

**Minutes of the Waukegan Park District
Special Meeting of the Board of Commissioners
Recreation Program Advisory Committee
March 10, 2025**

The Board of Commissioners of the Waukegan Park District met at a Special Meeting of the Recreation Program Advisory Committee on March 10, 2025, at the Field House Sports, Fitness, & Aquatics Center.

I. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 6:00pm by Errick Beverly who directed a call of the roll and welcomed all. Beverly invited all committee members to the annual Volunteer Reception and invitations have been mailed.

II. Roll Call

Present: Errick Beverly, Director of Recreation; Kaitlin Fischer, Superintendent of Sports, Fitness & Aquatics; Jennifer Dumas, Manager of General & Special Recreation; Javi Martinez, Manager of Fitness & Aquatics; Ty Rohrer, Manager of Cultural Arts; Brian Cowart, David Motley, Lori Nerheim, Mercedes Rivera; Sheryl Streicher; Christian Torres

Absent: George Bridges, Commissioner; Jacqueline Herrera Giron, Commissioner; Jay Lerner, Executive Director; Jo Dooley; Sam Johnson; Melissa Juarez; Martha Padilla-Ramos; Dulce Ortiz; Roxanne Swanson; Jane Waller; Tina Yurik

III. Review, Discuss, Divide

A. Programming Updates

- Arts & History Programs & Events
 - The holiday production of *A Christmas Carol* incorporating youth and adult actors had 3 sold out shows in December. The youth theatre production in February of *Shrek the Musical, Jr* also had 3 sold out shows. There were 30 youth actors along with talented staff at the Jack Benny Center who worked on costumes, set design and creation, and directed the show. The first outdoor theatre production will be this summer with Shakespeare in the Park.
 - WSO & WCC had another successful DIY Messiah concert in December at the Trapp Auditorium. The WSO had an outstanding concert on February 23 Celebrating Black Artistry. This was one of the best technical performances in recent history. And on Sunday, March 9, was our annual Young People's Concert which was a Disney Favorites Sing-Along featuring two of our music instructors as soloists and past youth theatre participants formed a youth choir to perform. It was a great culmination of talents across the Cultural Arts programs.
 - Committee Member comments:
 - Where will Shakespeare in the Park be held?
 - Rohrer responded it will be in the Bowen Formal Gardens
- General & Special Recreation Programs & Events

- In Special Recreation, the Polar Bear Plunge was again a very successful collaboration with the City of Waukegan with 524 plungers raising \$20,000. The Annual Valentine's Dance was a great success with participants from other Special Rec Associations attending. This year is the 25th anniversary of the SRSNLC (Special Recreation Services of Northern Lake County) which will be highlighted throughout the year.
- In General Recreation, we just had the annual Father Daughter Date Night which is a popular tradition and had an awesome dessert bar, dancing, and a lot of fun. To celebrate Black History Month, we had the Soul Food with Sylvia program which had maximum registration and a delicious cooking demonstration of favorite soul food dishes by Sylvia England. The annual Eggstravaganza Trail is coming up in April. The Parade theme this year is Family, Friends, and the Fourth with the Grand Marshal being SRSNLC to highlight and celebrate the 25th anniversary.
- Nature programming has included Urban Ag Lab programs at the Greenhouse which will have their annual Plant & Flower Days on May 9 and 10. The Nature's Classroom is in the Bevier Center in Bevier Park and has had an increase in participation in STEAM and Nature programs. These programs are free or low cost thanks to a grant from North Shore Gas. We have also added Open Drop-in Days at the Nature's Classroom over the summer. Each week there is a different theme with activities for families to drop in during the open hours to learn and explore the facility. Jonathan Cochrane is the staff member who implements these programs and is doing a great job.
- Sports, Fitness & Aquatics Programs
 - New adult fitness programs have been popular, including Merry Fitmas in December, Valentine's Partner Workout in February, and Fitness Games in March. There have been good registration numbers and great feedback on these programs.
 - The SplashZone will be opening on May 24, and we are incorporating some new programming this season, including Splashin' Thursdays, which will have weekly activities planned included in the regular admission fee for participants. The 2024 season had 13,000 patrons and we hoping to increase that this season.
 - On the weekend of March 7-9, the Field House hosted the Libertyville Gymnastics Academy's tournament. There were 1,700 athletes who completed in the tournament.
 - Committee member comments:
 - Where do the athletes come from for the gymnastics tournament?
 - Fischer responded that it is a regional tournament, so they come from all over the Midwest.

B. Facility Updates

- The Waukegan History Museum at the Carnegie is wrapping up some final construction details. The annual meeting of the Waukegan Historical Society was well attended, and members were excited to see the facility. There has been good press coverage in the Chicago Tribune and on WBBM.

- Field House member locker room design work is finalized, the materials have been ordered, and work should start in 4-6 weeks beginning with the women's locker room and when that is completed, then the men's locker room. We currently have 9500 members, so this is a greatly needed update that hasn't been done since the facility opened.
 - Committee member comments: What is the plan in the interim for locker rooms?
 - Fischer responded that the general locker rooms, located off of the lobby area, and the pool locker rooms will be available to members during construction.
- The Adaptive Recreation Center new parking lot in the property south of the building has been completed and was greatly needed for extra parking. The Jane Addams Center has been painted and along with the new flooring the facility has been nicely updated. The Bevier Center has had additional exterior lighting installed for better visibility.
 - Committee member comments: How is the Jane Addams Center being used and does it have a kitchen?
 - Dumas responded that it does have a kitchen and is currently used for some program space and primarily used for rental groups, especially on the weekends.

C. WPD News/Updates

- New promotional efforts
 - We are creating a new rental facility video to provide easier access for the community to view the available room rental space. Currently a staff person sets an appointment for a facility showing which can be inconvenient for both parties. This will allow people to view the facility instantly at their convenience.
 - Recruiting staff for Special Recreation has been challenging so we are creating a video to highlight programs and job opportunities.
- There are two new staff coming onboard in athletics. Jose Hernandez has been a part-time employee for 10 years and is now the full-time Recreation Specialist for Adult Athletics. Tyler Tiffany will be starting in March as the full-time Recreation Specialist for Youth Athletics. We are excited for both to join the Recreation Department team.
- The Recreation Department and the Park District have received several awards over the past year including being a NRPA Gold Medal finalist in our category for park districts. Javi Martinez received the NRPA Young Professional award, and our SwimSmart 2nd Grade Swim Lesson & Water Safety program received an NRPA Innovation in Health and Fitness award. Our executive director, Jay Lerner, received the IPRA Honored Professional of the Year and Quincy Bejster, the Director of Parks, received the IPRA Community Impact Award.

D. What Can We Do Better?

- Committee member comments:
 - Did you choose Thursday for the new programming at the SplashZone due to having lower attendance on that day?

- Martinez responded that it was part of the decision as well as trying to attract camp groups to utilize the facility.
- Have you done or considered doing a Spring Break Swim Camp and offering it at a low cost?
 - Martinez responded we can look into it and would need to coordinate around current programming, but it is a possibility.
 - Fischer responded that there are ongoing financial assistance opportunities for families for swim lessons and all programs.
- Zumba at the Beach is currently in the works for August but could it be offered more frequently?
 - Martinez responded that we have a full offering of Zumba classes at the Field House, including once per month a free Family Zumba event and are excited about Zumba at the Beach since Yoga at the Beach has been so popular.
- Have you considered offering Tai Chi
 - Martinez responded that there is Tai Chi at the Jack Benny Center and an Aqua Exercise program that is based on Tai Chi.
 - David Motley responded that in the past Tai Chi at the Beach was offered but not well attended.
- Last summer the SplashZone closed mid-August when school started, but is there a way to have the facility open for those hot days during August and September?
 - Martinez responded that the SplashZone does follow the school district schedule and after school is back in session goes to a weekend operation.
 - Beverly responded that when school is in session many of our staff are not available, including our contracted lifeguards, but we can investigate trying to find flexibility based on the weather.
- The ice rinks were great, but do you think the addition of a warming house is a possibility? And sharing information that the Village of Grayslake opened an ice rink at Gelatin Park using a refrigeration system so that skating can occur for a longer period in the winter season.
 - Beverly responded that he would pass along this information to the Parks Department, who manages the ice rinks for the park district.
- Do your interns complete special projects during their internship?
 - Fischer responded that our interns are usually with us for only a few weeks and may have projects they need to complete for their university requirements and in general we do not assign projects but provide them with an all-around work experience which may include them in any current projects.
- The Dandelion Wine festival was in a great location last year, will that continue?
 - Rohrer responded that we plan to continue to have the event in the upper part of Bowen Park. That location provided great visibility.
 - Lori Nerheim added that the location allowed for many more visitors to the Haines House Museum.
- What is the plan for the Haines House Museum and in the past, there was a program to discover the history of your house, will that be available and where are those records?

- Rohrer responded that the Haines House is continuing in its present state as a museum and may have some enhancements after the Carnegie facility has been opened. The program to discover the history of your house unfortunately didn't always have great success with about 25% of the participants being able to locate information on their home. The Historical Society's records were housed in the Lilac Cottage and have all been preserved and moved to the appropriate storage at the Carnegie along with many of the collections. The Historical Society acquired Ray Bradbury's collection which was originally donated to the Waukegan Library. This collection of over 4000 items has been inventoried and two thirds required special conservation efforts to mitigate mold, insects, and other issues. The collection will be on display at the Ray Bradbury room in the Carnegie facility.
- Lori Nerheim added that a grant from a donor provided the funds to conserve the Ray Bradbury collection.

Errick Beverly closed the meeting by thanking the committee members for their feedback and the community for supporting all that we do.

IV. Closed Session

There was no closed session.

V. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 6:40pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Errick Beverly
Director of Recreation