

**PARK DISTRICT OF HIGHLAND PARK
BOARD OF PARK COMMISSIONERS
MINUTES OF REGULAR MEETING
FEBRUARY 25, 2026**

The meeting was called to order at 6:02 p.m. President Grossberg.

ROLL CALL

Present: Commissioner Greenberg, Commissioner Beck, Commissioner Labrador, Vice President Freeman, President Grossberg

Absent: None

Staff Present: Executive Director Romes; Deputy Director Carr; Director Smith; Director Voss; Director Peters; Director Gogola; Director Hall; Assistant Director Acevedo; Manager Hartnett; Manager DiTomasso; Coordinator Hejnowski

Guest Speakers: Champions Point LLC, John Copper and Tim Halloway, Senior Associate with Hey and Associates

ADDITIONS TO THE AGENDA

None.

PUBLIC COMMENT FOR ITEMS ON THE AGENDA

None.

HELLER NATURE CENTER UPDATE

Executive Director Romes reported that on January 21, the Park Board discussed a proposal from Mr. Cooper regarding Champions Point and a proposed Museum of Greatness which included utilizing Heller Nature Center as a point of access. At that meeting it was the consensus of the Park Board of Commissioners that *“Congruent with the Park District of Highland Park’s Mission, Policies, Ordinances, and commitment to protecting and maintaining our natural areas, the Park District must fully understand the actual and potential environmental impacts on Heller Nature Center before considering if any opportunities are conceptually appropriate to explore with Champions Point”*.

As such, Mr. Cooper informed me that he would be working with Hey and Associates to evaluate access to the property through Heller Nature Center as it pertains to potential environmental impacts, maintenance, and infrastructure needs. As part of the access analysis, Hey and Associates evaluated the existing trail system and potential routes to Champions Point, performed a preliminary wetland assessment along a proposed route, and inventoried trees in the immediate vicinity of the proposed path. The report outlines access considerations and anticipated environmental impacts and recommends potential improvements to accommodate future access.

Regular Meeting Minutes
February 25, 2026

This report was sent to the Park District on Tuesday, February 17. Park District Staff have had an opportunity to review this report. Tonight, will be first opportunity the Park Board of Commissioners will hear directly from Hey and Associates regarding the report, as well as hear initial feedback from staff.

Mr. Halloway reviewed the report, which included aerial images of Heller Nature Center and the surrounding natural areas owned by the Park District of Highland Park and Champions Point. He highlighted the existing aggregate trail system at Heller Nature Center and presented the proposed access trail that would allow public access to Champions Point through the site. He also reviewed anticipated tree and natural habitat impacts associated with the proposed trail, noting that the impacts are expected to be low.

Executive Director Rome reported that as previously stated, staff reviewed the report provided. The proposal indicates that average visitor traffic through Heller Nature Center will expected to be 300 people per day. Although the evaluation provided by Hey and Associates reports that impacts to the environment (including habitat, wildlife, and connectivity) are expected to be minimal if using the proposed pathway, the reports acknowledges that this is assuming visitors follow the marked route and remain on the aggregate trails, and the proper maintenance of the trail should accommodate more pedestrian traffic that what is currently intended.

Staff have identified remaining concerns regarding the impacts on the environment and have several recommendations that require follow-up.

First, increased foot traffic, the proposed widening of the existing trail, and increased maintenance, will disturb and displace remnant plant species. This disturbance, earthwork and increased foot traffic may have a permanent effect on existing plant species. Furthermore, these disturbances may provide opportunity for invasive species to invade natural areas. There are several native plant species with high coefficients of conservation (c-values) in the north prairie. Earthwork in proximity to the prairie could result in their disappearance. As acknowledged in a memorandum provided by Hey and Associates that was included in the report provided by Mr. Cooper, the wetland field investigation was *preliminary* and would need to be fully completed at the start of the growing season, which is roughly May 15th. Completion of this report would allow for proper field data collection including plant inventory. Additionally, as acknowledged in the report, once the wetlands boundaries have been determined during the growing season, a wetland and water features Preliminary Jurisdictional Determination request should be submitted to the Lake County Stormwater Management Commission (LCSMC).

Secondly, staff would like to understand the potential considerations and impacts on wildlife that depend on Heller's existing habitat. The anticipated disruption and high volume of visitors could pose a critical threat to wildlife that depends on these existing natural habitats. For these reasons, staff recommend that a wildlife impact assessment be conducted.

Thirdly, although the report states that no trees on Heller's property would need to be removed, there are dozens in proximity to the proposed trail that would be impacted, and staff anticipate their decline from compaction and adjacent earthwork. Therefore, staff recommend a tree health impact assessment from a certified arborist be conducted.

Lastly, it should be noted that the proposed trail use requires widening the first stretch of trail from 5 to 8 feet which will create disturbance caused by excavating the existing grass trail and installation of screening. The trail widening will result in a loss of roughly 1,000 square feet of prairie which is significant, which results in degraded natural area and loss of plant species. Additionally, while not environmentally related, utilizing this space will interfere with existing Heller programming such as summer camp, rentals, school groups, family programs, special events, archery and other programs that use this space.

In conclusion, due to these remaining concerns, and the recommended remaining investigation, field data, and assessment needed, staff feel that these concerns should be re addressed and further evaluated after completion.

President Grossberg reported that we appreciate the presentation from Hey and Associates, as well as Staff's feedback and recommendations. Vice President Freeman and Commissioner Labrador were assigned to be liaisons with Director Romes in his engagement with Mr. Cooper regarding the proposal we received. I'd like to defer to our liaisons on any recommended next steps for the Park Board to Consider.

Commissioner Labrador and Vice President Freeman reported that they agree with staff's recommendations and recommend that if Commissioners have additional questions, concerns or recommendations that they be shared with Director Romes so that he may communicate them to Mr. Cooper.

Commissioner Greenberg thanked Mr. Cooper and Hey and Associates for the thorough report and for being here this evening. He shared his concerns about the loss of plant species.

It was the consensus of the Park Board that they do not yet fully understand the actual and potential environmental impacts on Heller Nature Center, and it remains premature to consider if any opportunities are conceptually appropriate to explore with Champions Point.

Mr. Cooper reported that there is an alternative option that provides access without disrupting the natural habitat.

The Park Board requested that the Climate Task Force Annual Report be removed from Unfinished Business and presented before the Consent Agenda.

CLIMATE TASK FORCE ANNUAL REPORT

Director Hall and Coordinator Hejnowski reviewed the employee-driven DEI and employee engagement task force purpose and summarized accomplishments since 2021, including education/training, team-building, and philanthropic campaigns supporting Highland Park, Highwood, and Lake County.

CONSENT AGENDA

A motion was made by Commissioner Greenberg, seconded by Commissioner Labrador to approve the Minutes from the January 14, 2026 Master Planning Committee Meeting, the Minutes from January 14, 2026 Workshop Meeting, the Minutes from January 20, 2026 Finance Committee Meeting, the Minutes from the January 21, 2026 Regular Meeting, Resolution 2026-01 Authorizing the Purchase of Electricity for Park District Facilities and Meters and Authorizing the Director to Approve a Contract with the Lowest Cost Electricity Provider for a Period up to 3 years, Club Pickle and Padel Change Order 19 for Fire Alarm Coverage, Changes to the Introductory Section of the Employee Handbook, Changes to Policy 5.1 Safety and Security from the Employee Handbook, Changes to Policy 5.5 Technology Acceptable Use Policy from the Employee Handbook, Changes to Policy 6.3 Illinois Municipal Retirement Fund from the Employee Handbook, Changes to Policy 6.7 Employee Participation in Programs and Use of Facilities from the Employee Handbook, Changes to Policy 7.4 Holidays from the Employee Handbook, Changes to Policy 7.5 Bereavement Leave from the Employee Handbook, Changes to Policy 7.8 Parental Leave from the Employee Handbook, Changes to Policy 7.10 Military Leave from the Employee Handbook, the 2026 Electrical Gear Upgrade at Centennial Ice Arena, the 2026 Hidden Creek AquaPark Mechanical Pump/Motor Replacement, the Purchase and Installation Geothermal HVAC Unit at Rosewood Interpretative Center, and Bills and Payroll in the amount of \$2,283,265.42

Roll Call:

Aye: Commissioner Greenberg, Commissioner Beck, Commissioner Labrador, Vice President Freeman, President Grossberg
Nay: None
Absent: None
Abstain: None

Motion Carried

FINANCIAL FORECASTS AND TREASURER’S REPORT

Operations (General and Recreation Funds) Budget vs. Actual

Director Peters shared the end-of-year projections and actual figures as of January 31, 2026. She is pleased to report that Actual Revenues exceeded budgeted revenues by \$825,000 actual expenses came in under budget by \$431,000.

Conclusion

The following Park District programs and facilities are performing better than budget: interest income has a \$45,000 surplus, adult tennis has a \$48,000 surplus, youth tennis has a \$49,000 surplus, dance program has a \$53,000 surplus, and early childhood enrichment has an \$84,000 surplus. Also, there is \$135,000 savings from payroll expenses.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

A. Master Plan Update

Executive Director Romes reported that Staff and the Lakota Group hosted a GreenPrint Master Plan Open House on February 7 to review the project’s progress and gather resident feedback. Close to 25 residents attended the open house. For residents who missed the Open House, You can view the

introductory video and the complete presentation and provide your comments on our GreenPrint website.

The presentation and video provide an overview of the planning process and community engagement to date, explore ideas for future capital projects and system priorities, provide an understanding of what these projects might cost, and explain what is currently budgeted versus what will require creative funding mechanisms to become a reality.

B. Approval of the 2026 Hidden Creek AquaPark and Rosewood Beach Concessions License Agreement

Manager Hartnett reported that on February 17, 2026, the Park District of Highland Park received two proposals for operating concessions at Hidden Creek AquaPark and Rosewood Beach from May 24, 2025 through September 1, 2026. Judy's Pizza is a long-standing Highland Park business operated concessions the last two years at Hidden Creek AquaPark and Rosewood Beach concessions. The Park District also currently has a license agreement with Catering with Relish, Inc., which manages the Clubhouse at Sunset Valley Golf Club and has provided off-site catering services for various Park District special events.

Having prior experience working with both vendors, Manager Hartnett reviewed and compared their service history, commitments, proposed menu offerings, and pricing.

Staff recommended acceptance of the 2026 Hidden Creek AquaPark and Rosewood Beach Concessions License proposal from Catering with Relish, Inc., citing strong customer service, high food quality, and positive references. Staff noted that these factors best align with the Park District's operational needs and guest experience goals for the 2026 season.

A motion was made by Vice President Freeman and seconded by Commissioner Beck to authorize the Executive Director to enter into a License Agreement with Catering with Relish, Inc for the 2026 Hidden Creek AquaPark and Rosewood Beach Concessions.

Roll Call:

Aye: Commissioner Greenberg, Commissioner Beck, Commissioner Labrador, Vice President Freeman, President Grossberg

Nay: None

Absent: None

Abstain: None

Motion Carried

C. Approval of the West Ridge Community Center Change Order for Fire Alarm System Permit

Director Smith reported that the project is required to add 81 fire alarms throughout the West Ridge Community Center. The alarms are a requirement of the City of Highland Park amendment to the 2018 International Fire Code. The alarms were not included in the base bid plan set due to a misinterpretation of the municipal code. The error was caught through the fire alarm system submittal review process. Installation of the fire alarms is required by the City Highland Park and necessary to open the building.

Regarding the financial impact, the change order total is \$89,646, 10% of which is fees. Following the direction of the Finance Committee, the project team is negotiating the fees. The change order will not exceed \$89,646. Change orders are paid for from the project's owner contingency budget.

A motion was made by Vice President Freeman and seconded by Commissioner Greenberg to approve the change order for the fire alarm system permit revisions and authorize the Executive Director to enter into an agreement in the amount of \$81,275.

Roll Call:

Aye: Commissioner Greenberg, Commissioner Beck, Commissioner Labrador, Vice President Freeman, President Grossberg

Nay: None

Absent: None

Abstain: None

Motion Carried

D. Approval of the 2026 Devonshire Park Playground Refresh

Director Smith reported that the Park District of Highland Park received sealed six (6) sealed bids on Thursday, February 12, 2026, for materials and labor to complete the 2026 Devonshire Park Playground Refresh. The project scope includes replacement of the brick walkways and patio, limestone edging, and gravel paths with concrete to improve durability, decrease maintenance, and address ADA compliance. ADA compliant concrete ramps will be added into the play areas, and an ADA accessible table will be added to the patio. The project will also include replacement of select play equipment components and site benches. Work is scheduled to occur March through May 2026.

The low bidder, Maneval Construction, did not provide a bid for item 4.00 of the Base Bid and is therefore deemed unresponsive. As a result, staff recommended awarding the project to the second lowest bidder, Hacienda Landscaping, Inc., in the amount of \$188,855. The project budget is \$194,000. While the bid from Hacienda Landscaping, Inc. is under budget, the purchase of play equipment and site amenities—including removal of pedestrian pathway brick pavers to be replaced with concrete to improve ADA accessibility, curbing, and value engineering—would result in the project exceeding the budget by approximately \$24,255 if approved.

To reduce costs, Parks Staff will install swing and site amenities and these items will not be included in the contract (Base Bid Items 5.00, 5.01, 5.02, and 6.03).

A motion was made by Commissioner Labrador and seconded by Commissioner Beck to approve the Base Bid, excluding items 5.00, 5.01, 5.02, and 6.03, and for Alternates 1 and 2 from Hacienda Landscaping Inc. for the 2026 Devonshire Park Playground Refresh and authorize the Executive Director to enter into an agreement in the amount of \$185,255.00

Roll Call:

Aye: Commissioner Greenberg, Commissioner Beck, Commissioner Labrador, Vice President Freeman, President Grossberg

Nay: None

Absent: None

Abstain: None

Motion Carried

NEW BUSINESS

A. Parks Foundation

Commissioner Beck reported that the 8th Annual Champions Celebration is this Friday and 185 tickets have been sold. Tickets can be purchased at the event. She anticipates 200 guests.

B. Board Committee Updates

Executive Director Romes reported at the February 17 Finance Committee Meeting staff presented and provided contract recommendations for several items on tonight's consent agenda, including Resolution 2026-01 Authorizing the Purchase of Electricity, Club Pickle and Padel Change Order 19 for Fire Alarm Coverage, the 2026 Electrical Gear Upgrade at Centennial Ice Arena, 2026 Hidden Creek AquaPark Mechanical Pump/Motor Replacement, and the Purchase and Installation of a Geothermal HVAC Unit at Rosewood Interpretative Center.

Staff also presented additional items that were brought forward under Unfinished Business to allow the Park Board additional time for discussion prior to consideration of contract approval.

C. Directors Report

Executive Director Romes highlighted upcoming events including Pancakes and Pirates on March 7 from 10:30 – 2:00 p.m. Participants will enjoy pancakes, crafts, and games and a performance by Uptown Music Theater. Maple Syrup Harvest on March 7 from 10:30 – 12:30 p.m. at the Preserve. Participants will enjoy a pancake breakfast and partake in maple tapping and winter tree identification. Friday Fish Fry's at the ClubHouse begin March 13. Shiver Me Timbers Plunge on March 15 from 10:00 – 12:00 p.m. at Rosewood Beach. Participants will plunge into Lake Michigan. Mat Pilates and Pickleball on March 15 from 1:30 – 3:00 p.m. at Club Pickle and Padel. The event will start with a Mat Pilates session, focusing on core strength, balance and flexibility. Then, we'll take everything you've activated onto the pickleball courts for open play.

D. Board Comments

None.

OTHER BUSINESS

Executive Director Romes reported that Members of Go Green Highland Park would like to meet with the Park Board.

Commissioner Greenberg and Vice President Freeman volunteered to be board liaisons and meet with Go Green Highland Park.

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC TO ADDRESS THE BOARD

Shawn Gordon

558 Sumac Rd, Highland Park, IL

Serves on the Park District's Golf Advisory Committee. He wanted clarification on an item that came up at the GreenPrint Master Plan Open House, the possibility of the Park District purchasing golf simulators.

Executive Director Romes reported that this was identified as a high interest item at the GreenPrint Master Plan Open House, but it is an unfunded item.

ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Commissioner Greenberg and seconded by Commissioner Beck and approved by a unanimous vote. The Board Meeting adjourned at 7:42 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Roxanne Hejnowski

Roxanne Hejnowski, Assistant Secretary