Commissioner Niziolek asked if staff are doing the park inventory or if the professional services we would hire are doing the park inventory. Mr. Stremcha explained that we have a good base already with the research that staff have done. He said it depends upon how deep the commission wants to get into the description of the inventory of each park. Commissioner Fermoye asked if the community public engagement piece is describing what the public does currently or what they hope they will do. Mr. Stremcha gave the example of the Play My Way campaign as an example of public engagement to gather information.

Commissioner Niziolek asked what facilities to include in the inventory. Mr. Stremcha explained that it would be the facilities within each park.

Commissioner Niziolek suggested that the FT Center was part of the parks inventory within facilities. Mr. Stremcha explained that the FT Center is not under the umbrella of Parks and Recreation other than the Senior Activity Center.

Commissioner Niziolek pointed out that park and trail use will want to be a quantifiable item to measure for the plan. Commissioner Goodwin said the point of this plan is to really lay out the honesty of the challenges they are facing and then go into the details. Mr. Stremcha questioned whether they need to add youth enrichment and other categories. Secretary Larson suggested this might fall under recreational programming. Mr. Stremcha suggested alphabetizing the list under the system plan, and the Commissioners agreed.

Commissioner Niziolek said that he wants to make sure they consider the sustainability of new park properties and work towards a sustainable system. Commissioner Goodwin said that she thinks that's where they need to be honest and lay out the next 10 to 15 years of parks and recreation as far as what it is going to look like as they pursue their goals and initiatives in order to make it great for Elk River. She thinks they should be honest about the challenges they are facing regarding sustainability and how they need to adjust their financial allocation. She thinks "Sustainability" could be under "Implementation." Commissioner Stewart agreed. Mr. Stremcha said they should change the header from "Maintenance" to "Implementation and Sustainability" and put maintenance under that category. The Commissioners agreed to change the header. Chair Anderson suggested putting the title word

“Implementation” before “Sustainability.”

Commissioner Niziolek said there is a sustainability element associated with the new parks and facilities they take on and he isn't sure if it is under any of the current headers suggested. Mr. Stremcha said that he feels they would be incorporated into the individual plans themselves under the category they fall under. Commissioner Niziolek said that he is concerned about taking on new properties that they can't sustain such as the Specht property. He wants to make sure that anything they take on can also be sustained. He wants to make sure it is addressed because he feels that is what has put them in the current position they are in with the playgrounds.

Commissioner Goodwin said that she thinks those details will flush out in each system plan. She agrees that if they build additional parks, they need to think about how they will be sustained. Commissioner Stewart asked if they could change the bullet point to recurrent and future capital, operations, and maintenance costs. Mr. Stremcha said he thinks it would be included in the general capital improvement plan. Mr. Stremcha said they should address risk management plans as well to address emergency concerns in the parks. Secretary Larson mentioned that it could go under the system plan.

The commissioners agreed that the appendix can be built as they decide what they want included as the plan develops. Mr. Stremcha asked the commissioners if they wanted to expand on the trends category to say levels of service analysis. For example, the level of service our Parks and Recreation department provides in the community compared to other cities. Secretary Larson pointed out that we are missing a needs assessment which is what would be included in according to other master plans she reviewed. This is usually provided by the outside professional consultants. Mr. Stremcha suggested it goes under the inventory category. Secretary Larson explained that most master plans have 5 to 7 categories.

Commissioner Stewart said they need to have enough separation to make it clear what category a user would want to go to. Mr. Stremcha asked the commissioners how they felt about a community profile in the introduction and overview. Commissioner Niziolek said that he thinks it's important to make a predictive profile for what the future looks like. Commissioner Varty suggested making it something that can change as the prediction changes. Chair Anderson said he wants to make sure they don't include so much information that it clouds the plan. Mr. Stremcha said it could be something as simple as a paragraph linking to the census data.

Mr. Stremcha asked if they wanted to consider a park stewardship plan. Chair Anderson said that it is a critical key element that can bring in valuable community resources and in the next few years there will be several major vacancies and it will become increasingly difficult to find volunteers. Commissioner Varty suggested it might need to be its own category. The commissioners agreed that it needs to be its own header. Secretary Larson asked if partnerships should be added as a category or subcategory. The Commissioners decided to leave them under the categories they work within.

The Commissioners gave the final recommended changes below:

- Alphabetize the subcategories under each heading.

Introduction:

- The Commissioners agreed to remove the word overview in the title of this section. Commissioner Fermoyle recommended putting “Plan Purpose” before “Planning Process.”

Inventory and Assessment:

- Commissioner Fermoyle recommended placing “Public/Community Engagement” under “Chapter Overview and before “Parks Inventory.” Change “Trends” to Level of Service Analysis (which would be a needs assessment which includes trends)

System Plan (Alphabetize the list)

- Risk Management Plan (added)

Volunteerism and Stewardship (add header and subcategories)

- Chapter Overview
- Opportunities
- Roles
- Coordination
- Recognition

Implementation and Sustainability

- Chapter overview
- Maintenance and Operations Strategy
- General Capital, Operations, and Maintenance Costs
- Funding options and Sources
- Implementation Recommendations
- Timeline

Appendix:

- Build it as plan develops.

12. MOTION TO ADJOURN

Moved by Commissioner Goodwin and seconded by Commissioner Niziolek to adjourn the meeting of the Parks and Recreation Commission at 8:52pm. Motion carried 6-0.



Dave Anderson, Chair



Tina Allard, City Clerk