

VERMILION PARKS & RECREATION BOARD

Minutes of September 15, 2026 - 6:00 p.m.

Mark Musial, Vice Chairperson, called the meeting of September 15, 2026, to order.

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

Also, Present: Marc Weisenberger, Parks Operation Manager; Tony Valerius, Service Director; Chad Kuhns, Recreation Director; Greg Drew, Council Representative; Melanie Wood, Clerk of Council.

Approval of Minutes:

C. Laughlin MOVED; S. Kuhn seconded to approve the August 18, 2026, Vermillion Parks & Recreation Board Minutes. Roll Call Vote 4 YEAS. MOTION CARRIED.

Correspondence/Presentations: None.

Community Event Group Use Permits:

Cheryl Girzzell – Ritter Readers – Event Date: September 19, 2026, from 1:00pm – 5:00pm (Rain Date 10/3) @ Showse Park

Cheryl Grizzell explained that the library was hoping to use Showse Park on Saturday, September 19th, from 2:00 to 4:00 PM as a kickoff event for a new children's literacy program called Ritter Readers. She described the event as a partnership opportunity between the library and the park, intended to highlight both institutions and reach children in the surrounding community who might not otherwise make it to the library. She noted that her staff was enthusiastic about the event, and that there would be donuts. She extended an open invitation to Board members and their families.

J. Beatty MOVED; C. Laughlin seconded to approve the use of Showse Park for Ritter Readers for the date and time as presented. Roll Call Vote 4 YEAS. MOTION CARRIED.

Rose Ramsey – Christmas Card Lane @ Victory Park – Event Date: November 2026 – January 2027

Rose Ramsey explained that she was requesting a permit to use a portion of Victory Park from November 28th through January 9th, 2027, preferably along the church side and the railroad side, with the possibility of extending into the park. She introduced the concept by announcing that there were 100 more days until Christmas and that Victory Park was in need of some holiday attention.

She described the initiative as a Christmas Card Lane — a community display in which businesses, organizations, places of worship, schools, social clubs, and other entities would each create a large plywood card, approximately 4 feet by 4 feet or 4 feet by 6 feet, to be placed and displayed in the park for residents, visitors, and tourists to view either by driving by or by walking among them. She explained that the practical motivation was that large institutions such as retail stores, restaurants, bars, auto dealerships, fitness centers, and

government entities cannot realistically send paper Christmas cards to everyone who comes through their doors — postage alone makes it financially prohibitive, and no one maintains a full log of everyone they serve. A public display card in the park would serve as their community greeting.

Ms. Ramsey shared that she had helped implement this concept in 1999 in Punta Gorda, Florida, as a Kiwanis Club fundraiser, and that it became so popular that a cap eventually had to be placed on the number of cards. At its height, they had 70 cards on display before Hurricane Charlie damaged and disrupted the program; it has since been reduced to around four.

Ms. Ramsey explained that the cards themselves would be painted on plywood — businesses or individuals would be responsible for creating their own cards, with the business name appearing on the front. Artists could sign the back if they wished. She noted that technology has also advanced to the point where a machine could produce the design. The cards would be mounted on posts, and the display would be arranged so that visitors could drive by for a viewing or park and walk among the cards. She added that the Vermilion Chamber of Commerce had agreed to participate and would help manage the registration and coordination process.

Regarding the fee structure, Ms. Ramsey explained that in Florida the registration fee was \$70. She indicated the committee — which she had agreed to chair — would make the final determination, but they were considering dropping the inaugural year's fee to \$50 given the cost to participants of making their own cards. She noted that annual fees would go to the Chamber of Commerce to be recycled back into the community based on the Chamber's discretion. She acknowledged that she had not yet had time to go through other organizations before bringing the request to the Board, but that the Chamber's involvement had made it possible to move forward with this timeline.

Board Member Musial asked where exactly the cards would be placed within the park. Ms. Ramsey explained they would be on posts and that the arrangement would be worked out with Director Weisenberger, most likely inside Victory Park in the grass as one comes around the parking lot, angled so they could be seen from a vehicle or on foot. She encouraged Board members to search "Punta Gorda Florida Kiwanis Christmas Card Lane" online and noted that she had already shared photographs with Parks Operation Director Weisenberger, Director Jeff Lucas, and Sean at the Vermilion Chamber of Commerce, all of whom responded positively.

Director Weisenberger confirmed the likely placement would be on the inside of Victory Park in the grass as you come around the parking lot. M. Musial asked whether the posts would be permanent or removable. Director Weisenberger clarified that they would be removable — similar to snow fence posts — not permanent installations. Board Member Kuhn expressed enthusiasm for the idea.

Board Member Laughlin asked whether Ms. Ramsey would be selling the cards to participants or whether businesses handled that themselves. Ms. Ramsey clarified that each participating business or individual would be responsible for creating and paying for their own card. The committee would provide guidance, but the card was the participant's own creation and responsibility. She noted that in the Florida program, Kiwanis members actually drilled the holes and installed the posts; there, the ROTC now assists with that task. She said she had discussed logistics with Director Weisenberger and that there were several workable options being considered.

Board Member Musial asked who would be purchasing the posts. Ms. Ramsey indicated that was still to be determined and that she was not yet at liberty to share details but explicitly clarified that she was not asking the Parks Board to pay for them. She stated that all she needed from the Board was a yes to allow the display to proceed.

Director Weisenberger noted that the Board would have the right to review cards before they were placed, and Ms. Ramsey confirmed this, adding that the registration form they were developing would include a reservation of the right to refuse any card that was not appropriate. She emphasized that no political content would be permitted, particularly at Christmas. She described the range of cards she had seen in Florida — some humorous, some serious, some inspirational from churches, and some creative from service clubs. Her personal favorite was a card from a fire department featuring a fireman seated next to a fire truck alongside two young children in oversized fire gear, with the message, "We're here to keep you safe." She said it was very moving.

C. Laughlin MOVED; S. Kuhn seconded to approve the use of Victory Park for Christmas Card Lane on the dates and times as presented. Roll Call Vote 4 YEAS. **MOTION CARRIED**.

City Council Representative Report:

Council Representative Greg Drew reported on the previous night's City Council meeting. He informed the Board that he had attempted to pass an ordinance awarding Phase 3 of the Showse Park Revitalization and Transformation Project to ADT Construction by emergency, in order to get the project underway as quickly as possible. However, two council members voted against passing it by emergency, meaning the ordinance would need to go through additional readings before it could be adopted, which Representative Drew estimated would push passage to mid-October at the earliest.

He expressed disappointment at the delay, explaining that the project involves the resurfacing and line-striping of the basketball and pickleball courts — work that requires asphalt plants to be operational, and those plants typically close in November. He noted that the funding situation made the delay particularly frustrating, as approximately \$150,000 of the project cost came from a grant, with only around \$4,000 coming from the parks budget.

Representative Drew characterized the vote against emergency passage as what he described as the council members' objection and said he believed it was an unnecessary delay. He clarified, however, that he was expressing his own personal view and was not speaking on behalf of the full council. Service Director Valerius indicated he would try again the following Monday to have the ordinance passed.

Mayor Russ Owens added context, noting that the reluctance to pass items by emergency was not unique to this situation and had occurred a number of times with the current council. He stated that the administration was doing its best to work within those constraints.

Representative Drew agreed and noted that most other items had passed by emergency, and that he had not anticipated this one would be an issue. He expressed hope that the two council members who had voted no might have a change of heart. He acknowledged that if the ordinance did not pass at the next reading, the project would likely not begin until spring, as the paperwork and contract signing alone would push the timeline past the point when asphalt work could reasonably be done.

Mayor's Report:

Mayor Russ Owens stated that he did not have a formal report for the Board but offered to answer any questions from the Board or the audience. No questions were raised.

Mayor Owens then offered a personal statement regarding the EPIC grant process. He acknowledged that the proper procedures had not been fully followed by the administration in connection with a grant from Erie County, and that John Lipaj had explained the situation to the Board previously. The mayor stated that he was accepting responsibility for that error, noting that he is new to the position and does not yet have full familiarity with all municipal procedures, something that Councilman Drew could attest to. He clarified that the issue was not an intentional effort to circumvent the process, but rather a failure to make people sufficiently aware of what was being done and when. He said he wanted the Board to know that the administration had learned from the experience. He added that the grants awarded were generous and would be well used by the parks, and that the city had been very clear and thorough in the application process going forward. He indicated that next year the city would begin the process earlier and would have significantly more funding available through the EPIC awards program. He concluded by apologizing and reaffirming that the intent was always to do something good for the community.

Recreation Director's Report:

Recreation Director Chad Kuhns reported that the department had hosted recreational football games the previous month and would be hosting them again the following Saturday, September 26th, at Sailor Stadium, beginning at approximately 10:00 AM and running until around 5:00 PM. He described it as an all-day event with a number of games scheduled. He reported that football and cheerleading programs were otherwise going well, and invited questions from the Board. No questions were raised.

Service Director's Report: No Report.

Parks Operation Manager Report:

Parks Operation Director Marc Weisenberger provided several updates.

Tree Farm at West Breeze Park: Director Weisenberger reported that a small tree farm had been established at West Breeze Park, located in the back corner of the park behind the pickleball courts. The tree commission has been doing the majority of the work. The city was recently awarded 100 seedlings and would be expanding the tree garden. On October 8th, a planting day is planned involving the Tree Commission, Vermilion High School FFA, and the green team from Ohio Edison, who will plant the 100 seedlings in the tree farm. The seedlings will be nurtured in place for the next five or six years, at which point the city will have a selection of trees available to plant throughout not only the parks, but the streets of Vermilion as well.

Board Member Musial asked whether the tree farm would be designated as such so that community members would understand why trees were being planted and later removed. Director Weisenberger confirmed that the area would be fenced in with temporary wire fencing. He noted that Gary Freight of the Tree Commission had taken the project on and had already been working with approximately a dozen trees in that location. He explained the process: seedlings would graduate to growing bags and then from the bags into the ground when ready. He noted the city had had very good results with bagged trees, as they do not experience the transplant shock associated with balled-and-burlapped trees, which can take three to four years to recover before showing significant growth. Bagged trees begin growing right away, tend to catch up with more established plantings, and have a better survival rate overall.

Storybook Trail: Director Weisenberger reported that the Storybook Trail project, proposed by the library some time ago, was now being actively advanced. The plan for the month was to begin expanding the trail slightly

using materials already on hand to complete a loop, and then to auger holes for the storyboard installations. He identified a small loop around the new playground as the target area for the trail.

CMAG Grant / Sherod Park: Director Weisenberger reported that he had looked into an ODNR Coastal Management Assistance Grant (CMAG) that had been raised via email. While the grant does not cover beach nourishment or traditional shoreline work, it does fund access projects and water quality projects, both of which score well in the program. He noted the city had previously used this grant at Main Street Park to fund the walkway connecting the upper parking lot to the beach and a bioswale in the northwest corner of the new parking lot.

He proposed using this grant for Sherod Park in conjunction with the planned paving of the parking lots there. Currently, stormwater at Sherod Park runs directly into the lake. The plan would route runoff through a bioswale first, incorporating a lily pond as part of the project. Erie County Soil and Water will be visiting the following week to discuss bioswale options and appropriate vegetation for that area. Director Weisenberger also noted they would be looking up any existing permits at the city's park locations that might allow work to proceed with fewer new approvals.

The second component of the grant project would be to pave a concrete access path at the far east end of the north parking lot at Sherod Park, similar to the walkway at Main Street, providing access from the parking lot down to the beach for visitors, swimmers, and paddle sport users such as kayakers and canoeists. He noted that existing funds already identified for the project could serve as the matching funds for the grant. He indicated the grant range was approximately \$30,000 at the low end and \$75,000 at the high end, and suggested applying for somewhere around \$50,000, in the middle, given that the program had received less federal funding than usual this cycle. He requested Board approval to submit the grant application.

C. Laughlin MOVED: J. Beatty seconded to allow Marc Weisenberger to proceed with writing and submitting the CMAG grant application. Roll Call Vote 4 YEAS. **MOTION CARRIED.**

Board Member Musial asked, somewhat speculatively, whether this type of grant might also be applicable to a potential Rotary Park Project involving the lower fishing access area. Director Weisenberger indicated it could possibly be a fit given the access component and said he and Board Member Musial would discuss it further.

Subcommittee Reports:

Budget/Finance Subcommittee Report: No Report.

Showse Park Revitalization & Transformation Project: No Report.

Recreation and School Relations: No Report.

Vermilion Community Pool Subcommittee:

Board Member Laughlin asked whether the pool had closed for the season. Director Weisenberger confirmed the pool had been closed and would be winterized in November. Work on the splash pad was also planned for early this week and into next week. Board Member Laughlin asked if numbers were available for the pool season. Director Weisenberger indicated numbers were not yet compiled, but speculated that revenue was likely up, as

were expenses due to pricing and maintenance issues encountered during the season. Several Board members agreed the season had been a great one and that the splash pad was very well received by the community.

Public Art Subcommittee: No Report.

Recreation Department Subcommittee:

Board Member Laughlin introduced Chloe Roth, the incoming Recreation Director, and invited her to introduce herself to the Board. Ms. Roth stated that she was born and raised in Vermilion, then spent approximately eight years living elsewhere. She noted that most recently she had been with the Ocean Community Chamber of Commerce in Rhode Island, and prior to that had served as Executive Director of an arts council in Tennessee. She expressed excitement about returning and about building on the work already underway in Vermilion. The Board welcomed her warmly.

Rotary Park Subcommittee:

Board Member Musial reported that the Rotary Club had closed on the sale of the property on Thursday and that the associated funds would be received on Thursday as well, enabling the Rotary Park project to finally move forward. He indicated he had been in contact with EDG, who would be finalizing their drawings so that presentations could be made to the Board, the Port Authority, ODNR, and other relevant parties. He described it as now being officially on the path to becoming a reality. The Board expressed enthusiasm, and Director Weisenberger was thanked for his role in the project.

Pickleball Subcommittee:

Board Member Laughlin noted that a new sign for the front of the park would be installed soon, as the area had been without the sign during recent landscaping and improvement work. The pickleball courts would remain open as long as weather permitted, with a closure decision to be made when conditions warranted.

Erosion Control/Beach Retention:

Director Weisenberger reported that he had obtained a couple of quotes from a contractor following a joint site inspection of the city's shoreline locations. These quotes covered general maintenance work on shoreline areas at Showse and Sherod Parks, where significant erosion issues have developed. Board Member Musial described what the group observed during the walkthrough: ledges at the top of the shoreline eroding down to the beaches, and large rocks — including five-ton slabs — having been moved out of position by the force of the lake during high-water periods. The quotes obtained were focused on repositioning the existing large blocks rather than introducing new materials.

Director Weisenberger elaborated on discussions with coastal management staff, who indicated that the west side of the creek at Sherod was not in the water and therefore could potentially be regraded without requiring extensive permitting. The vegetation in that area, which the department has been cutting back, has been getting out of hand. Erie County Soil and Water would be visiting the following week and would advise on appropriate vegetation for the regraded area. Director Weisenberger also noted that the coastal management contact planned

to search their database for any existing permits at the city's shoreline locations, as it may be possible to work from those existing permits rather than applying for new ones.

Mayor Owens interjected to share that he and Director Valerius had a meeting scheduled for the following day with a representative of the Army Corps of Engineers out of Buffalo. He noted that the individual had been somewhat resistant when the mayor previously raised Vermilion's erosion concerns, but that he intended to raise the issue again at tomorrow's meeting. He characterized the erosion at Sherwood Park in particular as a significant limiting factor to what the park could become if the problem were resolved, and stated that the city would pursue every avenue available to address it.

Open to the Audience:

Richard Kime, of 1387 Birchview Drive, came forward to address the Board. He introduced himself as a retired educator who spent 25 years working for another parks and recreation department as a supervisor, and who has been volunteering with Vermilion's parks department for three years. He noted that in the current year alone he had logged 130 hours, visiting parks every Thursday to maintain the downtown parks including Main Street Beach, Hanover, East Exchange, and Exchange Park.

Mr. Kime began by offering strong praise for Parks Operation Director Weisenberger, describing him as someone he had never seen work harder — noting that he has personally seen Director Weisenberger in the park on Saturdays cleaning the pool parking lot, mowing, and trimming. He stated that the Board was very lucky to have him.

Mr. Kime then raised three concerns for the Board's consideration. The first was handicapped parking in the parks. He described the situation at Main Street Park, where he and his wife have been running the Main Street Market in the park for nearly five years. He noted that the market area has only two handicapped parking spaces, and that those spaces are frequently unavailable. He described the situation as a crisis for older senior citizens who must walk longer distances to access the park. He acknowledged that Victory Park has more parking available, including overflow parking at an adjacent church, and that the park is currently operating at its maximum tent capacity of 45 vendors with a waiting list. He raised particular concern about access for handicapped visitors as the market continues to grow.

His second concern was handicapped parking at the concerts held at Main Street Beach. Mr. Kime described visiting the beach every day and observing large numbers of people using it for reflection, socializing, and recreation. However, when concerts are held there and all of the surrounding streets fill up with restaurant patrons and beach visitors, handicapped parking becomes extremely limited, leaving older visitors to park at the library or Victory Park and carry their chairs down to the beach. He suggested the Board consider whether Victory Park's underutilized parking on Sunday evenings might help address this, noting that a concert had previously been relocated to Victory Park with positive results.

His third concern was bicycle safety, specifically as it relates to e-bikes on the sidewalks of the downtown area and Victory Park. He noted that this was not only a problem with children but with adults as well, and that the existing signage requesting that cyclists walk their bikes through the park had not been consistently followed. He described an incident the previous year in which a bicycle struck a vendor tent at the market, and expressed

concern about the potential for a more serious accident involving a pedestrian or a cyclist. He suggested the city consider restricting bike riding on sidewalks from Victory Park through the downtown area and asked that city council or the mayor look into the matter.

Mr. Kime closed by thanking the Parks Board, Director Weisenberger, and the mayor for their cooperation, stating that without their support, the Main Street Market in the Park would not have achieved the success it has.

Mayor Owens followed the public comment with an update on a property located north of the railroad tracks between Main Street and Sandusky Street. He explained that this property, owned by Jeff Riddell, had been offered to the city for \$150,000 for use as a parking area that could accommodate approximately 67 parking spaces. The challenge with the property is the presence of an old diesel tank on the site. If removed, the tank triggers extensive EPA requirements including soil testing and environmental review. The preferred approach is to slurry the tank in place, which would eliminate many of those requirements. However, coordinating with BUSTER — the relevant state agency — to schedule the slurring process had so far proven difficult, as the company that manages the property on behalf of Mr. Riddell's daughter had been unable to get the process scheduled.

Mayor Owens reported that city council had expressed reluctance to move forward with purchasing the property until the tank issue is resolved. Once slurried, the mayor indicated the path would be clearer. He noted that Mr. Riddell had agreed to continue holding the property at \$150,000 and that the city retained first right of refusal if another buyer were to express interest. He acknowledged that the property's informal use as public parking had already been curtailed by Mr. Riddell, who had blocked access for liability purposes, further limiting parking availability in the area.

He also stated that the city had an alternative plan in development that he was not yet able to disclose publicly, but that he believed would also address the parking need and could potentially be implemented more quickly. He expressed hope that at least 67 additional parking spaces could be added by the middle of next year, which would help alleviate parking problems throughout the city, particularly at Main Street Beach.

Councilman Drew was then invited to respond to Mr. Kime's comments about e-bikes. He noted that City Council and the police chief had a lengthy discussion about e-bikes and the challenges they present at the previous night's council meeting. He explained that Ohio Revised Code establishes approximately three classifications for e-bikes, and that the city is working with the police chief to understand and address the issue. He acknowledged that it is a problem throughout the entire city, not just in the parks, and that while a quick resolution was not guaranteed, it was actively on the city's radar.

OLD/NEW BUSINESS: None.

Vice Chair, Mark Musial adjourned the meeting upon no further discussion.

NEXT MEETING:

October 20, 2026 @ 6:00 p.m.

Location: Vermilion Municipal Complex, 687 Decatur Street, Vermilion