



City of Gahanna

Meeting Minutes

Parks & Recreation Board

200 South Hamilton Road
Gahanna, Ohio 43230

Jan Ross, Chair
Eric Miller, Vice Chair
Ken Shepherd, Secretary
Holly Haines
Chrissy Kaminski
Harvey McCleskey
Donna Simmons

Harmoni Grable, Clerk

Wednesday, November 12, 2025

7:00 PM

Gahanna City Hall, Council Chambers

A. CALL MEETING TO ORDER

Vice Chair called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. The agenda was published on November 7, 2025.

B. ROLL CALL

Staff in Attendance: Stephania Ferrell, Director; Brian Gill, Superintendent; Chelsea Heppert, Supervisor Recreation; Tyler Wilson, Coordinator I; Harmoni Grable, Clerk.

Present: 4 - Eric Miller, Donna Simmons, Ken Shepherd and Holly Haines

Absent: 3 - Chrissy Kaminski, Jan Ross and Harvey McCleskey

C. Meeting Minutes 10.15.25

Attachments: [Meeting Minutes 10.15.25](#)

[Final MM 10.15 PR Board](#)

A motion was made by Shepherd, seconded by Simmons, that the October 15, 2025 Minutes be Approved. The motion carried unanimously.

Yes: 4 - Miller, Simmons, Shepherd and Haines

Absent: 3 - Kaminski, Ross and McCleskey

D. ADDITIONS OR CORRECTIONS TO THE AGENDA

E. HEARING OF VISITORS

Tim McClurg of 935 Leaflock Ct.

Mr. McClurg raised safety concerns about the bike path crossing at

Hamilton Road near I-270 and suggested exploring a tunnel option. He inquired about additional parking at Rocky Fork South through potential use of a nearby church lot. He also requested red icicle lights for the Mill Street Bridge during Holiday Lights, flood-safe spotlights for the Creekside waterfall, and a walking bridge connecting Friendship Park to the bike path on the east side.

G. CORRESPONDENCE AND ACTIONS

F. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

H. NEW BUSINESS

2025 EVENTS YEAR END REVIEW

Ms. Heppert stated that she has been with the program for over three years and oversees special events, paddle programming, volunteers, and sponsorships as the Parks and Recreation Events Supervisor. She works with Tyler Wilson, Recreation Coordinator, who assists and has been with the city for a year and a half.

In 2025, the paddle program hired 21 seasonal staff, with 61% returning from the previous year. Orientation focused on safety, customer service, and operational procedures. The program recorded 644 paddle boat rentals and 161 kayak rentals, generating \$8,000 in revenue—a slight decrease from 2024 due to increased rainfall. Additional ACA-certified instructors were trained, and the program offered two Kayak 101 sessions and a four-night Celestial Paddle with 38 participants. Ms. Heppert noted upcoming 2026 program additions, including a spring bird-migration float. She also credited an ODNR Boating & Education Safety grant for enabling the purchase of an additional trailer, contributing to the season's success.

To date in 2025, 17 events have been held with a total attendance of 23,000, slightly lower than 2024 due to the City's 175th anniversary celebrations last year. The City assisted with four internal events, including Mental Health Awareness and a Strategic Plan Talk of Tuesday session. The program continues to process and review special event applications and 5K permits, providing logistical and organizational

support. Significant coordination was required for the Vietnam Traveling Wall, which involved months of planning across multiple departments. Overall, substantial behind-the-scenes work contributed to successful events.

Mr. Wilson reported that the 2025 Gahanna Market was successful, featuring more than 22 vendors offering diverse products. He highlighted his outreach to other cities' market managers and his attendance at the Ohio Farmer's Market Conference, both of which supported market improvements. The Market's structure was modeled after the Canal Market District and included a mix of local and regional vendors. Each event featured a different local nonprofit to connect residents with community resources. The Gahanna Library Branch also participated at all four markets, providing activities for attendees. Ms. Heppert emphasized the significant time and effort invested by Mr. Wilson and the seasonal coordinator in ensuring the success of the Gahanna Market. She noted that while the results may appear simple in hindsight, their extensive behind-the-scenes work was essential to creating a positive experience for both visitors and vendors, whose success is vital to the Market's viability.

Ms. Heppert explained that this year staff began implementing OpenGov, the City's new online permitting software, to streamline applications such as park rentals, 5K permits, and vendor forms. Although user-friendly, the system required about five months of training and testing to ensure smooth functionality and a positive user experience. OpenGov allows automatic routing to relevant departments-such as Mifflin Fire Department for larger 5Ks-improving communication and safety coordination. The team is currently transitioning the roughly 12-page paper special event application into OpenGov to create a more efficient, centralized, and accessible process for applicants and City departments. Initial feedback on the system has been very positive.

Ms. Heppert explained that in 2025, fundraising continued to play a key role, with the department securing \$55,000 in sponsorships. The sponsorship packet was redesigned for clarity and improved branding, receiving positive feedback, and updates are underway for the 2026 edition. Ms. Heppert also reported receiving an \$18,000 ODNR Boating Safety Education Grant, which funded a new trailer, higher-capacity kayaks, and additional tandem kayaks. These additions support expanding programs, including middle school adventure days and camps.

Ms. Heppert was excited about a collaboration with the marketing team

to redesign the Special Community Events webpage, making it more accessible and user-friendly. Events are now organized by category with clear icons linking to details such as performance schedules, registration information, and event maps. The update greatly improved navigation and public access to event information, addressing previous challenges with the website's usability.

Ms. Heppert reviewed the department's volunteer program, noting over 900 volunteer hours completed through activities such as creek cleanups, mulching, invasive removal, and event support. Partnerships with local schools, including the high school honors government class and Columbus Academy Day, continue to provide successful volunteer engagement opportunities. Looking ahead to 2026, staff are developing an Adopt-A-Park program to offer ongoing, park-specific volunteer roles for individuals and groups. Work is underway on related volunteer policies and training procedures to ensure participants are properly prepared and supported. For 2026, staff anticipate a busy year with approximately 23 internal events planned and five external special event applications received to date.

Mr. Gill praised the team for a record-setting year, highlighting successes including onboarding, the ODNR grant for new kayaks and equipment, the OpenGov rollout, and the return of the Gahanna Market. He noted last year's Gahanna 175 event earned second place for historical and cultural arts at the OPRA Conference. The team excels in coordinating staff, volunteers, and the public, and often supports logistics and resources for other city events, such as the Senior Expo. Mr. Gill expressed appreciation for their dedication, flexibility, and work on nights and weekends.

Mr. Shepherd asked if the 21 total vendors were the limited number or the total who signed up. Mr. Wilson clarified that 21 vendors participated across the season, not per market, with space and layout considerations ensuring variety. Mr. Shepherd asked if there was any feedback from the vendors. Ms. Heppert noted the importance of building vendor relationships and reported positive feedback on location, marketing, and organization: Attendance improved after initial weather-related impacts. Mr. Sheperd asked if in 2026 they were planning on having more than the five applications received so far. Ms. Heppert explained that there are certain procedures that external events must follow for the application and approval process, so they expect these numbers to grow as applications are finalized. Mrs. Simmons asked if there was a possibility of collaboration with programs like SNAP or WIC and other nutritional

assistance programs through the USDA. Ms. Heppert explained that she hopes so in the future. Mrs. Simmons asked if OpenGov notifies GPD or Mifflin Township about the event. Ms. Heppert explained that it depends on the permit. For instance, under the vendor application, if a vendor indicates they cook with propane gas, a notification is sent automatically. Beyond that, staff coordinate directly with other departments as needed. Mrs. Simmons asked how much it costs to rent the paddle boats and kayaks. Ms. Heppert stated it is ten dollars for 30 minutes. Mrs. Simmons expressed how excited her neighbors were to attend the Great Goblin Fest and how many compliments it receives. Ms. Heppert stated that the event saw about 4,500 in attendance. Mrs. Haines asked about trends, including weather, with the paddle program. Ms. Heppert stated that weekends are more popular, with Monday-Friday hours from 4 p.m. - 8 p.m., and Saturday and Sunday hours from 12 p.m. - 8 p.m., staff and weather permitting. Mrs. Haines asked if there was a need for children with disabilities in the paddle program. Ms. Heppert said it is not as large for the paddle program, but they have seen the need with events like the Exhilarating Egg Hunt, which filled up its sensory-friendly session two years in a row. They are also exploring hosting an indoor session with the opening of Price Road. Independence Day offers sensory-friendly headphones to help reduce noise levels for attendees who need them. Mrs. Haines suggested exploring more adaptive equipment through future grants or funding. She then asked if the Columbus Academy program could be replicated with Gahanna schools. Ms. Heppert said it is something she would like to explore, depending on staffing and availability.

Mrs. Ferrell stated that multiple opportunities have been implemented, such as the Arbor Day Celebration, where students planted trees at Friendship Park and later returned to visit them. This provides a good model to replicate.

Ms. Heppert stated that they do not have any add-on certification for adaptive paddling. Having the four new certifications with instructors has been wonderful, but finding someone to teach adaptive lessons has been difficult. The instructor who certified them is from Sandusky, which makes arranging lessons challenging, especially during peak times. They have relationships with adaptive sports specialists in hopes of potential partnerships, depending on available resources.

Mr. Miller asked how many of the 5Ks were street runs versus trail runs. Ms. Heppert stated that they met in early January with the Safety Division to review procedures and protocols and decided to no longer offer street

runs, transitioning them to routes at Academy Park.

Mr. Miller asked if there were plans to change the fees for event permits.

Mrs. Ferrell stated that the process is under review, considering the increasing costs of services and safety requirements for larger attendance events, as part of implementing OpenGov. Mr. Shepherd noted that the fees were very reasonable and asked how volunteers are recruited for these events. Ms. Heppert stated that they utilize volunteer software linked to the City website, an email list from previous volunteers, and partnerships with organizations. Advertising for the Adopt-A-Park program includes the city website and local businesses. The first year would be smaller to work out issues for future success.

Mrs. Ferrell noted that the department's work, including the Gahanna Market, reflects priorities identified in the Master Plan. The Master Plan highlighted the community's need for expanded outdoor adventure programming, prompting growth in the paddling program and other park-based activities. She emphasized the importance of alternative funding through grants and corporate partnerships, as well as plans to expand the volunteer program for residents.

I. DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Attachments: [PR Directors Report October 2025](#)

Mrs. Ferrell noted that construction on the Exploration Center is in progress, with a walkthrough scheduled for this November 20th. The department obtained a grant through the Transportation Alternatives Program via ODOT for \$136,000 for Wayfinding and signage around the Big Walnut Trail, which aligns with the Master Plan. There is a deck replacement required at the Big Walnut Trail bridge that crosses over Big Walnut Creek by Stony Brook Church. Several planks have rotted and will need to be replaced.

Mrs. Ferrell emphasized that there is a misconception that special events occur only in the summer, but the team is busy year-round, including planning for the next cycle of events.

Mr. Miller asked about the Greens Keeper Revenge. Mrs. Ferrell explained that it is a fun event on the golf course with creative features at each hole, now in its third year.

Mrs. Simmons asked about the Hall Memorial Garden Project. Mrs. Ferrell explained that family donated funds through the Parks and Recreation Foundation to host a memorial for a family who utilized the golf course for many years. The garden will open next spring.

i. Bicycle & Trail Advisory Committee (BTAC)

ii. Gahanna Active Senior Advisory Committee (GASAC)

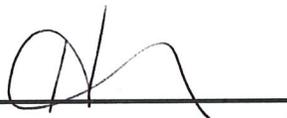
iii. Natural Resources Advisory Committee (NRAC)

K. POLL MEMBERS FOR COMMENT

Mrs. Shephard wanted to say that the Veterans Day ceremony had a very good turnout and wanted to thank Becky Kneeland for spearheading this effort.

L. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 8:07 p.m.



Harmoni Grable
Clerk

*APPROVED by the Parks & Recreation Board, this
day of 2025.*



Jan Ross