

PARKS & RECREATION ADVISORY BOARD MEETING MINUTES

June 3, 2026, 6 PM - Grand Rapids Public Service Center

Call to Order

Meeting was called to order at 6:03 PM

Roll Call

Members Present: Max Gibbs, Luke Stier, Sonja Forte, Kelli Jo Peltier, Stacy Bare, and Nate Rauh-Bieri

Staff Present: Laura Cleypool, Luke Bronkema, Chardonnay Henderson, and Christy Brunsell

Approval of Agenda

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

Approval of Minutes

A motion was made by Luke Stier and supported by Nate Rauh-Bieri, to approve the April 1, 2026 minutes as presented. Motion carried.

Comments from Public

Adam, Chair of the Highland Park Neighborhood Association, addressed the board regarding the Coldbrook Cut, a rails-to-trails proposal connecting the Grand River to Grand Avenue spanning approximately 1 ¼ miles through the Midtown, Highland Park, Belknap, Creston, and Monroe North neighborhoods. The project is part of the Grand Rapids Greenway initiative and is supported by multiple neighborhood associations. Adam noted that the project has been communicated to the Parks Department and other city entities, and encouraged the board to be aware of its existence and potential. No action taken.

Brittany Williams, Granddaughter of Don Williams, addressed the board in support of the proposed naming of the event space at the MLK Community Center in honor of her grandfather. She was joined by Marshall Booker, Lee Moyer, and Michael Remo, who each spoke to Don Williams' decades of leadership, his role as a driving force behind the creation of the youth center at MLK Park, and his commitment to youth opportunity and community connection in Grand Rapids.

Agenda Item(s)

Naming of the Don Williams Senior Legacy Room at MLK Community Center: Laura Cleypool provided background on the proposed naming of the event space within the MLK Community Center as the Don Williams Senior Legacy Room. In accordance with the City's park naming policy, postcards were mailed in early April to all residents within 300 feet of the community center, providing formal notification and an opportunity for public comment. Don Williams was recognized as a central driving force behind the creation of the MLK Community Center for more than two decades, maintaining his commitment to the project through significant challenges including the pandemic and fundraising setbacks. His vision and early advocacy helped lay the foundation for the community center that exists today. The proposed naming has received strong support from City Manager Mark Washington and Third Ward commissioners. Although full City Commission approval is not required for naming interior park

features, city leadership has expressed consistent encouragement for moving the tribute forward. A plaque will be affixed outside the event space, and the room will be formally identified as the Don Williams Senior Legacy Room when reserved. A motion was made by Sonja Forte and supported Stacy Bare to approve the naming of the event space as the Don Williams Senior Legacy Room. Motion carried.

Sullivan Field Naming—Sponsored Features: Laura presented the proposed naming of twelve features at Sullivan Field made possible through the philanthropic efforts of Friends of Allendale and individual donors. In accordance with the City's park naming policy, postcards were mailed in early April to all residents within 300 feet of Allendale Field. To date, private philanthropy has raised nearly \$2 million, with an additional \$680,000 secured in grants and city capital funding, bringing the total project investment to nearly \$6 million. The twelve features approved for naming are as follows:

- Bissell Gateway - \$350,000 donation
- Gordon Olson Museum, presented by Meyer - \$150,000 donation
- Dave and Carol Van Andel Family Foundation Home Dugout - \$100,000 donation
- Cook Foundation Comfort Stations - \$100,000 donation
- Klopchic Family Foundation Concession - \$100,000 donation
- Rockford Construction - \$100,000 donation
- The Secchia Infield - \$50,000 donation
- Brown Tassell Bullpen - \$50,000 donation
- Welcome to the Old Ballpark Entrance, sponsored by the Williams and Faber Families - \$50,000 donation
- Fry Foundation Ticket Booth - \$62,000 donation
- Bea Idema Foundation Stage and Pavilion - \$250,000 donation
- Doug Wabeke Locker Room - \$25,000 donation
- Mary Free Bed Guild Accessible Seating - \$25,000 donation

Motion made by Stacy Bare and supported by Nate Rauh-Bieri, to approve the naming of the twelve features at Sullivan Field as presented. Motion carried.

Introduction of Luke Bronkema, Assistant Director of Parks and Recreation: Laura Cleypool introduced Luke as the new Assistant Director for the Parks and Recreation Department, effective end of April. Luke previously served as Operations Director at the David D. Hunting YMCA before transitioning to the Kroc Center. He brings extensive experience in recreation leadership and operations, as well as an MBA with business and finance acumen. Luke addressed the board, sharing his background growing up through the YMCA over a 15-year career and his enthusiasm for community impact through parks and recreation.

Parks Master Plan Update Presentation by Viridis Design Group: Laura Cleypool introduced the consultant team contracted to complete the next five-year Parks and Recreation Master Plan update. Lindsay Moncion, landscape architect and principal at Veritas Design Group, led the presentation, joined by team members from Williams and Works, Pros Consulting, and additional Viridis staff. Viridis completed the 2022 master plan refresh and has reassembled a similar team for this update.

Lindsay provided an overview of the master plan process, noting that certain elements are required by the DNR to maintain eligibility for state funding, while the City has the option to expand the plan with additional depth and analysis. Key focus areas for this update include: activation of park spaces through amenities such as pump tracks, art installations, outdoor education, and climbing walls; climate

resiliency; equitable access to the Grand River; unconventional use of fields and sport courts; and a strong emphasis on operations, maintenance, and non-motorized trails.

The consultant team outlined the community engagement strategy, which includes an online public survey hosted on a dedicated project landing page, three pop-up booths in the wards (one per ward, tied to existing events or a standalone event where needed), a mobile pool cart presence at Richmond Park, MLK Park, and Birds Park, and a table at the MLK Park Party on June 27. A conversation lounge geared toward seniors and teens will also be held at the MLK Community Center during the Park Party. Additional engagement will include staff and stakeholder interviews, neighborhood association meetings, and regular check-ins with the Parks Advisory Board.

Board members offered input on the engagement strategy, including the importance of reaching the west side of the first ward—specifically the Roosevelt Park, Garfield Park, and bike park areas—which are often underrepresented in city-wide engagement efforts. The board also suggested potential engagement locations including Sullivan Field and the Garfield Park splash pad, where daily programming runs from 12:00 to 3:00 p.m. beginning the following week. Board member Stacy Bare noted that Friends of Grand Rapids Parks would be willing to help promote engagement events and distribute materials through their network.

Additional board input on plan priorities included: accessibility and an accessibility audit throughout the system; incorporation of the 1821 Treaty of Chicago framework and its relevance to land management and habitat restoration; the relationship between park land and GRPS school properties, particularly given anticipated school sales; the Grand Loop plan and natural surface trails; and alignment with other adopted city plans including the Climate Action and Adaptation Plan.

The project timeline was shared with the board. Community engagement will run from June through August, with analysis and plan development beginning in September. A rough draft is expected in October, with a presentation to the Parks Advisory Board anticipated at that time. A 30-day public review period will occur in November, followed by City Commission adoption in January 2026, with submission to the state by February 1 to maintain grant eligibility for 2027. The consultant team confirmed they will be present at Parks Advisory Board meetings through December. Jane Miller from Prose Consulting was noted as a future presenter, potentially in August, either in person or virtually. No action taken.

Comments from Board / Partner Reports

Stacy Bare / Friends of Grand Rapids Parks: As of May 1, Friends of Grand Rapids Parks had logged more volunteers through the first four months of the year than all the previous year, representing a 7% increase. A parks passport will be released within the next week or two, developed in partnership with Grand Rapids Public Library, neighborhood associations, and City Parks and Recreation. The passport highlights 20 parks organized by quadrant. The largest tree giveaway to date was held with Bloom Credit Union, with 250 households receiving trees and community demand exceeding supply. A trails program has launched, with the first official trail day scheduled for Saturday. Friends is piloting an outdoor summer camp in partnership with Baxter Community Center and GR Outside, targeting up to 10 Baxter Center campers, in recognition of the lack of youth-focused outdoor programming in Grand Rapids. Friends also received a significant conservation grant. Looking ahead, Friends will host a 20th anniversary celebration in February 2027 in lieu of the Green Gala.

Future agenda items

- Parking lots (August meeting)
- Parks master plan update — presentation by Jane Miller, Prose Consulting (August meeting)
- Parks master plan consultant team check-in (ongoing through December)

Adjournment

A motion was made by Kelli Jo Peltier and supported by Nate Rauh-Bieri to adjourn the meeting. Motion carried at 7:08 PM.