Jennings County Parks and Recreation Board

Meeting Minutes

Date: October 27, 2026
Time: 5:30 PM
Location: Conference Room – Jennings County Government Center

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Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 5:35 PM by Kristin Wiley, following a brief delay due to camera positioning issues. Not all Board members were visible in the meeting video. Government Center staff are aware of the issue and plan to troubleshoot it.

Roll Call

Present Board Members:

- Elizabeth Eaken (EE)
- Kristin Wiley (KW)
- Bill Ertel (BE)
- Johnathan Garrett (JG)

Present Staff:

- Seth Jones (SJ)

Absent:

- Emily Thompson (ET)

Approval of Previous Minutes

A motion was made by JG to approve the minutes of the September 22, 2026, meeting. BE seconded the motion.
KW, JG, BE, and EE were in favor and signed the approval form.

Old Business

Master Plan Update:

- The preliminary Master Plan draft is expected from Taylor Siefker Williams Design Group. Submission to the Indiana Department of Natural Resources (DNR) for feedback is due November 14, 2026.

New Business

Eco Lake Dump Station Pump Repair Approval:

- On October 14, 2026, SJ requested Board approval via email to use $8,496.13 in non-reverting funds to have Covalen replace a pump at the Eco Lake Park dump station and the gate valves associated with the backflow preventer. Board members JG, EE, BE, KW, and ET approved the request via email to allow the repairs to proceed without waiting until the next scheduled Board meeting.

- A formal Form 1178 request, two quotes from Covalen, and photographs of the existing dump station and associated blueprints were included with the email request for the Board's review and reference.

Director's Report

Personnel:

- Paul Gatewood will be retiring after approximately 10 years of service with the park.
- SJ discussed the possibility of promoting Isaac to fill Paul's position and hiring a replacement for the resulting entry-level vacancy. SJ plans to consult with the County Auditor's Office regarding the proposed staffing changes.
- Job descriptions will be revised, and the entry-level position will be advertised through Facebook, the County government website, and the Plain Dealer & Sun. The goal is to fill the position by January 1, 2027, if possible.
- The new Eco Lake campground hosts are enjoying the position and plan to remain next season. They intend to leave their camper on site during the winter to maintain a presence at the campground.

Office and Administrative:

Master Plan:

• See Old Business.

2027 Budget:

• The requested increases to the Tires and Tubes and Garage and Motor accounts were approved, and the Picnic Tables account was retained. A 1.5% salary increase was approved, compared with the typical 3% cost-of-living increase.

• The County Council added a $55,750 allocation from the Non-Reverting Fund to Draft 4 of the 2027 budget. Previously, expenditures from this fund were not included in the annual budget, and SJ was not required to request an annual allocation. Under the new procedure, expenditures will be subject to the budgeted amount.

• The County Council did not discuss the previously proposed use of non-reverting funds to pay park employee salaries.

Copies of Draft 4 and Draft 5 (the final approved budget) were provided to the Board.

Tree Donation Fund:

- Bob Ertel is working with the Jennings County Community Foundation (JCCF) on a proposal to establish a tree donation fund. The initiative would be coordinated by North Vernon Parks and Recreation (NVPR) and would support the annual planting of native trees in city and county parks by local landscaping companies, as funding permits. A copy of the proposed fundraising letter was provided to the Board.

Phone and Internet:

- The park has transitioned from Frontier to Metronet. Frontier waived the early contract termination fee, and internet service has improved significantly.

Volunteer Senior Project:

- Allison Balser, a Columbus East High School student, plans to volunteer approximately 10 to 15 hours with JCP&R as part of her senior project. A copy of Allison's senior project proposal was provided to the Board for reference.
- The County Attorney has provided a volunteer waiver, which will be required for all volunteers going forward**.**

Mission Adventure Race:

- Brian Holzhausen discussed a proposed 18-hour DINO Mission Adventure Race for the first weekend of May 2027. All park amenities needed for the event are currently available and have been tentatively reserved. SJ will obtain additional details regarding the proposed event.

Active Transportation / Pedestrian Trail:

- SJ met with the Indiana Department of Transportation (INDOT) and the Active Transportation Committee to discuss a proposed pedestrian trail connecting North Vernon and Vernon, including a potential crosswalk near the Muscatatuck Park entrance. Challenges discussed included narrow road shoulders, the potential need for boardwalk construction, and relocation of power lines.

Special Event – Craft Fair:

- Justin Miller provided updated plans for the Dining Hall event, with approximately 14 vendors paying $20 per space. Proceeds would help cover the $214 rental fee, with approximately $66 potential profit that will be used for a raffle.
- A Special Use Permit would be required, without an additional park charge. A food vendor may use the kitchen; SJ will check with the Health Department regarding requirements.

Grounds – Muscatatuck Park

Seasonal Closing:

- The season is winding down. Water service is expected to be turned off around November 1.

Splash Pad Removal:

- Following the September Board vote to discontinue maintenance of the splash pad, SJ discussed plans to dismantle the pump shed, remove fencing, and salvage usable equipment. Duke Energy will disconnect electrical service.
- Day and Son provided an informal estimate and received a scope of work (SOW) prepared by SJ. A formal quote is pending. Planned work includes removing underground tanks and overflow components, addressing drainage, filling excavated areas, and seeding the disturbed areas with grass seed and straw while preserving water access. A copy of the SOW was provided to the Board.
- Remaining funds in the 2026 splash pad budget may cover much of the removal costs. The target completion date is April 1, 2027. The Board also discussed potential future uses for the area, including the installation of exercise equipment.

Vinegar Mill:

• A controlled burn of the hillside is planned for early November.

Grounds – Eco Lake

Seasonal Closing:

• Eco Lake campground is scheduled to close November 1 and reopen April 1. Winterization will be completed.

Dump Station:

• One of the two dump station pumps has been repaired; however, the second pump now requires repair. The Board approved the additional repairs via email. See New Business for details.

Electrical Issues:

• The campground has experienced recurring electrical problems. Approximately $500–$600 has been spent on breakers.

• ETC may perform a power quality analysis, which requires the campground to be fully occupied. The Board discussed offering a special camping rate to help fill the campground during testing. ETC quote provided for reference.

Equipment

• No separate equipment update was recorded.

Financial Report

• The Fuel account has been depleted, in part due to frequent travel between park locations. Funds will be transferred from Buildings and Grounds to Fuel, subject to County Council approval.

• Non-Reverting Fund: $272,107.56 (as of October 14, 2026)

• Non-Reverting Fund Net Change for October: $8,256.41 (as of October 26, 2026)

• 2026 Outlook: Projected remaining income of $13,500.00 and a projected year-end balance of $269,751.38.

• Year-over-year income and monthly transactions were reviewed.

Events

• No additional events remain scheduled for 2026.

• The Hoosier Beemers event was well received. KW met with the group, which provided positive feedback about the park.

• The NICA bicycle race was successful and has been scheduled again for next year according to SJ.

Comments from Guests

No comments from guests were recorded.

Next Meeting

The November meeting will be rescheduled, tentatively to November 17, 2026, at the regular time. SJ will confirm the date by email and post notice on Facebook and at the Muscatatuck Park office.

Adjournment

A motion to adjourn was made by BE and seconded by JG.
The meeting was adjourned at 6:10 PM.

Minutes Approval – October 27, 2026

Bill Ertel _____

Kristin Wiley _____

Emily Thompson (Absent) _____

Elizabeth Eaken _____

Johnathan Garrett _____