



Van Buren County Parks Commission
Donald Hanson Board of Commission Chambers
219 E Paw Paw Street, Suite 204 Paw Paw, MI 49079



Meeting Minutes –February 11, 2025, 10:00 AM

1. **Call to Order & Attendance** –Chairperson Mike Chappel called the meeting to order at 10:00 AM.

Present: Chairperson Mike Chappel, Vice Chair John Small, Becky Grabemeyer, Kurt Doroh, Wayne Nelson, Daywi Cook, Joe Parman, Gail Patterson-Gladney and Emily Hickmott. **Also Present:** Marcy Hamilton, Bekah Schrag, and Lisa Ransler **Absent:** Paul Garrod (excused)

2. **Approval of February 11, 2025, Agenda**

3. **Approval of January 14, 2025, Minutes**

4. **Public Comments** - None.

5. **New Business:** Nelson made a motion with support from Grabemeyer to approve the February 11, 2025, Agenda, the January 14, 2025 Minutes and receive the Decatur / Hamilton Community Parks and Recreation Plan. The motion was approved by unanimous consent.

6. **Ongoing Business/Reports**

- a. Strategic Planning with Marcy Hamilton of SW MI Regional Planning Commission - During the strategic planning discussion with Marcy Hamilton from the Southwest Michigan Regional Planning Commission, the Planning Commission reviewed a SWOT analysis of the county's parks, identifying strengths such as abundant natural resources, available public land, and strong partnerships. Weaknesses included limited funding, lack of public awareness, and no dedicated staff. Opportunities were highlighted, such as expanding recreational programming, improving accessibility, and leveraging partnerships for funding and maintenance. Threats included funding cuts, resistance to change, and short grant application timelines.

Key priorities discussed for 2025 included maintaining and improving existing parks before considering expansion, finalizing the Paw Paw River Kayak Launch project, conducting an assessment of Syndicate Park, and updating the County Recreation Plan with public input. The highest priority for 2025 is the update of the Parks and Recreation Plan. Additionally, ongoing maintenance for established parks, including the kayak launch and Courtyard Park, was emphasized.

The discussion also addressed the need to create a formal policy for park operations, as well as the development of a Capital Improvement Program (CIP) to guide long-term investments in park facilities. There was also consideration of how the Historical Museum and other designated parks would interact with the Commission to ensure alignment with county-wide recreation goals.

Efforts to promote the Parks and Recreation Commission, along with recent park improvements, were identified as essential to increasing public awareness and support. The possibility of officially designating Veteran's Garden as a county park was also raised. Another key policy under consideration was establishing a process for accepting park and recreation property donations to ensure sustainability and proper management of new acquisitions.

- b. Membership and Bylaws** – An updated membership roster and term expiration was distributed and will be presented to the County Commission for approval. The need for by-laws were suggested and staff will work on a draft.
- c. General Member Comments and Discussion** – None.
- d. Adjournment:** All business being completed; the meeting was adjourned at 11:38 am by unanimous consent.

Submitted by:
Lisa Ransler, Recording Secretary