



Independence Park Commission Minutes

February 5, 2026 4:30 PM

George Owens Nature Park - DeWitt Center
1601 S. Speck Rd.

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Kyser called the meeting to order at 4:29 pm.

Commissioners Present – Diane Kyser, Kevin Baird, Katie Leiker, Paula Martin, Pamela Smith
City Staff Present – Zak Blanchard, Melissa Brown, Cheryl DeHaan, Jennifer Kim, Candi Laster, Tabitha Williams, Rosie Carlson, Kimberle Franks, Matthew Hartmann, Mike Hicks, Morris Heide, Jeff Umbreit

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

1. Minutes - November 6, 2025

Nov 6, 2025 - Commissioner Smith motioned and Commission Martin seconded. Minutes approved as presented.

STAFF REPORTS

1. Budget

Fiscal Administrator Kimberle Franks presented revenues for 2nd quarter and explained revenue balances compared to budgeted amounts. She is currently working on next year's

budget which is due in March.

2. 2025 Annual Report

Director Heide explained that the Annual Report is a new project compiled by Promotions and Marketing Supervisor Candi Laster and Digital Content Specialist Tabitha Williams. This report is for calendar year 2025, not fiscal year, and showcases department projects and programs. Ms. Laster explained the layout is designed to tell the Parks and Recreation story more effectively. Parks, Facilities & Grounds Assistant Director Mike Hicks discussed completed projects, graffiti and vandalism repairs, snow removal, and the dock replacement at Waterfall Park from the July flood. Mr. Hicks stated that the Independence Athletic Complex has been vandalized multiple times with copper stolen from electrical and plumbing fixtures.

Discussion followed about security cameras, police presence, insurance, and if other parks and recreation departments are dealing with similar issues. The Blackburn School Park pickleball courts were discussed. The courts need repair. The master plan recommends that park reverting back to the school district because it is on school property.

Ms. Laster noted the Awards & Achievements section in the Annual Report, the listing of new and regular recreation programs, volunteer hours, and attendance from all 50 states and multiple countries at the National Frontier Trails Museum.

Director Heide explained that Cable Dahmer Arena is included in the Annual Report because the department manages the Community Improvement District funds and oversees the Arena's management company.

Ms. Laster reported that social media presence increased in 2025 with more pictures and new videos, there were increases in views on posts and videos on all 5 accounts, staff implemented a new sponsorship program, and a fall/winter recreation catalog was published and work began on the spring/summer catalog. The Annual Report lists partnerships that help increase access to programming for lower-income community members. There is an index at the end showcasing all park sites, amenities, trails, courts & fields, and facilities.

Discussion followed about current funding and possible future funding from the proposed data center, cost of homeless camp cleanup and the mayor's monthly park cleanups, and options for NFTM donations.

The Annual Report will be posted on the City's website, and a link to it will be included in the monthly utility bill mailer.

OLD BUSINESS

1. Parks and Recreation Master Plan

Pros Consulting will present the master plan to the City Council next Monday at 6:00 pm. The draft master plan is available to download from the City's website. The historic sites

component will be presented on Feb. 23rd. There are some significant changes recommended going forward with parks and recreation programming.

Discussion followed about what happens next and how the plan will be implemented. The plan calls for the City to consider acquiring the Community of Christ Campus facility as a recreation center to replace the Sermon Center. Pros Consulting could complete a business plan if the council decides to pursue this recommendation. Questions were asked about the Adventure Oasis property, the KC Mavericks hockey team, and if the department's lakes are routinely stocked with fish.

NEW BUSINESS

There was no new business.

ADJOURNMENT - NEXT MEETING MAY 7, 2026

This commission is to act in an advisory capacity to the City Council relating to public education, use and knowledge regarding Parks and Recreation programs, will consider recommendations from the Tree Commission, will solicit and suggest disbursement of funds donated from private sources and will review the status of the projects funded by the Parks Improvement Sales Tax. They are to make a report to the City Council at least twice a year. They are to meet at least quarterly.

Commissioner Martin moved to adjourn. Meeting adjourned at 5:18 pm.