



**CITY OF WALLED LAKE
PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION
MONDAY, APRIL 13, 2026**

The Meeting was called to order at 7:30 p.m.

PLEDGE TO FLAG

ROLL CALL: Arnold, Dufresne, Johnson, Linihan, O'Rourke, Robertson

ABSENT: Fernandes

OTHERS PRESENT: City Manager Whitt, HR Director Sears, Council Member Woods

REQUESTS FOR AGENDA CHANGES: None

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

**P&R 04-01-26 APPROVAL OF THE MARCH 09, 2026, PARKS AND
RECREATION COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES**

Motion by Linihan, seconded by Dufresne, CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY: To approve the March 09, 2026, Parks and Recreation Commission meeting minutes.

AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION:

Janice Leonhardt, 232 W. Walled Lake Drive, said she went to the city council meeting on April 7, 2026, to discuss the Banks Dolbeer Foster Farmhouse and it was recommended that she come and speak to the Parks and Recreation Commission. She mentioned that she and her family are passionate about history. She said she served on the Commerce Township Parks & Recreation Commission for about 20 years, is a member of the Commerce Township Historical Society, and lives diagonally from the Farmhouse. Ms. Leonhardt gave a brief history of the farmhouse and how it ended up moved from its original site. She added that she brought some old photographs to share with the commission if they were interested in viewing them. She mentioned that her family has been involved with this building for many years now and it has come a long way. She said she actually donated the dollar to purchase the house. Ms. Leonhardt said it was a big undertaking then, and it still is but it needs to be finished. She said she thinks it could be a real asset with the right direction. Ms. Leonhardt said the farmhouse is a symbol of our uniqueness in the community and all the different legends that it has encompassed over the years. Ms. Leonhardt said she would like to see this building revived, and she is happy to help in any way possible.

Commissioner O'Rourke said he thinks everybody is in agreement, they would like to see the farmhouse refurbished and kept. Mr. O'Rourke said we don't have funds to allocate to the

farmhouse in the Parks & Recreation budget. Mr. O'Rourke asked Ms. Leonhardt, with her experience, what is the best way to go about obtaining funding for this project.

Ms. Leonhardt said they raised a lot of funds through corporate and in-kind donations over the years. She said there are grants out there, but there must be a plan in place to be awarded a grant. Ms. Leonhardt said to begin, this commission needs to determine what the possibilities are. She said maybe come up with plan A, B, and C.

Commissioner Linihan said he doesn't see the Michigan Natural Resources Trust fund being an option in this case. He said historical aspects are very difficult for them to fund because they don't score well.

Commissioner Dufresne said there are a lot of communities in the area that have historic buildings that are not necessarily designated by the state, but they somehow managed to make it a part of their park.

Chairman Johnson said he has heard this topic come up several times since he has been a part of the Parks and Recreation Commission. He said he did some of his own research after the conversation the city manager had brought up about the issue of validity, and what actually happened there. He said during his research he found significant information that supports the farmhouse being part of the underground railroad at one point in time. Mr. Johnson said he is waiting for a call back from the First Congregational Church of Detroit. He said they have been historically designated a part of the underground railroad and keep a lot of records at their church of other places linked to the underground railroad in Michigan. Mr. Johnson said once he hears back from the First Congregational Church of Detroit he will get the information back to the commission.

City Manager Whitt said when he got here over 15 years ago, he started doing his own research on the farmhouse. He said they moved the building before he got here and they didn't hook it up to electricity, water, or sewer. Mr. Whitt said he had all of that done. He said that he found out a significant amount of money was collected over the years but not accounted for. Mr. Whitt said he asked for an audit to be conducted, and they didn't feel that was necessary. He said he is a firm believer in, where did the money go? Mr. Whitt said he had people asking him where their money went and he did not have answers. He said that volunteers did not show up. He said elected officials such as John Owsinek, Bob Robertson, and Linda Ackley spent hundreds of hours working on that building. City Manager Whitt said another individual that put a lot into the farmhouse in recent years was Jerry Millen. Mr. Whitt suggested adding the farmhouse to their park walk-through plan. He said, in his opinion it needs to be a museum, there is a story to tell.

Chairman Johnson said personally, he wants to see this go forward the right way and we need to take the time to get whatever information we need, and a plan of action to make sure that it actually happens.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS: None

NEW BUSINESS: None

DISCUSSION:

1. Spring Egg Hunt

Chairman Johnson said the Spring Egg Hunt was scheduled for Saturday, April 4th. He said unfortunately due to inclement weather, the event was canceled. He thanked city administration for getting the information out there and notifying residents early. He said that he heard a few ideas from commission members about repurposing the candy. Mr. Johnson opened it up to the board for discussion on the spring egg hunt.

Commissioner Robertson suggested council hand out the candy at the Memorial Day Parade.

City Manager Whitt said it seems like this might be a good time for the Recreation Commission to partner with the library to get them to throw another egg hunt or incorporate the eggs with an upcoming library event.

Recording Secretary Sears said that she met with the library director today, and she mentioned having a summer reading kickoff event in June. Mrs. Sears said that the Library Board meeting is Friday the 17th at 9am. Mrs. Sears said if anyone would like to attend to try and coordinate something with them that would be great.

Chairman Johnson said he would try and attend this month's Library Board meeting.

Commissioner Linihan said he heard feedback from a lot of residents that Eddie from Barrells of Wine was having his egg hunt the same day as the city and it created a lot of confusion. Mr. Linihan suggested changing our egg hunt to the weekend before Easter, next year.

City Manager Whitt said the issue is simple, history has shown, whatever date we pick, Eddie picks.

Chairman Johnson said today is a new day, we have a new opportunity at something fresh, and he has had some good experiences with Eddie. He said maybe we can collaborate to get the best thing done for the kids.

City Manager Whitt said it is my job to protect the children and young people in the community from Eddie. He said we won't be a partner with him as long as he is the City Manager. He said to give you just one example, Eddie was handing out free alcohol to minors at one of our city events. He said this is just one of many reasons he will not allow the city to partner with Eddie.

Chairman Johnson said we need to find a way to address the concern that Mr. Linihan brought up, about the confusion between Eddie's egg hunt and ours. He said the event is about kids and we don't want confusion. He said we want the kids and the community as

a whole to enjoy themselves. He said we need to leave the past in the past, and move forward to the future.

Commissioner Linihan asked Mrs. Sears to put the topic of the 2027 Spring Egg Hunt Date, be placed on the agenda under unfinished business to discuss at our next meeting.

2. Memorial Day Parade

Recording Secretary Sears said the Memorial Day parade is scheduled for Monday, May 25th at 11 am. She said the parade begins at 850 Ladd Road, travels down Maple Road and ends at City Hall with a ceremony to follow. Mrs. Sears said the flags for cemetery have been ordered and should arrive later this week. She said we have 12 applications submitted so far. Mrs. Sears said she will send out an email prior to the event but typically we ask that the Parks & Recreation Commissioner meet at 850 Ladd Road by 9 am on the day of the parade to help line up the participants. She said we do not currently have a Grand Marshal for this year's parade, but she did reach out to Connor Hellebuyck's manager asking if he would be willing to participate. She said she has not heard anything back yet.

Chairman Johnson said he has reached out to Dax Shepard and Dave Coulier regarding the position of Grand Marshall. Mr. Johnson said neither have confirmed.

The commission discussed having Parks & Recreation Commissioner and newly elected City Council Member Dennis O'Rourke as the 2026 Grand Marshal.

City Manager Whitt said that Mr. O'Rourke received the highest number of votes this past November. He said more than the other candidates running for council and the candidates running for mayor. He said Mr. O'Rourke is well known in the community and has served the city in different capacities over the years. Mr. Whitt said he believes Mr. O'Rourke is an excellent choice for Grand Marshal.

3. Market Place

Recording Secretary Sears said as everyone is aware, Ms. Kaylee Hall is running the market this year. Mrs. Sears said she has been busy getting everything ready for the 2026 season. Ms. Hall has provided me with a written update to share with the commission tonight:

We currently have 30+ vendors signed up and we receive new applications weekly. We are excited to be partnering with Oakland County RAPP to bring fun entertainment options to the market on a few of our event days. We have 5 events scheduled for this season; details are as follows:

1. Opening Day Celebration- 05/06/26
 - a. Live music by Weekend ComeBack's very own Nic Cole-Klaes from 11am-1pm
 - b. Storytime and/or activity with the WL Library
 - c. Commerce Twp. Area Historical Society feature
 - d. Food truck - TRU Pizza Co.
2. Summer Kickoff Festival- 06/10/26
 - a. Live music with Rich Rustad from 11am-1pm
 - b. Storytime and/or activity with the WL Library
 - c. Commerce Twp. Area Historical Society feature
 - d. State Farm
 - e. Home Depot will have a take home activity kits for kids
 - f. Unique Pony Rides- petting zoo & pony rides
3. Kids' Festival- 07/15/26
 - a. Live music by Miss Paula
 - b. For the second year in a row, we will be allowing kid vendors to apply/participate
 - c. Storytime and/or activity with the WL Library
 - d. Commerce Twp. Area Historical Society feature
 - e. State Farm
 - f. Home Depot will have take home activity kits for kids
 - g. OC Parks & Rec sponsored putt-putt activity
 - h. Face painting by KJ Art
 - i. Food trucks- TRU Pizza Co. & Buoy's Coffee Truck
4. Back to School Festival- 08/19/26
 - a. Live music by Rich Rustad from 11am-1pm
 - b. Storytime and/or activity with the WL Library
 - c. State Farm
 - d. Commerce Twp. Area Historical Society feature (historical school exhibits?)
 - e. Home Depot will have a take home activity kits for kids
 - f. OC Parks & Rec sponsored GO! Games
5. Harvest Festival- 10/07/26
 - a. Live music by Weekend ComeBack's very own Nic Cole-Klaes from 11am-1pm
 - b. Storytime and/or activity with the WL Library
 - c. State Farm
 - d. Commerce Twp. Area Historical Society feature
 - e. WL Fire Department- Fire Safety Week

The commission asked that their appreciation be passed along to Ms. Kaylee Hall for all her hard work thus far.

4. Summer Concerts

City Manager Whitt informed the commission that there has been some pushback about the bands chosen this season. He said we have had a few complaints. He said one

individual showed up at City Hall to question why a certain band was not chosen this year.

Chairman Johnson thanked Mr. Whitt for letting them know. Mr. Johnson said in the past, the same few bands have been chosen over and over again. He said they play the same genre of music as well. Mr. Johnson said the current commission members want to promote diversity and that is exactly what we have done this year. He said we have a wide variety of music and some new fresh bands. He said on June 24th we have Neon Crows performing at the Casey J. Ambrose Public Safety Campus, on July 8th we have Detroit Social Club performing at Hiram Sims Park, on July 15th we have Taylor Tucky performing at Hiram Sims Park, on July 22nd we have 9D Proof Detroit performing at Hiram Sims Park, on July 29th we have Acoustic Madness performing at Hiram Sims Park, on August 5th we have Harmonized Steel performing at Hiram Sims Park, and on August 12th we have Beach Katz performing at the Casey J. Ambrose Public Safety Campus.

The commission thanked and complimented Mrs. Sears on the 2026 Summer Concert Flyer.

Chairman Johnson asked where the flyers will be posted.

Recording Secretary Sears said the flyers are currently available at City Hall and the Library. She said that the flyers will be passed out at the DDA meeting tomorrow for the business owners to display at their business. She said if anyone would like additional flyers, they are here tonight, feel free to take as many as you would like. Ms. Sears said there is a banner on the homepage of the city's website with the same information. She said there are personalized banners for each band that will go up on the website a week or two prior to their performance. She said similarly, there are advertisements for each band to be posted on our social media accounts. Mrs. Sears said she made some yard signs for the concerts that will be hosted next-door at the Casey J. Ambrose Public Safety Campus. She said in addition, we will utilize signage from past years as well. Mrs. Sears said the stage is booked for the first and last concert that will be held next door. She said the stage was not available through Oakland County Parks, we booked through a company called Pegasus out of Southfield. She said the cost was much much more, so keep that in mind for next year.

Commissioner Linihan suggested reaching out to someone from Commerce about getting an advertisement for the concerts on the M5 billboard. He said sometimes municipalities can get stuff up there for free.

5. DIA Inside|Out Program

Chairman Johnson said he attended the DIA Inside|Out Program orientation on Thursday, April 9th. He said Mrs. Sears and Mr. Ladd were in attendance also. He said they gave us a rundown on how the program will be implemented, how the artwork is installed, and how to engage the community. He said the information provided was extremely

informative and he is excited to have this program coming to Walled Lake. Mr. Johnson said they talked about implementing contests and the DIA can provide prizes for us to hand out at no cost. Mr. Johnson mentioned communities are only allowed to apply for this program every three years. He said just applying does not grantee you a spot. He said most communities have to wait closer to 10 to 12 years. Mr. Johnson said he wanted to bring this to the commission's attention to explain how special this is for the city to be selected. Mr. Johnson thanked Mr. O'Rourke for initiating this program. Mr. Johnson asked Mrs. Sears if she had anything to add.

Recording Secretary Sears said the goal for installation is by Memorial Day and the goal for deinstallation is around October, weather dependent. Mrs. Sears said we have 6 pieces of art within our city at the following locations: the Market Place, Pratt Park, the Library, the trailhead, Sims Park, and Mercer Beach. She said she has provided a document tonight showing the chosen artwork and the location they will be placed. Mrs. Sears said we can request DIA volunteers to come out and staff a booth or run a contest on our behalf. She said she requested a volunteer to run a booth at the Market Place on June 10th for the Summer Kickoff festival. She said she should hear back on availability within the next week or so. She said that the volunteer would provide information on the DIA and the Inside|Out Program. Mrs. Sears said a toolkit was provided by the DIA via email, last week. She said this included graphics, QR codes, activity ideas, as well as social media tips & tricks. Mrs. Sears said that the DIA recommended partnering with a local library to implement some activities and/or contests. She said that she met with the library director today to provide her with information on the program. She said she would follow up with any updates.

6. Park Walk-through Plan

Recording Secretary Sears said she put this topic on the agenda to get the conversation started. She said there are 7 parks and she doesn't believe the commission can do all the walk-throughs in one night. She said she provided the commission with an evaluation form tonight. She said she will email it over and can print it off for anyone that needs it. She said I know it was discussed at the last meeting to do the first walk-through after the May regularly scheduled meeting. She said however, if she doesn't have a date and exact time, it makes it difficult to advertise to the public and she knows this was something the commission wanted to do.

The commission thanked and complimented Mrs. Sears on the evaluation form she created.

City Manager Whitt said the commission does not need to do the walk-through on a regularly scheduled Parks & Recreation meeting day. He said the commissioners can go out and do the evaluations on their own or as a group at any date and time.

Commissioner O'Rourke suggested maybe doing some of the bigger parks as a group and the smaller ones individually.

Chairman Johnson suggested starting an email chain with everyone's availability and once we decide on a schedule, we can provide the schedule to Mrs. Sears for advertising purposes, to get the information out to the public

Chairman Johnson requested that shirts be made for our new commission members and additional shirts be made for the older members.

P&R 04-02-26 ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 9:15PM

Miranda Sears
Recording Secretary

Giovanni Johnson
Chairman