

VERMILION PARKS & RECREATION BOARD

Minutes of August 18, 2026 - 6:00 p.m.

Tina Swinehart, Chairperson, called the meeting of July 21, 2026, to order.

Roll Call: Tina Swinehart, Connie Laughlin, Jim Beatty, Lisa Dobinson, Aaron Gall. Absent: Mark Musial, Shari Kuhn.

Also, Present: Marc Weisenberger, Parks Operation Manager; Chad Kuhns, Recreation Director; Melanie Wood, Clerk of Council.

Approval of Minutes:

C. Laughlin MOVED; J. Beatty seconded to approve the July 21, 2026, Vermillion Parks & Recreation Board Minutes. Roll Call Vote 5 YEAS. MOTION CARRIED.

Correspondence/Presentations:

Chair Swinehart stated that she had received a letter from a community member expressing concern about the condition of Sherod Park following the Beach Market event held the previous Friday and Saturday. She offered to provide copies for entry into the formal minutes but summarized the concerns without reading the letter in full. The community member, who uses the park on a near-daily basis for dog walking, was "sad to see that things were in bad state" following the event.

Chair Swinehart noted that she had personally visited the park both during and after the event and took photographs, which she passed around to board members. She acknowledged that significant rainfall during the event had resulted in ruts and damage to the park grounds. She reported that she had been in communication with the event organizer, who "is going to compensate the parks for that" and that the area would be rolled and restored. Chair Swinehart emphasized that the organizer "is wanting to make things right" and that she wanted to ensure the board's awareness that the matter was being addressed.

Open to the Audience:

Note: Chair Swinehart moved the Open to Audience section forward on the agenda to accommodate members of the public who were present and wished to speak.

Fisherman's Bend Condo Association – Park Access Request for Seawall Project

Chris Laughlin and Tom Baker appeared before the board representing the Fisherman's Bend Condominium Association. Chair Swinehart asked them to step to the podium and provide their names and addresses for the record.

Chris Laughlin, 567 Main Street, addressed the board. He explained that Fisherman's Bend has been working on a significant project to ensure the structural integrity of their seawall, which "has been failing and having issues

with the foundation behind it," impacting walkways and stairways. He stated that engineering studies had been completed and that the association believes that, if properly repaired, the seawall can achieve "another 50 years" of useful life.

Laughlin described the nature of the request: the association is asking permission to utilize the adjacent park as an access point for equipment and materials between November 15 and April 2027. He explained that the contractor selected for the project, Shoreline, is experienced in this type of work, noting they had previously completed the VBC bulkhead project "a lot of stone and things that needed to be brought in and everything was put back exactly the way it needs to be." He emphasized that the contract with Shoreline requires that if park access is granted, the contractor would "put down the proper layouts over sidewalks" and restore the area. He described the equipment involved: "a barge with big excavators on it," while cement trucks would remain on the street, with smaller equipment used to move stone and pour concrete.

Laughlin affirmed the association's longstanding relationship with the city: "Fisherman's Bend believes we have been a good partner in the city. We pay good taxes... If you go way back, we actually donated the park to the city." He concluded simply: "We're just asking that you give us the permission to move forward with the project."

Handouts were distributed to board members and Parks Supervisor Marc Weisenberger.

Chair Swinehart asked whether the project would involve any work on the steel sheeting. Laughlin clarified, "The steel sheeting is solid. That's the whole goal of the project—to preserve it and make sure everything [is maintained]. Working for the steel sheeting to have another 40 to 50 years of life, which would include the steel piling in Exchange Park."

A question was raised about the Ice Affair event and whether it might be affected by the project timeline. Laughlin acknowledged the timing concern and stated, "I believe that is something that can be worked around... I feel pretty good in January and February that we won't be pouring. I would like to see, once the docks go out, to get started. I don't have a timeline of the project yet... We will work around what we need to so everyone is successful."

Chair Swinehart asked whether organizations such as Main Street or the Chamber of Commerce had been notified or were aware of this request. Laughlin confirmed this would be the first such notification "this would be, first"—and indicated he was open to working through those concerns. Chair Swinehart stated she did not see a problem with the request provided the community groups were informed and the logistics worked out, expressing confidence that Parks Supervisor Weisenberger would coordinate accordingly.

Parks Supervisor Marc Weisenberger confirmed he was willing to work with the association and raised an opportunity worth exploring whether the project timeline and equipment presence might allow the city to "piggyback" on the work for a small stretch of seawall across Exchange Park as well. Laughlin responded affirmatively: "It absolutely would be. They talked about that last spring when I reached out to the city over the last few years... Shoreline is fully willing to do that if it goes down that road; they are going to have all their equipment here."

Tom Baker elaborated on additional scope within the project, noting that spiral staircases at the property had settled over approximately 38 years due to erosion "some have settled down, pulled away from building." He explained the contractor plans to hydraulically lift them back to their original position. Baker also addressed the topic of dock stanchions, explaining the association had identified replacement units from a supplier in Texas at roughly half the normal cost "compared to a \$3,000 stanchion, we got it down to about \$1,500" and that the company is prepared to work collaboratively. Weisenberger noted that the new stanchions would be metered on each side, providing the city with the ability to receive income from electricity specific to the dock.

A question was raised about whether the association had yet entered into a contract with Shoreline. Laughlin responded: "We're getting on right now. We have the bid numbers. We just got approval from the association to spend money... We will have a contract by the end of this month or first of September."

When asked whether board approval was needed immediately, Laughlin explained that the approval was relevant primarily for staging and execution planning: "If for some reason we couldn't use the park, we have to look at tearing things out or we have to figure out how to do it."

Chair Swinehart asked Parks Supervisor Weisenberger whether he was comfortable with the proposal, noting its similarity to prior work on the river and pier. Weisenberger confirmed this project should be "way less" involved than that prior effort, which included pile driving. Weisenberger indicated comfort moving forward. With no further questions from the board, Chair Swinehart entertained a motion.

J. Beatty MOVED; L. Dobinson seconded to allow Fisherman's Bend Condo Association to use East Exchange Park as access for their bulkhead project assuming that the park will be returned in the same condition that it was in at the start of the project. Roll Call Vote 4 YEAS; 1 ABSTAIN (Laughlin). **MOTION CARRIED**.

Chair Swinehart thanked Laughlin and Baker for their presentation: "Good luck on the project. Hope it hits the timelines. Hope there's no glitches."

Night Lights Vermilion Update – Karen Viterna

Karen Viterna addressed the board to provide an update on the Night Lights Vermilion initiative.

Viterna reported that one prototype light shield has been installed at Main Street Beach so that one of the lights "doesn't really last light up as high," and that a donation had been received for the remaining shields needed to bring all Main Street Beach lights into compliance. She noted that Parks Supervisor Weisenberger had agreed to install those shields as soon as they were in hand, stating "those will be on their way to becoming Dark Sky compliant."

Regarding Sherod Park, Viterna stated that the initiative's astronomy group, in collaboration with the Black River Astronomical Society, had toured the site and determined that existing concrete already dug out from the old ball field could be repurposed as telescope pads. "Toward the eastern side where those exist, those are designated to become telescope pads." She also noted that four powered telescope pads will need to be added near the northern parking area, positioned between the walking path and the parking area.

On park lighting, Viterna reported she is working with two vendors and has reached out to two others, seeking input on what lighting should be considered and installed for the park.

Viterna also announced a significant organizational milestone: "I was able to get pro bono help so that 501(c)(3) will happen for Night Lights Vermilion." She acknowledged this would take some time, but expressed confidence that achieving nonprofit status would be "very helpful when it comes to submitting proposals for outside funding."

Viterna then raised a question about the northern parking lot at Sherod Park, referencing a previous budget proposal of \$95,000, of which \$50,000 had been funded. She expressed concern about the current condition of the lot—"the parking lot is just horrendous; it's a mud puddle" and noted this was particularly important given the expensive nature of telescope equipment that users would need to carry through the area. She asked whether there was a plan or any further information available.

Parks Supervisor Weisenberger responded that in addition to the existing grant, there is "another grant that is pending right now with ODNr and then there is a potential private donation as well," and confirmed the team is "still looking at Spring to get that done." He also agreed to follow up with Viterna on the exact concrete pad locations as the project progresses.

Viterna also confirmed that the telescope pad dimensions being proposed are 4 feet by 8 feet, consistent with the sandstone bench dimensions used elsewhere in the park, noting it "seems logical that we continue with that if we can."

Councilman John Gabriel – Grant Process Concerns

John Gabriel, Ward 1 Council Person, addressed the board. He began by thanking board members for their volunteer service, acknowledging that the parks are "a huge draw to our town."

Gabriel then raised a procedural concern. He had received a phone call informing him of a plan to install a deck or stage at Main Street Beach, and upon reviewing the board's minutes from throughout the year, found no mention of any such discussion. He stated: "I'm a very active reader of the minutes, and I can tell you I've read all of this year's minutes, and I don't see any mention of anything in Main Street as far as a deck or pavilion—could be, like, or whatever the plan is."

Gabriel referenced the city's charter, explaining that the process for pursuing grants related to park improvements is "meant to be more of a collaborative process where you sit down and you discuss the mission of the parks and the direction you would like to take it, and then pursue grants to accomplish those items." He expressed concern that "folks are going out and getting grants and then coming here kind of after the fact," characterizing this as "cart before the horse."

He also raised the issue of audits, noting that the City of Vermilion was currently under audit: "It wouldn't take 5 minutes for an auditor to go back and do the very thing I'm talking about—look at your minutes, find there's no mention of it, find that a grant was received, and then the permission to do whatever the other thing came after the fact." He emphasized that he was not assigning fault but wished to make the board aware of the proper

procedure: "Folks should come to you, say, 'Here's what I would like to do. I would like to pursue this grant,' then bring those monies to you as part of a plan where you folks all had a say in it."

John Lipaj – Main Street Beach Stage Grant Presentation & Reset

John Lipaj, a Vermilion resident and neighbor of Mayor Owens, addressed the board. He explained that when Mayor Owens was elected, he had volunteered to help with special projects—primarily grant research for streets and wastewater treatment, which he described as the mayor's "biggest priorities."

In the course of meetings with various government entities, county representatives mentioned the availability of tourism-related grants. Lipaj stated that three grants were submitted to Erie County: one for repaving Haley Street (approximately \$100,000 requested toward an \$800,000 project, which was not awarded); one for the north parking lot at Sherod Park (which was awarded); and one for a performance stage at Main Street Beach (which was also awarded at approximately \$65,000).

Lipaj directly and candidly acknowledged the procedural error: "I want to take a step back and apologize for my lack of knowledge of how this process should work... when we saw that there were some grants available on a pretty short deadline—June 30th—we felt like, 'let's just go out and see if we can get them, and then if we can get them, we'll figure out what to do next,' which I realized is the wrong way to do it. And that's not on Mayor Owens—it is on me entirely." He framed his appearance as "a hard reset," coming to the board to seek input and collaborate going forward.

He distributed materials, including AI renderings of a possible stage design, which the clerk had also sent to board members that morning.

Lipaj explained the purpose of the proposed project. Performers who play Sunday concerts near the lighthouse have raised concerns: one told him they perform "at a 10-to-15-degree angle," in "the hot sun," with significant physical discomfort. The project was also conceived as providing additional seating for residents who wish to "come to Main Street and just look at the sunset and have a place to sit."

Member Jim Beatty asked whether the wall visible in the renderings was currently in place. Lipaj confirmed it was. Beatty raised a safety concern about the elevated edge: "A guy in a wheelchair falls asleep and pushes his feet off—he goes up the back end," suggesting some form of ridge cap or barrier along the perimeter. Lipaj noted that a musician who performs there had independently raised the same point, and that a perimeter cap would also allow for the installation of anti-grinding hardware to deter skateboarders.

Beatty also raised the need for lighting, noting that even if the purpose is sunset viewing, there would need to be some indication of the drop-off for nighttime safety, either solar or hardwired. Lipaj confirmed that running electricity would be part of the project budget, noting that the team had already met with three contractors about running conduit from the pump house to the proposed location.

Beatty asked about the proposed square footage of the deck. Lipaj confirmed this was one of the key items on which the board's input was being sought and that no decision had been made. He then relayed input from musician Ken Birkin of the Leading Edge Band, who suggested the stage should be "approximately 26 feet wide

by 18 feet deep." Lipaj also noted that Paul Stockbridge of Stockbridge Acoustic had made similar recommendations, with both performers emphasizing the need for "some sort of a temporary awning" or sail-type canopy that would only be deployed during performances, so as "not to block the view in any way." Lipaj and Weisenberger had also discussed the idea with Kate from Main Street Vermilion, landing on a nautical sail concept that would be temporary and removable.

Member Lisa Dobinson asked who would bear responsibility for setup, takedown, and storage of the temporary canopy—specifically whether the parks department would be responsible each time there is a show. Lipaj confirmed the parks department would handle that.

Chair Swinehart then provided important historical context, noting that the development of Main Street Beach had involved "probably 10 years' worth of time and community effort—committees, discussions about amphitheaters and stages" and that the ultimate community consensus, reached through extensive deliberation, was that the park should remain green space: "We wanted it to remain natural." She raised the possibility of redirecting the grant toward a stage at Sherod Park instead, given its parking availability, open space, and slope. Lipaj acknowledged that the grant funds would not be transferable, since "this grant application is written specifically for this project," and that turning down the money and reapplying for a Sherod Park project would be required if the community chose that path.

Beatty offered a counterpoint in favor of the Main Street location, noting that the concerts draw between 2 and 400 people per date—"15 dates, 2 to 400 people—you're talking about between 3 to 6,000 people coming downtown," which benefits local businesses. He also noted that Sherod Park, while spacious, is "out of the way" and lacks the same community draw.

Parking was raised as a related concern. Lipaj acknowledged it as "a legitimate concern in this process," referring to a recent Photo-Journal article about downtown parking issues.

Dobinson reinforced the significance of the green space decision: "I don't think this would be taken lightly... that was a huge [loss when] we lost the museum. If the main purpose of discussion that went into all of this was keeping a nice green space, and then putting up again, just another concrete looking stage..." She asked about the grant's acceptance deadline. Lipaj confirmed the deadline is June 30, 2027, stating clearly: "We're not rushing anything. We're not looking for any decisions. We're starting the process."

Lipaj described his plan for gathering input: meetings with Main Street Vermilion and the Chamber of Commerce separately, followed by a combined committee including representatives from Parks, Main Street, the Chamber, the musicians, and City Council. When asked about open public meetings, Lipaj expressed hesitation, stating: "That can be problematic... if we open it up to the entire community, we're just going to have people coming out of the woodwork." He suggested that the representative structure would effectively capture the views of "40 to 50 individuals that have history with the city."

Chair Swinehart acknowledged the board was not at a point to take a vote or any action, particularly with an incomplete board present: "I don't think we are ready to take a vote or do anything—other than to listen and be part of the process at this point."

Lipaj reiterated his apology and purpose: "My only objective was to bring this to your attention; let you know that we're doing a reset on this. And again, we did it the wrong way, which is on me... we're trying to make up for that by collaborating with the different main groups here in town so that we get that history and the people who understand the history of Main Street Beach involved in that process."

Community Event Group Use Permits: None.

City Council Representative Report: No Report.

Mayor's Report: No Report.

Recreation Director's Report:

Recreation Director Chad Kuhns reported that football activities are underway, with the first games scheduled for the upcoming Saturday. Approximately 100 participants are enrolled in football teams, with a similar number in cheerleading. The season consists of 8 games, with a potential 10 if playoffs are reached. Vermilion will host 3 of those dates—August 29, September 26, and October 24—with 5 to 6 games played at the local field on each host day to consolidate referee assignments.

Chair Swinehart inquired about equipment, specifically helmets and jerseys. Kuhns confirmed that the team had sufficient helmets overall, but that sizing was not determinable until registration, resulting in the need to order approximately 7 smaller helmets that are currently on order and in transit. He confirmed, "Otherwise, we're good to go for the season."

Service Director's Report: No Report.

Parks Operation Manager Report:

Parks Supervisor Marc Weisenberger reported that the past month had been "a pretty active event month," with staff spending approximately one week each focused on Showse Park, Sherod Park, and downtown areas preparing and supporting the various events held throughout the period.

Weisenberger also reported that he has begun compiling numbers for budget preparation, covering both the remainder of the current year and the coming year, for both capital projects and park operations. He indicated he would present and formalize that work with the board's input as it progresses.

Weisenberger took the opportunity to thank the Showse Park committee, Kiwanis, the Police Department, the Fire Department, and the many community organizations involved in the event at Showse Park two weeks prior. He estimated attendance at "right around 1,000 people over the course of the evening," calling it "a really neat event."

Subcommittee Reports:

Budget/Finance Subcommittee Report:

Shari Kuhn was not present. Chair Swinehart noted on her behalf that Kuhn would be meeting in person with Parks Supervisor Weisenberger to review pool financials and update the board accordingly, with the goal of

providing a clearer picture of the budget as the year concludes. Chair Swinehart noted, "School starting this week—we are ending our final quarter."

Showse Park Revitalization & Transformation Project:

Council President Jeff Lucas provided the Showse Park update in place of the subcommittee members.

Lucas reported that the footer for the 21.5-foot fish skeleton sculpture—commissioned through Public Art for Vermilion—had just been poured that evening. He described the sculpture as "5.5 feet tall, 5.5 feet wide, 21.5 feet long," to be constructed in place at the park. He noted that wet concrete had prompted some concern about children interfering at the site, though he indicated that approximately 12 inches of mulch would ultimately cover the footer.

Lucas reported that bids for the sports complex went out approximately two weeks prior and were going out for a second time, with bids due back on the 27th and a goal of selecting a contractor on that same day. The primary objective is to complete asphalt work this fall. He described the planned sports complex features: four pickleball courts, a basketball court at the opposite end, and multipurpose painted surfaces including cornhole lanes, with bleacher seating to accommodate possible tournaments. He noted the intent to proceed in phases, with color-coding and final court surfaces planned for spring after the asphalt has had time to cure.

Lucas also reported that quotes (not bids, as Weisenberger clarified for the record) have been received from three contractors for both the east and west parking lots. The east lot will require complete tear-out and replacement, including wider handicapped striping at 10 feet, parking blocks to protect the grass, and improved drainage. Lucas noted that a contractor from ADT had identified two blocked and broken catch basins that, once cleared by the Service Director, had "solved quite a bit of the drainage issue." The west lot requires comparatively minimal work—estimated at approximately \$15,000 for surface repair, a surface coat, striping, and sealing.

Lucas noted that fencing work is also planned, with the institutional-height fencing will be trimmed down to a lower height: "We want enough to keep the balls in, but we don't want it to look too restrictive—like you were a prisoner in there."

Regarding the tiki hut signage, Lucas reported that Gary Gibbs of the Lorain County Visitors Bureau had approved the proposed language, which still needs to come before the board. The Lorain County Visitors Bureau has provided 100 percent of the funding for the two tiki huts. The planned sign design features copper to match existing roofing, mounted on stone, similar to the Sherod Park sign. Sign quotes are expected the following day.

Lucas also reported the Lorain County Veterans Service Commission who donated \$25,000 for the 65-foot flag pole, whose only request was a recognition sign similar to what exists at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Amherst—metal, mounted on stone, consistent with the Sherod Park sign aesthetic.

On the topic of vandalism, Lucas noted proudly that "there has not been one piece of vandalism at all, nothing" at the park.

Regarding playground equipment, Lucas reported that the Topsy Turvey spinning piece had snapped at the base during normal use—confirmed by security camera footage reviewed by the police chief, who stated definitively, "Jeff, there was no vandalism—it was just normal usage." No one was injured. The manufacturer agreed to replace the unit at no cost with a redesigned piece "lower to the ground, not so top heavy," featuring "more of a base, like a cone, but for smaller kids." The manufacturer will cover installation, concrete removal and replacement, and assembly. Lucas expected the replacement to arrive in September.

Member Beatty expressed enthusiasm about the park's trajectory, noting how Showse Park had for years been underutilized green space: "It wasn't used but by a few. Now we've added some additional pieces—not only for beautification, but it is used all the time and by a different group of people that would have never gone to that park any other way... Kids are finally going back to the park." He added: "I love the fact that everyone wants to make green space, which is beautiful, but also there's a lot of other options for people who don't normally just go out to sit on grass—but now it brings them to our community."

Recreation and School Relations:

Member Lisa Dobinson noted that school was back in session that week and that she would have more detailed information once she had received reports from building principals. She emphasized that the primary focus for the coming period would be levy efforts: "We need great schools to go with great parks, and that's going to be a big push for our community... that's kind of where the focus will be until November."

Vermilion Community Pool Subcommittee: No Report

Public Art Subcommittee:

Member Aaron Gall briefly noted that a target date of September 15th was being discussed for the concrete work to be finished, though he did not have a confirmed date.

Rotary Park Subcommittee: No Report.

Pickleball Subcommittee:

Member Connie Laughlin noted she had received a private message from a visitor to Vermilion who had difficulty locating the pickleball courts. Laughlin stated that better signage may help direct visitors. Chair Swinehart then asked, in a lighthearted manner, whether Laughlin planned to ask about the timeline for the additional courts at West Breeze Park. Laughlin confirmed she had already asked Parks Supervisor Weisenberger and that the project would not be happening this year, as "it's a different process, it's a different location."

Erosion Control/Beach Retention: No Report

Recreation Department Subcommittee: No Report

OLD BUSINESS: None.

NEW BUSINESS:

T. Swinehart MOVED; L. Dobinson seconded to adjourn into executive session to discuss the employment and compensation of a public employee. Roll Call Vote 5 YEAS. MOTION CARRIED.

T. Swinehart recessed the meeting into executive session.

At the conclusion of executive session, T. Swinehart called the regular meeting back to order and announced that no action would be taken as the result of executive session.

T. Swinehart adjourned the meeting upon no further discussion.

NEXT MEETING:

September 15, 2026 @ 6:00 p.m.

Location: Vermilion Municipal Complex, 687 Decatur Street, Vermilion