



City of Gahanna

Meeting Minutes

Parks & Recreation Board

200 South Hamilton Road
Gahanna, Ohio 43230

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

Harmoni Grable, Clerk

Wednesday, February 18, 2026

7:00 PM

Gahanna City Hall, Council Chambers

A. CALL MEETING TO ORDER

Chair Miller called the meeting to order at 7:01 p.m. The agenda was published on February 13, 2026.

B. ROLL CALL

Staff in Attendance: Stephania Ferrell, Director; Brian Gill, Superintendent; Nichole Butler, Youth & Family Coordinator; Harmoni Grable, Clerk.

Present: 5 - Chrissy Kaminski, Eric Miller, Jan Ross, Ken Shepherd and Donna Simmons

Absent: 2 - Harvey McCleskey and Holly Haines

C. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Attachments: [MM 1.14.26](#)

[1.14.26 PR MM Signed](#)

A motion was made by Ross, seconded by Shepherd, that the January 14, 2026 meeting minutes be Approved as Amended. The motion carried by the following vote:

Yes: 5 - Kaminski, Miller, Ross, Shepherd and Simmons

Absent: 2 - McCleskey and Haines

D. ADDITIONS OR CORRECTIONS TO THE AGENDA

E. HEARING OF VISITORS

G. CORRESPONDENCE AND ACTIONS

F. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Attachments: [PR RulesOfOp 2026- Clean](#)

Mrs. Ferrell reintroduced the item to allow board discussion on a potential meeting time change outlined in the Rules of Operation. Mrs. Ross suggested the board consider meeting earlier, at either 6:00 or 6:30 p.m. Board members discussed the proposed time change and agreed to continue holding meetings at 7:00 p.m. at this time.

Mr. Miller noted that the City’s website incorrectly lists the board as meeting on the second Wednesday of each month. Mrs. Ferrell responded that staff will review the website and update the information accordingly.

H. NEW BUSINESS

Attachments: [PR High Point Elementary Shelter Fee Waiver Request](#)

Attachments: [GMSE GMAC Fee Waiver Request](#)

Mrs. Ferrell introduced two waiver requests, noting they could be discussed and voted on separately. She referenced the 2025 approvals included in the board packets and outlined the first request from Gahanna Highpoint Elementary for a shelter waiver at Friendship Park on April 17, with the date available and the value detailed in the memo.

Mrs. Ross noted that a correction needed to be made to the original memo stating the GMAC students should be changed to the Gahanna Middle School East Students.

A motion was made by Mrs. Kaminiski, seconded by Mr. Shepherd, to approve the amended fee waivers from both High Point Elementary for a shelter waiver, as well as the GMAC rental waiver for Gahanna Middle School East.

Yes: 5 - Kaminski, Miller, Ross, Shepherd and Simmons

Absent: 2 - McCleskey and Haines

I. YOUTH & FAMILY PRESENTATION

Superintendent Brian Gill provided an overview of Youth and Family Programs, including a recap of 2025 and a preview of 2026. He highlighted the addition of year-round staff, including Supervisor Sarah Ruff and Recreation Coordinator Nicole, and noted growth in programming beyond camps, with popular offerings such as Story Times, Snow Cones at the Splash Pad, and Let's Go Creek returning or already underway.

Mrs. Butler reported that 1,750 campers participated last year, representing 471 unique campers. Camp Hannah and Camp Friendship were nearly sold out, with three weeks of Camp Hannah over enrolled due to sufficient staffing. Camp Thrive filled or nearly filled all eight weeks, and Camp Begins enrolled 126 of 128 preschool participants.

Superintendent Gill reported that more than 60 seasonal camp staff were hired last year, marking a record and reflecting continued hiring success. Early interviews for the upcoming season are already underway, allowing camps to open at full capacity without relying heavily on wait lists. He noted strong returning staff numbers, a positive camp culture, and the continued development of the Counselor-in-Training program. A new Behavior Specialist position has been added to support increasing individual camper needs and assist onsite leadership.

Mrs. Butler reported that campers participated in weekly pool visits and onsite enrichment activities, including reptile programs, DJ events, magic shows, and appearances by community figures. Due to cost and logistics, many experiences are now brought to camps rather than off site. Camp Thrive participants also attended select off site trips, including entertainment and recreational destinations. Mr. Shepherd asked if the parents were required to transport the kids to the off site locations. Mrs. Butler stated that Camp Thrive used an older senior van to transport participants to off site, day-time programs. Staff are trained in van safety, and only one van was needed to transport the group of 12 campers. Brian Gill explained that the Camp Thrive program is capped at 12 participants due to transportation limits, since only one vehicle and required staff are available for off site travel. Program capacity is considered when planning growth.

Mrs. Butler reported on specialty and contractual camps, including an Intro to Acting camp in partnership with Peace Lutheran (26 participants) and Bally Sports' multi-week sports camps (296 participants). Winter break camp was offered for three days with 15 participants and included enrichment activities such as DJ Matt Ryan, Gym Skills' mobile gymnastics, and science experiments led by Dr. Dan from Ohio Dominican. Activities were themed around the Olympics, providing both

fun and educational experiences. Mrs. Simmons asked if there was room for more participants at the camp. Mrs. Butler noted that the program was added after the program guide was published, once staff were settled into their roles. She suggested including it in future guides due to its potential popularity. Brian Gill stated that the program was added after the program guide was published, once staff were settled into their roles. He expressed hope that the program will be included in future guides for better visibility.

Mr. Shepherd asked days or camps for kids with special needs? Mrs. Butler responded that there are currently no programs in place, but future consideration is possible depending on staffing structure. Brian Gill stated that the current camp staffing and structure cannot support additional specialized programming. Staff will work with families to find appropriate options elsewhere if needed while maintaining safe operations for all campers.

Mrs. Butler highlighted several 2025 program offerings, including contractual programs such as Bally Sports, Spanish for preschool and beginners, Lego Battlebots STEM activities, Drama Kids, Kinder Dance, Mad Scientist programs, and Excel volleyball. Internal programs also performed well, including Backyard Biologist, Snow Cones at the Splash Pad, story time, holiday letter writing (282 children received responses), Earth Day coloring contest, and Spooktacular decoration events, all showing strong community participation.

Mrs. Butler stated that summer camp registration will open for community members, and families are encouraged to verify their online accounts and passwords in advance of registration. Camp offerings will include multiple weeks of programming at Camp Hannah, Camp Friendship, Camp Begins, and Camp Thrive, reflecting the local school calendar for Gahanna.

Staff hiring is well underway, with strong interest from returning employees, and the department is pursuing the addition of a Behavior Specialist position.

Youth and family programming will continue through community partnerships and expanded offerings, including STEAM-based programming through Busybees STEAM Program, early childhood music education through Music Together, beginner youth sports through Super Tots Sports, cooking classes, gymnastics programming with local partners, and STEM enrichment camps such as Challenge Island. Partnerships with DBAT Columbus are also being explored.

Mrs. Butler reported on several in-house programs led by staff, including the well-attended “PJ Pancakes and Plush” event, where children stuffed animals, read, and enjoyed pancakes in a Build-A-Bear-style activity. Other offerings include family puzzle challenges, junior ranger nature and outdoor education programming, homeschool recreation activities, and playground pop-up events held in parks during after-school hours in Gahanna.

Additional programs discussed included the return of the bike rodeo in partnership with community bicycle safety efforts, featuring bike maintenance, skill training, and a memorial family ride. Other initiatives include “Cops and Bobbers” fishing with police, stuffed animal “summer camp” experiences, parent’s night out activities with food and movies, and seasonal programs such as Cookies with Mrs. Claus. Staff will also support future programming development for the Exploration Center at Price Road.

Mrs. Ross asked if there were a lot of participation with the homeschool program? Mrs. Butler stated that the program has not yet started but will offer a variety of rotating activities such as athletics, yoga, and outdoor exploration to provide hour-long enrichment experiences for children not enrolled in traditional school settings in Gahanna. The program is intended to offer exposure to different activities rather than serve as academic credit, while making effective use of program time.

Mr. Gill stated that youth and family programming will continue to expand, especially with the opening of the new Civic Center and Exploration Center spaces in Gahanna. He emphasized continued community partnerships, including with Peace Lutheran, while looking forward to housing more programs in city facilities and expanding offerings throughout the year. Mrs. Kaminiski expressed excitement and appreciation for the variety of activities and programs offered to the community in Gahanna, including the creatively named Cops & Bobbers. Mrs. Butler reported that the “Cops and Bobbers” program is trademarked by another police department, and permission was obtained to use it. The program is being developed in partnership with the Gahanna Police Department to strengthen community relationships by offering positive, family-friendly interactions with officers and showing the community a welcoming side of policing. Mrs. Butler also stated a desire to expand on more teen activities as our facility growth occurs.

Mr. Miller asked what background and credentials are being sought for the Behavioral Specialist position. Mrs. Butler stated that the Behavioral Specialist does not require specific credentials but should have experience with behavior management, creating behavior plans, and

supporting children with emotional or developmental needs. The role is intended to assist camp staff, communicate with parents, develop supportive strategies such as visual schedules and structured activities, and help prevent behavior issues before they escalate, rather than serve as a primary counselor or discipline-only position. Mrs. Butler stated that the Behavioral Specialist will begin work before the camp season to contact parents and help develop individualized support strategies for children who need assistance. The specialist will also observe onsite to identify additional needs and help make physical, behavioral, or instructional adjustments to promote inclusion and better support campers and staff.

J. DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Attachments: [PR Directors Report January 2026](#)

Mrs. Ferrell reported that the youth and family program team has shown strong creativity and community responsiveness, with new programs successfully attracting participation, including some that sold out shortly after launch-an uncommon but positive outcome in Gahanna.

She provided project updates, noting continued progress on the Exploration Center, including insulation installation and upcoming drywall work. At Academy Park, tree removals are underway to comply with environmental requirements related to Indiana bat habitat protection. Playground design work at Friendship Park is advancing, with plans to integrate amenities such as benches, trash receptacles, and trail connections into the final layout after the summer season.

She also announced that the April 15 board meeting will be the final meeting held in the current facility, as the city transitions to new municipal buildings. A ribbon-cutting and introduction to the new senior space are tentatively planned, and a list of 2026 events was provided for board members to review and attend if desired. Mr. Miller expressed that this opens up good opportunities to meet with the community. Mrs. Ferrell stated that the Gahanna Market event in Gahanna provides tables for nonprofit and community organizations. She suggested that the Parks Board may consider hosting a table to engage with residents in an informal community setting if members are interested.

Mrs. Kaminiski asked if Goblin Fest will potentially be moved. Mrs. Ferrell responded that with the construction at Academy Park there is a potential for the location to be moved. Mr. Shepherd asked why the Creekside Live dates decreased to three days instead of six. Mrs. Ferrell stated that programming was intentionally reduced due to declining year-over-year participation. The department redirected resources

toward larger, more widely appealing acts to improve community engagement. She noted that programs are regularly evaluated and adjusted to better attract participation and support program goals.

Mrs. Ross asked for clarification on the \$136,000 grant funding. Mrs. Ferrell reported that the department secured \$136,000 in Ohio Department of Transportation funding for Wayfinding signage along the Big Walnut Trail. She noted that signage and kiosks will be installed near parks adjacent to the trail, with progress expected this year. Mrs. Ross asked about clarification on what a "key loan system" was. Mrs. Ferrell stated that she would get clarification and report back. Mrs. Simmons asked if we had a completion date for Price Road. Mrs. Ferrell stated that it was tentative for the end of the summer.

Mrs. Simmons asked why the trees were getting cut down at Academy Park. Mrs. Ferrell stated that the Academy Park project includes a complete redesign of the parking lot. Tree removals are required because existing trees and root systems cannot support construction. In compliance with requirements from the Ohio Department of Natural Resources related to Indiana bat protection, trees must be removed within a specified time frame. Tree removal is being completed internally by the park arbor team to reduce costs and maintain project control.

Mr. Shepherd asked about the campfire, pop-up parks activities. Mrs. Ferrell reported that the park campfire and s'mores program, now in its third or fourth year, has been highly successful. The program rotates locations each year, selecting walkable neighborhood parks to encourage community interaction, stewardship, and neighbor connections, with participants often meeting nearby residents for the first time. The initiative has been well received by the community and staff.

K. COMMITTEE REPORTS

i. Bicycle & Trail Advisory Committee (BTAC)

Mr. Miller reported updates from the BTAC, including a potential survey of high school students who walk or bike to school to gather feedback on trail conditions and safety concerns in Gahanna. He also noted that repairs to the two bridges on the Stonybrook Bridge are underway and expected to be completed within a couple of months.

Additional discussion included \$136,000 in funding for way finding signage along the Big Walnut Trail, the upcoming Gahanna Bike Rodeo,

and regional bicycle policy considerations, such as e-bike rule changes in New Albany and Bexley.

He also mentioned other regional trail and bikeway projects, including the 62 Bikeway connecting New Albany to Johnstown and trail work from Bexley toward Whitehall, which may impact the area in the future.

Mrs. Ross asked if they were looking into changing the laws on E biking. Mr. Miller noted that other communities are updating their policies and that the board will review those changes to determine whether to make local regulations more or less restrictive.

ii. Gahanna Active Senior Advisory Committee (GASAC)

Mrs. Ferrell reported that staff discussed strategies to engage new members and prepare for anticipated increases in participation in the new facility space in Gahanna. She also announced that Recreation Coordinator accepted a supervisor position with the New Albany Recreation District and has moved on to a new opportunity. The department has completed the hiring process to fill the position and expects to present the new hire at a future meeting. Mrs. Simmons stated that the next meeting is on March 17th at 3 p.m.

iii. Natural Resources Advisory Committee (NRAC)

Mrs. Ferrell reported that Parks & Recreation will be launching a Bioblitz program to engage community members interested in the ecosystem of Gahanna. Bioblitz training is expected to begin in the spring and will be included in the Explore Guide to help build interest through the program's mailing list.

She also described an "Explore Our Ecosystem" program to provide information about local flora, fauna, and the park system to attract individuals with environmental interests who may help support and reinvigorate NRAC participation. This aligns with previously discussed planning timelines.

L. POLL MEMBERS FOR COMMENT

M. ADJOURNMENT

Harmoni Grable
Clerk

*APPROVED by the Parks & Recreation Board, this
day of 2026.*

Eric Miller