

**PARKS & RECREATION ADVISORY COUNCIL
MINUTES FROM MEETING OF JANUARY 21, 2026**

The Marion County Parks & Recreation Advisory Council (PRAC) held a public meeting on January 21, 2026, at the Marion County Parks & Recreation Main Office, 111 SE 25th Avenue, Ocala, FL 34471.

COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT

Jerry Furlong, Chair
Joe Reichel, Vice-Chair
Brian Cretul
Kathy Funk
Curt Bromund

COUNCIL MEMBERS ABSENT

STAFF PRESENT

Jim Couillard, Director
Kelsey Mears, Assistant Director
Sara Lambert, Community Engagement Coordinator
Heather Leopard, Fiscal Manager

CALL TO ORDER

Jerry Furlong officially called the meeting to order at 3:02 PM, followed by the invocation and the Pledge of Allegiance.

ROLL CALL

Sara Lambert took roll call.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Jerry called for a motion to approve the minutes. Curt motioned to approve the minutes, Brian seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

STAFF ITEMS

A. Staff Introductions

1. Heather Leopard, Fiscal Manager, was formally introduced to the Council. She shared a brief bio regarding her work history and qualifications.

B. Recreation Software Update

1. Jim gave a brief update on the process of seeking out a new software company, how the selection committee worked, the criteria that were established, and why we're seeking a new software provider.
2. Jim explained that after this process, we narrowed it down to one company, Kaizen Labs.
3. Next steps include getting approval from our County Administrator and Commissioner Zalak. Our biggest concern is being told we can no longer pursue acquiring this new software.
4. We will host in-person only registration for summer camp as Kaizen migrates.
5. Curt asked if it would just be Parks & Recreation meeting with Commissioner Zalak about the new software.
6. Jim said no, sharing that our IT Director, who was part of the selection

committee, would be in attendance as well as members from County Administration. Jim then shared that the software would cost us around \$105,000 for a 3-year contract and how that would be paid.

7. Brian asked about how in-person registration would work. Kelsey shared that we host it on two Saturday mornings in April, Brick City Adventure Park's registration would take place on the McPherson Campus and Forest Community Center's would take place at the center. The dates were chosen to eliminate the pressure of weekday registration. Kelsey asked explained the more finite logistical details of how the registration process would take place.
 8. Kathy asked how many people sign up for summer camp. Kelsey explained that we have 1,115 spots across the ten weeks of camp, adding that all spots sell out within minutes.
 9. Kathy asked a follow-up question about if this software will simply be for camp registration. Both Kelsey and Jim explained that it will be used as the primary software for registration and rental opportunities that we offer. There's also a capacity for it to house some of the similar needs that we see at X35 and the Livestock Pavilion. Kathy wanted to know if this would be the point of sale system for KP Hole Park. Jim told her it would be the POS for KP Hole Park.
 10. Additional discussion was had regarding meeting state requirements for taking cash payments and using certain scanning technology for getting in and out of parks that require entry fees. This led to a sidebar regarding credit card fees associated with purchasing stuff through us and how the new software would absorb those fees.
- C. Customer Service Vision Statement
1. Jim provided the council with some background information on why Marion County is putting a major focus on "service culture," and why our department chose to develop a Customer Service Vision Statement.
 2. Jim shared the statement, "Friendly service and clean spaces. Each person, every time."
 3. Jim detailed the process for how to go to the statement, when it will be unveiled to staff, and how we plan to utilize it moving forward.
 4. There was a discussion using real-life examples on how this statement will be a guiding principle in developing park standards.
 5. Joe shared that he loved the statement because we're viewing everything through a customer-focused lens.
 6. Curt commented on how this will play into the standardization process, adding that there's a big benefit to getting fresh eyes and a fresh view on things.
 7. Additional discussion took place on how this will encourage staff to take their blinders off and get better at noticing things that need to be fixed.
- D. Strategic Planning Workshop
1. Jim shared that we are on the agenda for the upcoming Strategic Planning Workshop to discuss keeping X35 and SELP under the Parks & Recreation umbrella.
 2. This topic was raised by Commissioner Bryant in the past, and we are advocating for keeping them under Parks & Recreation.
 3. Both facilities have great managers, and the department's proposed solution to ease pressure on the department is to get Jim and Susan out of the development review process and have a staff member at Growth

Services assume these responsibilities.

E. Bond Funding Discussion

1. Jim gave an overview of what bonds are used for, their benefits, how it protects our operations budget, allow us to budget long-term, and how it would require voter approval.
2. Brian asked if we would need Board approval to move forward with getting it on a ballot. Jim said yes, and then explained the previous bonds we've had and how this one would be different.
3. Brian asked if we've engaged the CEP yet, and Jim explained we're not quite there. Jim then shared where we are at with engaging the commissioners, stating that we've met with Commissioners Zalak and Bryant, meeting with the other three is being scheduled, and we're hoping all 5 commissioners vote yes on moving this forward.
4. Additional discussion was had about engaging the CEP.
5. Jim went over the Clerk of the Court's report regarding bond funding and then shared a presentation from 2024 about how bond funding would be used to address deferred maintenance, land acquisition, and projects. He briefly touched on impact fees.
6. Curt and Jim discussed how commissioner term limits could affect the success of this initiative.
7. Discussion was had regarding the costs of engaging the Trust for Public Land (which is at no cost to us), conducting a feasibility study, and how they will engage the public. There was some additional discussion about impact fees and how the building industry could support this.

Old Business

None.

Council Items

1. Joe shared that he's excited about getting the new CEP President and CEO onboard when the time comes adding that he will be a good advocate for this initiative.
2. Kathy asked if the bond is more focused on acquisition or fixing current issues. Jim shared it would be focused on both, reiterating that it can be used for acquisition and maintenance.
3. Kathy asked what is the possibility of getting all the lights at the parks retrofitted with LED? What does that cost look like? Jim said he will get somebody to get those numbers figured out for her.
4. Discussion was had on the different lights and the different work that could be required for light replacement.
5. Kelsey shared that the lighting work at Belleview Sportsplex is complete.

Closing Comments

Adjournment

Meeting was adjourned at 4:10 PM

SIGNED _____
Jerry Furlong, Chair

DATE: _____

