Park Board Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, November 4, 2026
2:00 p.m.

4481 Gibbs Road
Danville, IN 46122

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 2:01 p.m.

Board Present: Brad Eisenhart, President
Vicky Byarley (arrived at 2:19 p.m.)
Gary Emsweller
Paul Miner
Jeff Pell

Board Absent: Mike Hayden, Vice President
Matt Freije, Secretary

Staff Present: Ryan Lemley, Superintendent
Avery Tyler, Park Manager
Patty Seymour, Administrative Assistant

Guests: Ted Baggesen

A. CALENDAR

A-1. Adopt Agenda

Miner moved to adopt the agenda; seconded by Pell, the motion passed unanimously.

A-2. Approval of Minutes of August 5, 2026, Park Board Meeting

Following the media report the Park Board returned to consider the August 5, 2026 meeting minutes for approval. **Byarley moved to approve the minutes; seconded by Pell, the motion passed unanimously.**

A-3. Approval of Minutes of September 2, 2026, Park Board Meeting

Approval of September 2, 2026 meeting minutes were tabled due to an insufficient quorum of Board members who had been present at that meeting.

A-4. Approval of Minutes of October 7, 2026, Park Board Meeting

A correction was discussed by changing the reference for the month in connection with traffic counters. **Miner moved to approve October 7, 2026 Park Board Meeting Minutes as corrected; seconded by Emsweller, the motion passed unanimously.**

B. PUBLIC HEARINGS/PRESENTATIONS

B-1. Public Comments

Ted Baggesen, an incoming board member whose term begins in January 2027, attended as a guest and introduced himself. Ted described a longstanding interest in outdoor recreation, including Grand Canyon hiking and rafting, extended camping trips, and climbing Kilimanjaro with his wife. He continues to visit county and state parks with his family and enjoys kayaking. He lives near Hazelwood, has approximately 30 years of experience in distribution and warehouse operations, and has expressed an interest in contributing to the park system. The Board welcomed his attendance before the start of his term.

Lemley relayed a request from Rachel Phillips concerning a memorial bench and reported that information had been provided. Ms. Phillips also complimented the McCloud maintenance crew, noting that employees are regularly working before her early morning visits.

C. CONTINUED BUSINESS

C-1. McCloud Nature Park – Romtec Vault Privy

Lemley reported that the Hendricks County Community Foundation had approved direct funding through the Harlos fund for a Romtec vault restroom on the north side of McCloud Nature Park. Funding allocations were $80,000 for the facility purchase and $80,000 for installation. The facility purchase was processed through Sourcewell with a 5 percent discount. Delivery was listed at $11,682 in the schedule of values. The Foundation approval letter and the vendor schedule of values were included in the Board packet. The schedule described how the Foundation would be billed. Lemley explained that the facility would ship from the West Coast, contributing to the delivery cost. The facility cost was discussed as approximately $76,000, within the $80,000 purchase allocation; an exact final purchase amount was not confirmed during the discussion.

The Harlos fund was described as an invested bequest associated with the former owners of land now comprising the northern portion of the park. Members noted that the lack of a restroom in that area requires a lengthy walk to existing facilities. The new restroom would serve both visitors and staff working on that side of the property.

Lemley and Seymour are completing the vendor process. Local installation contractors will be contacted as details are finalized. Delivery is anticipated for early spring 2027, with installation dependent on soil conditions. Service access will be available from the opposite side of the closed road rather than over the truss bridge. Lemley reported that the Romtec process was in its second stage. Installation planning and contractor contact would proceed over the next several months, with bids or pricing anticipated from local contractors.

In response to a question about pumping and service access, Lemley stated that a grass path would allow access from the opposite direction despite the road closure. Service vehicles would not cross the truss bridge.

An on-site sewage application had been submitted to the state for the manufactured, contained vault privy. Lemley has not received the state's response to date. The County Health Department indicated that soil samples might be required, although the facility would not use a septic drainfield. Lemley anticipated that further review might be delegated to the County Health Department, but this had not been confirmed at this time.

D. NEW BUSINESS

D-1. Eastern Expansion of the Vandalia Trail (phase II) – Bid Packet

Lemley requested authorization to advertise and solicit bids for the approximately two-mile expansion from Clayton west toward Amo. Funding identified included a $994,000 Land and Water Conservation Fund grant and $1 million from the County Council. The engineer's estimate included a 10 percent contingency.

Lemley outlined remaining review steps: a Drainage Board presentation on November 10th, zoning and planning review on November 16th for the parking area off County Road 500 South, and a pre-bid meeting on November 18th at the Government Center. Landscaping was requested to screen vehicle headlights from neighboring properties. Lemley explained that the Drainage Board review was being requested in addition to the anticipated DNR floodway permit, following earlier flooding concerns involving the Coatesville sewage treatment plant from the initial Vandalia Trail installation project. A brief presentation is planned. The Board of Zoning Appeals and Planning and Building Department review concerned the proposed parking area in which they requested landscaping to screen headlights from neighboring properties when vehicles are parked after dark.

Lemley explained that, pending Park Board approval, bids will be due December 1st, presented to the Board on December 2nd, and taken under advisement for a potential award at the January meeting. Advertising is planned for The Republican following formal Park Board approval. **Emsweller moved to authorize formal advertising and solicitation of bids for the Vandalia Trail Eastern Expansion Phase II project; seconded by Miner, the motion passed unanimously.**

Lemley reported that the Amo Town Planner had advised that two properties along the uncompleted connection might be offered for sale. The Board discussed renewing acquisition efforts once construction was underway and noted previous work with multiple acquisition firms.

For Ted Baggessen's background, the Vandalia corridor was described as part of a larger, incrementally developed trail route extending from Terre Haute toward the eastern side of Indiana. The county's ultimate segment was described as approximately eight miles within a broader route of approximately 157 miles.

D-2. 2027 Park Board Meeting Schedule

Seymour prepared the proposed 2027 schedule using the department's established practice of meeting on the first Wednesday of each month at 2:00 p.m. at W.S. Gibbs Memorial Park main office. Staff reported no holiday conflicts with the proposed dates. Members supported continuing the longstanding schedule. **Miner moved to approve the proposed 2027 meeting schedule; seconded by Pell, the motion passed unanimously.**

E. PROPERTY UPDATES

E-1. McCloud Nature Park

Lemley reported that the Fall Colors Festival drew an estimated 1,625 attendees, and recognized the naturalist and maintenance teams, volunteers, vendors, and Boy Scout Troop 301, which camped overnight before the event. Hay wagon ride donations totaled $513.70. A staff debriefing is planned to review the event. Lemley described the festival as one of the strongest attended in recent years. Vehicle queues extended well beyond the car counter, requiring staff traffic control. Michelle Eisenhart was recognized for volunteering throughout the day, and Gary Emsweller was thanked for lending his tractor wagon to the department for the wagon hayrides. The planned debrief will identify improvements to event operations and traffic management.

Lemley reported that the Parks Foundation awarded $3,000 toward a $10,000 request to refresh the

Nature Center taxidermy displays. The current proposal totaled approximately $10,700, leaving $7,700 in additional funding to be evaluated against the budget. The award was smaller than requested because of competition for Foundation funding. Staff will review which taxidermy pieces to purchase and which to defer, with attention to replacing displays that are no longer presented well. Lemley will review available funds with Ivie after he returns from the conference before approving or declining individual requests. Pell suggested asking taxidermy businesses about unclaimed specimens as another possible source.

Lemley informed the Park Board that maintenance work over the past month included replacement of the boardwalk along Smallmouth Run Trail, work on playground equipment and deteriorating nature playground logs, as well as installation of a small canoe and kayak launch near the lower parking lot. It was agreed to announce the canoe and kayak launch opening when it is complete. Lemley added that the emergency maintenance hotline has helped address issues promptly. As examples of the maintenance hotline's usefulness, Lemley cited a continuously running drinking fountain at McCloud that had been reported on a weekend and a separate issue reported at Gibbs Park the previous week. Staff will continue to monitor how the hotline is used.

Lemley reported that the wetland enhancement work will be paused because regulatory closeout documentation had not been obtained from the engineering office. Project plans and a manual are available, but staff want to avoid undertaking work that could require remediation. Lemley noted that some small wetland areas are functioning appropriately, while sediment appeared to affect the area around the wetland boardwalk. The wetland project was described as having originally cost approximately $600,000. Ivie had obtained the project manual and construction plans, but the engineering office did not have the requested regulatory closeout documentation. Lemley expressed concern about undertaking alterations without an adequate understanding of the project's regulatory status. The history of the wetland mitigation work, the apparent lack of monitoring and closeout, and whether additional spending would provide sufficient benefit were discussed. It was stated that creek bank stabilization had worked well. The area around the wetland boardwalk remained a concern, and replacement of the boardwalk would depend on the feasibility of future wetland improvements.

TRAFx counters documented 2,986 vehicles visiting McCloud Nature Park this month.

E-2. Vandalia Trail

With department approval, the Town of Coatesville removed a large, deteriorated maple tree near the restroom after significant rot was identified.

Lemley informed the Board that he had discussed ongoing restroom vandalism with Coatesville police. The Officer requested photographs and documentation before graffiti is removed so police can preserve evidence. Staff acknowledged the need to remove obscene material promptly while coordinating documentation with the police department. Lemley reported receiving confirmation from the police department that the security cameras were operational but had not received confirmation that a suspect had been identified.

Lemley reported that the trailhead restrooms are scheduled to close and will be winterized on November 23rd before holiday staffing interruptions and possible freezing weather. The restrooms must close by December 1st per permitting requirements.

Lemley informed the Park Board that the Amo Park Board installed an accessible picnic table at the Amo trailhead.

Maintenance staff re-striped parking area and restored a donated bench near the Putnam County line. The bench plaque had been vandalized so staff routed the wording directly into the bench planks and reinstalled the bench. Park Board member, Paul Miner, thanked Tyler for the restoration, as he was the one who originally purchased the bench before donating it to the department.

TRAFx counters documented 1,850 individuals using the trail this month.

E-3. W.S. Gibbs Memorial Park

Septic installation for the new Welcome Center building began at the beginning of the week, following state and local approvals, after an approximately seven-month approval process. The local health department promptly reviewed elevations and issued its approval. Most of the drainfield finger system was in place. Lemley emphasized the importance of completing the drainfield work before seasonal conditions worsened. Patterson-Horth is expected to begin concrete footers the following week, and weekly construction meetings will resume. Lemley reported unsuccessful earlier efforts to obtain a waiver of the Avon building permit fee and reported permit fees were $1,305 to Avon and $226 to the Washington Township Fire Department.

Two Market in the Park events, including the Fall Hallows Market, each drew approximately 250 attendees. It was discussed how the new facility, parking area, and classroom could support the markets and other programming and expect event demand and operating needs to become clearer after the building is open to the public.

The maintenance team installed hardwired pond aeration in Bluegill pond. The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Fish and Wildlife re-stocked 343 eight-inch channel catfish. Park Manager Tyler managed the aeration startup over the first week to allow the fish to acclimate. Staff learned that channel catfish stocking had been occurring annually, although the department had not routinely received notice. An electro-fishing survey planned for June 2027 will evaluate bass and panfish populations. For background information, staff recalled original stocking of approximately 2,500 largemouth bass, more than 10,000 bluegill and redear sunfish, and 200 channel catfish; the bass and panfish were smaller when stocked.

A crushed-stone connector from the Bicentennial Tree Trail to the maintenance hub was being installed using Parks Foundation funding. Approximately $10,000 remained in that account, with remaining funds intended for replacement trees, likely in spring 2027. The connector follows a route already used by staff. After the crushed-stone work, the remaining Foundation funds will support replacement trees. Staff plans to assess additional tree losses after the deer rut season before undertaking replacement planting.

Lemley shared a statewide DNR avian influenza notice for informational purposes.

TRAFx counters recorded 6,462 vehicles visiting W.S. Gibbs Memorial Park this month.

Lemley explained that Gibbs and McCloud vehicle counts are multiplied by 2.13 to estimate attendance, while Vandalia Trail counters record individual trail users. Magnetometers count vehicles entering McCloud Nature Park and Gibbs Memorial Park, while an infrared counter records people passing on the Vandalia Trail. It was questioned whether the historic 2.13-person multiplier might understate family attendance.

F. REPORTS

F-1. Superintendent Report

Lemley reported that Chase Hadley will be hired as a part-time assistant naturalist, with an anticipated November 16th start date with background screening being initiated. The schedule will be 28 hours weekly over four days. Lemley reminded the Board that the County Council and Human Resources authorized the available 2026 part-time salary funds for the remainder of the year. With the new hire, the naturalist team will include two full-time employees and two part-time employees, in which Lemley considers the department fully staffed for current needs. Limited overtime had previously been approved for full-time naturalists during the busy preceding month. Lemley emphasized that part-time employees must remain within their allotted hours.

Future staffing needs for the Gibbs Welcome Center will be evaluated after operations begin. Staff discussed a potential event or host position, which would require a job description and subsequent approvals if pursued. Lemley, Ivie, and Seymour had discussed several operating scenarios, but staffing projections will depend on actual reservations, rental activity, and programming during the first year. Lemley clarified that the new Welcome Center will have limited exhibits and a classroom rather than a full Nature Center.

Micromobility signs had been received for posting at all three properties.

Two snowplows were transferred from the Facilities Department through the Commissioners.

The 2027 Summer Fun Run schedule was finalized and includes all three properties.

Lemley reported that the Bobcat skid steer required repairs costing approximately $2,056. The breakdown occurred during work on the canoe and kayak launch. Tyler explored a wiring harness repair, but professional service and calibration were required. Maintenance staff transported the machine to Bobcat of North Indy on a trailer, avoiding a field service visit. Lemley emphasized the need to keep it operational both for ongoing work and for its eventual disposal value. An $80,000 budget line is available for replacement in 2027.

Staff are finalizing *The Explorer* publication content with the graphic designer. Ivie, Seymour, and the naturalist team expect to complete the publication work over the following month.

F-2. Budget Report

Lemley reported no major budget concerns. Approximately $900,000 in food and beverage funds for the new Gibbs Welcome Center had been spent primarily on purchased construction supplies. Construction materials had been purchased and stored on site or held by vendors. Electrical materials were reported to be on site.

Lemley explained that unused part-time salary funds resulted from employee absences, vacations, and appointments. Those available funds will cover Chase Hadley's November and December employment with the reported authorizations.

Staff will prepare year-end encumbrance requests and evaluate necessary budget transfers. The disposition of remaining land acquisition funds will be considered in light of the Vandalia Trail Phase II project and the Gibbs Welcome Center building needs before recommending a course of action at the next meeting. Lemley and Ivie plan to consolidate supporting documentation into two or three larger encumbrance requests. Lemley explained that the County Council can permit funding for documented, planned projects to carry into the following year through the encumbrance process.

No budget transfer or encumbrance approval was recorded during this discussion.

F-3. Media Report

Lemley reviewed social media performance with the Board. The Fall Hallows Market and Fall Colors Festival generated strong interest, and the naturalist team was recognized for its program promotion efforts.

ADJOURNMENT

With no additional business to come before the Board, Miner moved to adjourn the meeting at 2:44 p.m., seconded by Pell; the motion passed unanimously.

The next regularly scheduled Park Board meeting will be held on Wednesday, December 2, 2026, at 2:00 p.m. at the Gibbs Homestead located at 4481 Gibbs Road, Danville, IN 46122.

Respectfully Submitted,

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Brad Eisenhart, President