



Van Buren County Parks Commission

Donald Hanson Board of Commission Chambers
219 E Paw Paw Street, Suite 204 Paw Paw, MI 49079

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



1. **Call to Order & Attendance** –Chairperson Mike Chappel called the meeting to order at 11:04 AM.

Present: Chairperson Mike Chappel, Vice Chair John Small, Joe Parman, Paul Garrod, Wayne Nelson, and Gail Patterson-Gladney. **Absent:** Becky Grabemeyer, Kurt Doroh, Daywi Cook, and Emily Hickmott

2. **Approval of April 10, 2025, Agenda** - A motion was made by Nelson, with support from Parman, to approve the amended agenda for April 10, 2025. Motion carried by unanimous vote.
3. **Approval of March 11, 2025, Minutes** - A motion was made by Doroh, with support from Patterson-Gladney to approve the March 11, 2025 minutes. Motion carried by unanimous vote.
4. **Reports:** The finance report was received showing the budget on track with \$243,723 in revenue and \$19,335 in expenses.
5. **Public Comments** - None.
6. **New Business:**

- a. **Fairgrounds Sublease:** The Commission reviewed a request from the Van Buren Youth Fair Association to approve a one-year sublease agreement with Vassar Farms for use of approximately 30 acres of tillable farmland, beginning in Spring 2025 through December 31, 2025.

This portion of land, located in Hartford Township, is currently not in use during the off-season and would otherwise remain fallow. Authorizing the sublease supports beneficial agricultural use of the land, improves soil health through responsible cultivation, reduces weed and pest issues associated with unused acreage, and promotes local food production.

Parman, with support from Patterson-Galdney made a motion to approve the sublease with unanimous support, apart from Garrod who abstained because he serves on the Van Buren Youth Fair Board.

7. **Ongoing Business/Reports**

- a. **2025 Strategic Plan Draft:** The Parks Commission reviewed the 2025 Parks & Recreation Strategic Plan, which outlines near-term priorities focused on completing the DNR-approved Kayak Launch in Hartford, maintaining and assessing existing parks, updating the Parks & Recreation Master Plan by February 2026, and laying the groundwork for future projects like the Lakeshore Trail. The Commission voiced support for continuing work under this plan until the full Master Plan is completed. Chairperson Chappell also recommended exploring the possibility of a second kayak launch at the 40th Street Bridge, given the Road Commission’s upcoming construction in that area. Members acknowledged that, with limited staffing, these goals represent a significant workload, and encouraged thoughtful prioritization as the work moves forward.
- b. **By-Laws:** Nelson, supported by Patterson-Gladney made a motion to approve the final draft of the By-Laws and forward to the County Board of Commissioners with a recommendation of approval. Motion carried unanimously.

- c. **Kayak Launch Status:** Ransler noted that preliminary design and cost estimates for the Paw Paw River Kayak Launch continue. While the riverbed survey was delayed due to winter conditions, grading design for the river pathway moved forward, and tree clearing was completed ahead of the bat roosting season—thanks to the Building and Grounds team. A Pre-Application meeting with EGLE is being set to support Joint Permit Application, which typically takes 3–6 months. Chappel, Short and Parman would like to be included in the meeting. The permitting timeline may delay the start of construction, depending on how quickly approvals are received.
 - d. **Fairground Property Encroachment:** Ransler noted that a second certified letter had been sent to the owners and response was due back by April 25th.
 - e. **Distribution of 2024 Annual Report:** The 2024 Van Buren County Parks Commission Annual Report was distributed at the meeting. Chairperson Chappell expressed his appreciation for the report. The report highlights key accomplishments from 2024, outlined financial commitments, and previewed strategic goals for 2025.
8. **General Member Comments and Discussion** – None.
9. **Adjournment:** All business being completed the meeting was adjourned at 11:27 AM by unanimous consent.

Note: The next meeting will be held on May 13 at 11:00 AM

Submitted by:
Lisa Ransler, Recording Secretary