



PARKS AND TRAILS COMMISSION

Monday, September 08, 2025 at 4:00 PM

DRAFT MINUTES

MEMBERS PRESENT

Chair Dana Lathrope
Vise Chair Howard Blumenthal
Commissioner Jerry Belcher
Commissioner Lucas Green
Commissioner Scott Jacobson
Commissioner Lynne Pettit

STAFF PRESENT

Brandon Sundeen, City Councilor
Buck Tupper, Facilities Maintenance Supervisor
Dawn Richardson, Admin Billing Specialist
Jamie Ford, Admin Billing Specialist

OTHERS

Reed Hjort

MEMBERS ABSENT

Commissioner Barlow
Commissioner Woodruff

CALL TO ORDER - 4:02 PM

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

1. Approve Minutes of August 11, 2025

Motion made by Commissioner Belcher, Seconded by Commissioner Jacobson to approve the minutes of August 11, 2025.

Voting Yea: Chair Lathrope, Vice Chair Blumenthal, Commissioner Belcher, Commissioner Green, Commissioner Jacobson, Commissioner Pettit

TOPICS FROM THE FLOOR: From attendees not otherwise of the agenda

Chair Lathrope asked if there were any topics from the floor. Vise Chair Blumenthal introduced Reed Hjort, who had submitted an application to join the Commission. Chair Lathrope welcomed the prospective member.

NEW BUSINESS

2. Sidewalk Maintenance (Barlow)

Commissioner Barlow was not present for this agenda item. The Commission moved to the next item.

3. Round Table Question (Lathrope)

Chair Lathrope introduced the round table question as a team-building exercise that the Commission has been doing for the last few meetings. The question was: "*What is your favorite park that you've ever visited, and what made it so memorable for you?*"

Chair Lathrope shared her favorite park was in Hamilton, Montana, featuring large wooden castle-like play structures with wooden bridges and towers. She loved the texture and feel of the wood, which differs from modern plastic and metal equipment, and enjoyed watching her children explore and play.

Commissioner Belcher chose Sacajawea Park in Longview, describing it as one of the best parks in the world despite its proximity. He highlighted the walking trail around the lake, fishing opportunities, various activity areas, and excellent maintenance. He noted it accommodates many different users and hosts numerous community events.

Commissioner Jacobson mentioned having several favorites but highlighted parks with CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps) architecture, specifically mentioning Fort Lincoln.

Commissioner Green selected Oxbow Park in the Metro Park system along the Sandy River. He praised its amenities including play structures, camping areas, group picnic areas, and a stand of old growth forest. He noted it feels more like a state park than a city park.

Vice Chair Blumenthal listed three favorites: Nob Hill Nature Park, Forest Park in Portland (which sparked his love of the outdoors), and Patuxent National Wildlife Refuge on the south side of Washington D.C.

Commissioner Pettit diplomatically stated she likes all parks and preserves because they're all unique in their own way.

Councilor Sundeen agreed with Commissioner Belcher's observation that whenever visiting a community, they always end up at parks. He enjoys checking out new places to see what they offer but couldn't pinpoint a specific favorite.

Tupper chose old Yankee Stadium, noting that he hasn't been to Fenway Park yet.

4. Grant Opportunities (Lathrope)

Chair Lathrope discussed an email about Oregon Parks and Recreation grant opportunities that award more than \$28 million annually to Oregon communities. The grants include funding for public outdoor facilities like trails, sports fields, playgrounds, picnic facilities, campgrounds, and park support facilities. Additional grants are available specifically for motorized and non-motorized trail development and restoration projects.

Tupper immediately thought of Campbell Park's ball field lights as a potential project, noting the poles need replacement and the cross beams are in dangerous condition - they've been up since he was 11 years old and move in the wind. He expressed uncertainty about the application process but agreed any funding would be beneficial.

Commissioner Belcher mentioned his priority would be making the lower circuit of the Urban Trail ADA accessible with temporary asphalt until the riverfront trail is developed, which could be 5-15 years away. He acknowledged temporary solutions might not qualify for grants.

Discussion arose about the need to identify who on City staff would handle grant applications, with Tupper agreeing to investigate the proper channels and report back at the next meeting. The Commission emphasized the importance of acting quickly due to grant deadlines.

Chair Lathrope also mentioned a press release from Crystal King about public voting for "13 Nights on the River" funding opportunity - \$40,000 annually for three years totaling \$120,000. Councilor Sundeen clarified this grant is specifically for music venues and outdoor concerts, with Main Street applying on the city's behalf. While minor infrastructure improvements are possible, the primary purpose is funding bands and sponsorship incentives.

5. Parks Assessment (Lathrope)

Chair Lathrope presented the results of the first month of park assessments, expressing appreciation for the Commission's participation despite technical difficulties with access. She noted she's still working on gaining full access to the Excel spreadsheet that would link responses to specific parks.

Key findings from the assessments included:

- Most observations were completed between August 26-September 8
- Parks not assessed: Sand Island, Nob Hill (despite Blumenthal giving a tour), Columbia Blvd., Scappoose Bay Marina, and Sixth Street Park
- 57% of visits had patrons present
- Demographics showed higher numbers of teenagers and young adults across parks
- Only 12% reported off-leash dogs outside designated areas
- Activities observed included walking trails, biking, playground use, picnicking, pet activities, and sports

Patron feedback was mixed regarding structures and amenities, with satisfaction levels varying. Notable concerns included:

- One "unsatisfied" response regarding safety
- Requests for pickleball court resurfacing
- Need for more garbage cans
- Graffiti reported at McCormick Park

Safety issues identified:

- 21% of assessments noted safety concerns
- Unauthorized camping under bridges and in picnic areas at McCormick Park
- Broken rubber rung on playground ladder at Campbell Park
- Overfilled toilet at Grey Cliffs

Tupper provided protocol for reporting issues: contact him or Tory during work hours, or call non-emergency dispatch (503-397-1521) after hours.

Overall park cleanliness: 64% said yes, 35% said no. Specific issues included trash, dog waste bags, and feces on trails despite available garbage cans. Tupper noted the ongoing challenge with dog waste, mentioning a retired teacher who volunteered to help clean up with just a grabber and bucket.

Natural elements needing attention included poison oak along Dalton Lake's paved trail, extensive ivy on trees, and numerous dead trees at McCormick Park's walking trails. Tupper acknowledged the dead trees are on their radar but explained they try to limit removal during dry conditions.

Commission members shared positive feedback from patrons, with Commissioner Belcher noting overwhelmingly positive responses from people at multiple parks. The assessment process itself was well-received, with members finding it enjoyable and educational about parks they hadn't previously visited.

6. E-Bikes (Blumenthal)

Vice Chair Blumenthal raised concerns about electric motorcycles coming through Nob Hill Park at excessive speeds, noting three recent incidents where he would have had to jump out of the way. He suggested installing a chicane near the kiosk using natural stones to force riders to slow down, designed to still allow wheelbarrows through.

Tupper expressed concern that making access harder might lead riders to damage planted areas as they find alternative routes. The discussion shifted to the need for better police enforcement of this citywide problem.

Vice Chair Blumenthal suggested having Crystal King include an article in the City's monthly newsletter explaining that e-bikes and electric motorcycles are not permitted in parks. Tupper confirmed Crystal regularly asks for content and would be happy to include information about off-leash dogs, e-bikes, or poison oak warnings.

7. Bylaws

The Commission reviewed bylaws paragraph by paragraph:

Article I: No issues identified.

Article II: Chair Lathrope noted this references additional responsibilities in the Municipal Code.

Article III: No changes needed.

Article IV: Discussion focused on clarifying subcommittee operations given previous legal concerns. Commissioner Belcher explained they've been posting public notices for what would have been subcommittee meetings to comply with meeting laws. Chair Lathrope distinguished between these public work sessions and formal subcommittees that meet separately and report back. The Commission agreed to seek clarification from the city attorney.

Chair Lathrope also proposed adding language requiring Commission approval for duties assigned by the chair, suggesting the wording "fulfilling other duties as appointed by the Chair with approval of the Commission."

Article V: Discussion confirmed no term limits for officers, though Vice Chair Blumenthal noted positions are opened annually for reappointment. Given high turnover on the Commission, members agreed maintaining flexibility is important.

Articles VI-X: No changes proposed.

8. Municipal Code Review

The Commission identified two main issues in the Municipal Code:

- Section 2.74.009: References to "publicly accessible buildings and associated grounds" lack clarity. Tupper recommended removing this language entirely, as "maintenance of public parks" already covers structures within parks. The Commission agreed to discuss this with City Council at their joint meeting on October 22.
- Section 2.74.009, Line 7: Requires approval from the City engineering director for site visits. Tupper agreed this is unnecessary for visiting public parks. The Commission decided to recommend striking this requirement.

Councilor Sundeen suggested compiling all recommended changes into one document for efficiency when presenting to City Council. The Commission agreed to wait until after the joint meeting to finalize recommendations based on Council feedback.

OLD BUSINESS

9. Urban Trail (Belcher)

Commissioner Belcher distributed maps and a tentative list of work needed for the Urban Trail. He reported meeting briefly with Tupper about the project. Key updates included:

- The route through Nob Hill Park has been modified to go up the stairs through the middle of the park rather than by the waste treatment area
- Both Commissioner Belcher and Tupper agreed City Council approval is needed before implementation

Motion by Commissioner Belcher to request that City Council give authorization for the Parks Department to implement the Urban Trail. Seconded by Dana Lathrope.

Motion passed unanimously.

Chair Lathrope provided an update on the trail marking stencils, explaining her Cricut machine was stolen from her garage. She's arranged for a friend to cut the stencils this week and will deliver them to Tupper. Tupper suggested making about 12 stencils to allow the paint to dry between uses, with Commissioner Belcher joking he'd probably hang one in his workshop.

10. Milton Creek Reserve - Standing Item

Brief discussion with no significant updates. Commissioner Jacobson mentioned he would contact Elliott from the Port to explore potential grant opportunities or partnerships. The Commission agreed to have more detailed discussions after the joint meeting with City Council.

STAFF REPORT

Tupper reported:

- The concrete footing from the old gazebo was removed today, currently looks like a sandbox
- Area will remain unseeded until after Halloweentown to prevent damage
- Treefort plans a temporary pop-up stage for Halloweentown events, positioned where the permanent stage was previously approved
- Distributed Halloweentown event map showing tent locations

- Met with Vice Chair Blumenthal and work crew for invasive species removal
- Received recommendation from Gilly for native grass, wildflower, and forb seed mix at \$66 per pound; Commission approved purchasing two pounds
- Roger retired; 38 applicants for the position with applications open until month's end
- Provided Commissioner Belcher requested financial information for Parks Department review

COUNCILOR'S REPORT

Councilor Sundeen reported:

- 13 Nights on the River concert series has concluded
- Encouraged everyone to vote for the funding opportunity and share with others nationwide
- Sand Island Campground agreement questions arose at the last Council meeting; Brad will return to answer questions at the next meeting
- Invited Commission input on Sand Island issues to forward to appropriate parties
- Contract is available in recent City Council packets for review

Commissioner Belcher emphasized his concern that park-related decisions should come to the Parks and Trails Commission first for transparency. Commissioner Jacobson volunteered to attend the next City Council meeting as Commission representative, with others available as backup. The Commission agreed Commissioner Belcher could state they want to be part of discussions before decisions are made, citing Code section 2.74.009.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

Vice Chair Blumenthal:

- Friends crew donated 350 hours in the first six months of 2025, including 60-70 hours at the spring work party
- Requested corrections crew assistance with blackberry overgrowth on Fifth Street boardwalk; Tupper confirmed Vice Chair Blumenthal must be on-site
- New bench received for Nob Hill needs City pickup from his driveway
- Dog sign by kiosk needs replacement as it's completely faded
- Confirmed kiosk at railroad tie staircase is on Tupper's agenda pending location approval
- Reported Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife confirmed St. Helens has too many deer; they suggested the City could create ordinances against feeding deer and salt licks
- ODFW would issue hazing permits for property owners, including use of paintball guns

Commissioner Pettit asked about irrigation at Japanese Garden, Civic Pride Park, and Old Portland Road entrance to McCormick Park. Tupper confirmed no irrigation at Japanese Garden or Civic Pride Park; irrigation at OPR across from Johnny's is broken and unrepaired.

Commissioner Jacobson:

- Received call about Project Arcadia development possibly including 25 acres of park space

- Suggested Tupper provide monthly staff reports focusing on specific park assessments from Public Works' perspective
- Tupper agreed to pick a park each month and report on pros and cons

Commissioner Green referenced the 2015 Master Plan showing the City falls short of recommended service levels for parks. By 2020, the plan indicated need for 26.3 additional acres of nature park beyond the existing 9.8 acres (Nob Hill and Columbia Botanic Gardens).

ADJOURNMENT - 5:53 PM

Respectfully submitted by Jamie Ford, Administrative Billing Specialist