

**MINUTES OF THE
REGULAR MEETING OF THE
BOARD OF PARK COMMISSIONERS
SKOKIE PARK DISTRICT
APRIL 21, 2026
6:30 P.M.**

ATTENDANCE AT THE MEETING

Board Members Present: President Susan Aberman
Vice President Ezra Jaffe
Commissioner Elsa Fischer
Commissioner Antonia Kasalo-Terihaj
Commissioner Courtney Williams

Others Present: Executive Director/Secretary Michelle J. Tuft
Superintendent of Business Services William G. Schmidt
Superintendent of Parks, Planning & Facilities Corrie Guynn
Superintendent of Recreation & Facilities Breanne Labus
Assistant Superintendent of Recreation Mary Amato
Marketing and Communications Director Jim Bottorff
Executive Administrative Assistant Ann Perez

CALL TO ORDER

President Aberman called the regular meeting of the Board of Park Commissioners to order at 6:30 p.m. and called for the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance.

CITIZEN COMMENTS

Susan Haggard, President of the Chicago Jewish Alliance, reported that community concerns have emerged following three separate antisemitic incidents in different parks over the past six months. She emphasized the importance of disseminating clear and accurate information regarding these events. In response, the Alliance has proposed several measures, including the installation of security cameras, improved direct access to law enforcement, and an increased security presence—particularly during periods when Jewish children may be more vulnerable, such as during Shabbat. The primary concern is that many Jewish families no longer feel safe in public spaces.

David Maer described the park upgrades over the past six years as remarkable and noted children have enjoyed them. In light of recent events, he suggested placing cameras, adding push buttons, and enhancing surveillance in parks.

Annie Benson uses the Dammrich Rowing Center and is interested in how the Park District is balancing recreational use of the canal with protecting the environment. Ms. Tuft explained that the District does not manage the waterway and suggested she reach out to MWRD with specific questions regarding the water quality. Mr. Guynn explained that the District has worked to lessen its effect on waterways by cutting down the

amount of salt used during winter, which lowers chloride levels. The District has significantly cut salt use by two thirds.

SHARK TANK PRESENTATIONS

Ms. Labus stated that in 2020, the Shark Tank project was launched for full-time staff, encouraging them to develop new programs or events for the park district. Its success led to its return this year, with seven teams participating. Each team presented their idea and two winners were selected. The winners are present to share their ideas with the board.

The first Shark Tank presentation featured Rec Rover, introduced by staff members Serena Tyler, Tom Hejnowski, Anjum Hava, Sonia Traverso, Rebecca Goldberg, and Raisa Martin. Rec Rover repurposes the former active adult bus to increase park attendance and community engagement by reaching those without park access and raising awareness of the park district.

Vice President Jaffe inquired about the projected start date, to which Corrie responded that it is likely scheduled for autumn due to the significant renovations required within the bus.

Nancy Portillo and Stephanie Guthrie presented "100 Years of Play" for the park district's centennial in 2028. The celebration will feature a pop-up exhibit traveling to each facility, highlighting the park district's century of service. The Museum will also take on a digitization and cataloging project for the many Park District pictures not currently in the system. If approved, a \$25,000 grant could fund the cataloging with minimal cost to the district.

Festivities would kick off February 13, 2028, with a free centennial skate, and the debut of the exhibit at the Skatium. The centennial can be much more than a celebration, it is a chance to honor our past, engage our present, and invest in our future.

President Aberman thanked everyone for their presentations.

CONSENT AGENDA APPROVAL

Commissioner Williams moved to approve the Consent Agenda. Commissioner Kasalo-Terihaj seconded the motion. On a roll call vote, all Commissioners voted aye. Motion carried. The Consent Agenda consisted of the minutes of the Regular Board Meeting of March 16, 2026, minutes of the Public Hearing on Improvements at Emerson Park on March 17, 2026, bills payable for the month of March/April 2026, Treasurer's Report, and Staff Reports.

APPROVAL OF TENTATIVE BUDGET AND APPROPRIATION ORDINANCE #26-002 FISCAL YEAR 2026-2027

Last week the board and staff met to discuss the proposed budget. Superintendent Schmidt explained that the ordinance reflects the information discussed at the meeting

and is requesting the approval of the Tentative Budget and Appropriation Ordinance #26-002 Fiscal Year 2026-2027.

The Tentative Budget and Appropriation Ordinance #26-002 will be publicly displayed for 30 days at the Weber, Devonshire, and Oakton Centers, and on the website. There will also be public notice in the Skokie Review, and a public hearing will be held at the June board meeting.

Vice President Jaffe created a budget summary and distributed it to the board. He explained that it was a simplified view and felt it would be useful to the board.

Vice President Jaffe moved to approve the Tentative Budget and Appropriation Ordinance #26-002 for Fiscal Year 2026-2027. Commissioner Kasalo-Terihaj seconded the motion. On a roll call vote, all Commissioners voted. Motion carried.

APPOINTMENT OF AUDITING FIRM

In February, Treasurer Schmidt was informed of Miller Cooper Inc. LLC's decision to discontinue auditing government accounts. He subsequently issued a Request for Proposals to secure a new audit firm. Three firms responded and Lauterbach Amen submitted the most competitive bid. After consulting with other organizations that utilize their services, he received favorable feedback.

Vice President Jaffe asked what the current cost was and Mr. Schmidt said \$58,000. The cost for Lauterbach Amen will be \$33,600 for fiscal year 2026, \$34,900 for fiscal year 2027 and \$36,300 for fiscal year 2028.

Commissioner Williams moved to approve a three-year contract for audit services with Lauterbach Amen, beginning May 1, 2026, through fiscal year ending 2028. Vice President Jaffe seconded the motion. On a roll call vote, all Commissioners voted aye. Motion carried.

APPROVAL OF NATURAL GAS PURCHASE CONTRACT

Treasurer Schmidt requested approval of the natural gas purchase contract as the current agreement with IGS Energy expires on October 1, 2026.

EraNova Partners gathered quotes on fixed gas prices for the District's eleven facilities that use natural gas. Mansfield Energy submitted a fixed rate of \$0.4226 per dekatherm (dth) beginning in October 2026 and currently the cost has been \$0.441 per dth. Mr. Schmidt said Nicor delivers the gas.

Vice President Jaffe moved to approve a three-year purchase contract for natural gas supply with Mansfield Energy beginning October 1, 2026, for all eleven facilities of the Skokie Park District at a fixed rate cost of \$0.4226 per dth. Commissioner Kasalo-Terihaj seconded the motion. On a roll call vote, all Commissioners voted aye. Motion carried.

APPROVAL OF PLAYGROUND EQUIPMENT PURCHASE FOR EMERSON PARK

Mr. Guynn requested approval to purchase playground equipment for Emerson Park. Funding is through a \$250,000 Community Block and Development Grant from the Village of Skokie. The project deadline is July 8, 2026.

Commissioner Kasalo-Terihaj moved to approve the purchase of Emerson Park playground equipment from Burke for \$151,047. Commissioner Williams seconded the motion. On a roll call vote, all Commissioners voted aye. Motion carried.

APPROVAL OF EMERSON PARK PLAYGROUND EQUIPMENT REMOVAL AND INSTALLATION

Mr. Guynn requested approval of the bid to remove and install playground equipment at Emerson Park. Two bids were received, with Innovation Landscaping presenting the lowest bid at \$66,547.70. After conducting reference checks, staff is comfortable recommending Innovation Landscaping.

Commissioner Fischer moved to approve the bid from Innovation Landscaping for the Emerson park playground removal and installation for \$66,547.70. Commissioner Kasalo-Terihaj seconded the motion. On a roll call vote, all Commissioners voted aye. Motion carried.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

The next regular and annual board meetings will be held Tuesday, May 12, 2026, at 6:30 p.m.

COMMISSIONER'S COMMENTS

Commissioner Fischer said staff did a great job at Spring Greening.

President Aberman said the employee appreciation dinner was fun, and it looked like staff really enjoyed it. Commissioner Williams said it was nice to see the employee recognition.

DIRECTOR'S COMMENTS

Ms. Tuft reminded the board that Arbor Day planting is this Friday at 1:40 p.m. at Elizabeth Meyers School.

OLD BUSINESS

Ms. Tuft raised the possibility of including the purchase of the Bessie Rhodes School property in the referendum and asked if the board wished to pursue it. The next step is to contact the school district for pricing; if affordable, the purchase and renovation could be added to the referendum. The total cost is estimated at ten million dollars. Public input will be sought, and the referendum's term would extend from 20 to 25 years.

Vice President Jaffe asked when this would be approved and Ms. Tuft said the board would officially decide on pursuing the referendum at the July board meeting, with the


referendum in November 2026. The board consensus was to move forward with contacting the school district.

NEW BUSINESS

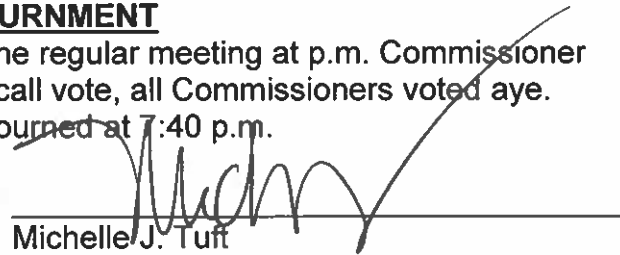
Commissioner Fischer informed the commissioners of an IAPD training in Wilmette on September 17. Ms. Tuft will send the information to the board, and they should let her know if they are interested in attending.

ADJOURNMENT

Vice President Jaffe moved to adjourn the regular meeting at p.m. Commissioner Fischer seconded the motion. On a roll call vote, all Commissioners voted aye. Motion carried. The regular meeting adjourned at 7:40 p.m.



Susan Aberman
President



Michelle J. Tuft
Secretary

May 12, 2026