



**OAK RIDGE PARKS & RECREATION ADVISORY BOARD MEETING
JANUARY 16, 2025 - 6:30 P.M.
(Held in person & electronically via the Zoom platform)**

MINUTES

Members Present

Adrian Eckenrod, Co-Chair
John Browning, Co-Chair (Via Zoom)
Mike Kimel
Phyllis Anders
Randy Collins
Caroline Ruch
Chelsea Young, Alternate (Sitting)
Ty Lindsay, Alternate (Not sitting)

Staff Present

Brock Dunigan, Parks Superintendent
Ashley Royal, Deputy Town Clerk

Members Absent

Kyle Anders
John Garrett, Alternate

Reese Bell, Teen Advisor

Note: This meeting was conducted remotely under N. C. Gen. Stat. § 166A-19.24 by use of simultaneous communication using the Zoom online platform and in which Parks & Recreation Advisory Board members participated by simultaneous communication. Board members joined and participated in the entire meeting, unless otherwise noted.

1. CALL TO ORDER

Co-Chair Adrian Eckenrod called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

2. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Co-Chair Adrian Eckenrod suggested moving item nine (9) – Public Comments - from the agenda to occur after item three (3).

Randy Collins made a motion to amend the agenda by moving agenda item nine (9) to item four (4) and Mike Kimel seconded. The motion passed unanimously (7-0).

Co-Chair Adrian Eckenrod made a motion to approve the amended agenda, and Caroline Ruch seconded. The motion passed unanimously (7-0).

3. APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES

Randy Collins made a motion to approve the minutes from December 19, 2024, regular meeting, and Co-Chair Adrian Eckenrod seconded. The motion was passed unanimously (7-0).

9. PUBLIC COMMENTS

Kim Carter, 1812 Oak Ridge Road, requested consideration of a fence to be installed around the inclusive playground at Heritage Farm Park. She explained that children with autism will bolt, or run away, when they are overstimulated or overwhelmed

by their surroundings. She stressed that a fence would protect the child from running away and provide security against losing a child. Randy Collins asked what type of fence would be suitable, and Carter replied that a black chain link fence would be adequate as it would not impair visibility of the surroundings. Collins suggested clear panels would also be suitable. Parks Superintendent Brock Dunigan stated that he would obtain a price quote for fencing around the playground. Co-Chair Adrian Eckenrod added that he had two other parents approach him with similar concerns about providing fencing around the inclusive playground.

5. STAFF REPORT

- Parks Superintendent Brock Dunigan presented the financial report and noted that 55 percent of the fiscal year had occurred with 34 percent of operating expenses spent. He explained that servicing the ORYA stipend accounted for the increase in operating expenses.
- Dunigan reported on the status of winter projects at the park:
 - Inquiries into memorial trees and benches at the park have increased.
 - The Eagle Scout project to update the MST campsite previously approved by the Board would begin on February 1 and would take two workdays to complete.
 - \$15,000 had been raised to fund the proposed memorial garden by Sarah Hoffman. Landscape designs from three designers have been submitted with cost assessed at \$25,000 by one designer. The memorial garden may be separated into two phases for development.
 - Organizers for the Skin Cancer Walk on January 25, 2025, reported a total of seventeen vendor booths registered, and 350 to 400 participants anticipated.
- Dunigan stated that construction at Heritage Farm Park was 99 percent complete with a few outstanding issues with drainage remaining. He noted that the engineer architectural firm, McGill & Associates, performed a survey of the areas retaining water to determine if the areas were built to specifications. Dunigan stated that reparations would be undertaken by either the Town or Bar Construction pending the survey results.
- Dunigan reported that Phase I of the Veterans Honor Green was complete and that bidding out for Phase II awaited redesigned plans by landscape architect, Revington Reaves.
- Dunigan stated that park staff had recently conducted a cleanup of Union Cemetery at Council's request. He explained that park staff had maintained the curb appeal of the cemetery grounds on a regular basis but were currently awaiting Council's direction for an updated maintenance protocol for the grounds.
- Dunigan reported that a Special Called Town Council meeting had been held earlier in the month to discuss overdue payments from Oak Ridge Youth Association (ORYA) for field usage and the non-resident surcharge fee. He noted that ORYA had submitted a remuneration plan for Council's consideration which broke non-resident surcharge payments into four parts over three months and asked for forgiveness for overages incurred from field use. He stated that Council had voted to approve the payment plan and to delay consideration of repayment of field costs for three months to allow ORYA time to organize their financial situation.
- Dunigan reported that park staff were monitoring and addressing incidents of unleashed dogs on park grounds. He noted that unleashed dogs on public property were a violation of state law. He cited an incident where a parkgoer had been bitten by an unleashed dog and was in the process of suing the owner for personal injury.

- Dunigan recognized that some recommendations made by the Board had recently been reworked by Council and returned to the Board for additional review. He offered reassurance to Board members that their efforts were valued.

4. PUBLIC COMMENTS

Public comments were resumed to recognize an individual awaiting the opportunity.

- Patrick Hawks, 5205 Harley Stafford Road, commented that he was revisiting the Board to request consideration to add a golf net at the park for enthusiasts to practice their golf swings. Collins advocated safety measures to protect potential injury to children playing in the area. Hawks was uncertain about the cost and Dunigan remarked that the cost would likely not qualify as a capital improvement project but could be considered as an added amenity for budget consideration.

5. ORYA REPORT

- Randy Collins reported that efforts were underway to rectify the account's overdue balance with the Town.
- Collins reported that the Town had approved an increase in ORYA's stipend for the period ending on June 30, 2025.
- Collins noted that registration for spring sports was underway.

6. NEW BUSINESS

A. Election of Chair/Vice Chair

Mike Kimel nominated John Browning and Adrian Eckenrod to continue as Co-Chairs. The vote passed unanimously (7-0).

B. Consideration/Approval of Property Management Proposal for Park Property Located at 8326 Linville Road

Deputy Town Clerk Ashley Royal provided a description of the property and of proposals from two property management firms outlined in a meeting packet insert which is hereby incorporated by reference and made a part of the minutes. She added that a public hearing of the property to be rented was required and would be followed by a resolution to enact a rental agreement for the property which would be voted on by Council for approval.

Discussion ensued focusing on issues including whether to permit pets in residence and the impact of event parking and the MST campsite on the rental property premises. The need to define the property limits resulted from the discussion specifically as it pertained to the potential installation of a privacy fence.

Co-Chair Adrian Eckenrod made a motion to

- *allow a maximum of two pets,*
- *define the property's perimeters to enable installation of a privacy fence by park staff and to assist management with event parking,*
- *to pump the septic tank,*

- *to recommend Your Triad Home Property Management Company as the property manager, and,*
- *to rent for \$1595 per month on a 12-month lease which would include monthly utility costs.*

Caroline Ruch seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously (7-0).

Royal noted that the Board's recommendation would be communicated to Council who would discuss the matter at their meeting in February. Dunigan suggested that in the event a fence is installed that the responsibility to maintain the grounds inside of that fence would be assigned to the renter.

C. Consideration/Approval of FY 2025-2026 Capital Improvement Projects

Dunigan introduced the discussion of Capital Improvement Projects (CIP) for the park. He drew attention to the recent clean-up of the Union Cemetery grounds performed by his staff at the request of Council. He indicated the need for clear direction from Council about future maintenance and use of the cemetery grounds.

Dunigan presented the FY2024-25 CIP list for discussion which is hereby incorporated by reference and made a part of the minutes. Deputy Town Clerk Ashley Royal stated that the qualifying threshold for CIP projects was \$15,000 and that any project cost estimated below this threshold would be considered a park amenity eligible for FY2025-26 budget consideration.

The Board commenced consideration of the eleven items off the 2024/25 CIP list:

1. Security System (ORTP, HFP)
 - Completed.
2. Enhanced A/V & Network Technology (ORTP, HFP)
 - Completed.
3. Shade Structures (ORTP)
 - Dunigan commented that the cost to install shade structures was uncertain and he deemed this item a low priority.
4. Additional Parking – 40 spaces (ORTP)
 - Dunigan explained that the additional parking proposed would be to accommodate overflow parking for large events. He pointed out that the need for overflow parking was currently being managed by using adjacent grass fields for parking.
5. Small Baseball/Softball Field (ORTP)
 - Dunigan considered additional fields a low priority because tournaments were no longer hosted at the park. Randy Collins later added that ORYA would not press for building more fields using taxpayer money and that ORYA had access to use of other fields at Oak Ridge Military Academy, Oak Ridge Elementary School and CrossFit. However, Dunigan added that ORYA would benefit from additional fields at the park and Collins suggested that condensing field usage to one area for ORYA would be desirable. Dunigan projected that the current number of fields at the park were insufficient to support all requests for use of the fields. He explained that ORYA's growth and priority access to the two baseball/softball fields at the park prevented the use of the fields by other organizations which impacted potential park revenue. Caroline Ruch countered that the park was developed for everyone's use and Eckenrod acknowledged that a large portion of the

park's resources were being dedicated to an organization whose player roster revealed a preponderance of non-resident participants. He questioned the legitimacy of investing more taxpayer funds to support a resource being utilized largely by non-residents.

6. Tennis/Pickleball Courts (HFP)
 - Eckenrod stated that Council had directed the Board to begin researching vendors to plan and design pickleball courts.
 - Discussion ensued focusing on the issues of the proposed location of pickleball courts to the inclusive children's playground and the potential for noise from the courts creating sensory overstimulation for children in the playground. Co-Chair John Browning recommended soliciting advice from McGill Associates on the design and location of the proposed courts and include basketball courts (CIP item number eight) into the design.
7. Paved Gravel Lot at Maintenance Shop
 - Dunigan considered paving the lot at the maintenance shop a low priority because of the heat that would likely be reflected off the surface in that area. He suggested instead considering paving the lot on the side of the shop outside the fenced area as it was often used for parking.
8. Basketball Courts (HFP)
 - Included with CIP item number six.
9. Outdoor Fitness Equipment
 - Dunigan explained that outdoor equipment was proposed in the past to be situated in the area of the horseshoe pit. He considered this item to be a low priority because adults had access to the nearby CrossFit facility for exercise equipment and many already used the playground equipment for exercise.
10. Union Cemetery Improvements
 - Dunigan explained that improvements to the property would include a small parking lot and split rail fencing in the front and rear of the grounds. He added that the split rail fencing could be taken on as an Eagle Scout project.
 - Dunigan revealed that one quarter acre of land across the cemetery could be purchased to develop a parking lot which could also serve as a trailhead parking area.
 - Securing ground penetrating radar services to identify locations of graves was included to consider in the development of a parking lot.
11. Splash Pad
 - Dunigan eliminated this item from consideration.

Dunigan proceeded to discuss suggestions for FY2025/26 Capital Improvement Project recommendations. He listed the following items as suggested park amenities which do not meet the CIP threshold:

1. Disc Golf
2. Golf Practice Net
3. River Birch Tree Asphalt Repair, pending root barrier solutions
4. Fencing surrounding the inclusive playground at Heritage Farm Park, pending scope of materials.

Dunigan added the following suggestions to the CIP list:

1. Updating the existing Town Park signs into the Lisa Drive parking lot, adding park signage to the Linville Road parking lot and adding a welcome sign to the park entrance at the intersection of Lisa Drive and Linville Road.

2. Installation of a privacy fence around the garage at Heritage Farm Park at an estimated cost of \$25,000.
3. Eighteen additional parking spots at the Farmhouse Community Center at an estimated cost of \$185,000.

Ruch requested adding a speaker system to the park for special events as well as for public service announcements. Eckenrod noted that a network based Public Announcement system would cost approximately \$20,000 which could be divided into separate phases.

Royal invited public comments before proceeding to a vote on the CIP projects.

Brian Dawson, 5902 Pepper Road, supported the installation of pickleball courts at Heritage Farm Park citing the sport as a social activity whose nearest facility to Oak Ridge was in Greensboro. He noted complaints of noise were generated mostly from neighborhoods with pickleball courts.

Royal opened discussions leading to votes on the CIP projects. She specified that the vote would relate to CIP items and not park amenities. She explained that park amenities would be reviewed as budget items for FY2025/26 consideration. She listed Disc Golf, Golf practice net, phased P/A system, and additional security cameras as park amenities to be considered as budget items. For CIP consideration, Royal listed the following:

1. Paving around the Maintenance shop outside the security fence
2. Sports courts at Heritage Farm Park
3. Ground Penetrating Radar service & parking at Union Cemetery
4. Small Baseball/Softball field to encourage the return of tournaments at an unknown cost
5. Shade structures
6. Security fence around the garage at Heritage Farm Park
7. Eighteen additional parking spaces at the Farmhouse Community Center
8. Repair of asphalt pathways by River Birch trees
9. Park signage
10. Fencing around the inclusive playground at Heritage Farm Park.

Additional parking at Oak Ridge Town Park, outdoor fitness equipment and a splash pad were removed from consideration.

Dunigan and each board member listed their top five selections for CIP consideration.

Consensus was achieved over the following list of CIP items in order of priority:

1. Additional parking spaces at the Farmhouse Community Center
2. Fencing around the inclusive playground at Heritage Farm Park
3. Park entrance signs at Linville Rd parking lot and Oak Ridge Town Park entrance, and updating existing signs at Lisa Drive park entrances
4. Security fence around the garage at Heritage Farm Park
5. Sports courts at Heritage Farm Park
6. Improvements at Union Cemetery to include ground penetrating radar service and parking
7. Repair of asphalt walkways caused by River Birch trees
8. Shade structures at Oak Ridge Town Park

- 9. Small Baseball and Softball fields
- 10. Paved lot outside the security fence by the maintenance building

Co-Chair Adrian Eckenrod made a motion to approve the list of Capital Improvement Projects for the Parks to be presented as recommendations to Council. Chelsea Young seconded, and the motion passed unanimously (7-0).

D. Discussion of Farmhouse Community Center Music Events

Royal explained that the music events at the Farmhouse Community Center would be budgeted for FY2025/26 and have the earliest start date be on July 1, 2025.

7. OLD BUSINESS

A. Update on Farmhouse Community Center Construction Project

Royal reported that flooring, mantles, and interior painting were completed at the Farmhouse. She indicated that lighting and cabinetry were underway, and she anticipated a completion date for the project at the end of January. She anticipated possible rental availability in April.

B. Update on Park Entrance Master Plan

Royal reported that inclement weather had impacted the progress of the park entrance project, and the anticipated completion had been extended to the end of February or beginning of March. Dunigan added that the Certificate of Occupancy would need to be obtained before permitting rental of the Farmhouse and he anticipated possible rental availability of the Farmhouse in April or May. He stressed the importance of having the Farmhouse and Park Entrance projects fully completed before scheduling a grand opening. Eckenrod suggested exploring a soft opening and test rentals prior to the grand opening to preemptively troubleshoot potential issues.

C. Update on 2025 Music in the Park Series

Royal reported that Randy Floss had approached her to request holding a Music in the Park event permitting alcohol during RidgeFest on Thursday, September 4, or Friday, September 5, 2025. She explained that RidgeFest hosted ORYA and Destination Arts nights and a car show on Thursday, September 4, and that the Town Council meeting would also fall on this night. She added that Council had approved six events serving alcohol for Music in the Park, and that only one event remained without a confirmed band contract. Discussion ensued, focusing on the advantages and disadvantages of combining a Music in the Park event with RidgeFest. The Board's consensus was not in favor of allowing Music in the Park at RidgeFest.

8. OTHER DISCUSSIONS/ANNOUNCEMENTS/REMINDERS

Next regular meeting	February 20, 2025
Canine Capers	April 26, 2025

9. PUBLIC COMMENTS

Mike Stone, 8112 Hunting Cog Road, commented on remarks made by Dunigan regarding issues which are returned for additional Board review by Council. He pointed out that criticism of Council for requesting additional review or making changes without input before voting on approvals were unfounded. He pointed out that the Board held an advisory position and as such Council valued their opinions and actively sought their input. He noted that time invested in reciprocating dialogue between Council and committees was effective in providing more information on issues.

10. ADJOURNMENT

Randy Collins made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:47 p.m., and Chelsea Young seconded. The motion passed unanimously (7-0).

Respectfully submitted:

Ashley Royal, CMC
Deputy Town Clerk

Adrian Eckenrod
Co-Chair