

AGENDA
REGULAR MEETING OF THE AMES PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION
COUNCIL CHAMBERS – CITY HALL – 515 CLARK AVENUE
THURSDAY, OCTOBER 15, 2026

NOTICE TO THE PUBLIC: The Parks and Recreation Commission welcomes public comment during discussion. The Standards of Decorum, posted at the door and available on the City website, define respectful conduct for public participation. Comments should be limited to items within the jurisdiction of the Commission, and the Commission will not engage in dialogue during public comment.

If you wish to speak, please complete a green card and hand it to City staff prior to the meeting. When your name is called, please step to the microphone, state your name and address for the record, and limit the time used to present your remarks to three minutes so others may speak. Time limits will be enforced. Applause, shouting, or other disruptive behavior is not permitted.

The normal process on an agenda item is as follows: staff may first give a report on the item, Commissioners may ask questions for clarification, public input is received, a motion is placed on the floor, the Commission discusses the issue or responds to audience concerns, and a vote is taken.

Individuals requiring special accommodation should contact City staff prior to the meeting. In consideration of all, if you have a cell phone, please turn it off or place it on silent mode. This meeting may be recorded.

1. Call to Order: 4:00 PM
2. Approval of September 17, 2026, Meeting Minutes
3. Public Forum (For topics other than those listed on this agenda.)
4. CIP Review
5. Recreation Center Update
6. November 2026 Meeting Date Change
7. Project Updates
 - a. Fitch Family Indoor Aquatic Center
 - b. Steven L. Schainker Plaza
 - c. Daley Park Splash Pad
8. Monthly Report
9. Commission Member Comments
10. Next Meeting: November 17, 2026, 4:00 PM (Regular Meeting) (Pending approval of Item #6)
11. Adjournment

**CITY OF AMES
PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES**

DATE September 17, 2026

COMMISSION PRESENT Erin Elsbernd, Janet Rathe, Hannah Sappenfield, Debra Tapp,
Gary Warning, Jeff White

ABSENT Jeff Iles

STAFF Keith Abraham, Courtney Kort, Joshua Thompson

1. CALL TO ORDER: 4:02 PM

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

MOTION: (Elsbernd/Warning) to approve the August 20, 2026, meeting minutes.

MOTION PASSED: (6-0)

3. PUBLIC FORUM

Max Weyers, 1210 28th Street, an Ames High School hockey team member, inquired about plans to upgrade sound/PA equipment at Ames/ISU Ice Arena. Abraham suggested Weyers meet with Recreation Superintendent Kort to get information.

4. CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Abraham reviewed the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) process and timeline. The CIP is a five-year plan. When adopted, the City Council allocates funds for Year 1. Years 2-5 are approved in concept, which provides flexibility for adjusting project programming. New projects are generally programmed in Year 5. If something is moved forward in the plan, other projects may be delayed. He noted budget funding sources, differentiating between Operations fund components (fees and charges, donations and grants, property taxes) and CIP fund components (donations and grants, shared funding, local option sales tax, general obligation bonds).

Immediate Need projects include: softball infields renovation, Furman Aquatic Center (FAC) slide seam and sand filters, Emma McCarthy Lee Park pickle ball and tennis courts, Brookside Park pickleball lines, and Ames/ISU Ice Arena roof repair. Abraham explained a project to add parking near the soccer fields at River Valley Park (RVP) is proposed to be removed from the FY 2026/27 plan due to concerns about parking infrastructure investment in a flood plain. An alternative is adding soccer fields to the south end of Ontario Park, with funding for the RVP parking project reprogrammed to address Immediate Need projects.

Abraham reviewed the current CIP. Noted projects programmed for FY 2026/27 include: Ontario Park Phase 1, solar panels at Fitch Family Indoor Aquatic Center and Steven L. Schainker Plaza, and a compressor top-end overhaul at Ames/ISU Ice Arena. Several FY 2027/28 projects may be delayed, e.g., playground equipment replacement projects shifted from 20-year to 25-year replacement (if still in good repair), and Ada Hayden Heritage Park pond renovation. Noted FY 2028/29 projects include replacing FAC deck light fixtures and adding entrance and concession area lighting. The FY 2029/30 plan included projects to relocate parking and replace Cottonwood Shelter. These projects may be eliminated due to no strong demand for change expressed by the

public. FY 2030/31 projects include tennis and basketball court reconstruction. This project may be moved up to address demand for more pickle ball courts. Abraham spoke about benefits of post-tension concrete and reconstructing the Inis Grove and Emma McCarthy Lee courts successively to allow a contractor to mobilize once.

Staff project suggestions included lighting at the FAC concession and gate areas and shade tarp replacement, and pickle ball/tennis court reconstruction Emma McCarthy Lee Park.

a. Review Public Input

Abraham shared project ideas compiled from the September 9 public input meeting, including: canoe/kayak launch at Moore Memorial Park; roof replacement, additional restrooms, and stairs at Ada Hayden Heritage Park (AHHP); and a neighborhood park at Scenic Valley. Public suggestions received via email included: improved invasive vegetation control at AHHP, more pickleball courts, replace Inis Grove tennis and basketball courts, children memorial at Moore Memorial Park, and adding mutt mitt dispensers and trash cans to all parks. Project suggestions from the last few public input meetings included: modernizing AHHP restrooms, adding parking in Daley Park, more soccer goals in parks, Roosevelt Park fence, adding a lighted trail, a trail connection from Hunziker Youth Sports Complex to AHHP, and repairing the slope on Homewood #4.

b. Discuss Potential Changes, Deletions, and Additions

Abraham asked for commissioner feedback.

White commented on the River Valley Park (RVP) low-head dam area, noting canoe/kayak access points are often unusable – washed out, mudded or sanded in, blocked by logs – and the area is not visually appealing or easily accessible. Also, access south of Lincoln Way is not really functional. Abraham replied money is available to address the washed-out RVP access and the South 16th Street access. The other RVP accesses have been discussed with staff and can be addressed operationally. Thompson confirmed the South 16th access is usable if there is enough water in the river. White believes if RVP were cleaned up, more accessible as a paddling base, and generally more aesthetically pleasing, it would get a lot more use. Rathe asked White to comment on Cottonwood Shelter. White said it gets steady but not heavy usage, that it looks older and has been there without change for quite a while. He did not see changing it as a high priority that would increase user visits. Abraham and White agreed the low-head dam improvements increased users greatly. Abraham pointed out weather events affect staff's ability to address more items.

Cappie Dobyns, 4804 Utah Drive, asked that Ontario Park remain a priority as the CIP develops. She acknowledged existing funding and initial plans for park development but is concerned about what comes next given no mention of Ontario Park in the CIP beyond an initial development phase. Dobyns spoke favorably about continued investment in existing parks while also investing in places where significant recreational infrastructure is missing. West Ames has experienced substantial residential growth yet lacks comparable community-scale park space. Ontario Park offers a way to address that need, offering residents substantial trails, recreational opportunities, gathering places, and access to nature. In her view, it seems the right time to request adjustments to the CIP along with information about additional Ontario Park development plans and funding mechanisms. She encouraged consideration of geographic equity when decisions are made about investing in both existing parks and in areas lacking recreational opportunities.

Abraham spoke about the City Council summer retreat where major priorities were discussed – rec center, fire station, animal shelter, Resource Recovery and Recycling Campus, and Ontario Park. \$1.3 million is set aside for Ontario Park for a first phase of development and to complete a Master Plan to identify future development phases, funding needs, and potential funding sources, including naming rights and grants that would need a completed Master Plan to be successful. Abraham spoke about how development of the south end of Ontario Park depends on the timing of the Wilder Avenue extension. Once the bridge is in place on the north end, paths will be mowed within the south end, creating a usable feature while other project phases develop. He assured Dobyons that Ontario Park will not be forgotten. Dobyons said the information was helpful. She wondered about other projects and whether they are for isolated activities or can serve a large population, and that further investment in Ontario Park may spur development of friends groups, etc. Sappenfield stated it is great to hear Dobyons' passion about Ontario Park, which struck her as similar to feedback from the open house held earlier in 2026. She agreed with Abraham that Ontario Park will be kept top of mind – the base pieces are getting in place now.

Abraham asked for commissioners' response to funding Immediate Needs projects with dollars previously programmed for RVP parking. Sappenfield thought it sounded good and aligned with previous discussions. Rathe thought staff had a better sense of projects and what needs to be done. Staff will bring a draft plan to the October 15 commission meeting, Abraham said.

5. BUDGET DISCUSSION

Warning and Abraham discussed State legislation limiting property tax increases to two percent, potential impacts on funding for both operations and projects included in the Capital Improvement Plan, and operating cost increases possibly requiring choices about where to devote resources. Staff is navigating operations funding, Abraham said, focusing on identifying budget efficiencies and new revenue opportunities, e.g., credit card processing fees. Abraham and Thompson spoke about staff cuts in Des Moines in response to a multi-million-dollar budget deficit. There are no plans to eliminate staff or services in Ames, at least not currently, Abraham said. Warning and Abraham discussed the importance of monitoring facility and program usage and understanding user demand when making decisions. As an information resource example, Abraham cited Placer, which can provide foot traffic data via mobile device data.

Abraham reviewed upcoming deadlines for budget preparation and review with Finance staff and the City Manager. He noted staff does not yet have complete information in some budget areas, such as projected payroll, or how rising fuel costs may affect costs for internal services from the Fleet Department, for instance. If these expenses rise, staff may need to find additional funding or do things differently to cut expenses. It will not be an easy year, Abraham summarized.

6. WALK WITH EASE AGREEMENT

Kort gave an overview of the Iowa State University (ISU) Walk with Ease program, noting grant funding ended and ISU and City interest in establishing a more formalized partnership to continue offering the free wellness program to the community. Under this agreement, ISU will provide students and expertise to facilitate and lead the program. The City will provide the facility, moving the program from the Community Center gymnasium to the Fitch Family Indoor Aquatic Center indoor walking track and multipurpose room.

MOTION: (Sappenfield/White) to recommend Alternative 1, which states:

Approve the Walk with Ease Agreement through June 1, 2027.

MOTION PASSED: (6-0)

7. REC CENTER UPDATE

Abraham reported on staff conversations with groups representing baseball, softball, football, gymnastics, wrestling, and more. Feedback and comments from these groups regarding how a rec center could help to address needs and preferences will be compiled and shared with the Commission at its October 15 meeting and with the City Council at its October 20 meeting.

8. PROJECT UPDATES

a. Fitch Family Indoor Aquatic Center Ribbon Cutting, Fri., Sept. 18, 4:00 PM

Abraham shared that the building's precast concrete panels have been stained and look much better. A ribbon cutting is scheduled for September 18 at 4:00 PM. Open swim will occur afterwards beginning at 5:00 PM. Staff has received many positive comments and suggestions from users during the initial weeks of the facility operating with a full schedule.

Kort provided a staffing update. Recruitment efforts are focused on the midday shift, where the need for additional staff is greatest.

Rathe asked if users may continue to swim if weather is bad. Kort indicated the pool basins remain usable when thunder and lightning occurs, but the slide closes.

Sappenfield asked if summer staff stayed on as expected. Retention has been positive and encouraging, Kort replied, and some staff may return in winter if unable to work during the fall, for instance. Morning and evening shifts have been easier to fill thus far. A new group of Iowa State University students presents further recruitment possibilities.

Abraham gave an update on aquatic pass sales, noting over 200 Aquatics Season Pass sales, and 44 Fitch Family Indoor Aquatic Center (FFIAC) Pass sales to date.

Sappenfield asked if user traffic meets expectations. Kort indicated staff sees ebbing and flowing, that facility usage has not settled into patterns. Rathe asked if lap swimmers are transitioning from Furman Aquatic Center to FFIAC. Kort said yes and agreed with Abraham's observation that users may be trying to figure out their routine and schedules. Rathe predicted FFIAC would get busier with colder weather.

b. Steven L. Schainker Plaza

The last day for the spray pad was August 31. Abraham noted staff has some winterizing work to do, but otherwise the plaza is shut down and fenced off to enable the contractor to replace the ice ribbon. To date, concrete has been removed from the ice ribbon. Next, materials and components will be replaced. Weather-dependent goals include: repouring concrete on October 19, making ice by November 15, and hosting a ribbon cutting the week before Thanksgiving if everything goes well.

c. Daley Park Splash Pad

Thompson reviewed delays and changes related to State requirements for including a restroom as part of the splash pad project. Staff recently received approval from the State, including a restroom waiver, allowing construction to proceed without requirements for bathroom fixtures. Staff and the contractor will develop a construction schedule for 2027.

9. MONTHLY REPORT

Thompson reported annual playground inspections are nearly complete. If deficiencies are found, most are fixed immediately or required replacement parts are ordered.

Kort reported total season attendance at Furman Aquatic Center in 2026 of 93,093, an increase from 86,900 in 2025. Staff will present end of season summary reports for Furman Aquatic Center and Homewood Golf Course at the November meeting.

10. COMMISSION MEMBER COMMENTS

None

11. NEXT MEETING: Thursday, October 15, 2026, 4:00 PM (Regular Meeting)

12. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION (Sappenfield) to adjourn the meeting. The meeting adjourned at 5:23 PM.

COMMISSION ACTION FORM

SUBJECT: PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION NOVEMBER 2026
MEETING DATE CHANGE

BACKGROUND:

The Parks and Recreation Commission meets on the third Thursday of the month; however, the date may occasionally change due to a conflict or the addition of a special meeting. History of the Commission moving a meeting may also play a role in not meeting on the third Thursday.

The November Commission meeting is scheduled for November 19. At this meeting, staff is planning on sharing the feedback received from focus groups related to the potential Rec Center. Unfortunately, not all staff necessary to present the feedback are available on the 19th. Therefore, staff is recommending moving the November meeting to Tuesday, November 17 at 4:00 pm.

ALTERNATIVES:

1. Approve moving the Parks and Recreation Commission November 19, 2026 meeting to Tuesday, November 17 at 4:00 pm.
2. Refer back to staff.

STAFF'S RECOMMENDED ACTION:

Sharing the feedback from the focus groups related to the potential Rec Center is an important step in educating the Commission and the public. Having the staff that conducted the focus group discussions available to present is also critical as they will have firsthand knowledge of the conversations. This staff is not available on the 19th but is available on the 17th. Therefore, staff recommends Alternative 1 as stated above.



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TO: Keith Abraham, Director of Parks and Recreation

FROM: Staff

RE: Monthly Report October 2025

PARKS AND FACILITIES:

1. Staff continue to maintain soccer fields at Brookside and Emma McCarthy Lee Parks and softball fields at North and South River Valley Park for fall program. Once the seasons are completed on October 18, staff will remove goals and activity boxes and will complete fall turf maintenance which includes core aerification, overseeding, and fertilization.
2. As temperatures start turning colder, staff will start shutting down restrooms, water fountains, and irrigation systems for the winter months. The public will be notified when this will happen, typically mid to late October, via the Parks and Recreation weekly E-Newsletter, radio, and social media.
3. Staff has started mowing areas around the parks that were “no-mow” areas throughout the growing season. End of the season mowing helps control woody vegetation and other weeds from overtaking those areas.
4. Staff hosted a volunteer day at Ontario Park on October 10. There were approximately 25 volunteers that assisted with removing vegetation in the ditch along the road, trimmed trees, picked up trash, and removed old fencing.

RECREATION PROGRAMS:

1. In September, the Ames/ISU Ice Arena hosted 17 public skating sessions with a total attendance of 384 skaters. A total of 78 skaters attended 20 figure freestyle sessions, and 87 skaters attended 13 stick and helmet sessions. A total of 22 skates were sharpened, and 2 birthday parties were held in the Igloo Room.
2. Homewood Golf Course had 2,128 rounds played in September, which is low for this time of year due to the amount of rain received and overall weather.
3. Fall evening swim lessons began on September 15 with 85 registrations. Fall Saturday swim lessons began on October 3 with 109 registrations.

4. In September, Fitch offered one lifeguard recertification class with 4 registrants and one lifeguard class with 6 registrants.
5. In the Auditorium:
 - a. The Central Iowa Symphony held three rehearsals in September.
 - b. Lutheran Church of Hope held its final service at Ames City Auditorium Sunday, August 30.
6. At the Bandshell:
 - a. The annual Free Movie Night event was held Friday, September 4 with the showing of Casper. Approximately 250 people attended the movie.
 - b. The Iowa State University Department of Music and Theatre hosted the ISU Wind Ensemble and Marching Band Bandshell Block Party on September 11. This is planned to be a bi-annual Cy-Hawk pep rally event when the Cy-Hawk football game is scheduled in Iowa City.
7. Registrations for Kindergarten – 2nd grade youth basketball program for this fall is shown below:

Program	2026	2025	2024	2023	2022
Youth Basketball K-2	29	29	44	34	42

8. Team registrations for adult basketball for this fall/winter are shown below:

Program	2026	2025	2024	2023	2022
Men's Basketball	17	13	18	14	15

PROJECT UPDATES:

1. Staff reviewed playground proposals from multiple vendors for the replacement of the two play structures at O'Neil Park, 300 S. Maple. There were 14 proposals submitted and were voted on by staff, the Oak to Riverside Neighborhood, and the Ames residents. The selected playground structures will be installed along with a swing set, concrete playground border, and engineered wood fibers in the spring of 2027.
2. Staff met with contractors that will be completing the dirt work, concrete, and installation of the Daley Park Splash Pad equipment in early October. Work will commence in November with the installation of the balance tank and the rain diverter valve. The rest of the grading, underground electrical, concrete, shelters, showers, and splash pad equipment will be installed in the spring and completed by May 15, 2027.
3. Con-Struct, Ames, Iowa, poured the concrete cart path for the Homewood Golf Course Hole #9 Crossing Project. The project included removing the former walking bridge, installing approximately 200 feet of culvert, and grading over 1,000 cubic yards of dirt to create a crossing that can be used by walkers and golf carts. Grading and seeding will be completed by the end of October to finish up the project.