

MINUTES
PARKS AND RECREATION ADVISORY BOARD MEETING
CITY COMMISSION ROOM
January 12, 2026 - 5:30 P.M.

Present were the following members of the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board: Mr. Nick Lander, Mr. Joe Knopp, Ms. Sue Maes, Ms. Christine Weixelman, Mr. Greg Hoyt, and Mr. Matt Enoch.

Ms. Maes left the meeting during the Train Depot Naming Request presentation and was not present for those votes.

Absent: Mr. Bruce Snead.

Employees present: Mr. Aaron Stewart, Director of Parks and Recreation; Mr. Casey Smithson, Parks Superintendent; Mr. Tyler Burroughs, Athletics Supervisor.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS

Ms. Maes commented she was impressed with how good Roger Schultz Park looks as well as Warner Park.

Mr. Hoyt wanted to commend Christine Weixelman on her service to this Board as well as the USD 383 Board of Education as this is her last Board meeting with Parks and Recreation. Ms. Weixelman wanted to thank Staff for all they do and shared her favorite part was being part of the CiCo Project.

Mr. Knopp asked if the Commission took action on expanding the Parks and Rec Board as well as if a Zoo Director has been hired yet and shared that he feels the Zoo Board should be part of that hiring process. Mr. Stewart answered the Commission did take action to expand this Board to 9 members so Staff will be seeking out additional members for this Board and hopefully have people in place by the February meeting. He stated as hiring processes go, he understands outside entities have desire to be involved but typically at a Division Head level that's not a common practice. He has a very well-vetted out process to determine who will be the best fit.

Ms. Maes shared she was excited when she read in the paper there will be a playground a CiCo. Mr. Stewart commented the sales tax has performed well so additional capacity opened up in that fund, which will be about \$250,000 for the equipment and the surface. It will be on the north end of the park. Mr. Knopp asked if the playground would be within a boundary fence that controls access and how people would access it during the winter. Mr. Stewart shared it would be within the fence but would remain open to the public as well as the warmup area year-round. What will close down during the winter is the fields.

MINUTES

It was moved and seconded to approve the minutes of the regular meeting held on December 8, 2025. On vote, motion carried 6-0.

Mr. Knopp wanted to ask a question. As issues come to Board members and are debated internally, is there a protocol on members of the Board then going to City Commission to observe or comment on issues that have appeared before the Board. Mr. Stewart answered generally the minutes would be provided from the meeting in draft form if an item is advanced to the Commission, so the Commission has the opportunity to read the discussion. As a private citizen you can speak your mind to a Board, just make sure to state you are coming as a citizen and not a representative of a Board.

STAFF REPORTS

Ms. Maes had a question on the Douglass Center participation and shared she noticed a significant drop in numbers. Mr. Stewart commented the Douglass programs have rolled into other divisions based on the nature of the program so the idea of isolated Douglass programs, it's not how the budget is formulated anymore with cost recovery. Also, the drop-in use has been moved around from Center to Center so that could also be a factor in the attendance numbers.

NEW BUSINESS

1. Mr. Stewart presented a Move MHK! Annual Report to the Board and shared this is the first year where goal settings were implemented to make progress.

Goal #1: Enhance the Level of Quality in Parks. Mr. Stewart shared updates for Technology and Sustainability to include the robotic mower fleet expanded to 34, evaluated auto scrubbers for the Rec Centers, implemented Vizpin entry for Batting Cages. Updates for CiCo Park Complex include the core field systems were installed, athletic and safety infrastructure in place, a fully funded playground and a private naming partner. Updates for the Flint Hills Breadbasket Building include four batting tunnels, two self-feeding pitching machines, a dedicated throwing and pitching area, and retractable cage systems. No new updates for the Cemetery Master Plan, it will be discussed at the Commission retreat in February.

Goal #2: Focus on the Quality Improvements that Consider Future Needs and Growth. Mr. Stewart shared updates for Indoor Aquatics Exploration to include the survey was completed in December and had 1,361 responses with a final report in late January, and explored collaborations with USD 383 and Riley County. Updates for Optimizing Underutilized Facilities to include the partnership with Manhattan Arts Center to renovate and reopen City Park Activity Center (CPAC), the former storage area was converted into a pottery studio, and the parking lot next to CPAC and Wefald Pavilion has been removed from the Fuchsia Zone.

Goal #3: Enhance the Delivery of Programs and Services. Mr. Stewart shared updates for the Scholarship Program include a total of \$83,000 awarded across 54 activities with an average assistance level of 79%, and the Sunflower Summer program brought in about \$62,000 in revenue. Updates for Program Planning and Evaluation include continued development of cost recovery, and negotiations with CivicRec to include cost recovery software. Updates for Expand and Innovate Offerings include the new NFL Flag Football and expanding the My First program, the Discovery Center exhibits, the Zoo's special events, and the Douglass Batting Cages. Updates for Staff Development include professional association conferences Staff attended, the quarterly Mission-Driven Values-Based Culture trainings, several Staff attended Manhattan Leadership Academy, and position specific certifications and trainings for Staff.

Goal #4: Enhance Operational Efficiency and Financial Health of the Department. Mr. Stewart shared updates for the Fee Resolution and Cost Recovery to include revenues went up by 14% from 2024, cost recovery is around 29%, Rec Centers have generated about \$58,400 in revenue, and Recreation Program participation went up 10%. Updates for AZA Accreditation for Sunset Zoo include the Zoo Staff worked very hard and are AZA accredited. Updates for Marketing and Promotion Enhancement include cross-platform growth and digital storytelling, targeted communication on fee changes, cross-promotion to expand communication reach, and decentralized control for more responsive and staff-driven approach. Updates for Operational Efficiency include automation implementation, Vizpin access to Douglass Batting Cages, and cost recovery software finalized. Updates for Inter-Divisional Collaboration include the CPAC renovation, batting cages, improved event planning and coordinated outreach, improved staff deployment across divisions, and the addition of Building Services. Updates for Concessions Operations includes a total of \$182,000 in revenue in 2025, had 19 seasonal staff employed, finalizing CiCo equipment, and hired a new full-time staff member on.

2. Mr. Burroughs presented a Spring Programs Preview for Arts and Humanities. He shared information on Dance, Theatre and Art, Special Populations, Senior Trips, Barrier Free Theatre, and Douglass Fitness classes.

Mr. Burroughs also presented a Spring Programs Preview for Athletics. He shared information on Youth Athletics to include Baseball/Softball/T-Ball and My First Sports. Adult Athletics include Slowpitch Softball, Indoor Volleyball, and Pickleball.

Mr. Knopp asked if the CiCo fields are exclusively for youth programs during the week. Mr. Burroughs answered Staff is looking to better utilize fields and will potentially have Fall Slowpitch Softball using the Baseball fields at CiCo. Mr. Knopp asked how many weekends would be open for the public during the Summer when tournaments are not being held. Mr. Stewart answered there are 9 tournaments booked for the year already and Staff will continue to fill every weekend if possible.

3. Mr. Stewart presented a Train Depot Naming Request to the Board and stated there is not anything adopted by the City Commission, but there is an internal document that was adopted by this Board on how to go about this process. He shared Mike will present to the Board to share why he thinks the Train Depot should be named after Dr. Reitz. Staff will need a recommendation from the Board and next steps is the Historic Resources Board (HRB) and then the City Commission.

Mr. Mike Matson shared he is representing the children of Roger Reitz who have an interest in honoring their father to the community. Roger Reitz is 93 years old, born and raised in Manhattan, long-time physician, has served the community on the USD 383 School Board, the City Commission, was elected as Mayor, and served in the state legislature in both the House and the Senate. He developed a fondness for trains and railroads. He stated the current idea is a bronze plaque on the side of the building. Mr. Reitz was involved at the City level when the Depot was rehabbed in the 90's and early 2000's and even made a generous financial contribution to that project. He also shared he has had conversations with stakeholders involved with the historical aspect and the family wants to make sure to honor the historic preservation alliance components of the Depot.

Several Board members shared they feel Roger has done a great service over his lifetime and deserves to be commemorated. Mr. Knopp commented he is interested to see the wording put together to go on the plaque to give meaning and not just service. Mr. Enoch shared there should be a recommendation to formalize the process.

Mr. Lander opened the floor for public comment.

Mr. Mel Borst shared he believes Dr. Reitz did a great deal financially to get the Depot project going and connecting the venue to parking lots by going under the ramp. He stated he feels a black granite marker should be added with a summary of the history to tell the story and even possibly have a QR code. He also feels a marker could go in the tunnel to tell the story of that as well.

Ms. Cathy Jolthaus wanted to share she does not like the idea of the Train Depot being named something like Gatorade, or Nike. She'd much rather see it named after Roger Reitz.

Mr. Knopp commented he feels there is a historical analysis that can or cannot be made. He does feel there needs to be a formal procedure and would like to see comments from the historic community.

Mr. Lander asked a question regarding the policy. Mr. Stewart shared the document is not required to go to the HRB to rename the Depot. However, given the nature of the building, based on the recommendation Staff would proceed with that to get HRB input. The City Commission gets the final approval. He stated

what will happen regardless of what the naming rights is, there is an agreement that gets executed and that's what will ultimately be presented to City Commission. He also shared a robust policy needs to be written to segment the difference between ceremonial naming and financial naming. There is a process, and that process is to present something to City Commission and they render a decision, there's just no formalized step to get to that point.

Ms. Weixelman commented there are 4 Board members not present, and this is her last meeting so she feels this item should be discussed again at a future meeting with all the new Board members present.

Mr. Hoyt commented he fully supports the honoring of Dr. Reitz at the Train Depot in this manner and feels he is a worthy individual and hopes the City Commission follows through.

It was moved by Ms. Weixelman, seconded by Mr. Knopp to table the Train Depot Naming Request item. Mr. Lander shared he wants to make sure the Board takes action on this and that it doesn't just sit there as there's been a lot of thought put into it. Mr. Knopp stated he is unsure as to what the proposal is. Mr. Stewart answered the proposal is to rename the facility itself. Mr. Matson stated the family does not want to mess with the historic aspect by renaming the Depot, they just want a way to honor their father with some sort of visual display. On 2-3 vote, the motion to table the item did not pass.

Mr. Enoch moved, seconded by Mr. Knopp, to recommend the Board deny the request at this time and the building remains the current name it has. Mr. Hoyt commented that the Board is not renaming the facility, it's talking about honoring a person who has gone above and beyond in this community for decades and feels this should be moved forward. On vote, motion carried 5-0.

Mr. Hoyt moved, seconded by Ms. Weixelman, to honor Roger Reitz in some fashion at the Union Pacific Train Depot in Manhattan, Kansas. On vote, motion carried 5-0.

UPCOMING MEETING TOPICS

Mr. Lander shared the upcoming meeting topics include a 2026 Move MHK! Annual Plan Update.

Mr. Hoyt asked if it was possible to have the Indoor Aquatics survey in a presentable format at the next meeting. Mr. Stewart answered yes, it will be ready for the next meeting. Mr. Knopp asked if it would be available to the Board before the meeting. Mr. Stewart shared it's supposed to be ready for the Commission Retreat which is before this Board's next meeting.

Meeting adjourned.