



**MUNICIPALITY OF ANCHORAGE
PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION**



**MINUTES OF THE
REGULAR MEETING**

January 9, 2025

The January 9, 2025, meeting was held in person at the Spenard Community Recreation Center

CALL TO ORDER

The January 9, 2025, regular meeting of the Parks and Recreation Commission was called to order by Chair Brian Looney at **6:04 p.m.**

ROLL CALL

Commissioners present:

- Commissioner Edwin Blair
- Commissioner Rob Earl
- Commissioner Andrew Kastning
- Commissioner Brian Looney
- Commissioner Mary Vollendorf
- Commissioner Scott Wamsganz

A quorum was achieved with **six** members present.

Staff present:

- Mike Braniff
- Shanna Gamble
- Taylor Keegan
- Nicolette Dent
- Ellen Devine

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

Upon a motion duly made by **Commissioner Vollendorf** and seconded by **Commissioner Wamsganz**, the Agenda for the January 9, 2025, meeting was unanimously approved.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Upon motion duly made by **Commissioner Vollendorf** and seconded by **Commissioner Blair** the Minutes of the December 12, 2024, meeting was unanimously approved.

DIRECTOR'S COMMENTS

Director's Comments section was provided by Taylor Keegan, Park Superintendent and Mike Braniff, Park Director

1. **Fairview Recreation Center:** The Fairview Rec Center is getting a face lift this winter including new bleachers, paint, signage, etc.
2. **Park Dedications:** As you know we have been working through several Park Dedications this winter. We are building a resource to help make it easier for folks to look up which parks are dedicated, and which are not.
3. **January Warm Up:** Temperatures have warmed up this past week which is affecting our ice and trails. Lakes have water standing on top while rinks are doing a bit better because water can drain.
4. **Horticulture:** The horticulture crew is currently working on potting plants for the upcoming summer.
5. **Recreation Programs:**
 - a. **Winter Solstice:** We estimate over 1,000 individuals came out for this event. It included new
 - b. **Ski Outreach:** We offer a free ski outreach program to Title I schools at Russian Jack Springs Park that includes the use of our fleet of skis and transportation to the park.
 - c. **Skater Tots:** We are starting new ice-skating pop-up events this winter that includes our skate-assist seals, ice skate for kids, and hot chocolate while highlighting ice rinks around town.
 - d. **Westchester Family Skate:** Happens weekly on Saturdays in January and February. We provide free skate loans and skate assist seals.
6. **Centennial Campground:** Extended the camping season by a couple weeks!
7. **Bartlett Diving Boards** (Presented by Mike Braniff): The commissioners have rescinded their initial resolution regarding the Bartlett diving boards, which may lead to public questions about what this means for their future. As a department, once we establish a process and reach a decision, it's important to uphold that decision for the set timeframe to maintain consistency and reliability. Otherwise, we risk becoming unpredictable and difficult to work with.

In this case, there is now a one-year period for the diving community to demonstrate the need for the boards, while the swimming community can show how the boards may impact their meets.

8. **Pool Analysis** (Presented by Mike Braniff): We are contracting Counsilman Hunsaker to do an analysis of all five of our Municipal pools pertaining to mechanical systems, diving boards, and all aspects of the building minus the shell itself.

ANCHORAGE PARK FOUNDATION

There was no report from the Anchorage Parks Foundation

NON-AGENDA APPEARANCE REQUESTS

Brian Baldwin – Self

- I am here to get clarification on where we are going from here. The Counselman Hunsaker report did an evaluation of the structure but didn't necessarily review the safety of swimmers and how we run swim meets.
- I understand the desire by Parks and Recreation to remain a consistent entity and stand by their decision, but this decision is immediately affecting our swimmers. I ask that we reach a decision prior to waiting for the full year to pass.

Commissioner Comments:

- **Commissioner Wamsganz:** What is the solution you propose?
 - **Brian Baldwin:** The swimming community has offered to pay for removal of the boards and storage and then pay for reinstallation when the diving community has a national meet or other event that would need the dueling 3-meters then we can reinstall them.
- **Commissioner Vollendorf:** Is this a solution you have offered to Parks and Recreation? If so, Mike is that something that you would consider?
 - **Brian Baldwin:** Yes. It was provided in a packet to both the commissioners and Parks and Recreation.
 - **Mike Braniff:** We want to digest this information still and have decided that we want to see through the one-year timeline.

Matt McDaniel – Arctic Diving Club

- I wanted to voice that I am happy that Parks and Recreation has decided to stick with their third-party report. The importance of a third-party report is to provide objectivity, independence, and transparency.
- If you had reversed a decision made based on a third-party review it would have ruined the credibility of this commission.

Commissioner Comments:

- **Commissioner Vollendorf:** Do you have any upcoming meets coming up?
 - **Matt McDaniel:** The problem is there is a private contract that has booked up the pool until 7 PM each night and we can't get access to the facility. I have asked for a schedule, but we have not been able to book a meet.
 - **Mike Braniff:** Success to us would look like diving practices at East High using the twin 3-meter boards and YMCA who is operating East Pool is happy to work with them and get them in. Chugach aquatics club does not have exclusive use of the pool or an exclusive use agreement. They do not have every weekend booked out.

- **Commissioner Wamsganz:** Is there is a swimming and diving season?
 - **Matt McDaniel:** Swimming and diving run concurrently year-round. It does depend on capacity though. Lighter months include May and June.

Shad Schoppert – Central Area Swimming

- I am the Central Area Swimming chair and represent swimming teams from Cordova to Anchorage. I am also a registered engineer, and my firm prepared the report for the removal of the boards. I am also a USA Swim official. So, I see this from a variety of points of view.
- This feels a bit like a run around. We have provided how this is impacting our swimmers, reports on how to remove the boards, and letters from legislators asking for the removal of the boards. It has been affecting our swimmers for 5-6 months and at this point waiting a full year will not necessarily provide you with any additional information. You can take a board down and then put it back up when necessary.
- This is a solvable situation that can be solved for both communities.

Commissioner Comments:

- **Commissioner Kastning:** Have you had sanctioned meets since the boards have been up?
 - **Shad Schoppert:** Yes.

Bambi Bizson-Williams – Self

- I am here to represent my kids. I have both divers and swimmers, but today I am here to represent my divers. I am not here to discuss taking boards in and out.
- Right now, my divers can not be recruited because they need a 3-meter list, and we don't have access to all of them.
- I am here to ask for time on the boards. While the boards at Bartlett are there can we find time for them to use them.

Commissioner Comments:

- **Commissioner Blair:** Why have you not been able to use the boards at Bartlett?
 - **Bambi Bizson-Williams:** We have not been given time. I don't know if it is a lifeguard thing, but we have not had time on a high dive since October.
 - **Mike Braniff:** We know that all our pools are aging and need work. That is why we are doing a pool analysis. After the October meeting the pool needed work and was closed for repairs for 6 weeks.

Stacey Manck – Self

- I am a swim parent and meet referee. I have concerns with the Counselman-Hunsaker report. I agree that they are top-notch and do good work. The folks who presented in October heavily relied on the UNLV pool as did the diving technical report. The UNLV pool was remodeled in 2009 and no longer looks like the Bartlett configuration.
- Another issue that was brought up was the way relay takeoffs were done. They only provided an example from an Olympic coach who typically coaches high-level swimmers. All coaches will coach different takeoffs, but a big arm swing may cause a safety issue for some of our swimmers.
- CAC works hard to hire and train their own lifeguards. The insurance they have only covers lifeguarding of swimming and not of diving.

Fiona Yin – Self

- I am a swim parent, and I am a referee. I highly recommend that the commissioners come to a swim meet to see how the diving boards impact our swimmers. We have one this weekend and invite you all to come out.
- In terms of safety concerns, the tiles around the diving boards are already coming up. I am worried of swimmers cutting their feet.
- The diving boards currently obstruct the view to the scoreboard which is affecting timing and scoring. This is not fair to the swimmers.

Commissioner Comments:

- **Commissioner Kastning:** Is the swim meet a free event to come view?
 - **Fiona Yin:** Yes. You are welcome to join, the event starts at 9 am.

ACTION ITEMS

PRC 25-01: Eastchester Park Master Plan

PRC Resolution 2025-01

Presented by Nicolette Dent

Nicolette Dent, Anchorage Parks and Recreation Park Planner, presented the Eastchester Park Master Plan. A master plan starts with a site analysis and a review of what is present in the park and then moves on to working with the public to create a vision for the park for the future. A master plan is a guiding document for our department to prioritize improvements to this park for 20 years. Eastchester Park is an 80-acre portion of the Chester Creek Greenbelt. Sitka Street Park is not included in this plan. It does contain two developed play areas—one at Woodside Park and one at Hillstrand Pond.

So far, we have passed two Municipal Park Bonds so that we can start working on improvements once the plan is approved. Historically, Chester Creek was much more meandering, and the later parts of Chester Creek were channelized. A vibrant neighborhood called the Eastchester Flats and later Fairview sprung up in the area and became a hub of black property owners and businesses.

The park is surrounded by dense housing and a diverse group of Anchorage residents. 6,300 individuals have access to this park within a 10-minute walk from their homes.

Some known issues include no paved parking lot, lack of lighting for winter access, an aging playground, invasive plants, and some pedestrian access issues. In terms of public outreach, we worked with the community councils as well as community advisory groups for guidance and input. We also engaged using a variety of community pop-ups and an online survey.

Through that process, the public's vision for this park included improving connectivity, being able to use it year-round, having the space be intergenerational and accessible to individuals of all ages, and highlighting the history of the Fairview community.

Upon motion made by **Commissioner Kastning**, seconded by **Commissioner Blair**, and approved unanimously by commissioners to approve resolution PRC 25-01: Eastchester Park Master Plan was passed.

INFORMATION ITEMS

There were no information items.

COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

UPCOMING MEETING

The next meeting of the Parks and Recreation Commission is scheduled for 6:00 p.m., on Thursday, February 13, 2025, at the Spenard Community Recreation Center.

ADJOURNMENT

Upon motion made by **Commissioner Vollendorf** seconded by **Commissioner Wamsganz** and unanimously approved, the meeting adjourned at **7:54 p.m.**

MINUTES APPROVED this ___ day of _____, 2025:

Brian Looney, Chair
Parks & Recreation Commission

Mike Braniff, Director
Parks & Recreation

