NORTH LITTLE ROCK PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION MINUTES
May 19, 2025

The North Little Rock Parks and Recreation commission meeting was called to order by Mrs. Vicki Stephens at 5:00 p.m. on May 19, 2025 at the North Little Rock Community Center.

Commission Members Present: Randall Bradley, Neil Bryant, Toby Burkett, Laura Juels, Don Skrivanos, Otistine Smith, and Vicki Stephens.

Vote for Excused or Unexcused Absences: All members were present.

Staff Members Present: Jeff Caplinger, Daniel Cornelison, Amy Fields, Jennifer Fields, Jamie Pettit, Joe Ralston, Jason Rhodes, Katrina Wilbon, Tina Worrell, and Greg Zonner.

Others Present: Officer James Neeley, Deanna Garretson, Sharon Bennett, Heather Kouns, Blane McClellan, and Caroline Faulkner.

Disposition of Minutes: Mrs. Stephens presented the April 21, 2025 minutes to be approved.

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

North Little Rock High School Softball Agreement: Jamie Pettit presented a new softball agreement between the City of North Little Rock Parks and Recreation Department and North Little Rock High School. Ms. Pettit stated that the previous North Little Rock High School Softball Agreement was a ten (10) year agreement, but it has now been changed to a two (2) year agreement. This change aligns the softball agreement with the North Little Rock baseball agreement making both agreements the same duration. She noted that some dates and terms in the agreement were updated to reflect more current standards, including provisions regarding vendors and concessions. Section 8 now more clearly outlines the responsibilities of the City and those of the North Little Rock School District.

Ms. Stephens asked Mrs. Pettit if Caroline Faulkner, Coordinator of Student-Athlete Development and Academic Engagement, had reviewed the agreement. Mrs. Pettit confirmed that she had emailed the agreement to Ms. Faulkner. Ms. Faulkner responded that she was satisfied with the new agreement. Ms. Stephens asked the commissioners if they had any questions or comments.

Mrs. Smith inquired about Article 14, which addresses advertisements and vendors, and whether the new agreement would align with the approved vendor fee structure of $50 during the week and $100 on weekends. Ms. Worrell clarified that the vendor fees do not apply to vendors at the softball field.

Ms. Smith also asked about the concessions contract outlined in the agreement. Ms. Pettit explained that the North Little Rock School District operates its own concession stands during softball games, whereas the Parks and Recreation Department manages concessions at the baseball field.

Mr. Bryant asked whether the Parks and Recreation Department receives a percentage of the concession revenue generated by the school district. Ms. Pettit stated that it does not, as the softball field is essentially a North Little Rock School District facility and is not rented out to other groups.

North Little Rock High School Softball Agreement Continued: Mr. Burkett asked whether the agreement was for two (2) years or three (3) years. Mrs. Pettit acknowledged that there was a typo and assured the Commission that she would correct it before the agreement was signed. Ms. Stephens then noted that the director recommends approval of the agreement.

Mrs. Smith made a motion, seconded by Ms. Juels, to approve the North Little Rock High School Softball Agreement. All voted aye, and the motion passed unanimously.

Naming of Big Rock Quarry Climbing Areas: Ms. Stephens stated that she needed a motion to amend the agenda to include the Arkansas Climbers Association.

Mrs. Smith made a motion, seconded by Mr. Skrivanos to amend the agenda. All voted aye and the motion passed unanimously.

Sharon Bennett represented the Arkansas Climbers Coalition. Ms. Bennett presented information regarding two new climbing areas at the Rock Quarry, which have been named *Crystal Bluff.* Ms. Bennett provided the Commissioners with a map of the areas. Ms. Bennett stated that Director Kenny Stephens has expressed his support for the name, stating that he thought it was a wonderful choice and noted that a sign is being prepared. Ms. Bennett announced that a ribbon-cutting ceremony for the new climbing areas is scheduled for May 30 at 1:00 p.m.

Ms. Bennett proposed three potential names for Climbing Area Crag A: *Main Street,* because many great things are found off Main Street, particularly in North Little Rock; *Crag Central,* since it is the central starting point of the development; and *The Lode,* referencing the "mother lode," as the area was once a quarry that contributed to building the city. She noted that the Arkansas Climbers Coalition recommends the name *Main Street,* and that the developers involved felt it was the most fitting. She also welcomed additional suggestions from the Commission. Ms. Juels expressed her support for the name *Main Street.*

Mr. Skrivanos made a motion, seconded by Mr. Burkett, to approve the name *Main Street* for Climbing Area Crag A. All voted aye, and the motion passed unanimously.

Ms. Bennett then presented two (2) name options for Climbing Area Crag B: *Vestal,* in reference to the smokestack and artifact located in Rockwater, and *Broadway,* to continue the street name theme. Mr. Bryant stated that he preferred the name *Vestal,* and Ms. Stephens agreed.

Mr. Burkett made a motion, seconded by Ms. Juels, to approve the name *Vestal* for Climbing Area Crag B. All voted aye, and the motion passed unanimously.

North Little Rock Tourism Engagement with Parks and Recreation Department Update:
Heather Kouns provided an update on the North Little Rock Tourism Department's engagement with the Parks and Recreation Department. She reported that she has been collaborating with Telina Mahan at the Arkansas Inland Maritime Museum (AIMM) to recognize veterans holding reunions at the museum. Heather explained that they are working on developing and pursuing several active leads to bring events to North Little Rock in an effort to generate increased lodging tax revenue that would benefit Parks and Recreation. Events being targeted include Ultimate Frisbee tournaments, baseball league championships, pickleball tournaments, USA Ultimate Frisbee Association events, the

North Little Rock Tourism Engagement with Parks and Recreation Department Update Continued: Athletic Conference Championship for soccer, and Archery Shooting Association tournaments. She noted that a previous event generated approximately 1,000 room nights and expressed hope that similar success could be achieved again, especially with the soccer events for both male and female teams. Additionally, she shared that the baseball championship organizers were eager to return due to their positive experience in North Little Rock.

Ms. Kouns referred to a packet provided to Commissioners that listed all the active leads North Little Rock Tourism is currently pursuing for the year. Ms. Stephens asked Ms. Kouns if she planned to return to future Commission meetings. Ms. Kouns responded that she will be attending future meetings, adding that she and Director Kenny Stephens had discussed next steps for ongoing collaboration. Ms. Stephens asked for clarification from Ms. Kouns about the way North Little Rock Tourism supports the Parks and Recreation Department is by generating lodging tax revenue. Ms. Kouns stated that yes that is how North Little Rock Tourism supports the Parks and Recreation Department, explaining that both lodging and restaurant activity contribute to this revenue stream. Ms. Kouns added that even when events are held outside of North Little Rock such as Cabot, the city can still benefit from overflow lodging and dining activity. Ms. Kouns mentioned that North Little Rock Tourism often partners with Little Rock to accommodate large-scale events that exceed one city's capacity alone. Ms. Stephens asked if any Commissioners had questions for Ms. Kouns. Mr. Bryant thanked her for the information and for demonstrating how North Little Rock Tourism supports Parks and Recreation.

Director Reports: Jason Rhodes informed the Commission that Ms. Worrell had to leave the meeting due to conducting lifeguard interviews at the North Heights Community Center. Mr. Rhodes stated that Director Kenny Stephens had asked him to provide an update on Bonzai BMX. He shared that Bonzai BMX is preparing to begin racing soon and has made some improvements to the track. If weather permits, Mr. Rhodes hopes to bring more information to the Commission at the next meeting.

City Attorney, Amy Fields asked if there is currently an active contract with Bonzai BMX or if it has expired. Mr. Rhodes responded that he believes the contract has expired, and Ms. Stephens agreed. Mr. Bryant stated that no racing should take place until a new contract is approved and presented to the Parks Commission. Ms. Stephens stated that the course must also be reviewed and approved. Mr. Bryant further stated that proper insurance and contract documentation need to be in place prior to any racing activity. Mr. Rhodes asked if the contract must be signed before racing can occur. City Attorney, Amy Fields, confirmed that the contract must be approved by the Commission first. Mr. Rhodes stated that Bonzai BMX would be notified of this requirement the following day.

Mrs. Smith asked if the same individual is still in charge of Bonzai BMX, and Mr. Rhodes confirmed that Dave Larson remains in that role. Mr. Rhodes provided additional updates, stating that work on the archery range is still in progress. He also reported that the department recently spent over $10,000 on the train and track at Funland, with approximately $10,000 used specifically for replacing the worn-down wheels under the engine. Mr. Rhodes explained that the steel wheels had become extremely thin and worn, jeopardizing the train's ability to stay on the tracks.

Director Reports (continued): In addition, Mr. Rhodes shared that the Parks Department successfully hosted the 6A State Boys Baseball Tournament last week, along with the 3A State Boys and Girls Soccer Tournament, both of which drew a large attendance. A youth baseball tournament was also held over the weekend.

Greg Zonner reported for the Arkansas Inland Maritime Museum. Mr. Zonner stated that April was a very busy month. Mr. Zonner informed the Commission that there had been a lot of school groups. Mr. Zonner explained that The Pulaski County Fair is in town and the attendees take over the parking lot at the museum. Mr. Zonner stated that AIMM was still open during the Pulaski County Fair and gives a discount to guests who are attending the Pulaski County Fair.

Joe Ralston reported for Burns Park Golf Course. Total revenues were $104,962.00. Mr. Ralston stated that the course saw an increase of $30,000 in revenue for April, and similar results are anticipated for May. Mr. Ralston added that the tournament season is beginning and the course may be on track for a record year.

Mrs. Otistine asked Mr. Ralston if Abundant Life was a school, to which he confirmed that it is. Mrs. Smith then referenced the Director's Report, noting that the Wednesday Hot Dog Scramble is setting participation records. Mrs. Smith asked whether the event was named due to the golf course serving hot dogs. Mr. Ralston confirmed that it was and explained the origin of the name. Mr. Ralston stated that the Hot Dog Scramble is a weekly team event held every Wednesday, which originally began with tee times between 4:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. Due to increased participation, tee times now begin as early as 1:30 p.m. The event regularly draws over 100 players each week, and participants receive a hot dog after playing.

Mr. Cornelison reported for the Burns Park Tennis Center. Mr. Cornelison stated that the Tennis Center has been busy, having recently hosted a State Tournament and planning to host another next week. Mr. Cornelison also mentioned that pickleball leagues are set to start again soon. Mr. Bryant asked about court 25 and if it was gone or not. Mr. Cornelison explained it is one (1) of nine (9) courts scheduled for resurfacing. Mr. Cornelison informed Mr. Bryant that a bid had been received, but they are waiting to see if the United States Tennis Association (USTA) grant will be awarded.

Mr. Bryant suggested proceeding with the resurfacing using the bid rather than waiting for the grant. Ms. Garretson noted the grant process is fast, but Ms. Stephens expressed uncertainty about the grant and said it needs further discussion. City Attorney, Amy Fields, explained that the grant requires approval from the Parks Commission. She also shared concerns raised by Chief Financial Officer, Ember Strange, regarding a clause in the grant that would prohibit realigning the courts for other sports, such as pickleball, for five (5) years. This restriction must be approved by the commission.

Mr. Burkett asked if the grant applied to the same courts planned for resurfacing, and Mr. Cornelison clarified that the grant covers different courts. The resurfacing planned with budgeted funds is separate from the grant. Mr. Bryant stated there is about $300,000 allocated, while Mr. Cornelison said it is $250,000. The commission agreed it would be best to use the budgeted funds to resurface the courts to avoid the restrictions imposed by the grant.

Director Reports (continued): Mr. Bryant made a motion to proceed with resurfacing the courts using budgeted funds and the bidding process. The bids received ranged from $82,000 to $85,000. City Attorney Fields noted the need to verify budget availability before proceeding. Mr. Cornelison confirmed that $150,000 is allocated in the maintenance budget for resurfacing and that he will confirm with Director Kenny Stephens prior to moving forward.

Ms. Stephens and Mr. Burkett both expressed support for using the budget funds, with Ms. Stephens emphasizing the need to consider potential lost revenue if the courts are restricted under the grant. Ms. Smith questioned why the grant was pursued if funds were already available, and Mr. Burkett explained it was an attempt to stretch the budget. Mr. Rhodes said he would discuss the matter with Director Stephens to finalize plans.

Finally, Mr. Bryant raised concerns that the Tennis Center is losing teams to other facilities due to inadequate lighting. Mr. Cornelison stated he has already contacted Director Stephens about the lighting issue and noted that the number of teams playing at the facility has dropped from 18 to 3. Mr. Bryant encouraged continued efforts to improve lighting to retain and attract teams.

Mr. Cornelison reported for the Burns Park Tennis Center, noting that the facility has been busy. They hosted a state tournament the previous week and are preparing to host another one next week. He added that the pickleball leagues are about to start again.

Mr. Bryant asked if Court 25 was gone. Mr. Cornelison responded that Court 25 is one of the nine courts scheduled to be resurfaced. He said they already have a bid in place but are waiting to find out if they will receive the United States Tennis Association (USTA) grant before proceeding. Mr. Bryant questioned why they were waiting on the grant instead of moving forward with the bid. Deanna Garretson commented that the grant process is relatively fast.

Ms. Stephens expressed uncertainty about whether the grant was the right fit and said it needed to be discussed further. City Attorney Amy Fields stated that the grant must be approved by the Parks and Recreation Commission before proceeding. She shared that she had spoken with Chief Executive Officer Ember Strange about concerns related to a clause in the grant. This clause would restrict the facility from being realigned for any other sports for five years if the grant were accepted.

Mr. Burkett asked if the grant was going to be used for the same red ball courts included in the resurfacing bid. Mr. Bryant said that the grant is for the entire center and could be used as needed. Ms. Stephens stated that the grant might not be worth pursuing because of the five (5) year restriction, especially if there's a possibility of converting some courts into pickleball courts, which could bring in revenue. Mr. Cornelison explained that the grant did not apply to the same courts, and Mrs. Smith confirmed that it concerned the older courts—numbers four (4), five (5), six (6), 22, 23, 24, 25, 26 and 27—rather than the 12 red ball courts.

Mrs. Smith then brought up the five (5) year commitment required by the grant, pointing out that it would prevent the city from converting courts into pickleball courts. Mr. Bryant noted that the city already had $300,000 budgeted for court improvements. Mr. Cornelison said it was $250,000 and clarified that they are holding off on spending it until they find out about the grant.

Director Reports (continued): City Attorney Amy Fields emphasized that the commission must approve any grant that places long-term restrictions on facility use. She mentioned that she had sent an email to Ms. Jennifer Fields, Chief Financial Officer Ember Strange, Vicki Stephens, Jason Rhodes, and copied Director Kenny Stephens, requesting to add this item to the agenda. City Attorney, Amy Fields, reiterated that if the city accepts the grant, it will not be able to re-line the tennis courts or use them for pickleball for a five (5) year period.

Mr. Cornelison said he was unaware of that clause in the grant. Mr. Burkett asked whether the resurfacing currently planned and budgeted was the same project. Mr. Cornelison confirmed that it was and that the grant was submitted to help pay for the resurfacing. He had sent the grant to both Director Kenny Stephens and Chief Financial Officer, Ember Strange.

Mr. Bryant expressed the need to go ahead and use the already budgeted funds rather than rely on the grant. Ms. Stephens pointed out that the grant could still be used for other improvements, but agreed that the restrictions posed a concern. Mr. Burkett stated that if the funds are already in the budget, then the resurfacing should move forward without the grant to avoid limitations.

Mr. Cornelison confirmed that a bid had already been received for the resurfacing of the tennis courts, ranging from $82,000 to $85,000. Ms. Stephens added that the grant is a matching grant, which means they would have to spend $41,000 to receive $82,000, but the five-year use restriction is significant.

Mr. Burkett emphasized that if the courts were converted to pickleball, the city could generate additional revenue. Ms. Stephens said she was not opposed to resurfacing the courts using budgeted funds and encouraged a big-picture view before any decision is made.

Mr. Bryant said this discussion had been ongoing since the beginning of the year and reiterated the need to move forward. Ms. Stephens concluded that if the funds are in the budget and Director Kenny Stephens approves, the courts should be resurfaced without a formal motion. A directive would be enough.

Mrs. Smith asked why the grant was pursued if the money was already available. Mr. Burkett replied that the intention was to stretch existing funds. Mr. Rhodes added that he would speak to Director Kenny Stephens to determine how best to proceed with the budgeted funds.

Mr. Bryant then brought up concerns about the lighting at the Tennis Center. He noted that the city is losing teams to both, Rebsamen and Sherwood Tennis Centers because of their superior lighting. Mr. Cornelison confirmed that he had emailed Director Kenny Stephens regarding the lighting and added that the number of teams playing at the facility has dropped from 18 to three (3). Mr. Bryant urged Mr. Cornelison to speak with Director Stephens to explore whether revenue could be generated to upgrade the lighting and attract more teams.

Jeff Caplinger reported for special projects. Mr. Caplinger reported he has been working with Coach Morgan to design gymnastic logos for t-shirts. Mr. Caplinger stated that he had operation training for splash pad in April. Mr. Caplinger explained that he recorded all of the training he received to help if they have issues in the future.

Director Reports (continued): Mr. Caplinger announced that he submitted another grant for Recycle Bikes for Kids. Mr. Caplinger reported that he had not heard from Recycle Bikes for Kids to start proceeding. Mr. Caplinger indicated that he will be starting the application process for the Recycle Bikes for Kids Grant as well. Mr. Caplinger stated that he spoke with Shara Hutchcraft about creating a webpage for the new climbing wall. The new webpage would explain details of the trails and crags. Mr. Caplinger spoke with Sharon about getting a webpage built for the climbing wall that explains how the trails and crags are done. Mr. Caplinger announced that the City of North Little Rock mobile app is now active. The app includes notifications related to Parks and Recreation Department, police updates, weather alerts, and the City of North Little Rock in general.

Jamie Pettit reported for Field Reservations and Special Events. Ms. Pettit announced that several events are scheduled for the upcoming weekend, including the Pulaski County Fair, a trail run at Burns Park, a disc golf tournament, and a baseball tournament, all taking place at Burns Park. She also noted that the recreational leagues are still ongoing, with approximately three (3) to four (4) weeks remaining in the current season. Mrs. Smith asked Ms. Pettit about the South Central Shine Motor Court Association competition, specifically what the event involved. Ms. Pettit responded that, to her knowledge, Casey Canady oversees the event, which involves racing small cars. She explained that they use one of the parking lots at the soccer fields as the racing area for the event.

Mrs. Smith asked Mr. Rhodes a few questions concerning the community centers since Ms. Tina Worrell had to leave the meeting early. She mentioned that someone from the football group at Sherman Park had said he was turning in work orders, so she wanted to go over some things and see what had been done.

Mrs. Smith asked about the red ants and bees at the football field. Mr. Rhodes said that maintenance treats them every time they mow, but Mrs. Smith said the ants are back and asked him to double-check. Mrs. Smith also stated that the back fence is overgrown again and needs to be cleaned up.

Mrs. Smith brought up the lights in the computer room and the meeting room where people have parties. She asked if work orders were in for those lights because it's been months and the rooms are still too dark. She also mentioned the door with the plexiglass that still hasn't been fixed, even though it's been talked about for over a year.

Mrs. Smith asked if there was money to buy more tables and chairs for the community centers since they don't have enough for rentals. Mr. Rhodes stated he would look into it and get the answers.

Mrs. Smith asked if the community centers would have enough lifeguards this year or if they'd have to keep moving them around like before. Mr. Rhodes said they're hoping to have full staff at each location but he's not sure yet. He said he would find out. Mrs. Smith said she and Director Kenny Stephens need to talk about hiring enough lifeguards because it's been a problem for years.

Calendar of Events: Mrs. Stephens stated the agenda deadline for the next meeting is Tuesday, June 1, 2025 at 2:00 p.m. The June commission meeting will be held Monday, June 16, 2025. The meeting will take place at 5:00 p.m. at the North Little Rock Community Center.

Adjournment: Mr. Skrivanos made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Smith to adjourn the meeting at 5:50 p.m. All voted aye and the motion passed unanimously.

Public Comments/Visitors: Mrs. Stephens opened the floor for public comments. Deanna Garretson addressed the commission regarding the USTA grant, stating that the clause in question is a standard provision in all of their contracts. She clarified that USTA does not permit league tournaments or matches to be played on courts that have pickleball lines. Therefore, it is necessary that the regular tennis courts at Burns Park remain without any pickleball markings.
City Attorney Amy Fields added that the contract refers to the "facility as a whole," which cannot be lined for pickleball. She expressed discomfort in advising the commission that they could later convert the red ball courts for pickleball use, given the language of the grant.
Mr. Cornelison inquired whether the clause applies only to existing tennis courts, considering that red ball courts would be new construction. Ms. Fields reiterated that the contract language refers to the entire "facility," and emphasized that she must interpret the terms as written, which is the source of her concern regarding compliance with the grant.

APPROVED BY: Vicki Stephens
Chair, Vicki Stephens

SUBMITTED BY: Otistene Smith
Secretary, Otistene Smith