Park Board Meeting

July 20, 2026

Pursuant to due call and order, the Board of Park Commissioners, Dickinson Park District, met for a Park Board Budget Workshop at 3:30 pm on Monday, July 20, 2026, at the West River Community Center.

ROLL CALL: Commissioners Tim Daniel, Tyler Tucker, Zach Keller, Zach Jahner were present. Also, present were Executive Director/Clerk Benjamin Rae, Deputy Director Caleb Burgard, Director of Parks/Golf Maintenance Scott Mack, Finance/HR Manager Patty Riely, and Administrative Manager Leah Hoenke. Commissioner Nic Stevenson was absent.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE: The Pledge of Allegiance was given.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA: MOTION: Zach Keller; SECOND: Zach Jahner to approve agenda as presented. Roll call vote: Ayes-4; Nayes-0; Absent-1 (Stevenson). Motion carried.

BUDGET WORKSHOP:
Half Cent Sales Tax Review – Executive Director Benjamin Rae reviewed the half cent sales tax that was originally put into place for the creation of the West River Community Center. He showed the existing ordinance No. 1233. Because of the way it is written, we must request dollars when needed. If we don't request, the City has discretion over the funds, which can hurt us in our long-term planning. Director Rae said his plan is to jointly work together with the city to put together a proposal for adoption of a future 1 percent sales tax. This would repeal existing half cent sales tax and replace with a 1 percent sales tax. Director Rae stated that he met with City Administrator Dustin Dassinger on this and in principle they agree on what this looks like. The proposed ballot language states, **(a)** Three-tenths percent (0.3%) to the Dickinson Parks and Recreation District for the sole purpose of funding operations, maintenance, equipment, facilities, and capital improvements; **(b)** Two-tenths percent (0.2%) to the City of Dickinson for the sole purpose of funding quality of life improvements, which may include public amenities, community development projects, beautification, cultural and recreational facilities, and related capital improvements; **(c)** Five-tenths percent (0.5%) to the City of Dickinson for the sole purpose of funding public safety infrastructure and operations, including personnel, equipment, facilities, technology, and capital improvements. Director Rae said the sticking point is that he doesn't believe the City Commission wants to give up any control over dollars, which means if they don't, then we would give up the cooperative. Discussion followed on how many dollars make up the three tenths to the Park District. Director Rae explained that he has already asked for 1.5 million for 2027 and that is already in the City's budget. He said this this looks beyond 2027. Discussion was held on the City putting this back on the ballot in November. Director Rae reviewed what other cities are doing with sales tax and mill levy. He also said the other part of this is back in the 1990's, the state instituted a sales tax sharing model that the city's would share a certain percentage of sales tax with park district's. He shared that compared to other park districts we are not getting around $400,000 per year. The board's consensus was that they prefer guaranteed money instead of having to ask for funds each year, they believe the three tenths is a fair number. Director Rae said he will meet with Dustin Dassinger and will come back to the board before it is approved to go on the ballot.

2027 Budget Review – Executive Director Benjamin Rae reviewed the 2027 budget requests and welcomed board feedback. For the West River Community Center (WRCC), budget adjustments reduced the deficit to ($18,037) through a $5,000 reduction in expenses and a $13,000 increase in admissions revenue. He noted that significantly reducing the deficit would likely require increases to daily fees and memberships. Board members discussed opportunities to grow membership revenue, particularly by expanding membership eligibility beyond on-campus students. Commissioner Zach Keller supported future fee increases, citing improved maintenance and customer service, while Deputy Director Caleb Burgard emphasized the importance of transparency and public communication when fees are adjusted. Director Rae then presented the General Fund initial request showing a deficit of ($136,521). Key budget items included a $6,000 phone system upgrade, $55,000 for a full-time public relations position, and $23,000 for equipment leases, along with estimated retirement savings of $80,000. He estimated a maximum levy increase of $162,977, explaining that a 3% mill levy increase would average about $12 annually on a $300,000 home. Board members agreed with the preliminary budget approach and preferred waiting for updated valuation figures before making further adjustments. The board also reviewed 2026 fund balances and reserve goals, including maintaining a $1.4 million General Fund reserve and setting aside 20% of the Capital Betterment Mill Levy for future projects. Director Benjamin Rae outlined proposed 2027 capital projects totaling funding needs across Administration, HRG, Parks/Patterson Lake, WRCC, WRIC, and Fleet/Equipment. Discussion focused on golf course improvements. Director Rae recommended postponing the planned clubhouse project, which is now estimated at approximately $200,000, and instead using reserved funds to expand and improve practice areas, including additional greens and bunker upgrades. Board members generally supported prioritizing practice area improvements while exploring future clubhouse partnership opportunities. Members also requested renderings to help communicate the project to the public. Additional project discussions included Parks and Patterson Lake improvements, trail projects, outdoor recreation amenities, water supply concerns at the West River campus, and maintenance needs at the Sanford Sports Complex. Zach Keller suggested improving soccer field layouts and facilities to attract larger tournaments, particularly indoor events. Director Rae also reviewed planned improvements at the West River Community Center, West River Ice Center, and various fleet and equipment replacement projects. Funding sources include the half-cent sales tax, general fund, capital betterment funds, and grants/donations. Following the presentation and discussion, the board expressed consensus with the proposed budget direction and had no additional questions.

Adjournment – MOTIONED BY: Tyler Tucker; SECOND BY: Zach Keller to adjourn the meeting at 4:51 pm. All aye, motion carried.

PREPARED BY:
CLERK

APPROVED BY:
PRESIDENT