



**Meeting of the Parks and Recreation
Commission
Held at the Elk River City Hall
Wednesday, August 13, 2025**

Members Present: Chair Dave Anderson, Commissioners Mike Niziolek (left at 8:37p.m.), Greg Loidolt (left at 8:15p.m.), Hal Stewart, Melissa Fermoye(left at 8:47p.m.), and Commissioner Jill Varty (arrived at 6:45p.m.)

Members Absent: Commissioner Joy Goodwin

Staff Present: 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 Niziolek and seconded by Commissioner Loidolt to approve the August 13, 2025, agenda. Motion carried 5-0.

4. CONSIDER MINUTES

4.1 07-09-2025 Parks and Recreation Commission Minutes

Moved by Commissioner Loidolt and seconded by Commissioner Fermoye to approve July 9, 2025, Parks and Recreation Commission Minutes. Motion carried 5-0.

5. OPEN FORUM

6. PRESENTATIONS, AWARDS, AND RECOGNITION

6.1 Summer Program Recap Presented by Recreation Intern Taylor Ryan

Ms. Ryan presented a slide show summarizing her experience as an intern this summer in the Parks and Recreation Department. Eager Elks, Park-a-Palooza, Youth Soccer, Little Rays Day Camp, and Sunshine Explorers were some of the programs she highlighted.

7. ACTION ITEMS

7.1 Prairie Haven - Park Dedication

Mr. Shelby presented his report.

Moved by Commissioner Fermoye and seconded by Commissioner Loidolt to approve the park dedication for Prairie Haven be paid in cash for two single-family parcels, at the

applicable rate at the time of recording and a trail access easement where the location and width will be determined by the City Council and staff. Motion carried 5-0.

7.2 Table of Contents - Elk River Parks and Recreation Framework Plan

Mr. Shelby presented his report. Commissioner Niziolek asked if the table of contents page will have web-based links. Mr. Shelby stated that he believes that is the intention based on what was discussed at the previous meeting. Commissioner Niziolek asked if the links could also be tracked via the website. Mr. Shelby said that would be something our communications department could determine. He can confirm this with them and bring back that information at the next meeting.

Moved by Commissioner Stewart and seconded by Commissioner Fermoye to approve the table of contents for the Elk River Parks and Recreation Framework Plan as presented. Motion carried 6-0.

7.3 Park Usage Survey - Region I

Mr. Shelby presented his report. Chair Anderson asked Mr. Shelby to review the questions under one of the parks listed in the survey with the intent that once approved and finalized it would be duplicated for all of the parks included in the survey.

Councilmember Grupa asked the commissioners what they would do if they got feedback from the residents requesting amenities or upgrades that the city may not be able to afford and may even need to remove. Councilmember Grupa said he thought they were looking for just the usage of each park and how far the users lived from them. He is concerned about asking questions that give the impression something might be added and then the park might be completely removed.

Commissioner Varty asked him if he wanted to remove the question. Commissioner Fermoye said that if they are transparent with what they are trying to achieve, she thinks residents will understand. Commissioner Loidolt suggested they could state something that gives the message that there is no guarantee that these items will be added to the park. Commissioner Fermoye said they could include a disclaimer at the end of the survey.

Commissioner Niziolek said he thinks that, by the nature of the survey, they are drawing attention to the park. He thinks that usership will go up for a while right after the survey and then it will drop off. He also asked what the cost of the survey is and if they could do something different that would track the usership of the park and give quantifiable data such as visiting the site and recording the number of people present. Mr. Shelby said they could do whatever the commission decides. If the Commission wants staff to compare the cost of a postcard versus a monitoring type of technology, they could certainly explore that, but it is not an area of his expertise. He would also need a longer timeline to gather that information. Commissioner Niziolek said if this is something they are going to do multiple times they might save money if they invest in a more efficient way to monitor the presence of people in the parks to gather data.

Mr. Shelby suggested that if the commission wants to switch gears, then that should be determined tonight so more time isn't wasted on this survey. Commissioner Niziolek said he doesn't think that doing the survey is the wrong thing to do, but that he feels there might be a better way of doing it. If this survey is significantly cheaper than he thinks, they should go with it, but if they have a better way of gathering quantifiable data that is cost effective, then they should explore that.

Commissioner Fermoye asked Commissioner Niziolek if he had any ideas of what type of equipment

other than a deer cam, that they could use for gathering data. He said there is so much technology out there today and everything is changing by the moment so he can't speak to that. Chair Anderson said if they change things now, they would essentially be pushing the project out a year. Commissioner Stewart asked if the point of the survey is to count the number of people in the park or what amenities they are using in the park. Commissioner Niziolek said that he just wants to monitor the usage of the park to make the best decisions with the budget they have.

Commissioner Loidolt said that he is concerned about citizens feeling like their privacy is invaded with a monitoring system and he is also concerned about vandalism to the units that are doing the tracking if they are portable. He is not in favor of this. Commissioner Niziolek said the city is already moving in the direction of monitoring, and the city would have to buy more units that are expensive. Councilmember Grupa said they have had vandalism in some of the parks, which is why the cameras have been installed.

Commissioner Niziolek said he thinks that the data is all there and that we just have to use it. Commissioner Niziolek said based on the feeling he is getting he thinks they should just go with the survey. He says the Commission should strongly consider more objective ways to gather the data. Commissioner Stewart said that in the interest of transparency bullet points 19 and 20 address that this survey is about what the residents want but also reiterates that the city has a budget.

Commissioner Niziolek asked if the sequence of questions is of significance in this survey. He wonders if the sequence could affect the answers they get. He would like to have data backing up the significance of the sequence of the questions. Secretary Larson pointed out that Mr. Shelby pulled these questions from a lot of current surveys that exist right now. Mr. Shelby shared that he reviewed many surveys from other communities that were looking for the same information. Commissioner Niziolek said that they should collect as much data as they can so more choices and more data is what he would like. Chair Anderson said that he agrees that Orono Park should be included in the survey. Commissioner Varty said she thinks the questions are in the standard order that you see in most surveys.

Chair Anderson stated that the Commission has two surveys to choose from, one with Orono Park in it and one without. Commissioner Niziolek said he thinks they should collect as much data as they can and that information about another park is only going to help them make good choices. Chair Anderson said that he agrees that Orono Park should be included. Commissioner Varty agreed as well.

Commissioner Loidolt said that he views Orono as a destination park and not a neighborhood park so he doesn't think it should be included.

Commissioner Fermoye said she can email her suggested changes to the document to Mr. Shelby. Commissioner Loidolt said he thinks that residents will all choose Orono Park on question 25. Councilmember Grupa said that if they include Orono Park in the survey, the data will show in favor of recommending keeping Orono and getting rid of the other three parks. Commissioner Niziolek asked if question 25 can be reorganized to have the surveyor rank the parks in the order. Chair Anderson stated that the majority of the Commission want to include Orono Park in the survey.

Commissioner Fermoye said that she would like to rewrite the opening paragraphs of the survey. She wants to explain why the current model for maintaining the parks isn't sustainable. She suggested varied options of what the paragraph could say.

Commissioner Loidolt said question 25 doesn't make sense because he thinks everyone will choose

Orono Park. He still disagrees with including Orono Park. Councilmember Grupa said he thinks there are problems within the first three parks in the survey and there are changes and decisions to be made about just these specific ones, not Orono.

Chair Anderson said they are looking for usership. Councilmember Grupa said yes, but not Orono Park. Commissioner Loidolt reiterated that they already know people are using Orono Park, they need to find out how many people are using the other three in the survey. Councilmember Grupa said if everyone chooses Orono Park then they know what they are going to do with the other three.

Commissioner Niziolek asked if they could put the parks in list format, for example most likely to use, least likely to use, etc. and then they would have valuable data. Chair Anderson suggested rank choice voting. Chair Anderson suggested that they change the way that question 25 is worded.

Commissioner Stewart said that they need to change the question to get the answers they are looking for. In this case it is ranking the parks in order of lowest to highest or vice versa. Commissioner Loidolt said they all know that Orono Park will come in number one. Commissioner Varty said then what they are really looking for is what order the others come in.

Mr. Shelby said that his suggestion would be to identify how 25 should be rewritten and then they can include that in the recommendation in the motion by approving the survey with the amendments. Chair Anderson said that one option would also be for Commissioners to send their suggested changes to Mr. Shelby, and he can bring the document back the following month for review. Commissioner Niziolek said it would take too long to get the survey out, and they wouldn't get quality data. If they can't get it going tonight, they should wait until next year. Mr. Shelby confirmed that the Commission wants to change the first paragraphs of the survey as well as question 25. They will go line by line.

Commissioner Niziolek had concerns about the first sentence in the survey and felt that it was out of place. Chair Anderson said he believed it is fine where it is.

The Commission agreed to change the first paragraph of the survey to the following:

Park Usage Survey-Region I

The City of Elk Rivers' current model for maintaining parks isn't sustainable long-term due to financial constraints. We need your help to make informed decisions about park spending for Country Crossings Park, Fresno Park, Mississippi Oaks Park, and Orono Park. We're seeking your feedback on these parks to understand how residents use them. We've divided up our park system by region and we are asking for input on these parks closest to your home. (remove "this will be done citywide")
Your input will directly impact how we manage and maintain our parks for everyone to enjoy.

The survey should take about 5-10 minutes to complete.

Change Question 25:

If the city had to make a difficult decision due to budget constraints, please rank the importance of playground structures in the following parks one through four with one being the most important.

Remove "no preference."

Moved by Commissioner Fermoye and seconded by Commissioner Varty to approve the park usage survey number two including Orono Park with the modifications made in the first paragraph and question 25 for staff to conduct with residents. Motion carried 5-1. Commissioner Loidolt opposed.

8. DISCUSSION ITEMS

8.1 Bradford Park

Mr. Shelby presented his report. He also shared that to his knowledge the park will not come online until 2026/2027. This discussion can serve as a refresher of what was discussed at previous commission meetings and to brainstorm ideas of what the park could look like.

Chair Anderson said it is important for everyone to understand what part of the park space is programmable. He referenced the area on the left side of the proposed park area. He said they will be challenged by the topography of the trails versus the programmable part of the park. He would like to see the grading plan even if it is conceptual when this item is discussed again. Chair Anderson asked how many homes there will be in that area. Mr. Shelby said he believes each phase will have about 200 homes.

Chair Anderson believes this will be a destination park, but it will be linear programming since the park will have a trail on both sides. Commissioner Niziolek said he thinks this map has been modified since the last time he saw it. He thinks it is different on the north side than the original one he saw. He would like to see the planned elevations on the northeast side.

Commissioner Niziolek asked what the blue on the map was for. Chair Anderson said he believes they are stormwater ponds. Commissioner Niziolek is concerned about the slope and would like to see that on a map. Chair Anderson said that is not the programmable part that they are discussing tonight. Commissioner Niziolek said he would like to see the elevations and the topography to make sure they are making proper decisions. He believes how the trails tie into the land on the west side will impact the flat space and change their decisions.

Chair Anderson said they can still talk about some of the amenities that they could potentially put on the left side. Commissioner Niziolek asked if a picnic pavilion is considered a programmable space. Mr. Shelby said they are just discussing options tonight since they have time.

Chair Anderson said a shelter or pavilion is what he would like as well as water access. He also suggested a swimming beach, fishing pier and water access for kayaking. Commissioner Niziolek said that the quality of the water will be influenced by the shoreline work. If they don't focus on that it won't have quality water. It is a clean body of water right now so he would like to maintain that. Chair Anderson said that it will be affected more by the storm water coming into it than the runoff from the trails.

Chair Anderson said that the shoreline is important, but it isn't an amenity. Commissioner Stewart asked if there was a commission field trip to this space. Chair Anderson and Commissioner Niziolek have been out to the land already but would like to go again.

Commissioner Stewart says that a visit to the property would enhance their discussions. Chair Anderson said seeing a grading plan and taking a tour would be good for the commission to do. Mr. Shelby can get information and see if he can arrange a tour in the Spring.

Chair Anderson suggested another nature play area. Commissioner Niziolek said acquiring the other side of the park would impact this entire site. He said there was a little rapid area in that area which could be a good place for kids to play in a nature area. He believes that water is a key component for children's play and added that a five-foot elevation change with rocks in a water area is a natural attraction for kids.

Commissioner Niziolek asked if they could talk to the developer about the possibility of having land on the east side of the park. He and Chair Anderson would like to have a grading plan next time they discuss this.

In summary the Commission would like to have the following amenities considered for this park:

Access to water
Nature Play
Pavilion

9. RECREATION MANAGER UPDATE

9.1 Recreation Manager Update

Mr. Shelby presented his report.

10. ANNOUNCEMENTS

11. MOTION TO ADJOURN REGULAR MEETING

Moved by Commissioner Niziolek and seconded by Commissioner Loidolt to adjourn the regular meeting of the Parks and Recreation Commission at 8:15p.m. Motion carried 6-0.

12. WORK SESSION

Chair Anderson called the work session to order at 8:21p.m.

12.1 Elk River Parks and Recreation Framework Plan - Introduction

Mr. Shelby presented his report. Secretary Larson reminded the Commissioners that they can send her the changes that they propose before the meeting, so it is in writing before the discussion.

Commissioner Fermoye asked if the goal of this product is to help with decision making or is it just an overview of Elk River. Mr. Shelby stated that the document is a guided document for decision making about what we would like to see over the next decade.

Chair Anderson said to read the overview and that explains what it is. He feels that it is a lot of words and that is what he has trouble with.

Commissioner Niziolek stated that he believes the word sustainable must be included in the Introduction. He suggested adding the word sustainability to the introduction under review after resource allocation. He said this plan will serve as the foundation tool for decision making, resource allocation, sustainability, and capital improvement projects over the next few years. He feels that the word sustainability has to jump out.

Commissioner Stewart asked if they wanted to explain what kind of sustainability they wanted. He

thinks adding all of that is too much. Chair Anderson said that he thinks it is impossible to be sustainable, but he wants the plan to have ideas.

Secretary Larson pointed out that this is the shortest introduction she has seen after doing research on other parks and recreation master plan table of contents. Mr. Shelby said that he could add a “strategic and sustainable vision” in the first sentence. The Commissioners agreed. Commissioner Niziolek wants to make sure that moving forward they can replace things they install so they aren’t burning future generations.

Chair Anderson suggested they now edit the section under “Plan Purpose.” Commissioner Niziolek said there is a maintenance element that they need to address that they are not stating. They need to think about replacing everything they put in. They need a strategic framework for development and maintenance of present park amenities.

He is concerned that the city is already struggling to maintain current facilities. Chair Anderson asked if this document will also serve as a guide for the commission. Mr. Shelby suggested it state “City Staff and citizen led commissions.” Commissioner Loidolt said that he would like a different word than “guides.” Chair Anderson suggested using the words “reference document.” Mr. Shelby suggested that it states, “serves as a reference guide for city staff, commissions, and elected officials.” Chair Anderson said that he doesn’t believe it guides the work of city staff.

Commissioner Niziolek wants to add the words “collaborative missions.” He wants to make a formal effort to collaborate with private and nonprofit organizations. Mr. Shelby suggested using “partner collaboration.”

Commissioner Niziolek left at 8:37pm.

The Commissioners discussed where the collaboration should go in the list. Mr. Shelby suggested adding it as number six. He said that he could verify the language with Commissioner Niziolek and fill it in later. Chair Anderson said he thinks that strategic vision is a mouthful. Commissioner Fermoye asked if they had all agreed on strategic vision being included in number one. He said that the next one is “guide capital improvements” and that doesn’t fit what he thinks capital improvements are.

Commissioner Stewart asked how this list was decided upon. Councilmember Grupa stated that he thought this was based off what they talked about at the previous commission meeting. Mr. Shelby agreed. Commissioner Stewart would like to change capital improvement to capital expenses. Chair Anderson said that capital improvement is not a facility renovation, renovations would be a capital expense. He would like to add capital expenditure and park improvements.

Commissioner Fermoye left at 8:47pm. There was not a quorum at this point in the meeting.

Commissioner Stewart said that there is purchasing brand new things and then repairing things. Chair Anderson asked Mr. Shelby to explain his budget. Mr. Shelby said they have the park improvement fund and park dedication. He said they could say “guide capital expenditures and improvements.”

Commissioner Varty asked if they could move on to number three. She suggested that they stop there and reconvene next month since everyone is getting tired.

Chair Anderson said that these types of discussions need to be done earlier. The Commission discussed

how to shorten the meetings. Chair Anderson said he thinks that these discussions need to stay in a work session. He said that this is a challenging process for part time volunteers. He said that previously when he was involved in this process a few of the commissioners were able to write drafts and send them back and forth to each other outside the meetings.

Secretary Larson pointed out that tonight's document is the summary of what was discussed at the previous meeting. She reiterated that reading the previous month's meetings minutes will be particularly important going forward to make sure that the commissioners remember what was previously discussed. Commissioner Stewart asked if the version they reviewed tonight with the red corrections could be sent out before next month's meeting, so the commissioners are reminded what has already been discussed and decided before the next meeting.

This can be repeated after each meeting as progress is made. The documents will show the corrections in red.

The Commissioners decided to bring back the document from tonight with the corrections in red to the next meeting, noting that they left off at number three. Councilmember Grupa suggested that Secretary Larson remind the Commissioners when she sends the next packet that they can send her discussion points or statements for the proposed discussion at the meeting, that way she has their corrections in writing before the meeting.

13. MOTION TO ADJOURN

There were not enough Commissioners present to make a motion to adjourn. The meeting ended at 9:03pm.

Minutes prepared by Dawn Larson.



Dave Anderson, Chair



Tina Allard, City Clerk