NORTH LITTLE ROCK PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION MINUTES
March 16, 2026

The North Little Rock Parks and Recreation commission meeting was called to order by Mrs. Vicki Stephens at 5:02 p.m. on March 16, 2026 at the North Little Rock Community Center.

Commission Members Present: Randall Bradley, Laura Juels, Stephen Bentley, Otistene Smith and Vicki Stephens.

Vote for Excused or Unexcused Absences: Mrs. Stephens asked for Neil Bryant to be excused. Ms. Juels made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Smith, to excuse Mr. Bryant from the March commission meeting. All voted aye and motion passed unanimously.

Mrs. Stephens informed the commission Toby Burkett resigned from the parks and recreation commission.

Staff Members Present: Kenny Stephens, Jennifer Fields, Betty Perkins, Greg Zonner, Amy Fields, Jamie Pettit, Katrina Wilbon, Jenifer Holland, Joe Ralston, Daniel Cornelison, and Casey Canady.

Others Present: Sandy Decoursey, Dan Scott, John Owens, Chris Riggins, and Officer Hammons.

Disposition of Minutes: Mrs. Stephens presented minutes from the February 17, 2026 Parks and Recreation commission meeting. Ms. Juels made a motion, seconded by Mr. Bentley, to accept and file the minutes. All voted aye and the motion passed unanimously.

Conversion of Red Ball Courts at Burns Park Tennis Center: Mrs. Stephens asked Daniel Cornelison, Tennis Director, if he had any new updates on the conversion of the red ball courts. Director Kenny Stephens explained he would speak on the red ball courts. He reported he talked to the mayor about the red ball courts, and asphalt is being considered. Director Kenny Stephens added the red ball courts are a work in progress.

Mrs. Smith asked if the asphalt would be lower grade or just as good. Director Kenny Stephens replied it will not be as good. Director Kenny Stephens explained they have had asphalt used on other courts and it cracks frequently. This creates problems and requires ongoing repairs to fill the cracks. Director Kenny Stephens added he and Mr. Cornelison agree asphalt is not the best option. He noted it may be cheaper initially but creates more problems over time. Mrs. Smith commented in the long run it could cost just as much. Mr. Cornelison explained it would end up costing more. He noted asphalt courts would not perform as well compared to post-tension concrete. He added they have one (1) bid guaranteeing 50 years with a regular court and has not had problems with post-tension courts. Mrs. Stephens commented this was good information and the red ball courts should remain under unfinished business on the agenda.

Trail Committee Update: Commissioner Stephen Bentley presented updates for the Trail Committee. Mr. Bentley reported the Trail Committee met a couple of weeks ago and had a good turnout. He explained one of the volunteers, Chris Kacena, is already laying out a hiking trail in the rock quarry. They plan to meet again in about four (4) weeks to review progress and organize

Trail Committee Update Continued: volunteers. Mr. Bentley noted they are trying to complete these projects without significant cost to the city.

Mr. Bentley reported Director Kenny Stephens, and the city are going to allow an extension of the Levy Trail from Kierre Road to Remount Road. He explained they will begin clearing the area. He added the trail could potentially become a gravel trail, noting gravel trails are popular at this time. Mr. Bentley stated they have been working with volunteer John Owens. Mrs. Stephens informed the commission Mr. Owens was in attendance and will be a new commissioner next month. Mr. Bentley commented Mr. Owens has been a big help to the Trail Committee and often shares Northwest Arkansas has nothing over the trail systems in this area. The city does not do a good job of advertising our trails. He added North Little Rock has the Arkansas River which Northwest Arkansas does not.

Mr. Bentley stated the Trail Committee is working with the railroad but has not received a response from them. Director Kenny Stephens informed the commission he spoke with the individual referenced and received a return call. He explained he addressed safety concerns regarding one (1) of the covers and indicated both need to be removed. He noted he was told someone would follow up, but he has not heard anything further.

Mr. Bentley stated the Trail Committee is working with the Rockwater Apartment Complex regarding installation of a fence along the trail. He explained the area is currently somewhat dangerous and unattractive. He added they are asking Lisa Ferrell to extend her fence to create a consistent boundary. Mr. Bentley also discussed the unfinished road along the Rockwater Apartment Complex, noting it is partially paved and owned by the City. He indicated the committee would like to see that project completed.

Director Kenny Stephens reported he has spoken with David Cook, who is involved in the project. He added he will not install a gate in that area unless Lisa Ferrell extends her fence, as it would not be effective otherwise.

Mr. Bentley reported the Trail Committee is scheduled to meet with Kyle Key, Grant Writer, on March 31st. He explained they will provide a list of proposed projects. Mr. Bentley added with new hotels coming into downtown and a new event center recently opened, the downtown river trail area needs to be improved and cleaned up. He suggested adding signage to better direct visitors.

Bonzai BMX Requirements: Jamie Pettit, Special Events Coordinator, presented updates on the Bonzai BMX requirements. Mrs. Pettit stated she had nothing to report. Director Kenny Stephens informed the commission he and Patrick Isbell, Parks Superintendent, met with the individual who built the pump track. He explained they wanted to get a quote on what it would take to restore the BMX track to its previous condition or develop a velocity park. He noted it would be more like a park designed for younger children to ride, and they are looking into both options.

Baring Cross Community Garden 2025 Report and 2026 Agreement: Jamie Pettit, Special Events Coordinator, presented the Baring Cross Community Garden 2025 Report and 2026 Agreement. Mrs. Pettit introduced Chris Riggins of the Baring Cross Community Garden and noted copies of the

Baring Cross Community Garden 2025 Report and 2026 Agreement Continued: agreement and report were provided. Mrs. Pettit stated the commission had questions regarding funding.

Mrs. Stephens noted the report referenced hiring additional help and expressed concern after reviewing the financial report, which showed less than $200 available. She questioned how that would be possible. Mr. Riggins explained the church is working to budget for a master gardener to oversee operations at the garden. He noted funding has been identified, but they have not yet secured a master gardener.

Mr. Riggins reported a year ago there were six (6) tunnels at the site, but four (4) were damaged during a snowstorm and had to be removed. He explained the remaining two (2) tunnels collapsed during the most recent snowstorm, leaving no usable tunnels currently. He stated two (2) damaged tunnels still need to be cut up and removed, and a crew is scheduled to complete that work within the next two (2) weeks. He added they are almost certain they will construct a new tunnel.

Mr. Riggins reported a 5K run/walk is scheduled for April 18th to help generate activity in the area. He noted he has been working with Lauren Anderson, Founder of Calm + Confidence, on community projects. They expect honey production to begin in late May. Mr. Riggins stated they have discussed potential partnerships for the property, but some ideas did not align with the church's mission to grow food and provide it to the community at no cost.

Mrs. Smith asked if Boone Elementary would continue to participate after losing their pumpkin crop and also asked about the role of Urban Promise Arkansas. Mr. Riggins explained Boone Elementary will remain a partner but currently does not have crops growing and is waiting for the garden to be reestablished. He added Urban Promise operates out of the North Little Rock church and participates by providing opportunities for youth to be involved and learn.

Mrs. Stephens expressed concern about vandalism at the site and referenced the report indicating the gate lock has not been effective. She asked if there is anything the city can do to assist. Director Kenny Stephens indicated park police may be able to monitor the area periodically. Mrs. Stephens asked if vandalism occurs at night with individuals taking crops. Mr. Riggins confirmed this has occurred. He stated it is difficult to prevent vandalism, especially since the garden provides food to the community for free. He noted improvements could include better signage and more staff presence. Mr. Riggins added it is suspected some individuals may be taking items to sell. He stated increased communication about operating hours may help, but complete prevention is difficult. Mrs. Stephens asked if the city could assist with signage. Director Kenny Stephens replied it would not be a problem and asked Mr. Riggins to follow up with Mrs. Pettit to coordinate. Mrs. Stephens commented the city and the garden should work together on this effort.

Mr. Bentley made a motion, seconded by Ms. Juels, to accept the Baring Cross Community Garden 2025 report. All voted aye and the motion passed unanimously.

Mrs. Stephens asked whether the commission should proceed with the 2026 to 2028 agreement or wait until additional progress is made. Mrs. Pettit explained an agreement is needed for the group to continue operations. City Attorney Amy Fields explained the agreement is broad enough to allow continued use of the facility but noted it currently extends through 2028. She suggested the

Baring Cross Community Garden 2025 Report and 2026 Agreement Continued: commission consider a shorter term. Mrs. Pettit stated the group could return in a few months with updates or provide a report for presentation to the commission. Mrs. Stephens noted other groups have expressed interest in the facility, but the City's current commitment is to Baring Cross Community Garden. She requested the item remain on the agenda.

Mrs. Stephens stated the agreement should be shortened. Mrs. Pettit indicated Mr. Riggins is also agreeable to a one (1) year agreement. Mr. Riggins expressed appreciation for the City's support and stated the organization intends to meet its responsibilities. He noted they would like to return in one (1) year to report on progress and discuss future plans.

Mrs. Smith made a motion, seconded by Mr. Bentley, to approve the Baring Cross Community Garden 2026 agreement through January 2027. All voted aye and the motion passed unanimously.

Little Rock Rangers Permission to Practice on Lit Soccer Fields Report: Casey Canady, Program Coordinator, presented the report on allowing the Little Rock Rangers to practice on lit soccer fields. Mr. Canady explained he wanted to provide an overview of soccer rentals throughout the year and outline concerns regarding the use of lit fields. He noted the fields are currently in good condition. With Daylight Saving Time, the Little Rock Rangers will return to non-lit fields during the summer months. He explained their request is primarily for use from November through March, which is the most difficult time on the fields due to dormant conditions. Mr. Canady noted this creates concern for increased wear and damage. Mr. Canady also reported concerns about individuals using fields without renting them. Mrs. Stephens stated when the request returns in the fall, staff should remind the commission of the concerns discussed. She explained the commission addresses budget and policy, while staff manages day to day operations. Mr. Canady confirmed he would do so.

Mrs. Smith asked for clarification on the total number of fields. Mr. Canady confirmed there are 17 fields. Mrs. Smith asked how many fields have lights. Mr. Canady answered seven (7) fields. Mrs. Smith asked if any association or group is working toward funding additional lighting. Mr. Canady reported he has not heard of any efforts and noted some groups bring portable lights for temporary use. Mrs. Smith asked if fundraising for additional lighting has been discussed with the groups, given their long-term use of the fields.

Mrs. Pettit reported she has met with Grant Manager, Kyle Key, who is aware of the lighting needs and is monitoring potential grant opportunities for adding lights. Mrs. Smith stated she is glad grants are being pursued but believes user groups should also contribute toward improvements. She noted there is currently no funding available to install additional lights. Mr. Canady explained an additional quad of lights could help resolve many of these issues but acknowledged the cost would be significant.

Mr. Canady reported the Little Rock Rangers have increased their field usage over the past year and a half and prefer Burns Park due to the condition of their other facilities. He stated he will reach out to the Little Rock Rangers to discuss potential funding ideas for field lighting. Mrs. Stephens commented it would be beneficial to have a group willing to help raise funds.

Little Rock Rangers Permission to Practice on Lit Soccer Fields Report Continued: Mr. Bentley asked if additional lighting would be required to bring back the US Club Soccer South Central Regional tournament. Mrs. Pettit indicated it would not, noting the tournament is held at the end of June when lighting needs are minimal. She explained most tournaments conclude around 6:00 p.m. and lighting is primarily needed for high school, college, and adult league play. She added additional lighting could help attract more tournaments to Burns Park.

Mr. Canady noted other facilities, including those in Conway have added new fields with lighting. This could draw events away from Burns Park. Mrs. Stephens acknowledged similar trends in other activities. Mr. Canady explained another concern is affiliated groups currently have priority use of lit fields through contracts. Allowing the Little Rock Rangers to use lit fields without a contract would require extending the same opportunity to other groups. This could increase wear on the fields. He added individuals are also using fields without paying which is contributing to maintenance issues. Mrs. Stephens asked if individuals are entering fields without reservations. Mr. Canady confirmed this occurs. Mrs. Pettit stated staff will contact police rather than directly approaching individuals. She noted signage is posted indicating fields require reservations and includes contact information. Mr. Canady added there are designated free field areas available. Mrs. Stephens noted individuals tend to use fields four (4) and ten (10). Mrs. Pettit explained those fields are easier to access when parking lot gates are locked.

Mr. Canady reported staff has removed goals from certain fields to discourage unauthorized use. This has been somewhat effective but it creates additional work. Mrs. Stephens noted field ten (10) is currently closed due to poor condition. Mr. Canady confirmed the field has significant wear and limited grass coverage. Mrs. Stephens asked if cold weather is slowing grass recovery. Mr. Canady indicated the grass should recover and expects improvement around May. He added field four (4) has already improved with recent warmer temperatures.

Mr. Bentley asked if the free fields are clearly marked. Mr. Canady reported signage is in progress and an email was sent requesting signs identifying free fields. He added there is a large rugby field across from field four (4) that can accommodate two (2) soccer games.

Mr. Canady reported another concern is the large spring tournament held the first weekend of May, which generates significant revenue. He explained increased field damage during the dormant season would delay recovery and could impact tournament quality. He noted the Arkansas Soccer Association has other venue options, and maintaining field conditions is important to keep their events. Arkansas Soccer Association has other options.

Mrs. Stephens confirmed the Little Rock Rangers will not use lit fields during Daylight Saving Time. Mr. Canady confirmed this is correct for the next several months. Mrs. Stephens stated staff recommends maintaining the current policy for lit field use to preserve field conditions and control maintenance costs. She added the Director supports this recommendation.

Mr. Bentley asked how many additional lit fields would be needed in an ideal situation. Mrs. Pettit responded six (6). Mr. Canady indicated lighting quad four (4) would be beneficial but would likely

Little Rock Rangers Permission to Practice on Lit Soccer Fields Report Continued: require grant funding. He added additional lighting and improvements to field nine (9) could help address current concerns.

Mrs. Stephens stated during the upcoming budget process, lighting proposals could be presented to the commission and supported through grant opportunities. She expressed appreciation for Mr. Canady's report.

Ms. Juels made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Smith, to keep the current lit field policies in place. All voted aye and the motion passed unanimously.

Mrs. Stephens stated Mr. Bradley left during the meeting, and at least four (4) commissioners remained present, constituting a quorum.

Mr. Bentley commented there is no better soccer complex in Arkansas than Burns Park and suggested additional lighting could further improve it. Director Kenny Stephens stated staff should begin obtaining quotes for lighting improvements for review.

Director Reports: Director Kenny Stephens reported Patrick Isbell, Parks Superintendent, was unable to attend the meeting due to a death in his family.

Daniel Cornelison, Tennis Director, reported for tennis. Mr. Cornelison explained the new fans are working well and they have received positive feedback. Mrs. Stephens asked if maintenance installed the fans. Director Kenny Stephens explained the installation was contracted out and completed within budget. Mr. Cornelison reported the pickleball league has started and noted he has discussed with Director Kenny Stephens the potential for Burns Park tennis to generate additional revenue. He added the spring season is approaching and court bookings are continuing. Mrs. Smith asked about grant opportunities. Mr. Cornelison explained he is interested in pursuing grants and noted the United States Tennis Association (USTA) grant is typically available once every three (3) years. Mrs. Smith asked if that was the only option, recalling other equipment related grants. Mr. Cornelison responded those were also through USTA but added he has been informed there may be additional grant opportunities and will explore those.

Greg Zonner, Museum Director, reported for the Arkansas Inland Maritime Museum (AIMM). Mr. Zonner explained the museum has several overnight reservations scheduled. It will host its first overnight event with the Air Force this weekend, which will be family oriented. He noted overnight bookings are scheduled through August. Mr. Zonner also informed the commission that school groups have resumed visits. He explained larger schools, with approximately 150 participants, present scheduling challenges. Touring the submarine can take up to eight (8) hours. To address this, they are coordinating with other local attractions such as the Clinton Library and a nearby nature park.

Joe Ralston, Golf Director, reported for Burns Park Golf Course. Mr. Ralston stated revenue for January and February has doubled compared to the same period last year. He explained staff covered the greens during below-freezing temperatures and noted there are currently two (2)

Director Reports Continued: maintenance positions available. He also reported Mike Van Gilder has been promoted to Assistant Golf Professional and Andrew Martindale has been promoted to full time Golf Assistant.

Betty Perkins, Recreation Superintendent, reported for recreation. Ms. Perkins explained community center rentals are performing well and staff is maintaining operations effectively. She reported senior baseball activities are underway despite weather challenges. She added staff will begin preparing Funland for the season, including reopening the splash pad. Adult basketball leagues are scheduled to begin the first of May. Ms. Perkins also noted each community center will host Easter egg hunts, along with a larger event at Burns Park soccer fields.

Mrs. Smith asked about activity at Funland and whether the facility is being rented for birthday parties. Ms. Perkins confirmed pavilion rentals have begun for birthday parties. She explained some seasonal features, such as screens, are still being reinstalled following winter. She noted several reservations are already scheduled. Ms. Perkins added recent rentals included a birthday party utilizing two (2) pavilions and that school field trips have resumed.

Mrs. Stephens asked whether schools are required to rent the facility. Ms. Perkins explained admission to Funland is free, but pavilion use requires a $60 rental fee. She added free pavilion options are available elsewhere in the park. Mrs. Stephens raised concerns about potential abuse of Funland by private businesses. Director Kenny Stephens explained most usage has been by school and church groups, with minimal daycare activity. Mrs. Pettit added groups often rotate between Funland, One Heart Playground, and the Rocket Slide area Ms. Perkins stated buses frequently park near the Rocket Slide. Ms. Perkins noted visitation increases significantly when the splash pad is operational.

Mrs. Stephens requested that community center participation numbers be reported regularly, noting only Rose City Community Center has recently provided that information. Ms. Perkins agreed to communicate that request to staff.

Director Kenny Stephens reported progress on a new concession stand at Funland. He explained the project has received legal approval and is currently in the utility planning phase, including electrical, plumbing, and water connections. He estimated construction will take approximately two and one half (2.5) to three (3) months once underway. The facility will be approximately 750 square feet and include an office, restrooms, and an outdoor overhang with four (4) picnic tables. Mrs. Smith asked about the project cost. Director Kenny Stephens reported a cost of $400,000, with a $100,000 grant. Mrs. Stephens noted this exceeds the previously approved $150,000. Director Kenny Stephens explained cost adjustments may occur, but final figures are not yet confirmed. Mrs. Smith asked about the location, and Director Kenny Stephens confirmed it will be across the train tracks. He added the Funland restrooms have been painted, and staff is preparing for another successful splash pad season.

Katrina Wilbon, Glenview Community Center Director, invited the commission to attend the upcoming Easter event scheduled for April fourth. She explained the event is a partnership with New Hope Church and Rose City Community Center due to staffing limitations. The event will include

Director Reports Continued: activities for multiple age groups. Ms. Wilbon also shared that a youth basketball program she started 23 years ago for three (3) and four (4) year olds is still active and has since been replicated in other cities. She noted games will be held this Saturday.

Dan Scott, Neighborhood Services Director, reported on the Cultivation Station nonprofit initiative. He explained the group is interested in utilizing the former watermelon patch site behind Stone Links Clubhouse, previously operated by Hunger Relief Alliance. Mr. Scott described the project as a potential destination for gardening education and small-scale farming, with 30% of produce designated for donation to North Little Rock residents through food pantries. He noted attorney Bob Hardin has reviewed the prior agreement and developed recommendations for a new contract. Mr. Scott stated he plans to work with Director Kenny Stephens to present a proposal at the next meeting.

Mr. Scott also discussed the Baring Cross Garden at Vestal Park in partnership with ACTS Church. He explained efforts are underway to hire a full-time garden staff member who would split time between this and other community gardens. He emphasized the importance of establishing regular operating hours and improved signage to increase community engagement. He noted prior discussions about locating Cultivation Station at this site were not pursued due to differing goals regarding produce distribution. He added the beekeeping program has expanded to five (5) additional community gardens. Mr. Scott indicated Patrick O'Brien, Founder of Cultivation Station, will attend the next meeting to answer questions. Mrs. Stephens requested staff coordinate and place this item on the next agenda. She expressed appreciation for the ongoing efforts.

Mr. Scott commented positively of the parks and recreation commission meeting, noting his impression based on over 30 years of experience.

City Attorney Amy Fields reported a Request for Proposals has been drafted for potential lease uses at Burns Park. She explained the first publication will occur Sunday, followed by a short response period. Staff will evaluate submissions promptly and present recommendations to the commission at the next meeting.

Calendar of Events: Mrs. Stephens stated the agenda deadline for the next meeting is Tuesday, April 7, 2026 at 2:00 pm. The April Commission Meeting is scheduled for Monday, April 20, 2026 at 5:00 pm at the North Little Rock Community Center.

Adjournment: Mrs. Smith made a motion, seconded by Mr. Bentley, to adjourn at 6:03 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