

PARKS & RECREATION ADVISORY BOARD MEETING MINUTES

August 5, 2026, 6 PM - Grand Rapids Public Service Center

Call to Order

Meeting was called to order at 6:02 PM

Roll Call

Members Present: Hannah Mico (Chair), Max Gibbs (Vice Chair), Megan Catcho, Sonja Forte, Kelli Jo Peltier, Stacy Bare, and Marta Johnson

Staff Present: Laura Cleypool, Steve Krogman, Chardonnay Henderson, Christy Brunsell, and Dervin Figueroa

Approval of Agenda

A motion was made by Max Gibbs and supported by Kelli Jo Peltier, to approve the agenda as presented. Motion carried.

Approval of Minutes

A motion was made by Kelli Jo Peltier and supported by Megan Catcho, to approve the June 3, 2026 minutes as presented. Motion carried.

Comments from Public

None.

Agenda Item(s)

Park Parking Lots: Laura Cleypool provided an update on the condition of parking lots across the park system. In 2023, an asset assessment of parking lots throughout the park system identified an \$11 million deferred maintenance need — a figure that does not account for inflation and represents only parking lots. The department does not have a dedicated funding source for parking lot maintenance. Projects are addressed on a case-by-case basis, such as the current work at Lincoln Park where one parking lot is being fully redone and another is being removed. Laura noted that this information is being incorporated into the Parks Master Plan to tell a comprehensive story of the system's deferred maintenance needs. The park millage provides approximately \$2.4 million per year toward capital needs across all 94 parks and trails. An additional \$9 million in capital improvement funding has been allocated for the next two years, directed specifically toward completing Anomaly Park, completing Sullivan Field, and a potential expansion of the Griff's Icehouse in partnership with outside funders. Laura noted that the asset inventory system is evergreen and will continue to be updated. Board members noted that having a specific dollar figure strengthens conversations with city leadership and commissioners, and that the parking lot need represents only one component of a larger deferred maintenance picture that also includes miles of asphalt trails. No action taken.

Parks master plan update — presentation by Viridis, Williams and Works, and PROS: Lindsay Moncion of Viridis Design Group returned to provide a project update, joined by Maleah Rakestraw from Williams and Works, and Travis Tranbarger from PROS Consulting.

Public engagement update: The online survey remains open and is approaching 2,000 responses. The team noted it is trying to surpass the high bar set by the city's dog park survey. A board member flagged that the survey link in the original email was broken, and a correction email was sent within an hour. The team asked Christy Brunsell to resend the survey link through Parks and Recreation channels to reach additional respondents. In-person engagement sessions have been held at Richmond Pool and Briggs Pool, featuring a mobile refreshment cart with popsicles, snacks, and a prize wheel. An engagement table and conversation lounge were held at the MLK Community Center grand opening, where \$10 gift cards to local businesses were used to draw in teens and seniors for targeted conversations. Survey signs with QR codes have been posted in parks and along trails throughout the city. An upcoming engagement session is planned at the Plaster Creek Family Park during Friends of Grand Rapids Parks' Insect Extravaganza. The team also met with the Neighborhood Association Collaborative, with follow-up worksheets sent virtually to neighborhood associations with a mid-month deadline. The full engagement summary, comparing in-person and online responses, will be presented at the next meeting.

Staff interviews: The consultant team met with parks maintenance crews and Steve's team to understand field-level challenges and opportunities. Travis Tranbarger of PROS Consulting presented benchmarking information to maintenance staff framing the systemic nature of the challenges they face.

Operations and maintenance benchmarking: PROS Consulting is currently benchmarking five peer city park systems of similar size and population, as well as three aspirational systems. Operations and maintenance will be a significant component of the master plan, woven throughout every chapter of the report.

Trail gap analysis and park inventory: Maleah and the Williams and Works team have been conducting a trail gap analysis and updating the park inventory mapping. The team met with Mobile GR to discuss overlap between trails, bike lanes, bike facilities, sidewalk facilities, and crossing points. Maps showing connectivity between park and trail spaces have been developed, with a write-up and potential connector recommendations forthcoming. Board member Stacy Bare requested that the plan use precise language distinguishing between paved non-motorized trails and natural surface trails, noting that operations and maintenance costs differ significantly across trail types. The consultant team confirmed that trail typology naming conventions are being pulled from both Vital Streets and the Southside Creekways plan, and that the Grand Loop plan is being incorporated into the master plan.

Park activation needs assessment: The team has begun analysis of how parks are being used, with outreach to partner organizations including DGRI, Mobile GR, and GR Outside. The team is also exploring tracking data on movement into and out of park spaces to understand activation success. A board member suggested the team also reach out to the Office of Special Events for permit data, and that the master plan potentially include a recommendation around streamlining the permitting process and exploring whether parks managing permitting directly could increase activation. The consultant team noted this as an action item for follow-up.

River programming update: Travis Tranbarger of PROS Consulting reported on stakeholder engagement with staff, GR Outside, and Downtown Grand Rapids Inc. regarding river programming. The focus is on understanding how Parks and Recreation currently supports river programming partners, and how to strengthen that partnership framework going forward. PROS Consulting is drawing

on experience with river-oriented projects in Oklahoma City, Des Moines, Philadelphia, and other cities. Key themes include water safety, equity in access, re-engaging Grand Rapids Public Schools in river programming, and supporting underrepresented groups. El Gro has been participating in multiple engagement sessions, providing interactive watershed education and promoting water safety.

Board discussion — strengths, opportunities, and vision: Travis Tranbarger led a facilitated discussion with the board on the strengths of the parks system, areas for improvement, and big-picture vision. Key themes included:

Strengths: The free summer class series and affordable adult fitness programming were highlighted as major assets. The pool pass program was noted for improving both accessibility and behavioral accountability. No-mow and native planting strategies were recognized as positive ecological improvements. The department's responsiveness, community outreach capacity, communications work, and willingness to partner were identified as distinguishing strengths. Board members noted that the Parks and Recreation Department is likely in the top 10% of peer departments nationally, though this is not always recognized locally.

Areas for improvement: Board members noted challenges with navigating city systems and knowing who to contact for park issues, and suggested improved physical signage directing residents to 311 or the city's app for reporting park concerns. Survey and engagement fatigue among residents was raised as a concern, with a call for more creative, tactile, in-person engagement and clearer communication about how feedback leads to action. Board members suggested the master plan include a preamble highlighting accomplishments from the 2022 plan to demonstrate impact. Improved wayfinding — both on-street signage and within parks — was identified as a priority. Transportation access to parks, including clearer bus routes and stops named for parks, was raised as a gap. Concerns were noted about certain organizations using park spaces without following reservation or fee policies, and about capital projects being built outside the master plan process.

Vision: Board members identified the following as high-priority improvements: restoration of pool facilities, including the possibility of an indoor pool; expanded native plantings and ecosystems within parks; improved and consistently accessible restroom facilities, particularly at parks hosting fitness programming and along river trails; a major pump track or bike park facility; improved wayfinding and transportation access to parks; expanded natural surface trails; and continued work on equitable access to the Grand River.

The consultant team noted that many of the improvements identified are achievable and that the primary limiting factor is operations and maintenance capacity rather than capital investment alone. The draft report outline will be shared with the board by email for review and comment prior to the next meeting. Jayne Miller of PROS Consulting is expected to present at the next meeting, either in person or virtually. No action taken.

Comments from Board / Partner Reports

Downtown Grand Rapids Inc. (DGRI): Return to the River festival is coming up. The event is alien galaxy themed, free to attend, and will feature two stages, bands, DJs, activations, and art.

Friends of Grand Rapids Parks / Stacy Bare: The Parks Passport has been released in its second iteration. Copies are available at Grand Rapids Public Library, the Children's Museum, and the Parks and Recreation offices, among other locations. The passport highlights 12 parks — three per quadrant — and has received strong early feedback. A goal was expressed to eventually distribute a copy to every GRPS student. Board members were encouraged to help distribute remaining copies.

Future Agenda Items

- Board development
- Parks master plan consultant team check-in (ongoing through December)

Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 7:24 p.m.