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CITY OF RALEIGH

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**Raleigh Parks, Recreation, & Greenway  
Advisory Board**

**February 19, 2026**

**[https://youtu.be/F\\_KmccYJjsI](https://youtu.be/F_KmccYJjsI)**

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## OVERVIEW

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The Parks, Recreation, and Greenway Advisory Board (PRGAB) meeting opened with continued advocacy from the Southeast Raleigh tennis community regarding the Biltmore Hills Park expansion. Three public speakers urged the board to support rebuilding the existing eight courts alongside the construction of eight new ones, while a fourth speaker separately advocated for a permanent asphalt pump track in the Raleigh park system.

The board received a "What We Do" presentation from the Learning and Development Team, which showcased orientation programs, leadership development initiatives, and safety training across the department's nearly 500 full-time and thousands of seasonal employees. Staff also presented a request for board endorsement of a \$500,000 Parks and Recreation Trust Fund (PARTF) grant application for the Neuse River Park project, which the board approved unanimously.

A major portion of the meeting was devoted to the Leaf Out initiative, a strategic plan focused on the protection, expansion, and care of Raleigh's public tree canopy. Staff outlined seven key focus areas, including native plant lists for developers and residents, an internal policy limiting invasive species on city projects, and a goal of planting 24,000 trees by Raleigh's 240th anniversary in 2032. The board passed a resolution encouraging the City Council to include first-year funding for the 24,000-tree campaign.

Ken Hisler presented a partnership with the Wake County Public School System (WCPSS) to develop athletic fields and infrastructure at Fred Fletcher Park, with construction funded by the school system. The project would add a lit girls' softball field, a regulation multi-purpose field, and a public restroom.

The Director's Report highlighted ongoing Dix Park campus demolition, record summer camp registration, and the upcoming "From Bond to Beyond" open house. The meeting concluded with a unanimous board motion requesting the city council review the Biltmore Hills project and consider revisions to include a rebuild of the existing courts and incorporation of a park structure for on-site staff.

## PUBLIC COMMENT

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- **Robert Braswell (Southeast Raleigh):** Spoke regarding the Biltmore Hills Park tennis courts.
  - He stated he lives at 1308 Foxrun Drive in Cedarwood Estates and has played tennis at Biltmore Hills for over 47 years.
  - He expressed concern that the planned addition of eight new courts does not address the condition of the existing lower eight courts, which have only received resurfacing throughout his time there.
  - He noted that his children played in the United junior tennis league at the facility and that the courts have served the community for decades. • He urged the board to support digging up and rebuilding the existing courts to bring them to the same standard as the new courts, noting it would enhance playability and quality of life in the community.

- **Sam Patterson (Raleigh resident):** Spoke in support of building a permanent pump track in the Raleigh park system.
  - He described a pump track as a loop track for bikes, skateboards, scooters, and rollerblades, where riders navigate rolling hills and banked turns using body movement to generate speed. He noted they build balance, coordination, strength, and confidence and are accessible to a wide range of ages and skill levels.
  - He emphasized that pump tracks grow with the rider, noting that a child on a balance bike can safely roll through the same features that a more advanced rider might use as a jump, and that a well-designed track does not need to change as skill levels improve.
  - He described pump tracks as inexpensive to build, relatively small, and requiring less management than a typical playground, while also providing a designated space for wheeled recreation that helps reduce riding in parking lots, plazas, and other unintended areas.
  - He cited Carrboro, Charlotte, Gastonia, Greenville, Boone, Swannanoa, Spindale, Wilmington, and Troy as North Carolina cities that have already invested in permanent pump tracks and similar wheeled sports facilities.
  - He acknowledged Raleigh's modular pump track installations as a strong proof of concept and argued the next step is a permanent asphalt facility that is durable, always available, and designed to serve the community long-term.
  - He asked whether the board has existing plans for a permanent pump track and, if not, encouraged the board to explore feasibility, potential sites, and funding options.
  - **Staff Response:** Ken Hisler noted the only pump track in a current master plan is at Barwell Road, which is not funded in the next five- to 10-year plans. Stephen Bentley added that a wheeled sports master plan is in development and will launch community engagement this summer, examining skating, biking, and related activities together, similar to the approach used for the aquatic study. The Chair encouraged Patterson to stay engaged as that process moves forward.
  
- **Nicole Sullivan (Biltmore Hills Tennis Community, Shaw University Tennis Program, Ebony Racquet Club):** Delivered an extensive statement on the Biltmore Hills tennis project.
  - She stated the community supports the project but does not support moving forward with a scope that falls short of what has been consistently requested, funded, and publicly promised.

- She outlined three core priorities the community has raised in every meeting with Parks and Recreation since 2017: (1) a public tennis destination with new courts comparable to Millbrook Exchange Park; (2) rebuilding, not resurfacing, the existing courts; and (3) on-site tennis staff with a dedicated office near the courts for safety, oversight, and management.
- She stated that for city staff to claim the community has not shared this input is "simply untrue."
- She described the existing eight courts as 40 to 50 years old with drainage failures, dead spots, and grading issues that resurfacing has not fixed despite multiple attempts. She characterized resurfacing as cosmetic rather than structural, noting the bottom courts were built on a buried stream and the foundation has likely eroded over 50 years.
- She warned that mixing brand-new courts with failing old courts will result in inconsistent play and will eliminate the possibility of hosting USA- or NCAA-sanctioned events.
- She raised public safety and liability concerns for a 16-court complex without staff presence, citing the current recreation center's lack of line of sight to the courts, standalone bathrooms, ball fields, and playground areas. She reported that players have experienced car break-ins, gunfire, loitering, indecent exposure, and medical emergencies, and noted an indecent exposure incident on the Biltmore Hills greenway that occurred the previous Monday.
- She raised transparency concerns regarding approximately \$1.85 million redirected from the abandoned Barwell Road tennis project to Biltmore Hills, noting the 2022 bond provided sufficient funding to complete the project fully. She questioned why the budget shows more than \$7.4 million available for constructing eight new courts, which amounts to more than \$900,000 per court.
- She framed the project as a matter of equity and legacy during Black History Month, noting Biltmore Hills is deeply rooted in Black tennis culture and will become the primary public tennis destination in Southeast Raleigh as courts are eliminated at other locations.
- She argued that completing all work during the approximately one-year construction closure would avoid far more expensive and disruptive work later, and would mean nothing else needs to be done at Biltmore Hills related to tennis for 25 years.
- She urged the city to pause, re-examine the project before construction, and amend the scope to rebuild all courts, provide on-site tennis staffing with a visible office, address safety, and be transparent about the budget.
- She referenced a comment by Stephen Bentley at the previous meeting questioning whether the advisory board had the "backbone" to recommend a pause on the multi-million-dollar

project, and expressed confidence that the board wants to see the best possible outcome for Biltmore Hills Park.

- **John Smith (Longtime Biltmore Hills player):** Spoke in support of the community's requests regarding the tennis courts.
  - He recalled that when Parks and Recreation first proposed the new tennis complex in March 2016, the stated plan was to build a modern, quality 16-court complex as a destination point for tennis in Southeast Raleigh, renovate the existing courts, and add additional space to the community center for tennis programming.
  - He noted that the project was delayed beginning in 2017 and was placed on hold multiple times. He stated the revised scope now includes only eight new courts, entrance accessibility, parking lot reconstruction, and stormwater management devices, with no provisions for addressing the existing courts.
  - He described the existing courts as over 50 years old with deterioration in surface structure and integrity, and argued that a 16-court complex should begin with 16 quality tennis courts as its foundation.

## RALEIGH YOUTH COUNCIL REPORT

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The Raleigh Youth Council liaison presented the committee report.

- On January 20, council members attended a comic book artist selection panel. Public Art has been tasked with creating a comic book version of the Raleigh Ready Guide, targeting a teen audience.
- The February 9 meeting focused on the importance of knowing Black history, featuring a guest speaker and Black history-themed Jeopardy games.
- Upcoming events include an egg hunt in partnership with community centers at Jaycee Community Center, and Buddy Basketball with Specialized Recreation and Inclusion Services (location to be determined).
- The council is co-hosting the 2026 State Youth Council Team Building and Leadership Conference with the Fuquay-Varina Teen Council the weekend of February 27 through March 1. Friday and Sunday sessions will be held at Tarboro Road Community Center, and Saturday will be held in Fuquay-Varina. The conference will include nine councils, 86 teens, and 22 advisers.

# PRESENTATIONS

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## WHAT WE DO: LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT TEAM

**Helene McCullough**, Business Process Management Supervisor, introduced Dana Hariton, Program Supervisor for the Raleigh Parks Learning Team.

- The department has an employee base of approximately 488 full-time employees, 107 permanent part-time employees, and a large seasonal and temporary workforce. The Learning Team itself consists of two full-time employees, two permanent part-time, and one part-time employee, in addition to Hariton.
- An employee life cycle visual was presented to illustrate that careers in Parks are "circuitous" rather than linear, with opportunities for mobility, supervisor and leadership development, professional development aligned with city values and competencies, and multiple orientation programs.
  - **Orientation Academy:** A two-day program for full-time employees that includes trolley tours of parks and recreation facilities, presentations from leadership including Stephen Bentley, and cohort-building activities. Participants form lasting connections, with staff later recognizing one another in leadership programs. A permanent part-time orientation was launched at the end of 2025 and will continue expanding.
  - **Camp Training:** Approximately 400 seasonal hires receive one full day of training, offered in two sessions. The program creates a strong connection to the department, with many camp counselors returning as repeat seasonal employees.
  - **Pairing Program:** A four-month mentoring initiative launched in 2025, pairing "pathfinders" (new hires) with "navigators" (seasoned staff) to introduce the breadth and scope of the department.
  - **Raleigh Parks Leads:** A new six-month leadership development program meeting once per month for four hours, focused on competencies for current supervisors aspiring to lead at the organizational level. The program follows an industry framework of leading yourself, leading others, and leading the business. A capstone project is scheduled for April 2026, during which Mecklenburg County's leadership academy will visit and tour Raleigh's program.
  - **Raleigh Parks Innovates:** A seven-week program in partnership with the Office of Innovation and Strategy using human-centered design thinking to solve problems. The 2025 cycle focused on heat in urban parks, yielding prototype solutions such as increased shade requirements in design reviews and misting systems. The 2026 cycle is focused on

community cohesion, with listening sessions and community engagement beginning immediately. Staff noted they are working with strategic partners to secure funding for moving solutions past the prototyping stage.

- **Other Services:** The team manages the learning management system (Success Factors), automates curricula, runs reports, provides a dedicated instructional designer for proprietary courses (e.g., for fallen-tree response), runs an annual safety training program aligned with seasonal needs (CPR, heat, ladder safety), uses DART rates and workers' compensation data to target training priorities, hosts tours for other municipalities, and offers professional development scholarships for employees.
- Chris Pereira asked whether any ideas from the 2025 heat innovation cycle were implemented. Stephen Bentley confirmed that the first innovation cycle produced the Capitol Area Greenway Explorer app and the concept of glow-in-the-dark paint, and that the heat cycle has led to shade being prioritized in design reviews and some projects incorporating misters.
- Steve Brechbiel asked whether the Learning Team aligns with a larger city learning and development organization. Staff explained that peers with similar roles in different departments meet quarterly through a training liaison meeting to share resources and best practices. Larger departments such as Parks, Planning, and Public Utilities have their own dedicated teams, which also connect up to the larger city HR structure.
- Iain Burnett asked about compensation incentives for returning seasonal employees. Staff confirmed that lifeguards who return with additional certifications receive increased compensation, and camp counselors receive incremental pay increases as they return and advance to director roles.
- Douglas Johnston asked how topics for the innovation projects are developed. Stephen Bentley explained they are selected to address real departmental challenges and that the department also has a relationship with the UNC School of Government, sending staff to participate in programs there.
- Stephen McGuinness commended the Learning Team's partnership with health and wellness staff on QPR (Question, Persuade, Refer) suicide prevention training and overdose response training, noting these programs have been made available to park staff through Success Factors.

## **NEUSE RIVER PARK: PARTF GRANT APPLICATION**

Tom Dawson, staff lead for the Neuse River Park project, presented a request for board endorsement of a Parks and Recreation Trust Fund (PARTF) grant application.

- The grant request is for \$500,000 with a one-to-one match requirement, which is available from bond funding. The anticipated award announcement is August 2026, aligning with the schematic design process.
- The Neuse River Park master plan, developed approximately one year ago, envisions river access, boat launches, in-river play waves, overlooks, a shelter, restrooms, trails, parking, open space, a play area, bank enhancement, and the feasibility of a pump track.
- The PARTF proposal focuses specifically on the river area, including riverside environmental restoration features, accessibility and recreation features, a river overlook, and an ADA-accessible canoe launch positioned alongside the Neuse River Trail.
- Bank stabilization is a central component of the proposal, addressing erosion caused by high flow rates from the dam and by informal user-created trails. The approach will combine naturalistic boulders and native plantings to stabilize the banks while allowing public access to the water. Staff noted the river access component is considered highly competitive for the grant because of its uniqueness.
- The river overlooks will provide ADA-accessible opportunities for fishing, bird watching, and general enjoyment, while the improved river access point connects the greenway and blueways systems at this location.
- The ADA canoe launch involves engineering the correct slope and incorporating handbar grabs to allow users to transfer from the walking surface down a ramp into a boat, which Dawson acknowledged is a challenging design goal given the steep site.
- A construction manager at risk (CMAR) has been onboarded, which differs from a traditional design-bid-build approach by integrating the construction manager into the design period to vet designs, provide cost estimates, and plan the construction path earlier in the process.
- A consultant called Caliber, specializing in in-river treatments, is advising on the river restoration components. Landscape architects are separately working on shade trees and environmental restoration in the upland portions of the site.
- A board member asked about engaging property owners on the opposite bank of the river. Dawson noted that broader blueway planning addresses different landowners and their potential contributions, but schematic design is constrained to city property and Army Corps of Engineers property.
- **Timeline:**
  - May 2026: schematic design and cost review.

- August 2026: PARTF grant announcements.
  - Summer/fall 2026: continued design development, permitting, prioritization, and budget reconciliation.
  - Early 2027: design completion.
  - 2027–2028: bidding and construction.
- Motion to recommend supporting staff for the PARTF grant. The motion passed unanimously.

## LEAF OUT INITIATIVE

Charles Craig, Assistant Director for Raleigh Parks & Natural Resources, presented the Leaf Out initiative with support from multiple staff members.

### Overview and Scope

- Leaf Out is a strategic initiative focused on the protection, expansion, and care of Raleigh's public tree canopy on city-owned property. The initiative is structured around three goals visualized as a tree: roots (protection of existing trees and sensitive habitat), trunk (expanding the tree canopy through planting), and leaves (stewardship, education, and community engagement).
- The scope centers on three main areas: (1) city-owned property, with a focus on greenways and parks; (2) interdepartmental collaboration with Stormwater, Sustainability, Raleigh Water, and Transportation; and (3) a community-centered approach to engage residents.
- Craig emphasized the scope does not include regulatory or policy requirements for private land development.

### Alignment with City Initiatives

- Leaf Out aligns with the city's comprehensive plan process, Reflecting Raleigh, and was developed in close collaboration with the Department of Planning and Development. Leaf Out was featured in the March 2025 State of the City address.
- The initiative also aligns with the Parks Plan adopted in December 2024.

### Community Engagement

- Staff conducted extensive community outreach including surveys, in-person intercept events at multiple locations, newsletters, subscriber email lists, and social media. A survey map showed participation from zip codes across the entire City of Raleigh.

- In partnership with Reflecting Raleigh, staff hosted the Director of Trees Atlanta for an in-person discussion about the importance of trees and Atlanta's tree program, followed by Ask a Planner events throughout March 2025.

## Seven Key Focus Areas

- **Initiative 1 – Eliminate Invasive Species on City Property:**

- **Brian Smith**, Natural Resources Superintendent, presented an internal policy that has been developed and is being socialized through the city's approval process. The policy promotes native plantings and prohibits invasive plants on city development projects, setting a minimum goal of 50% native plantings with a target of 70%. Parks already meets the 70% threshold. The policy includes caveats for turf, water quality management, and other necessary carve-outs. A significant win was achieved with sericea lespedeza, an invasive species used for soil stabilization that is listed as a level-one invasive in the state design manual for sediment erosion control, providing traction to remove it from Raleigh Water easement planting mixes.

- **Initiative 2 – Development Plant List:**

- **Zach Manor**, Raleigh Parks Urban Forester, presented a native trees and shrubs list being finalized by the Department of Planning and Development for developers to meet private property requirements under the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO). The list includes approximately 43 trees (a mix of evergreen, deciduous, large-maturing, and small-maturing) and approximately 50 shrubs. This is a non-regulatory resource designed to make it easier for developers to identify native species. The list was presented to the Sustainability, Wildlife, and Urban Trees (SWUT) Committee earlier in the year and is expected to be published within one to two months.
- Manor also noted that a recent UDO amendment (Section 7.2.7.C.1.E) now prohibits invasive species from being planted to satisfy any landscaping or screening requirement, and prevents existing invasive species from being used to meet those requirements. The invasive species reference list is maintained by the NC State University Extension Plant Toolbox database.

- **Initiative 3 – Community/Resident Plant List:**

- **Lauren Freudenberger**, City Horticulturist, is developing a public-facing native plant list for residents. The list will be approximately 95% native species and include canopy trees, understory trees, shrubs, perennials, grasses, vines, sedges, and an invasive "do not plant" list sourced from the North Carolina Invasive Plant Council. To define "native," staff are using

state-native designation while providing distinct information about eco-regions to help residents make informed choices based on site conditions, climate change, and development context. Staff have engaged nursery vendors and distributors to ensure the green industry can accommodate demand, addressing barriers such as land availability, production time, cost, and container success rates.

- **Initiative 4 – Internal Best Practices for City Property:**

- **Zach Manor** described a forthcoming internal document establishing best management practices for tree retention and planting on city development properties (parks, greenways, fire stations, etc.). This effort will launch in late spring or early summer 2026 after the invasive species policy clears internal approvals, with a draft targeted for fall. The document will address balancing preservation of existing trees with infrastructure needs such as sewer lines, baseball fields, and pools, while pursuing colocation and restoration where possible. Updates will be brought to the SWUT Committee throughout the process.

- **Initiative 5 – Leaf Out Landing Page:** A green landing page on RaleighNC.gov consolidating all departments' green initiatives and programs in one location, reducing the need for users to navigate between departments and preventing conflicting messaging.

- **Initiative 6 – Community Outreach and Partnerships:** Working with nonprofit partners, community groups, and through contracts, grants, events, tree giveaways, and plantings to engage the public.

- **Initiative 7 – 24,000 Trees by 2032:** A goal of planting 24,000 trees by Raleigh's 240th anniversary. A budget request has been submitted and is under consideration in the current budget process.

## Q&A

- **Chris Pereira** asked why street trees were not mentioned, given their relevance to reducing urban heat islands and Vision Zero pedestrian safety goals. Staff explained that city council provided clear guidance that Leaf Out should be non-regulatory, and street trees typically involve regulatory mechanisms, utility conflicts, and North Carolina Department of Transportation right-of-way complexities. Staff noted Leaf Out's focus on backyard trees represents an area without a dedicated program and fills a gap, while street tree maintenance and planting will continue through existing programs.

- **Kate Dixon**, chair of the SWUT Committee, commended staff for the work accomplished and noted the committee considers it a model for the country. She emphasized that while two of the seven initiatives focus solely on city property (the internal policies), the other five have a broader public-facing vision, and encouraged staff to adjust the presentation messaging to avoid implying the initiative is limited to city property.

- **Linda Pearsall** echoed Dixon's comments, noting that the citizen engagement component is central to what city council members have expressed enthusiasm about, and supported Dixon's concept of a resolution.
- **Kara Strang** asked whether native planting recommendations could be included when developers interact with Parks through zoning-adjacent processes such as greenway connections. Staff clarified the board does not review zoning cases (city council does) but confirmed the adopted plant list documents will guide staff recommendations on all park plans and that staff can share the recommended list during any developer interaction.
- **Kara Strang** asked about connecting with local garden centers. Staff described an idea discussed that morning to create a form for garden center customers to request more obscure native species, allowing distributors to gauge demand and increase volume.
- **April Love** asked how schools could connect with Leaf Out, given many schools are adjacent to parks and some are designated environmental schools. Craig noted that nonprofit partners will be key to delivering education and outreach to schools, as the city cannot mandate participation from Wake County Public Schools but can provide educational support.
- **Bob Edgerton** requested that staff acquire a Bobcat skid loader with a 24-inch auger to support the 24,000-tree planting goal, rather than relying on volunteers with shovels. Staff confirmed the department already has such equipment.

## Leaf Out Resolution

- **Kate Dixon** presented a draft resolution for the board's consideration:
  - "Whereas Raleigh is rapidly losing trees that are critical to cooling the city, cleaning the air, reducing flooding, protecting pedestrians by slowing traffic, providing habitat for wildlife, and providing natural beauty. Whereas the Leaf Out program envisions planting more trees on state, county, and city land, and encouraging residents to plant trees on their own properties. Now, therefore, be it resolved that the Parks, Recreation, and Greenways Advisory Board strongly encourages the city council to include first-year funding for a campaign to plant 24,000 new trees across the city in celebration of Raleigh's 240th anniversary in 2032."
- The phrase "and providing natural beauty" was added at a board member's suggestion after the initial reading.
- **Motion** to approve the resolution. **The motion passed unanimously.**

## FRED FLETCHER PARK: WAKE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM PARTNERSHIP

**Ken Hisler** presented on a joint development project between Raleigh Parks and the Wake County Public School System (WCPSS) at Fred Fletcher Park.

### Background

- The presentation was prompted by a visit from Broughton High School representatives several years ago, who raised the need for athletic space proximal to the school. Staff have been meeting with WCPSS for approximately two years to develop a mutually beneficial solution.
- Fred Fletcher Park has a complex property arrangement. The eastern portion (tennis courts) and central area are clearly owned by the city. The western portion contains three parcels bisected by a multi-purpose field, owned by two entities: one by the city alone, one by the Board of Education, and one jointly. The original 1990 development agreement was updated in 2013 with a joint use agreement.
- Broughton High School is landlocked and does not have a home field for its girls' softball team. The school currently plays home games at Oakwood Park and uses the Fletcher Park multi-purpose field for practice, band preseason drills, football, soccer, and lacrosse.

### Proposed Concept

- **Lit Girls' Softball Field (Northwest Corner):** A regulation, fenced softball field with dugouts and lighting, funded by WCPSS. The field is oriented to direct play toward the park interior rather than toward adjacent residential and commercial properties. Lighting is not typical for WCPSS standards but was agreed upon to support city evening programming needs and to benefit the school's own early-season practice schedules.
- **Public Restroom:** Located just outside left field to meet WCPSS proximity requirements for spectator seating. Staff negotiated to push the restroom as far into the park as possible to also serve general park visitors. Fred Fletcher Park currently has no outdoor restroom despite hosting weddings, special events, yoga classes, and regular visitors.
- **Pedestrian Connection to Broughton High School:** A crosswalk connection across St. Mary's Street to leverage existing school parking, provide equipment storage access, and allow easy student-athlete access. This addresses the park's limited parking.
- **Regulation Multi-Purpose Field (Southern Portion):** The existing former softball field area will be reconfigured into a regulation-size multi-purpose field with natural grass and no lighting. This is

significant because the city has constructed only one regulation-size multi-purpose field in its entire park system (Buffalo Road Park) and converted one open space at Kiwanis Park to meet demand.

- **City-Funded Improvements:** Raleigh Parks will invest in upgrading the playground and relocating the picnic shelter uphill to improve connectivity, pedestrian circulation, and ADA accessibility within the park. • All field construction costs will be funded by WCPSS through the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) standards process.

## Public Benefit

- The project leverages an existing relationship and advances needs of both organizations at no construction cost to the city for the fields and restroom.
- Downtown Raleigh is increasingly pressed for green space for active play. The city currently leases a field from the Raleigh Housing Authority on a year-by-year basis, creating potential for loss of that space to development.
- The regulation multi-purpose field could support programs including the Challenger Football program (currently held at Millbrook Park) and flag football, which has seen significant growth. The last athletic field built in the Raleigh park system was at Honeycutt Park in 2007.
- The lower field will be unlit and natural grass, intentionally balancing programming needs with neighborhood character.

## Safety and Design Considerations

- Netting will be extended from the fence line near the restroom to address potential ball trajectory concerns, following the same approach used at Millbrook Park, Buffalo Road Park, and Walnut Creek.
- Lighting on the softball field will comply with UDO regulations for illumination timing and will use shielded, downcast fixtures with foot-candle assessments to prevent light spill into adjacent neighborhoods.

## Q&A

- Kara Strang asked whether the public engagement process could change the current concept. Hisler confirmed it could, noting that engagement is conducted in partnership and that feedback may result in changes to orientation or configuration, though significant reconfiguration would be constrained by the site.
- Douglas Johnston asked about tree planting within the project scope. Hisler clarified there is very little vegetative impact in the current scope because it is not a full park project. Tree planting along

buffers could be pursued separately through a volunteer effort or future planning, potentially through the Leaf Out program or Trees Across Raleigh (a longstanding city tree-planting initiative). He noted the importance of being intentional about maintaining the park's existing character.

- Chris Periera asked about safety concerns with the restroom's proximity to the softball field. Hisler noted that design solutions such as extended netting (rather than fencing) will be used, consistent with approaches at other parks.

## Timeline

- Late February 2026: Inform city council through the manager update process.
- Spring 2026: Public engagement.
- 2027: Amend the joint use agreement. City planning staff confirmed the project can proceed through permitting under the joint use agreement without requiring property transfer.
- 2028: Anticipated construction.

## APPROVAL OF MINUTES

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- **Motion** to approve the January 2026 meeting minutes. **The motion passed unanimously.**

## DIRECTOR'S REPORT

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Stephen Bentley presented the Director's Report.

- **Dix Park – Western Campus Demolition:** All state buildings on the western campus will be abated and demolished in 2026, returning the land to green space. The Flower Cottage will be retained. A \$3 million construction contract has been awarded for the work.
- **Dix Park Conservancy Agreement:** An updated agreement was presented to city council. The current Dix Park Leadership Committee will be reformed and reconstituted as the Dix Park Commission, with an additional community representative added. The relationship with the Parks Board is unchanged; the board still has an appointment to the commission.
- **Tucker House Lead Abatement:** A \$700,000 project to remove all lead paint and asbestos from the historic home.
- **Summer Camp Registration:** Out of approximately 15,000 available spots, nearly 10,000 campers were registered during the first three days of registration (Monday through Wednesday of that week).

- **Run for the Roses 5K:** The 45th annual event, one of the oldest 5Ks in the Triangle, was held at Walnut Creek Athletic Park. Every female finisher received a rose at the finish line in conjunction with Valentine's Day.
- **Black History Month:** Programming included events at Chavis Park on January 19 for MLK Day and February 7, as well as an upcoming event at Tarboro Road Community Center on Saturday.
- **Horseshoe Farm Nature Preserve:** A new nature preserve map is now available online.
- **Raleigh Medal of Arts:** Nominations are open through the 30th.
- **Public Art:** A new installation by artist in residence Scott Hazard has been placed at Annie Louise Wilkerson Nature Preserve, overlooking a meadow.
- **Block Gallery Opening:** An art opening coincided with the quilters' convention at the convention center.
- **Fayetteville Street:** The department is leading a city effort to improve Fayetteville Street through enhanced plantings, visual public art, and activations, in collaboration with the Raleigh Planning Department.
- **Pullen Park:** The park has been partially closed and Lake Howell has been drained. The park reopens in April, and the new electric train is on-site. Pope House Museum reopens in May.
- **Top Greene Park:** The park will shut down in July for its bond project, a two-year undertaking.
- **Green Road Park:** Construction has been initiated on this park bond project.
- **"From Bond to Beyond" Open House:** Scheduled for March 26, 4:30 to 7:30 p.m., at the chapel. The event will celebrate all 22 bond projects that have been initiated, with updated designs, a DJ, and food.
- **"In Living Color" Exhibit:** An art exhibit at Dix Park will be up throughout February.
- **Job Fair:** Scheduled for March 19.
- **Nash Square Public Realm Study:** Bentley announced a study of Nash Square that will examine the tree canopy, walkways, and ADA compliance. Two park board members are needed to serve on a Community Advisory Group (CAG) for the project.
- **Biltmore Hills Master Plan Update / Cross Link Property:** The community requested that the city examine the Cross Link property adjacent to Biltmore Hills as part of a broader master plan update

for the park. Two park board members are needed for this project as well. Links to both project scopes are included in the Director's Report.

- The Chair indicated that a consolidated list of all volunteer needs from the meeting would be circulated.

## COMMITTEE REPORTS

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### Parks Committee

- The committee received an extensive presentation on the Forestville Road Park master plan. Key highlights included an interpretive loop trail integrated within the park, designed to accommodate different grading and surface materials and to appeal to users who prefer to measure their activity in loops. The committee also discussed the park's historic cabin, which has been determined to be too challenging and costly to fully refurbish. Instead, the cabin will be reinterpreted so that visitors can view different parts of the structure from various vantage points, with surrounding features highlighting the history of the site and its former residents.

### Fred Fletcher Awards Committee

- The committee met at Kiwanis Park and finalized award winners (not yet publicly announced). The committee decided to offer two Outstanding Park Volunteer awards: one in horticulture and one in landscape. A nomination was also moved from the Financial Contributor category to the Award of Excellence category.
- **Key Dates:**
  - March 13 (4:00 to 6:00 p.m.): headshot photos for award winners and any interested board members. Formal invitations will be sent in April.
  - April 22: board members should have selected their presentation categories and contacted their assigned winners.
  - April 28: RSVP deadline.

### Greenway Committee

- The committee reviewed the Leaf Out presentation and adopted its 2026 goals, two of which focus on greenway detours and closures, with the committee planning to leverage FRoG (Friends of the Raleigh Greenway) to supplement staff communications. A third major objective is to examine the collapse of bollards, which will be addressed at the March committee meeting.

## **Sustainability, Wildlife, and Urban Trees Committee**

- The committee's primary work – the Leaf Out initiative – was presented to the full board during this meeting.
- The committee will not meet in March because the city council's regular meeting day falls on the primary election date. The city council meeting at which Leaf Out will be presented is scheduled for March 17 at 1:00 p.m. under the report and recommendation of the city manager. Committee members and supporters are encouraged to attend and wear green.

## **LIAISON REPORTS**

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### **Arts Commission (CORAC)**

- Medal of Arts nominations are currently open. Steve Brechbiel has agreed to serve as the new Arts Commission liaison going forward.

### **Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Commission (BPAC)**

- CAMPO presented on the Triangle Bikeway, specifically the eastern section from the Morrisville area into Raleigh, extending to approximately the western edge of the NC State University campus. Discussion focused on maintaining the path at maximum width to accommodate multimodal activity without interference between users. The project has a long-term horizon of approximately 15 years.

### **Dix Park Leadership Committee**

- The meeting was canceled due to ice. The committee is scheduled to meet the following week.

### **Historic Resources and Museum Advisory Board**

- Pullen Park reopens in April with the new electric train. Pope House Museum reopens in May. Top Greene Park will close in July for its two-year bond project.

### **2026 Environmental Awards**

- One board representative is needed to serve on the Environmental Awards jury. The jury will meet Thursday, March 12, from 4:00 to 6:30 p.m. The application deadline has been extended.

## Work Plan Committee

- Iain Burnett is seeking three to four volunteers, ideally a mix of new and established board members. The committee will receive the department's operational priorities from Stephen Bentley in March, then hold an in-person meeting to set focus areas. From there, the four standing committees will develop their own priority areas for the coming fiscal year. The time commitment is approximately two in-person meetings and some email correspondence. The goal is to complete the work plan by mid-May for presentation at the board retreat and approval in June.

## Park Bond Engagement

- The Forestville Road Park CAG has completed its work and produced a comprehensive document (647 pages). The document will be reviewed again at the March 5 CAG meeting, with approval expected at that time. It will then be forwarded to the full board, which will determine how long to hold it before voting.

## CHAIR REPORT

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- The Chair announced plans for a board retreat in May, noting it will be a collaborative experience with staff focused on relationship-building, policy familiarity, and improved cooperation. Board members were asked to hold weekend dates in May.

## OTHER BUSINESS

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### Biltmore Hills Motion

- **Iain Burnett** raised concerns about the direction of the Biltmore Hills Tennis Project, drawing on personal experience playing tennis in high school. He described the difference between schools with new courts and those with aging, cracked courts with drainage problems, noting that puddles on a court introduce an element of luck into the game where there should only be skill. He stated the current project trajectory would result in a complex with new, good courts alongside old, deteriorating ones.
  - He acknowledged the difficulty of revisiting a project already in design but noted it is not without precedent, citing a recent project where a city council member requested a water feature addition that increased the budget.
- **Motion** that the board request the City Council review the Biltmore Hills project in light of public feedback and consider a revision to the project plan that will include a rebuild of the existing courts and incorporation of a park structure for on-site staff. **The motion passed unanimously.**

- **Bob Edgerton** suggested the board retreat be held at Biltmore Hills Community Center to give board members an opportunity to visit the site firsthand.
- **April Love** supported the suggestion, noting she had raised the idea of a site visit at the previous meeting and emphasized the importance of the board seeing the facility in person, citing her own history as a camper, junior counselor, and director at Biltmore Hills and Tarboro Road.
- **Stephen Bentley** confirmed that site visits can be arranged in pairs (to avoid triggering public meeting requirements) and that the availability of the community center for the retreat would be explored.

## **Biltmore Hills Master Plan Clarification**

- **Kara Strang** asked whether any decisions had been made regarding the Biltmore Hills project since the canceled January focus group meeting. **Stephen Bentley** clarified that the tennis project is an approved project currently in design and permitting, while the broader master plan update for the overall park (which includes the Cross Link property) is a separate effort. The January focus group meeting for the master plan was canceled due to weather.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

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The meeting was adjourned.