



Inver Grove Heights Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee

Wednesday, September 10, 2025 at 7:00 PM

8150 Barbara Avenue, Inver Grove Heights, MN 55077

AGENDA

1. **Call to Order**
2. **Roll Call**
3. **Presentations**
 - A. Al Vandehoef, Recreation Coordinator - Active Older Adult Programming
4. **Announcements**
 - A. Annual Commissioner Appreciation Dinner — Tuesday, September 23, 2025, 5:00–8:00 pm. Location — South Valley Park Shelter
 - B. October Meeting – Wednesday, October 8, 2025, at 7:00 pm
 - C. November Work Session – Wednesday, November 12, 2025, at 5pm
5. **Consent Agenda**

All items on the Consent Agenda are considered routine and have been made available to the Commission at least two days prior to the meeting; the items will be enacted in one motion. There will be no separate discussion of these items unless a Commission member or citizen so requests, in which event the item will be removed from this Agenda and considered in normal sequence.

 - A. Approval of Agenda
 - B. Approve Minutes from August 13, 2025, Meeting
6. **Public Comment**

Public comment provides an opportunity for the public to address the Commission on items that are not on the agenda. Comments will be limited to three (3) minutes per person.
7. **Unfinished Business**

Items that are brought back to the Commission for action from a previous meeting
8. **Regular Agenda**
 - A. Angel of Hope Memorial
 - B. Sleepy Hollow Park – Proposed 2026 CIP (Playground Replacement)
9. **Administrative Presentations**
 - A. Parks Superintendent Update
 - B. Recreation Superintendent Update
 - C. Parks and Recreation Director Update
10. **Commission Comments**

September 10, 2025 - Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee Agenda

11. **Adjourn**



**Parks & Recreation Advisory Commission
Staff Report**

SUBJECT: Approve Minutes from August 13, 2025, Meeting

MEETING DATE: September 10, 2025

ITEM TYPE: Consent Agenda

CONTACT:

PURPOSE/ACTION REQUESTED

BACKGROUND

FISCAL IMPACT

RECOMMENDATION

ATTACHMENTS

1. August 13 2025 Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission Meeting Mts (1)

**Inver Grove Heights
Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission
City Hall Council Chambers- 8150 Barbara Avenue
Wednesday, August 13, 2025 - 7:00 p.m.**

1. CALL TO ORDER:

Chair Cook called the August 13, 2025 Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission Meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL:

Present: Chair Steve Cook; Commissioners: Bill Skar, Luisa Torres, Sandy Christensen, Tracy Mulcahy, Niki Barker, Abby Heidenreich, Lukas Johnson

Absent: Commissioner Kurt Stangler

Others Present: Parks and Recreation Director Adam Lares, Parks Superintendent Brian Swoboda, Recreation Superintendent Julie Dorshak

3. PRESENTATIONS:

A. Recognition of Commission Terms for Wilfred Krech and Benjamin Stone

Parks and Recreation Director Lares thanked the two outgoing commissioners for their contributions – Ben Stone for his attention to biking opportunities and his careful consideration of issues; and Willie Krech for his many years of service, valuable institutional memory, focus on recreational opportunities for young people, and pragmatism/persistence in creating new parks. Chair Cook and the current commissioners also thanked Commissioners Stone and Krech for their dedication.

Commissioner Stone and Commissioner Krech thanked the City staff and other commissioners.

Commissioner Stone complimented the City's Parks and Recreation department and the number and quality of the parks.

Commissioner Krech spoke about the value of getting involved; his proudest accomplishments, including the Rock Island Swing Bridge preservation and his involvement with the passage of a state law to ensure that money designated for parks not be reallocated; and his hopes for future parks projects, including a band shelter.

B. Mississippi River Greenway Natural Resource Management Plan – Tom Lewanski, Dakota County

Dakota County Parks Natural Resources Manager Lewanski presented relevant aspects of the Final Draft of the Mississippi River Greenway Natural Resource Management Plan and invited comments, questions, and suggestions through August 28.

The Mississippi River Greenway is a 28-mile paved hiking/bike trail that follows the river from South St. Paul to Hastings. There is a plan (currently in the preliminary design stage) to extend the Greenway to the Goodhue County border (9.5 additional miles).

He highlighted two plan objectives: gaining a better understanding of the existing condition of Mississippi River Greenway's natural areas and guiding restoration activities.

He discussed one Priority Features of the Greenway: habitat connectivity to other existing corridors and high biodiversity sites helps species move through the landscape.

The Plan also covers Primary Issues -- challenges (such as invasive species) along the Mississippi River Greenway and ways to manage them.

He mentioned that restoration activities are planned with an understanding of pre-settlement vegetation. Biological surveys indicate that most of Dakota County was oak savanna and prairie. He estimated that only 1.5% of that original land cover remains today due to farmland conversion, development, and alteration of fire/flood regimes. Sometimes, it is more cost-effective to manage an area as forest, rather than trying to recreate it as a prairie, due to these altered natural cycles.

He noted one endangered species that uses the Mississippi River Greenway as critical habitat – the rusty-patched bumblebee.

He also discussed 8 Natural Area Nodes in Inver Grove Heights (of 22 total nodes along the Greenway), including Heritage Village/Rock Island Swing Bridge Park, Dehrer Park, Ernster Park, River Front Park, Pine Bend Bluffs Scientific and Natural Area, and Flint Hills Resources.

Using the Rock Island Swing Bridge Natural Area Node as an example of the information detailed in the plan, he discussed that the target plant communities for that node are southern dry prairie and savanna. The plan contains cost estimates and sources of funding (state and federal grants) for restoration activities associated with creating these target plant communities.

Implementation will be managed via Joint Powers Agreements, which lay out funding schemes. These will be approved by the County Board as well as local governing bodies. The Mississippi River Greenway Natural Resource Management Plan is currently in a public comment period; the next step (after comments are incorporated) is to bring the Plan to the County Board in October for adoption.

Chair Cook asked how the public has been invited to comment.

Dakota County Parks Natural Resources Manager Lewanski said that the draft is posted on the Dakota County website and comments are welcome via email.

Chair Cook asked why oak savannas are fire dependent plant communities.

Dakota County Parks Natural Resources Manager Lewanski said that lightning-caused fires and management fires set by indigenous people in the area maintained about 80% of Dakota County as prairie and oak savanna. Oaks have thicker bark, which protects them from fire. There are not many oak savannas remaining in Minnesota because they were easy to convert to farmland (compared to big woods).

Commissioner Torres asked how Dakota County works with the City of Inver Grove Heights on restoration projects.

Dakota County Parks Natural Resources Manager Lewanski said that he regularly meets with Inver Grove Heights Parks and Recreation staff as part of Dakota County's Land Conservation Program

and its City-County Conservation Collaborative. He noted that cities without dedicated natural resource staff rely more on the County to manage restoration projects. He also mentioned that he is currently working with the County Attorney to bundle adjacent restoration projects along the river corridor into one Joint Powers Agreement, and that funding is in place to begin restoration projects along the Greenway soon.

Parks and Recreation Director Lares added that there are existing Joint Powers Agreements for the Greenway.

Dakota County Parks Natural Resources Manager Lewanski invited further questions via email.

C. Parks and Recreation Communication and Marketing Update – Olivia Skelton, Communications Specialist

Communications Specialist Skelton presented her strategies, priorities, and recent successes in increasing awareness of and engagement with Parks and Recreation programming.

She uses a digital-first strategy, aims for plain-language communication, and showcases the work involved in local government -- balancing important updates with fun and people-centered content.

Print communications include the recreation brochure and Insights newsletter.

Digital communications include the City website, social media, and the Highway 52 billboard.

She mentioned that part of her work is to ensure consistency of messaging from Parks and Recreation as well as the Veterans Memorial Community Center.

Over the past year, the Parks and Recreation Department's presence on social media platforms has seen growth. Communications Specialist Skelton noted that most people engaging on social media are women ages 35 to 65. She noted that over 270,000 people were reached on Facebook in the last year and a half and highlighted a few popular posts and some Google Business reviews of the Veterans Memorial Community Center.

One Commissioner mentioned that she had seen and appreciated the staff outfit videos recorded to promote a Member Appreciation Week 80s-themed fitness class.

Communications Specialist Skelton also manages the lighting of the Rock Island Swing Bridge, which has daily 5-minute light shows every 15 minutes from dusk to 10 p.m.

Commissioner Skar asked about creating a Parks and Recreation presence on TikTok.

Communications Specialist Skelton said that it would involve a significant time investment to do well and mentioned that there is already TikTok-style content (short, engaging videos) on the Department's social media platforms.

Parks and Recreation Director Lares said that Communications Specialist Skelton's efforts have led to growth in Parks programming and usage of Veterans Memorial Community Center, and he said that having a dedicated communications person in the department is very helpful. He commended her ability to work independently and execute ideas.

Chair Cook asked if support is available from other staff in the Parks and Recreation Department.

Communications Specialist Skelton said yes; staff have been very helpful and amenable to participating in ideas.

4. ANNOUNCEMENTS:

- A. Annual Commissioner Appreciation Dinner – Tuesday, September 23, 2025 – 5:00 to 8:00 pm at South Valley Park Shelter
- B. Next Regular Meeting - Wednesday, September 10, 2025 - 7:00 pm

5. CONSENT AGENDA:

- A. Approval of Agenda
- B. Approval of the Minutes from June 11, 2025 Meeting

Motion by Commissioner Barker, second by Commissioner Christensen, to approve the June Minutes and the Consent Agenda.

Ayes: 8

Nays: 0 Motion carried.

6. PUBLIC COMMENT:

There was no public comment.

7. UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

There was no unfinished business.

8. REGULAR AGENDA:

- A. PRAC 2025 Sub-Committee Assignments

With the departure of two commissioners and the appointment of two new members to the Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission (PRAC), there are now vacancies on several subcommittees.

Commissioner Barker asked about the work remaining for the Heritage Village Park Development subcommittee.

Parks and Recreation Director Lares said there is the sixth and final phase, and additional issues may come up in the future; that subcommittee could be called on to address items as needed.

Commissioner Torres expressed interest in the Parks & Recreation Systems Plan RFP Development subcommittee

Commissioner Johnson expressed interest in the Recreation Programs & Community Engagement subcommittee.

Commissioner Torres asked about the commitment involved in serving on the Northwest Area Park Development subcommittee.

Parks and Recreation Director Lares said it was difficult to estimate but said Commissioner Torres could be added later.

This resulted in the following subcommittee assignments:

- Heritage Village Park Development: Barker, Cook, Mulcahy, Skar
- Northwest Area Park Development: Christensen, Heidenreich, Stangler
- Parks & Recreation Systems Plan RFP Development: Barker, Cook, Stangler, Torres
- Rich Valley Park Master Plan – Southwest Area: Barker, Christensen, Heidenreich, Mulcahy
- Recreation Programs & Community Engagement (newly added): Cook, Mulcahy, Skar, Johnson

Parks and Recreation Director Lares said he would work with each subcommittee on scheduling and that the entire Parks and Recreation Commission would be updated on the outcome of subcommittee work.

9. ADMINISTRATIVE PRESENTATIONS

A. Department Happenings

1. Recreation Superintendent Update

Recreation Superintendent Dorshak updated the Commission on the following:

- The Veterans Memorial Community Center and Parks and Recreation Department are now fully staffed. Recent hires include:
 - Denzel Flowers, Aquatics Program Supervisor, has a background in hospitality management and communications and extensive experience with water safety from prior roles as Park Operations Manager at Valley Fair and Great Wolf Lodge in addition to risk management consulting
 - Amber Adam, Aquatics Specialist, has worked for the City for four years training lifeguards. She helped with the transition period during hiring for the Aquatics Program Supervisor position.
- The process of selecting a new facility scheduling software continues
 - A recent software demo is preferred because program participants could scan a barcode to check in efficiently (instead of staff having to find names on a roster)
- Staff recently visited six local indoor playgrounds (per direction from City Council in June) to gather information on cleaning, rates, management, design, materials, HVAC, etc., to guide planning and design work on the indoor playground project
 - Construction is currently slated for the first or second quarter of 2026
 - Estimated costs are higher than the amount earmarked by City Council, but there may be savings from maintenance items that can be deferred to future years that could be used to help fund the project
 - The playground design will come before PRAC for feedback and comments, then go to the Council for approval
- Summer programs
 - Parks and Recreation involvement in IGH Days includes Bike the Bridges, Disc Golf Tournament, and participation in the parade
 - Food Fest at Rich Valley, August 15, 4:00 to 8:00 p.m.
 - The Kids R.O.C.K. program is winding down – 153 participants, 70-80 kids attending daily
 - Totals for summer programming: 318 programs with 2,000+ participants
- Fall brochure is out – registration for 294 Fall programs will be opening shortly
- Inver Grove Heights lifeguards recently took first place in the MRPA Aquatics Competition. Staff members Amber, Noah, and Eric volunteered their time to help prepare City lifeguards.

- Minnesota Recreation and Park Association Aquatics Facility Managers hold this competition annually – 19 teams participated from across the state.
- Each team handled scenarios with multiple crises occurring at once and was judged for timeliness and appropriateness of their response.

Chair Cook commended Recreation Superintendent Dorshak for her and her staff's work.

2. Parks Superintendent Update

Parks Superintendent Swoboda updated the Commission on the following:

- Ribbon-cutting for the Archery Range was successful – it is now open to the public
- Crews have been working on maintaining athletic fields, adjusting irrigation based on weather, helping run tournaments at Rich Valley, and cleaning picnic areas
- Crews have also been busy with inspecting playgrounds, trimming trees, landscaping/mulching beds, and applying fertilizer in City parks
- Heritage Village Phase 5 work has begun
 - The playground equipment should be installed within a week
 - Forms are set for concrete work – completion estimated mid-September
 - Overall, the project is on schedule to open in spring 2026
- Trail work continues at Arbor Pointe
- Groveland Ballfield Restoration completed
- Goats are now on the Sliding Hill at South Valley
- Seasonal Staff will be leaving through the end of the month

Commissioner Christensen asked about two parks being vandalized.

Parks Superintendent Swoboda said no one was caught, but police reports were filed.

Commissioner Torres mentioned that people were setting off fireworks in Oakwood Park in early July and asked about increasing police presence in parks leading up to July 4 in the future.

Commissioner Barker said police are generally active in Oakwood Park.

Parks Superintendent Swoboda said police know that they need to spend extra time in parks on holidays. He commented that all the parks were a mess after the 4th of July.

Chair Cook commended Parks staff on the Archery Range.

3. Parks and Recreation Director Update

Parks and Recreation Director Lares updated the Commission on the following:

- Angel of Hope Park consideration is underway – currently gathering feedback from neighboring communities, then will do a presentation to the Commission
- Sleepy Hollow playground replacement being planned – will gather feedback from community using a similar process as past park playground replacements'

Parks and Recreation Director Lares thanked all staff, Commissioners, and Council for the pride and passion they bring to their work. He noted that there are close to a million users of Inver Grove

Heights parks and facilities annually, including 500,000 people annually in the Veterans Memorial Community Center and 80,000 to 90,000 rounds of golf played in a typical season. He mentioned that 43 full-time positions as well as 150-350 seasonal part-time staff make this possible.

Chair Cook asked about going to look at nearby Angel of Hope parks in Woodbury, Eagan, and/or Maple Grove.

Parks and Recreation Director Lares said he had not seen them, but he had received photos; a field trip will be useful in the future.

Chair Cook asked about the status of efforts to acquire property for a future park.

Parks and Recreation Director Lares said there were negotiations underway, but nothing to report at this time.

10. COMMISSION COMMENTS:

Commissioner Barker said she hoped everyone enjoyed the rest of summer.

Commissioner Johnson thanked Parks and Recreation staff for their efforts.

Commissioner Torres said she was a big user of City parks and appreciates all the effort behind making them beautiful.

Commissioner Skar said his child is in a swim class and his skills are improving noticeably.

11. ADJOURN:

Motion by Commissioner Christensen, second by Commissioner Mulcahy, to adjourn the meeting at 8:28 p.m.

Ayes: 8

Nays: 0 Motion carried.

Minutes prepared by Recording Secretary Wilfred Clashe



**Parks & Recreation Advisory Commission
Staff Report**

SUBJECT: **Angel of Hope Memorial**

MEETING DATE: September 10, 2025

ITEM TYPE: Regular Agenda

CONTACT: Adam Lares, Parks & Recreation Director, 651.450.2587

PURPOSE/ACTION REQUESTED

The Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission is asked to provide a recommendation to the City Council on whether to support the installation of an Angel of Hope Memorial within the City’s park system. If the Commission recommends proceeding, it is further asked to advise on the preferred park location, the general scope and design of the memorial space, and potential funding approaches.

BACKGROUND

At its May 2025 regular meeting, the Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission (PRAC) received a public presentation from a resident proposing the installation of an Angel of Hope memorial within the City’s park system. In response, the Commission directed staff to schedule a future work session to further explore the concept.

Since that time, staff have conducted preliminary research and contacted other cities with existing Angel of Hope memorials, including Maple Grove, Duluth, and Woodbury, to better understand their planning, funding, and implementation processes.

On July 30, during a scheduled PRAC work session, staff presented research findings and outlined the various approaches taken by other communities in establishing their memorials. Following the discussion, the Commission requested additional information regarding requirements for plaques on the base of the memorial statue and how other cities have addressed those requirements.

Staff have since completed this additional research and will provide the PRAC with a high-level presentation summarizing the initial findings from the work session along with the requested follow-up information.

FISCAL IMPACT

At this time, there is no direct fiscal impact. If the PRAC recommends funding for the project, it may also recommend that the City Council allocate resources for a portion of the memorial statue and/or site landscaping. The current estimated cost of the Angel of Hope statue is approximately \$19,000; this does not include the base or any site construction within the park. Those costs would depend on the scope and design of the memorial space and would need to be estimated once a design is selected.

If the statue is donated to the City, the PRAC would request that the donation follow the process outlined in the City’s Memorial Monument Policy, which requires the proposed donation to return to

the PRAC for review and recommendation to the Council. See attached Memorial Policy for reference.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission provide a recommendation to the City Council on whether to support or deny the installation of an Angel of Hope Memorial within the City's park system. If the Commission supports proceeding, it is further asked to identify a preferred park location, outline the general scope and design, and suggest potential funding approaches.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Final Approved - Donation and Memorial Policy (4.11.2022)

City of Inver Grove Heights
Park Donation and Memorial Policy

The City welcomes donations that enhance public spaces, facilities and parks. There are also several options for individuals, businesses, civic groups, and others wishing to memorialize or pay tribute to an individual in a manner that supports the City. All donations are subject to final approval by the City Council, and the Council reserves the right to refuse any donations.

A. Donation Options

1. Memorial Trees

Individuals may pay for the cost of a tree to be planted in a City park as a living tribute that benefits present and future generations of park users. Trees will be planted and maintained by City staff. Donors may select from a list of trees approved by the City's Parks Superintendent, who will work with the donor to select appropriate placement within a City Park. Placement in a particular park will be subject to availability and is at the sole discretion of the City's Parks Superintendent. The cost of a memorial tree varies based on the species and size. Memorial plaques or markers are not permitted for tree donations. All donated trees are the property and responsibility of the City.

2. Memorial Benches

Individuals may pay for the cost of a memorial bench for placement within a City park. Donors may select from a list of approved benches provided by the Parks Superintendent. The cost of each bench varies depending on size and style selected. Donors will work with the City's Parks Superintendent to select appropriate park placement. Placement in a particular park will be subject to availability and is at the sole discretion of the City's Parks Superintendent. Benches may be engraved or come with a memorial plaque. The plaque location, size, materials, text and graphics shall be approved by the City's Parks Superintendent. All donated benches are the property and responsibility of the City.

3. Donation of Equipment or Park Amenities

Donations of equipment or other park amenities provide an opportunity for businesses, civic organizations, and individuals to support the City's parks by adding significant amenities to existing parks and enhancing the recreational opportunities for all. Individuals or groups interested in donating equipment or other park amenities, such as playground elements and park shelters should contact the City's Parks Superintendent to discuss options for such donations. All donated equipment and amenities are the property and responsibility of the City.

4. Donation of Permanent Monuments

Permanent monuments may be accepted for placement in City parks when recommended by the Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission and approved by the City Council. Donors should contact the Parks and Recreation Director to discuss the suitability of a proposed monument in advance. Permanent monuments shall only be accepted and placed in parks as a form of government speech; City parks are not open to the public as a forum for private speech in the form of permanent monument placement. The City Council has the sole authority to select the location where a donated monument will be installed. At a minimum, all monuments must be comprised of materials suitable for outdoor placement and of a size suitable for placement within a particular park or public open space. Accepted monuments will be installed by the City. All donated monuments become the property of the City upon acceptance. The City makes no representations regarding the length of time a donated item will be maintained or remain within the park where it is originally placed. The City reserves the right to remove donated monuments at any time.

5. Financial Contributions

Individuals seeking to support the City's parks with a financial contribution may make a monetary donation directly to the City via the Parks and Recreation Director for such use. Funds may be designated for approved park projects or capital improvements, or may be given as unrestricted funds for use as determined by the City Council.

B. Donation Review and Approval Process

Park staff will work with potential contributors regarding the donation process. Memorial trees and benches may be administratively accepted by the Parks Superintendent, subject to final approval by the City Council. All tree and bench donations shall be submitted to the City Council biannually for final acceptance by the City.

Proposed donations of permanent monuments, playground equipment, other park amenities, or permanent memorials (other than trees and benches) will be referred to the Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission (PRAC) for review for consistency with the City's Park Plans and any master plan for the individual park where the proposed equipment or other amenity will be located. The PRAC shall make a recommendation regarding acceptance of the proposed donation to the City Council. All donations are subject to formal acceptance by the City Council, and the Council reserves the right to refuse any donation. The City will not take possession of any permanent monument, playground equipment, or other park amenity prior formal Council acceptance.



**Parks & Recreation Advisory Commission
Staff Report**

SUBJECT: Sleepy Hollow Park – Proposed 2026 CIP (Playground Replacement)

MEETING DATE: September 10, 2025

ITEM TYPE: Regular Agenda

CONTACT: Adam Lares, Parks & Recreation Director, 651.450.2587

PURPOSE/ACTION REQUESTED

The Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission is asked to receive a presentation on the proposed 2026 Capital Improvement Plan project for the replacement of playground equipment at Sleepy Hollow Park.

BACKGROUND

In the proposed 2026–2030 Capital Improvements Plan (CIP) for park improvements, replacement of the playground equipment at Sleepy Hollow Park is included. This location was part of the PRAC’s July park tour, and the existing equipment, now more than 20 years old, has reached the end of its useful life.

Following the approach used for the 2025 CIP playground replacements at Southern Lakes and VMCC Park, staff began community engagement 7 months prior to installation to gather input on desired features for the new playground. On Tuesday, September 2, a survey was posted on the City’s website and promoted through social media to collect resident feedback on the planned replacement at Sleepy Hollow Park. The survey will remain open through September 23.

An on-site open house is scheduled for Tuesday, October 21, to provide another opportunity for community input. Residents in the neighborhood will also receive the postcard shown below, inviting their participation. Staff will present a high-level overview of the project timeline and engagement process to the Commission.

FISCAL IMPACT

Pending approval of the City Council’s 2026–2030 Capital Improvement Plan, the current allocation for the Sleepy Hollow Park playground equipment replacement is \$150,000 for the total project.

RECOMMENDATION

ATTACHMENTS

None