

NORTH LITTLE ROCK PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION MINUTES

June 16, 2025

The North Little Rock Parks and Recreation commission meeting was called to order by Mrs. Vicki Stephens at 5:00 p.m. on June 16, 2025 at the North Little Rock Community Center.

Commission Members Present: Randall Bradley, Laura Juels, Don Skrivanos, Otistene Smith, and Vicki Stephens.

Vote for Excused or Unexcused Absences: Mrs. Stephens asked for Neil Bryant and Toby Burkett to be excused.

Mrs. Smith made a motion, seconded by Ms. Juels to excuse Neil Bryant and Toby Burkett from the June 16th, 2025 commission meeting. All voted aye and the motion passed unanimously.

Staff Members Present: Kenny Stephens, Amy Fields, Jennifer Fields, Patrick Isbell, Joe Ralston, Jamie Pettit, Greg Zonner, Jeff Caplinger, Tina Worrell, and Daniel Cornelison.

Others Present: Officer James Neeley, Deana Garretson, Sharon Bennett, Dave Larson, Stan Jackson, Ralph Shoptaw, Patrick McCormack, and Patrick McCormack III.

Disposition of Minutes: Mrs. Stephens presented the May 19, 2025 minutes to be approved.

Mr. Skrivanos made a motion, seconded by Ms. Juels, to approve all of the presented minutes. All voted aye and the motion passed unanimously.

Approval of 2025 Bonzai BMX Program and Facility Management Agreement: Jamie Pettit introduced Dave Larson, the owner of Bonzai BMX. Mrs. Pettit stated that the City of North Little Rock and Bonzai BMX decided to create a seven (7) month agreement to last through the beginning of the year. Ms. Stephens informed the commission that a draft of the agreement was included in the packets and asked if anyone had questions.

Mr. Larson expressed that he would like to change the amount of dirt allocated annually to the BMX dirt track at Burns Park in the agreement. Director Kenny Stephens stated that the agreement includes five (5) loads of dirt per year and explained that the City of North Little Rock had already given Bonzai BMX 15 loads, exceeding the original agreement. Mr. Larson explained that Mayor Terry Hartwick had told him he could receive 1,000 yards of dirt to help get the track operational again. However, Mr. Larson stated that he had only received 260 yards.

Ms. Stephens told Mr. Larson that she would prefer Bonzai BMX work directly with the Parks and Recreation Department and he needed to communicate with Director Kenny Stephens before anyone else.

Director Kenny Stephens reiterated that the agreement states five (5) loads per year and that 15 loads had already been provided. He then asked Mr. Larson how much more dirt was needed. Mr. Larson responded that the track was experiencing significant washout, especially on the turns, and they did not have any tarps for coverage. Director Kenny Stephens stated that when Bonzai BMX

Approval of 2025 Bonzai BMX Program and Facility Management Agreement Continued:

removed the asphalt from the turns, it created an erosion problem during rain. He further explained that the track no longer had anything to stabilize and hold the dirt in place and added that the Parks and Recreation Department had not been informed of the removal of the asphalt.

Mr. Larson suggested that ten (10) to 15 loads per year would be an ideal amount. Director Kenny Stephens repeated that 15 loads had already been provided and asked if more were still needed. Mr. Larson stated that more dirt was required to rebuild the BMX track. Director Kenny Stephens said he would need to look into the cost and could not make a decision at this time. He noted that Bonzai BMX had already received ten (10) loads more than what was projected.

Mrs. Smith sought clarification that the additional dirt was needed due to the removal of the asphalt, which is now causing erosion. Director Kenny Stephens confirmed that the asphalt removal had caused problems with erosion control on the turns. Mr. Larson stated that the asphalt in those curves had been broken up, which is why it was removed. Director Kenny Stephens suggested that the asphalt could have been patched until a more permanent solution was developed.

Mr. Larson stated that another issue was that the track layout had remained the same for the past ten (10) years, discouraging returning riders. Mrs. Smith pointed out that there is now a budget concern because asphalt is a critical element of the track and must be replaced. She added that the removal of the asphalt, as well as the redesign of the track and its associated costs, had not been presented to the commission.

Mrs. Smith stated that a written proposal outlining the needs and costs should be presented to the commission. City Attorney Amy Fields mentioned that this issue had been raised at a previous meeting, where it was noted that changes had been made to the BMX track without notifying the park staff, park director, or commission. As a result, on page 4, section 8 of the agreement, it was added that the association shall not make any major alterations to the track or facility without the express consent of the Department.

Mrs. Smith informed Mr. Larson that any maintenance issues or funding needs for the BMX track should go through Director Kenny Stephens. She emphasized the importance of presenting cost information in writing to the commission.

Ms. Stephens stated that in Section 8.02 of the agreement, the department will supply dirt as needed for pre-season use, within reason, up to five (5) loads. She said she is unsure whether Bonzai BMX will sign the agreement, as the City is not willing to provide more dirt than it has in the past.

Mrs. Smith asked if the item needed to be tabled. City Attorney Amy Fields responded that the City of North Little Rock is only obligated to supply up to five (5) loads for pre-season and, if Bonzai BMX is unwilling to sign under those terms, then they are not at a place to sign the agreement. Dave Larson stated he had no issue signing for the five (5) loads of dirt. Director Kenny Stephens reiterated that 15 loads had already been given. Ms. Stephens stated that he is willing to sign it, and that it is only a seven (7) month contract. Mrs. Smith added that he appears to be requesting an additional five (5) loads. Ms. Stephens responded that the City has already provided the five (5) loads.

Approval of 2025 Bonzai BMX Program and Facility Management Agreement Continued: City Attorney Amy Fields asked when pre-season BMX begins. Mr. Larson answered and said it starts in January. City Attorney Amy Fields confirmed that the season begins January 1st, and the previous 15 loads were provided for last season. Ms. Stephens said she is not willing to move forward with the agreement if another five (5) loads must be given, and she did not appreciate how the situation unfolded, adding that it is a Parks and Recreation program and should not be handled without their involvement.

Mrs. Smith asked if there had been a preliminary discussion prior to finalizing the contract. Director Kenny Stephens stated that the only information he had received was that additional dirt was needed to get the track operational, and they agreed to provide 15 loads. City Attorney Amy Fields noted that we are currently in the off-season until January.

Mrs. Smith asked if the BMX track was currently operational. Mr. Larson told the commission that it was not. City Attorney Amy Fields asked if the additional dirt was needed to get the track up and running. Mr. Larson stated that the dirt previously provided was intended for last season.

Mr. Skrivanos asked if the 15 loads were from this year or last. Director Kenny Stephens clarified that if the 15 loads were intended to get the track open for the 2025 season, it was not successful. The track is not open, and the erosion continues to be an issue. He emphasized the need for erosion control measures.

Mrs. Smith concluded that since the BMX track is not currently operational, the conversation should be tabled until there is a full discussion on what is required to get the track functional again. She stated if the track is not up and running, the contract would be null and void.

Ms. Juels stated a solution needs to be developed, especially since the weather is unpredictable, and it should be clear who is responsible. Mr. Bradley asked how the dirt will be kept in place. Mr. Larson stated that machinery is needed, and they need an all-volunteer staff. He added that the track would have been operational last year, but the extreme heat prevented volunteers from completing the work.

Director Kenny Stephens stated that two (2) years ago after the tornado, there was \$9,000 in funds allocated to the BMX track that should have been used for equipment to make the dirt compacted and usable.

Mrs. Stephens asked if the commission wanted Mr. Larson to meet with Director Kenny Stephens to come up with a solution and develop a plan.

Mrs. Smith made a motion, seconded by Mr. Skrivanos, for Mr. Larson and Director Kenny Stephens to meet and return to the commission with a plan to get the BMX track operational. All voted aye, and the motion passed unanimously.

Resurfacing and Repairs of Tennis Red Ball Courts: Ms. Stephens stated that she needed a motion to amend the agenda and add the resurfacing and repairs of the tennis red ball courts. Ms. Stephens informed the commission that the mayor had approached her and Director Kenny Stephens concerning the resurfacing and repairing of the red ball courts at Burns Park Tennis Center.

Resurfacing and Repairs of Tennis Red Ball Courts Continued: Ms. Stephens stated that the mayor said he had the money and wanted the commission to decide what we want to do with the red ball courts. Ms. Stephens stated she does not want the commission to make the decision at this meeting on converting them to tennis or pickleball, just to make decision of allowing the red ball courts to be repaired and resurfaced.

Ms. Stephens informed the commission that North Little Rock Tourism had done a survey known as the Huddle Up Group Sports Feasibility Study. The group supposedly has conducted this study in City of North Little Rock and are supposed to meet with Director Kenny Stephens and some of the park staff in the month of July. They will present the findings, which will reflect what direction the citizens of North Little Rock would like to see the sports facilities move towards.

Shelby Morris of North Little Rock Tourism has been asked to present the results of the study at the July Commission Meeting. Ms. Stephens stated that this will help the commission decide what direction we want to go in the future and Daniel Cornelison can answer any questions we have about the red ball courts. Ms. Stephens expressed that the direction of what we want to do with the red ball courts will be discussed at the July Commission meeting.

City Attorney Amy Fields asked if the money was coming from additional funds. Ms. Stephens answered and said it is coming from additional funds and is not coming out of the Parks and Recreation Department's sales tax. Ms. Stephens reiterated that the people of North Little Rock passed the sales tax, to support the community centers. Daniel Cornelison stated that the company Generations is coming to look at the red ball courts. Ms. Stephens asked Daniel Cornelison and Director Kenny Stephens to get at least two (2) bids and go with best option, even if it not lowest in price.

Ms. Juels made a motion, seconded by Mr. Skrivanos to repair and resurface the Tennis Red Ball courts. All said aye and the motion passed unanimously.

Pulaski County Fair 2025 Report: Jamie Pettit introduced Stan Jackson and Ralph Shoptaw, organizers of the Pulaski County Fair, to break down the Pulaski County Fair 2025 report. Mr. Jackson reported that last year they had lost 12 tents and only lost 10 this year, but the weather was not favorable. Ms. Stephens asked if they were contemplating hosting the fair during another time of the year. Mr. Jackson stated that no, they were not because they are locked in as far as availability for carnivals. Mr. Jackson explained that the carnival companies that they are working with they are locked in with multi- year contracts and have been that way for the past 20 years, and they wanted to stay as far away from the Arkansas State Fair's schedule as possible. Ms. Stephens thanked Stan Jackson and Ralph Shoptaw for the report.

Safety Measures in City Parks: Director Kenny Stephens reported on the safety measures in the North Little Rock City Parks. Director Kenny Stephens stated that one of the things being done to measure safety in parks is to keep track of the number of attendees of pavilion rentals in Burns Park.

Director Kenny Stephens provided an example of a recent rental that had originally been 75 people and had gone up to 300 people. The police department, park staff and Chief of Staff Mike Davis worked together on the incident. Director Kenny Stephens called and canceled the rental over the

Safety Measures in City Parks Continued: phone. Director Kenny Stephens stated that park rangers and staff closely monitor the rentals of pavilions and clubhouses to ensure safety and proper use. He also provided an update on operations at the splash pad, describing it as a "learning as we go" process. Director Stephens emphasized the importance of staffing, noting that personnel are positioned both at the top and bottom of the slide at Funland to ensure safe use.

He further noted that staff remain vigilant regarding weather conditions. When lightning is detected in the area, the splash pad is immediately closed for a minimum of 30 minutes, and operations do not resume until it is safe to do so.

Director Kenny Stephens stated that the park staff communicates through phone calls to keep each other updated what is going on at Funland. Director Kenny Stephens expressed that we have park rangers on site at Burns Park. Additional gates have also been installed to help stop any disturbances at night.

Ms. Stephens asked Director Kenny Stephens if the park had a traffic flow problem. Director Kenny Stephens stated that barricades have been moved in to the cross walk on both sides which prevents vehicles from driving past the cross walk or circling back out of the area. Director Kenny Stephens stated that event signs have been placed that states the roads are closed around the Funland area during splash pad hours of operation.

Director Kenny Stephens stated that he plans on putting more gates in the Funland area and pedestrian signs to help control traffic as much as possible. Director Kenny Stephens informed the commission that plans are to pour sidewalk at edge of Funland to the softball field area so they can use the softball parking lot as overflow.

Mrs. Smith asked Director Kenny Stephens about safety measures taking place in other city parks. The community center directors had expressed concern about safety in their particular parks. Director Kenny Stephens stated that he has not heard anything negative about any incidents happening at the parks by the community centers.

Arkansas Climbers Coalition update on Funding, Next Stages and Progress: Sharon Bennett was present on behalf of the Arkansas Climber's Coalition to provide updates on funding, progress, and the next phases of development at Big Rock Quarry. Ms. Bennett reported that the recent rope-cutting ceremony was a success, with strong community turnout. Ms. Bennett noted that some attendees traveled from Louisiana, and stated that Big Rock Quarry offers the best climbing in Central Arkansas.

Ms. Bennett shared that the site continues to see a consistent number of climbers and thanked Director Kenny Stephens for the installation of signage in the area. She announced that the Coalition has raised \$15,000 in monetary donations and received contributions of materials, from members who work at companies using the same type of steel needed for the climbing infrastructure.

The Arkansas Climber's Coalition is now fully funded for the completion of the project, having received an additional \$20,000 grant from North Little Rock Tourism. This funding will support the

Arkansas Climbers Coalition update on Funding, Next Stages and Progress Continued:

development of the remaining crags. Ms. Bennett informed the commission that work has begun on the next crag, where 40 climbing routes have already been established. The routes range from 80 to 100 feet in height and offer views of Pinnacle Mountain. The crag is expected to have 45 routes upon completion, after which trail work will begin from Main Street and Vestal to Crag C. For safety, the area is currently marked with signage requesting that visitors refrain from entering.

Ms. Bennett mentioned that the Coalition is considering naming Crag C "El Capitan," in reference to the famous rock formation in Yosemite National Park, which is historically significant in the sport climbing community. She stated that they are open to other name suggestions if the Parks and Recreation Commission has any recommendations. Ms. Stephens indicated support for the proposed name and asked the commission if they preferred to move forward with the name or take more time to consider alternatives. The commission expressed consensus in favor of the name.

Mr. Skrivanos made a motion, seconded by Ms. Juels to name Crag C "El Capitan." All voted aye and the motion passed unanimously.

Director Reports: Kenny Stephens called upon Pat Isbell to stand and informed the commission that Mr. Isbell will serve as the Interim Parks Superintendent for the time being.

Pat Isbell reported for Parks Maintenance. Mr. Isbell reported that work is ongoing to complete maintenance at the Burns Park Archery Range. Mr. Isbell stated that he is making sure staff is helping maintain Funland to ensure everything is in good condition.

Director Kenny Stephens updated the commission on the Funland Train. He explained that the train is a 1971 year model and have spent a large amount of money on the track after the tornado in 2023.

Director Kenny Stephens informed the commission that more money has been spent on the train including buying all new wheels. Even with the new wheels, the train continues to come off the track in certain spots. Director Kenny Stephens stated that children love the train and is a big draw for Funland.

Director Kenny Stephens explained that a company out of Missouri has been hired to start the process of fixing this issues with the Funland train, starting on June 23, 2025. The company will focus on redoing the curves where the train has been coming off the track. Director Kenny Stephens stated that the ongoing issues with the train is not acceptable and the goal is to ensure the train can operate smoothly and continuously.

The company will be here in three (3) to four (4) days working on the train. Mrs. Smith inquired if the train hours will be increasing or if they are staying the same once it is operational. Director Kenny Stephens stated that the running of the train will be staying the same hours, six (6) days a week.

Daniel Cornelison reported for the Burns Park Tennis Center. Mr. Cornelison stated the Tennis Center has tournaments scheduled the next three (3) weekends. The Tennis Center held two (2) tournaments this past two (2) weekends, making it five (5) consecutive weekends of tournaments. Mr. Cornelison stated that tomorrow at 1:00 p.m. he and the company, Generations, are having a walk through to discuss repairs and resurfacing of the red ball courts.

Director Reports Continued: Joe Ralston reported for the Burns Park Golf Course. Mr. Ralston stated that April revenues were higher than April of last year by \$16,516.50 and they are at 13.5% for the year. He expects June to be around the same amount. Mr. Ralston informed the commission that the Burns Park Golf Course has several events scheduled July 9th through July 12th with junior tournaments. Mr. Ralston stated that weekends at the Burns Park Golf Course are very busy along with the Hot Dog Scramble every Wednesday. The Burns Park Golf Course is hosting a Drive, Chip, and Putt Qualifier tomorrow.

Director Kenny Stephens asked Mr. Ralston what his total revenue was for the month of May. Mr. Ralston stated that the amount was \$129,956.00 and expecting around the same amount for the month of June. Mr. Ralston stated that next month he was going to try and put together percentages from the Golf Pro Shop and start including that in his financial report.

Tina Worrell reported for the Recreation Division. Ms. Worrell stated that the splash pad is staying busy, with staff throughout Funland. Staff members are located at the top and the bottom of the big slide there, to help children safely slide down. Mrs. Worrell explained that when the train was operational, over 3,000 people had ridden it. When the train is operational once again, the hours will be changing to 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. every day except Monday. On Monday, the train will be closed.

Mrs. Worrell stated that the after school program has concluded and they have started their summer programs. All the community centers summer programs are full except the Rose City Teen Summer Camp which has room for ten (10) more kids. Gymnastic pop up classes are taking place and both pools at North Heights Community Center and Sherman Park Community Center are open. Mrs. Worrell explained that they have filled nine (9) lifeguard positions and are looking to fill three (3) more spots and will help pay for the lifeguard certification classes. Mrs. Worrell informed the commission that the starting pay rate for lifeguards is \$15.55 per hour which is the second highest hourly amount in central Arkansas behind the North Little Rock Athletic Club.

Ms. Worrell informed the commission that staff had attended CPR training the previous month and are planning on having another training this month.

Mrs. Worrell stated that the summer programs are including therapeutic recreation this year. That way it is more accessible to all populations of children. Both Gardens of the North Heights Community Center and Glenview Community Center are going well and will have some vegetables to pick the following month. Ms. Worrell informed the commission that Sherman Park Community Center has been adopted by 7th Street Elementary School's garden.

Mrs. Smith asked Mrs. Worrell why the issues of staffing lifeguards are the same every year and if it had something to do with the timing of recruiting the lifeguards or if they need additional help paying for the lifeguard certification. Mrs. Worrell stated that they start the recruiting process of hiring lifeguards at the beginning of each year. Mrs. Worrell stated that the day after the first of the year, she sends a memorandum to Director Kenny Stephens about starting the recruiting process and adding bonuses and that they start recruiting at three high schools in February.

Mrs. Worrell informed the commission that the City of North Little Rock does help pay for the lifeguard certification. Glenda Parker and Renee Henson have had 75 interviews for hiring lifeguard

Director Reports Continued: positions. Mrs. Worrell pointed out that Jeff Caplinger helps share the hiring of lifeguard information on social media platforms.

Mrs. Smith asked how they advertise the lifeguard positions with two (2) year and four (4) year colleges and if that age group was interested. Ms. Worrell stated that they are not finding anyone who is not already in the system who wants to go back and get their certification. Mrs. Worrell stated that Pulaski Technical College does know that the City of North Little Rock has job opportunities, but they do not have a job fair for summer seasonal jobs.

Mrs. Smith stated that she brought up the colleges and universities because they do have swim teams and could possibly talk to the swim coaches about lifeguard opportunities. Mrs. Worrell informed the commission that the latest lifeguard hired was from the North Little Rock High School swim team. Mrs. Worrell stated that she is open to any suggestions anyone may have on how staffing lifeguards could be more successful.

Director Kenny Stephens asked Mrs. Worrell if charging for vendors around Funland was going well. Ms. Worrell stated that yes it is going very well and the vendors have no issues paying the \$50 fee because they will make up the money in sales. Mrs. Worrell informed the commission how parking has been an issue because of how busy Funland is since opening. Mrs. Smith asked if the parking lot was shared between Funland, tennis, and pickle ball. Director Kenny Stephens stated yes it is overflow from all of the areas.

Greg Zonner reported for the Arkansas Inland Maritime Museum (AIMM). Mr. Zonner stated AIMM was having a very decent month and they have overnight events scheduled all the way until August 4th, 2025. Mr. Zonner reminded the commission of the 4th of July event at AIMM and that he is able to provide parking passes for parks and recreation employees. Mr. Zonner stated that the gates that have been installed are helping with overnight events. Director Kenny Stephens informed the commission that plans are to add fencing around AIMM to make it safer at Riverfront Park.

Jeff Caplinger reported for special projects. Mr. Caplinger stated that he is waiting on the contract for the Recycle Bikes for Kids grant and is waiting on Mayor Terry Hartwick's signature to turn the grant in. Mr. Caplinger informed the commission that the new North Little Rock App has had over 700 downloads since release. Mr. Caplinger stated that a new digital billboard is located on I-30 from Little Rock into North Little Rock. He explained the new billboard has promotional content from the City of North Little Rock, especially parks and recreation, and are planning to swap content out on a monthly or yearly basis.

Director Kenny Stephens reported they have received a \$100,000 grant for a concession stand at Funland and he has a meeting tomorrow to discuss pouring the concrete slab. The concession stand building will also include a family restroom on one side and an office on the other. The cost of the concession stand is \$225 per square foot. With the grant and the money available, Director Kenny Stephens noted that it has the potential to be a high-quality concession stand.

Mrs. Smith asked if the grant was a matching grant and Director Kenny Stephens confirmed that it was not. Mr. Cornelison stated that people have been asking if there can be a sign installed that directs them to the concession stand at the Burns Park Tennis Center until the concession stand at

Director Reports Continued: Funland is finished. Director Kenny Stephens stated that signs would not be a problem and he will install one if Mr. Cornelison provides him with the necessary information.

Calendar of Events: Mrs. Stephens stated the agenda deadline for the next meeting is Tuesday, July 1, 2025 at 2:00 p.m. The July commission meeting will be held Monday, July 21, 2025. The July meeting will take place at 5:00 p.m. at the North Little Rock Community Center.

Adjournment: Mrs. Smith made a motion, seconded by Mr. Bradley, to adjourn the meeting at 5:56 p.m. All voted aye and the motion passed unanimously.

Public Comments/Visitors: Mrs. Stephens opened the meeting for public comments. There were none.

APPROVED BY:


Chair, Vicki Stephens

SUBMITTED BY:


Secretary, Otistene Smith