NORTH LITTLE ROCK PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION MINUTES
July 21, 2025

The North Little Rock Parks and Recreation commission meeting was called to order by Mrs. Vicki Stephens at 5:00 p.m. on July 21, 2025 at the North Little Rock Community Center.

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

Vote for Excused or Unexcused Absences: All members were present. Ms. Stephens stated that City Attorney, Amy Fields would not be present at this meeting.

Staff Members Present: Kenny Stephens, Jennifer Fields, Joe Ralston, Jamie Pettit, Casey Canady, Greg Zonner, Jeff Caplinger, Tina Worrell

Others Present: Officer James Neeley, Sean Dunbar, and Jim Henke

Disposition of Minutes: Mrs. Stephens presented the June 16, 2025 minutes to be approved. Ms. Juels made a motion, seconded by Mr. Skrivanos, to approve the minutes. All voted aye and the motion passed unanimously.

Bonzai BMX Requirements: Jamie Pettit presented information regarding Bonzai BMX and stated she wanted to get something on record outlining what the department expects from future agreements with the association. Mrs. Pettit suggested that Bonzai BMX should be required to submit a written plan that includes a budget and how they intend to fund any proposed improvements, with a possible deadline set for the September meeting. Mrs. Stephens added that the topic was left open-ended at the previous meeting and emphasized that Bonzai BMX should operate as an association with officers, a board, and a clear plan of action. Mrs. Stephens stated that they should be held to the same standards as other associations working with the department, and expressed concern that currently it seems to be led by a single individual without a structured association.

Director Kenny Stephens shared that Bonzai BMX had previously been an organized association. He stated that he had a conversation with Gary Rogers, the former director, who stated the group had $9,000 and equipment set aside for the following year. However, when Director Kenny Stephens asked Dave Larson about this, he was unaware of the funds and did not have them in his budget. Director Kenny Stephens noted that only one piece of equipment is currently on the track and that Mr. Larson had removed asphalt from the track after being asked not to, which caused erosion and created costly damage. Director Kenny Stephens stated that they have already delivered 15 loads of dirt to the site, and Mr. Larson recently requested five (5) more loads. Director Kenny Stephens added that the department has not received any phone calls or expressions of interest in the BMX track outside of Mr. Larson.

Mrs. Stephens acknowledged that the tornado damaged parts of the BMX area, but clarified that the actual track was not significantly affected, only buildings and fencing. Mrs. Stephens stated that if there is no community need or interest in the track, the City should consider removing it. Mrs. Smith asked whether Mr. Larson was familiar with proper planning and budgeting, and Director Kenny

Bonzai BMX Requirements Continued: Stephens responded that he was unsure, noting that Mr. Rogers previously ran a tighter operation. Mrs. Pettit confirmed that expectations had not yet been sent to Mr. Larson in writing, as the Commission wished to discuss it first. Mrs. Smith expressed concern about the financial aspect, stating that if a proposal is submitted, the City may not be in a position to fund it. Mrs. Pettit emphasized that any proposal should include how improvements will be paid for, and Mrs. Stephens added that in the past, the City had set limits on the number of dirt loads it would provide.

Mr. Bryant stated that the RV Park at the site is not currently operational and questioned whether the BMX track is worth investing in, given the lack of public interest. He stated that unless a detailed proposal is submitted, including cost estimates and funding sources, he would not support further investment. Mr. Burkett asked what Bonzai BMX had previously paid, and Mrs. Pettit responded that they operated on a per-plan basis and paid $300 annually. Mr. Burkett agreed with the importance of governance and planning and asked about the cost of demolishing the track or repurposing the space for something else, such as another RV park. Mrs. Stephens said that a new RV park would not be cost-effective due to the costs of wiring, electrical, septic, and staffing. Director Kenny Stephens stated that the previous plan to add yurts had been dropped, and that the restroom at the site are still in good condition. Director Kenny Stephens added that if they decided to build an RV park, it would be a slow process and it would not have staff on site.

Director Stephens confirmed that the asphalt previously on the track had been removed and replaced with dirt that cannot be compacted, resulting in poor conditions and ongoing erosion. Mrs. Stephens expressed concern about safety, stating that the track is no longer usable. Director Stephens reiterated that 15 loads of dirt have already been provided, and with no progress or community engagement, he does not plan to provide additional support. He noted that the restroom facilities at the site are still in good condition and that the area could be repurposed in the future. Mrs. Stephens concluded that if there is demonstrated need and an organized association with youth participation, she would support continued use of the track, but at present, there is no evidence of either. Mrs. Stephens asked if City Attorney, Amy Fields, should communicate with Mr. Larson to outline the expectations moving forward. Director Kenny Stephens stated that he would be willing to relay the expectations personally and find out what happened to the $9,000 that was previously set aside for renovations. Mr. Skrivanos and Mrs. Stephens both agreed that any future request from Bonzai BMX must come from a formal association, not an individual. Mrs. Stephens thanked Mrs. Pettit for bringing the issue forward and confirmed she would remain on the agenda for further updates.

The North Little Rock Tourism Department not attending the July Parks and Recreation Commission Meeting No Tourism updates or Reports will be Presented this Month: Mrs. Stephens stated that North Little Rock Tourism was supposed to attend the meeting but they did not have the Sports Feasibility Study report finalized, but will keep them on the agenda and hope to see them in the near future.

Conversion of Red Ball Courts at Burns Park Tennis Center: Mrs. Stephens reported that the resurfacing of the original tennis courts is currently underway, as discussed at last month's meeting.

Conversion of Red Ball Courts at Burns Park Tennis Center Continued: Director Kenny Stephens added that a detailed bid sheet was created and sent out for proposals. Two bids were received: one for approximately $924,000 and another for $324,000, highlighting a significant difference in cost. Director Kenny Stephens stated that courts 22, 23, 24, 25, and 27 are currently being resurfaced.

Director Kenny Stephens noted that activity on the courts remains high, with the Nike Tennis Camp, Junior Academy, rollover tournaments from Rebsamen Tennis, league play, and Friday special indoor events all taking place. Director Kenny Stephens expressed hope for receiving quality bids and beginning discussions on whether to dedicate the junior courts to tennis or convert them to pickleball courts.

Mr. Bryant questioned why the courts are being resurfaced in their current layout. Mrs. Stephens responded that Mayor Hartwick wants the courts to be used for either tennis or pickleball, and the goal is to determine which will be most beneficial. Director Kenny Stephens noted that one of the key considerations of determining what to do with the courts is that pickleball is currently offered free of charge nearby, which could affect future use.

Mrs. Stephens stated that Daniel Cornelison said that pickleball could generate more revenue than tennis through tournament hosting. Mrs. Stephens stated that concerns about outdoor court use without cover may be overstated, as many players would prefer to rent a court rather than wait all day for one to become available.

The Commission agreed that a decision did not need to be made immediately, but they hope to establish a direction by the September meeting. Mr. Burkett asked whether the resurfacing would be appropriate for whichever sport is ultimately chosen. Director Kenny Stephens confirmed that research had been done. Although cheaper options were explored, they would not hold up long-term. Other courts that with the cheaper option developed cracks within a few years.

Mrs. Stephens also suggested contacting a pickleball court designer based in Hot Springs who was involved in the building of the pickleball courts. She recommended consulting him again, as he had worked closely with Director Steve Shields when he was the Parks and Recreation Director, to select the current court location. Director Kenny Stephens added that one company originally considered for the junior courts is now involved in internal legal issues, making them unavailable at this time.

Arkansas Soccer Association Annual Report and Agreement: Casey Canady presented the Arkansas Soccer Association Annual Report and Agreement. Mr. Canady introduced Jim Henke of the Arkansas Soccer Association. Mr. Canady started with the Annual Report. Mrs. Stephens asked the commissioners if they had any questions they would like to ask Mr. Canady or Mr. Henke.

Mrs. Stephens asked Mr. Henke if the Arkansas Soccer Association was happy with the fields. Mr. Henke expressed that they were very happy with the fields and really enjoyed Burns Park. Mr. Bryant asked if we were in line to get any more National, State, or Regional tournaments. Mr. Henke stated that regional tournaments are going away this upcoming year and are going straight to nationals for the national championship. Mr. Henke stated that the Presidents Cup is going the other direction instead of having four regions they are going to have 8 throughout the country and that will go out to bid. Mr. Bryant asked if they were the bid process or would parks go through the bid process. Ms.

Arkansas Soccer Association Annual Report and Agreement Continued: Pettit stated that usually it would be a combined effort of the City, the Association, and NLR Tourism to submit a bid to host an event. Ms. Pettit stated that she would get with Shelbey Morris, Senior Manager of Sales and Partnerships, and see if there is anything out there for bids already and we will look on our end as well. Mr. Bryant stated that they would like to start working with the Arkansas Soccer Association to help get soccer tournaments back at Burns Park.

Mr. Skrivanos made a motion, seconded by Ms. Juels to accept the Arkansas Soccer Association Annual Report. All voted aye and the motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Canady presented the Arkansas Soccer Association Agreement. Mrs. Stephens asked the commissioners if they had any questions.

Mr. Bryant made a motion, seconded by Mr. Skrivanos to pass the Arkansas Soccer Association Agreement. All voted aye and the motion passed unanimously.

Arkansas Rising Soccer Club Annual Report: Casey Canady presented the Arkansas Rising Soccer Club Annual Report. Mr. Canady introduced Sean Dunbar of the Arkansas Rising Soccer Club. Mr. Bryant asked the Commission if this was a new soccer association. Mr. Dunbar stated that they used to be known as Arkansas United and had joined with a couple of other groups to create the Arkansas Rising Soccer Club. Mr. Dunbar stated they are working with US Club Soccer to bring in regional tournaments in 2026. He informed the Commission that Arkansas Rising Soccer Club had a meeting with US Club Soccer and that the tournaments had previously been held in Tulsa, but they believe Burns Park has a better setup and could possibly host future regional tournaments. Mrs. Stephens advised Mr. Dunbar to be sure and work with Mrs. Pettit and Mr. Canady. Mrs. Stephens thanked Mr. Dunbar.

Mr. Bryant made a motion, seconded by Mr. Skrivanos to accept the Arkansas Rising Soccer Club Annual Report. All voted aye and the motion passed unanimously.

Raise Credit Card Fee from 2.5% to 3%: Director Kenny Stephens presented the proposal to raise the credit card fee from 2.5% to 3%. Director Stephens stated that, based on the amount of money taken in through credit card transactions, the department is back in the hole and owes money to the credit card company. In order to resolve this and move forward, he recommended increasing the fee to 3%, effective as early as August. He mentioned that in the past, the City was paying around $40,000 a year even when they weren't taking in much revenue. Now, because of increased revenue, they are again in the red when it comes to covering the cost of credit card fees.

Ms. Juels made a motion, seconded by Mr. Bryant, to raise the credit card fee from 2.5% to 3% starting in August. All voted aye, and the motion passed unanimously.

Director Reports: Director Kenny Stephens stated that he had a few things to announce. He mentioned that a pavilion is going to be built in the Argenta grass area. It is expected to include statues of well-known figures such as Glen Campbell and Johnny Cash. While he didn't have many details, he wanted the Commission to be aware.

Director Reports Continued: Mr. Burkett and Mrs. Stephens asked if the pavilion is going to be built in an area considered part of the Parks and Recreation Department and if parks staff would be responsible for maintaining it. Director Stephens stated all he knows is that the pavilion will be located in the grass area near the Argenta District. Mr. Burkett asked where exactly that is. Mrs. Stephens responded that she believes it's behind the area where they work on the trolley, near the plaza. Mr. Burkett asked if the land belongs to Parks or the Downtown Council. Director Stephens stated that the funding is supposed to come from Advertising and Promotion, but he's not sure yet. Mrs. Stephens asked Mr. Burkett to keep an eye on it.

Mr. Bryant asked if the Parks Department is responsible for landscape of the medians in Park Hill. Director Stephens stated that the City is paying for the landscaping, but the Parks and Recreation Department is not directly responsible.

Director Kenny Stephens shared information about a future concession stand at Funland. He stated they received a $100,000 grant and estimated that a quality concession stand could be built for $225,000. Director Kenny Stephens informed the commission that drawings are currently in progress. The plan includes a 20-foot overhang with four picnic tables in front, an office and break area for Funland workers, and two restrooms. The back side will feature a four-foot overhang to allow for grilling or other activities.

Director Stephens noted that instead of putting the project out to bid, the City is considering a design-build approach. This would involve hiring a contractor to manage and build the project simultaneously. JCon Inc., the contractor that completed the archery range renovation, is being considered. The design would match the look of Funland.

Mrs. Smith asked if sole source justification was allowed. Director Stephens explained that it is, as long as it's a design-build project. The contractor would pay for the drawings, soil samples, and foundation—bundled into one package.

Mr. Bryant asked where the additional funding would come from. Director Stephens stated that the money is already in the budget. Mrs. Stephens asked if the money was from the half-cent sales tax for the community centers. Director Stephens confirmed it was not. Mrs. Stephens asked Mr. Burkett to look into that as well.

Mrs. Smith asked if JCon Inc. built buildings at the archery range. Director Stephens stated they built a concession stand in Maumelle and that using this method would be more efficient and timely.

Mrs. Stephens asked about the status of the train at Funland. Director Stephens reported that the train was running that day. They recently brought in a company from Missouri to redo the curves to prevent derailment, which cost $27,000. Previously, $47,000 was spent due to storm damage from the 2023 tornado. They also had to purchase new wheels for $3,000. He emphasized the community's love for the train and that it remains a great part of Funland, despite the cost.

Mrs. Smith noted that more repairs are likely needed due to the train's age and wear and tear. Ms. Juels pointed out that the train is the only original part of Funland, dating back to 1971, and needs to be preserved.

Director Reports Continued: Patrick Isbell reported for Parks Maintenance. Director Stephens announced that Mr. Isbell has been officially accepted for the Parks Superintendent position. Mrs. Stephens mentioned that the archery range ribbon cutting received great news coverage.

Mr. Isbell stated the ribbon cutting took place last Wednesday, with around 70 attendees. The newly reopened range is ADA accessible, includes new benches, targets, and shooting lanes ranging from 10 to 50 yards. There are also 3D targets that can be moved daily or weekly.

Director Stephens asked if the 3D targets were being removed each night, and Mr. Isbell confirmed they were. Mrs. Smith asked if someone had to be stationed at the range, and Mr. Isbell said no, but staff do check in regularly. The site now includes trash cans, a striped parking lot with accessible spaces, and a larger berm to support crossbow use.

Mr. Isbell shared that Koppers Inc. donated 90 railroad ties to help raise the berm. He credited Jeff Caplinger for helping with signage and the Traffic Department for ensuring safety.

Parks Maintenance had 54 work orders this month, 47 completed, and 28 still in progress. Ms. Pettit has submitted everything for Dixie Day, scheduled for August 9th. Josh Lewis is managing mowing, trimming, and restroom prep for the event.

Glenview Community Center: Two front restrooms and one of the two smaller restrooms are complete. The kitchen still needs work.
Sherman Park: All floors have been completed, countertops done, and the new front door glass is in progress. LED lights will begin installation the next day.

Mrs. Smith asked about a leaning electrical pole behind Sherman Park. Mr. Isbell confirmed it and said someone from Electric will check it next week. She also inquired about overgrowth on the back fence, Mr. Isbell said it was cleared about a month ago.

Mrs. Smith mentioned that Parks Maintenance is expected to begin work at North Heights Community Center in the fall or January. Mr. Isbell confirmed that the plan is to complete Glenview and Sherman Park first.

Director Stephens stated that the North Little Rock Community Center is now fully complete.

Director Stephens stated that after talking to the Mayor, they have installed 15 new shade structures at the girls' softball fields. There are plans to add new lights to Fields 1 and 5 at a cost of approximately $300,000. The plan is to complete those two fields this year.

Mrs. Smith announced that she had to leave the meeting.

Jamie Pettit reported for Field Reservations and Special Events. She stated that adult softball league is finally finishing up. Arkansas Rising is having their soccer camp at Burns Park Soccer Complex this week. Mrs. Pettit stated that about two weeks ago they had an ultimate Frisbee tournament. On August 2nd, North Little Rock Police Department and Camp Robinson are having military training out at Burns Park. Mrs. Pettit informed the commission she will be getting with Jeff Caplinger and Shara Hutchcraft to communicate the closures to the public because some parts of Burns Park will be closed for the training. Mrs. Pettit stated about 250 people are coming for this training.

Director Reports Continued: Greg Zonner reported for the Arkansas Inland Maritime Museum (AIMM). Mr. Zonner stated that AIMM had a really good month last month, and this month is projected to be the same. He shared information about an upcoming event on September 2nd. AIMM is working with the Arkansas Symphony Orchestra to create an event on the boat celebrating the 80th anniversary of the end of WWII. Mr. Zonner stated that he will be getting more information once the Arkansas Symphony Orchestra finalizes the structure of the event.

Mr. Zonner also shared some news with the Commission about the USS *Arkansas*. He stated that last week, the USS *Arkansas*, a nuclear-powered submarine (SSN) currently under construction, was put in the water. The vessel is almost complete, and we expect to have a ship named *Arkansas* officially in the water by September.

Tina Worrell reported for Recreation. She stated that the recreation staff has been really busy. Summer programs, field trips, and activities are currently underway. They have just switched over to their final three-week program. Next week is the last week of summer camp, followed by the one week mini-skills camp.

School starts on August 11th, and the department will transition back to the after-school program. Funland has been very busy, especially with the splash pad. Mrs. Worrell stated kids love riding the train when it's running.

Ms. Worrell informed the commission about a North Little Rock CARES Youth Coalition event headed by Councilman Linda Robinson at Sherman Park on August 9th, which typically brings in around 500 people to help kids transition back to school. Ms. Worrell mentioned adult basketball is also wrapping up, with finals taking place the weekend of August 3rd. The cooling center at the North Little Rock Community Center is currently in operation. Mrs. Worrell remarked that due to frequent rain and lightning, the pools and splash pad have had to close on several occasions throughout the month of June.

Mrs. Stephens asked if the directors could provide an estimate of how many kids are attending the programs, in addition to the pool attendance already listed. She noted that Betty Perkins' report mentioned 22,000 visitors to Funland, and asked if there is a way to find out how much revenue is being generated through pavilion rentals.

Mrs. Worrell stated she could gather that information for the Commission and noted that the first page of her director's report includes how many kids are enrolled in the summer programs. Mrs. Stephens said she was also curious about how many kids are visiting the centers in general, regardless of whether they are enrolled in a program. She added that this information helps the Commission understand revenue potential and make decisions about how much money can be allocated for future programming.

Joe Ralston reported for the Burns Park Golf Center. Mr. Ralston stated that even with the rain, the golf course was still able to generate more revenue than a year ago for the month of June. He stated Mr. Isbell has helped out with the Heritage room since golf is an employee short. Mr. Ralston informed the commission the golf course is caught up on fertilization and spraying the fairways, and that the greens are in really good shape. Mr. Ralston stated that he added two extra revenue sources

Director Reports Continued: on his report so the commission can get a better idea of what the golf course is generating. He stated that July looks like it is going to generate more revenue than last year also. No tournaments are scheduled due to the heat. Mr. Bryant asked Mr. Ralston to speak about the Air Force coming out to the golf course. Mr. Ralston informed Mr. Bryant the Air Force had an outing and they had a good time, even with the rain.

Director Kenny Stephens stated that Steve Ralston has asked if he can extend his contract for one more year. Director Kenny Stephens stated that Steve can probably come to the next meeting to disucss the contract. Mrs. Stephens stated that would be fine.

Director Kenny Stephens asked the Commission what they thought about the design build for the concession stand at Funland. Mr. Burkett and Mrs. Stephens expressed that as long as it abides by City policies, that they were fine with it.

Director Kenny Stephens stated that the archery range has turned out to be really great and state of the art as far as Arkansas goes. He stated that "he could not thank Mr. Isbell and his crew enough for working out there and parks maintenance bought and installed the lumber. Director Kenny Stephens stated he wants to use the parks maintenance crew as much as possible in order to cut spending.

Director Kenny Stephens also mentioned an incident where a woman from the Special Olympics painted a yellow line in the archery range parking lot and began shooting from that point. He warned that safety needs to be monitored closely to prevent similar issues.

Mrs. Stephens stated that Chief Financial Officer, Ember Strange should be bringing the financial reports. Mrs. Stephens asked Mr. Burkett if that would be in August or in September. Mr. Burkett stated that he would speak with her about it. Director Kenny Stephens stated that City Departments have been called to have budget meetings with the mayor because of overspending and the Parks and Recreation Department has only spent 48% of our budget so far this year.

Calendar of Events: Mrs. Stephens stated the agenda deadline for the next meeting is Tuesday, August 5, 2025 at 2:00 p.m. The August commission meeting will be held Monday, August 18, 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 Mr. Burkett, to adjourn the meeting at 6:02 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