

OFFICIAL PROCEEDINGS OF A REGULAR MEETING OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF THE PLEASURE DRIVEWAY AND PARK DISTRICT OF PEORIA, ILLINOIS, HELD AT 6:30 P.M. ON WEDNESDAY, MARCH 25, 2026 HELD AT THE BONNIE W. NOBLE CENTER FOR PARK DISTRICT ADMINISTRATION, 1125 WEST LAKE AVENUE, PEORIA, IL

TRUSTEES PRESENT: Trustees Joyce Harant, Reagan Leslie Hill, Alexander Sierra, Ron Silver, Mark Slover, Vice President Steve Montez, and President Robert Johnson

TRUSTEES ABSENT: None.

STAFF PRESENT: Executive Director Emily Cahill, Brianna Cobb, Nick Conrad, Matt Freeman, Becky Fredrickson, Scott Loftus, Shalesse Pie, Karrie Ross, Jennifer Swanson, Willie Howe, Brittany Moldenhauer, Attorneys Kevin Day and Justin Gunn, Miles Howley, and Alicia Woodworth

OTHERS PRESENT: Peoria Police Sergeant Stevie Hughes

1. CALL TO ORDER

President Johnson presided and called the meeting to order at 6:38 pm.

2. ROLL CALL

Roll call was taken.

3. CALL FOR MOTION TO PERMIT TRUSTEE TO ATTEND MEETING ELECTRONICALLY

No requests were received to attend electronically.

4. MOMENT OF SILENCE AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

A moment of silence was observed, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

SPECIAL RECOGNITION

Prior to convening the scheduled Public Hearing, President Johnson requested a brief deviation from the agenda to recognize distinguished guests in attendance. Trustee Sierra introduced members of the Peoria Manual High School Boys Basketball Team, along with Head Coach Marvin Jordan, Principal Devin Hawks, and Peoria Public Schools Board representative Martha Ross.

Trustee Sierra then read the following formal proclamation into the record:

“Recognizing the Peoria Manual Rams Boys Basketball Team, 2026 IHSA Class 2A State Champions.

Whereas, the Peoria Manual Rams Boys Basketball Team has achieved the highest honor in Illinois high school athletics by capturing the 2026 Illinois High School Association Class 2A State Championship; and

Whereas, the Rams demonstrated exceptional performance throughout the 2025–2026 season, advancing through IHSA regional, sectional, and super-sectional competition; and

Whereas, Peoria Manual High School stands as one of the most historic basketball programs in the State of Illinois, highlighted by six IHSA state championships, including a legendary run of four consecutive titles from 1994 through 1997; and

Whereas, the 2026 championship team represents not only athletic excellence, but also the values of scholarship, leadership, perseverance, and brotherhood, serving as role models for future generations; and

Whereas, this achievement reflects the leadership of Head Coach Marvin Jordan and his coaching staff, as well as the administration of Principal Devon Hawks, Athletic Director Constance Jackson, and Peoria Public Schools District leadership; and

Whereas, the Peoria Park District and Peoria Public Schools share a long-standing partnership grounded in community development, wellness, and youth enrichment; and

Whereas, this championship stands as a testament to what is possible when educational excellence and recreational opportunity are supported collectively;

Now, therefore, I, Alexander Sierra, Trustee of the Peoria Park District, do hereby proclaim and recognize the Peoria Manual Rams Boys Basketball Team as the 2026 IHSA Class 2A State Champions.”

Following the reading of the proclamation, Trustee Sierra invited the team and representatives forward for recognition.

President Johnson and members of the Board congratulated the team, noting the significance of their achievement and the pride it brings to the Peoria community. During discussion, student-athletes confirmed that many had utilized Park District facilities—including Trewyn Park, Logan Park, Carver Center, and Proctor Center—as part of their development.

Head Coach Jordan expressed appreciation for the Park District’s role in providing safe and accessible recreational spaces, stating that such environments contribute meaningfully to youth development and team success.

Principal Hawks thanked the Board for the recognition, noting that opportunities for students to be acknowledged in civic settings are meaningful and reinforce the significance of their accomplishments.

Peoria Public Schools Board representative Martha Ross also offered remarks, expressing pride in the team and acknowledging the broader community support system that contributes to student success.

Additional recognition was given to a parent and community member for significant personal contributions toward youth athletics, including financial support and efforts to enhance recreational opportunities within the community.

Trustee Sierra concluded by emphasizing that the team’s accomplishment represents not only athletic excellence but also a lasting legacy for the school and community. The Board collectively extended congratulations and appreciation to the team, coaching staff, and school leadership.

5. PUBLIC HEARING CONCERNING A PROPOSED CHANGE TO A HISTORIC RESOURCE – TREWYN PARK PAVILION – LISTED IN THE PARK DISTRICT REGISTER OF HISTORIC RESOURCES

Trustee Silver MOVED TO CONVENE a public hearing for the proposed change to a historic resource – Trewyn Park Pavilion – listed in the Park District Register of Historic Resources. Motion seconded by Trustee Harant and carried on the following roll call vote: Trustees Harant - Aye, Hill - Abstain, Sierra - Aye, Silver - Aye, Slover - Aye, Vice President Montez - Aye, and President Johnson - Aye. (Results: 6 Ayes; 1 Abstain)

President Johnson declared the public hearing in session and opened the floor for public comment concerning change to a historic resource – Trewyn Park Pavilion – listed in the Park District Register of Historic Resources. No in-person comments were received at the hearing.

Secretary Woodworth stated the following in regards to public input already received: “At this time, I would like to note for the record that the Park District has received written public comments regarding the proposed

change to the historic resource at Trewyn Park Pavilion. These comments will be provided to the Board of Trustees and will be included in the official record of this public hearing. In summary, the written comments received reflect strong overall support for the proposed changes. Commenters expressed that the design complements the existing structure and shared enthusiasm for the addition of Market 309 at this location. Several comments also highlighted the positive impact on the community, including improved access to fresh food and support for residents in need. No written comments in opposition to the proposal were received. This concludes the summary of written public comments.”

Trustee Silver MOVED TO ADJOURN the public hearing and reconvene the regular meeting of the Board of Trustees. Motion seconded by Trustee Harant and carried on the following roll call vote: Trustees Harant - Aye, Hill - Abstain, Sierra - Aye, Silver - Aye, Slover - Aye, Vice President Montez - Aye, and President Johnson - Aye. (Results: 6 Ayes; 1 Abstain)

6. MINUTES

6.A. Approval of Minutes of the March 11, 2026 Regular Board Meeting

Trustee Sierra MOVED TO APPROVE the minutes of the March 11, 2026 Regular Board Meeting, contingent upon correcting “Hanks” to “Hengst” on page 2 within the Executive Director’s Report. Motion seconded by Trustee Slover and carried and unanimously on roll call vote.

7. CITIZEN REQUEST TO ADDRESS THE BOARD

Mr. David Pittman addressed the Board regarding concerns about a proposed land transaction (non-Park District land transaction) affecting the Riverfront Trail. He:

- Thanked the Board for postponing action for 30 days
- Emphasized the importance of transparency and public input
- Highlighted the Park District’s historical investment in the trail
- Requested a public meeting within two weeks

Joyce Blumenshine addressed the Board regarding her concerns about the sale of (non-Park District) property affecting the Riverfront Trail. She:

- Expressed concern over lack of public awareness and input
- Noted confusion regarding property ownership
- Highlighted historical significance of the site
- Raised concerns about public access and waterway use
- Encouraged additional public engagement

8. STAFF REPORTS

8.A. Executive Director

-Strategic Plan 2026 Goals

Executive Director Cahill presented the 2026 strategic action steps aligned with the 2025–2027 Strategic Plan.

Key focus areas included:

Priority 1: Capital & Revenue Sustainability

- Advancing major initiatives (Golf Learning Center, Peoria Zoo, Owens Center)
- Increasing non-tax revenue
- Developing a 5-year capital improvement strategy

Priority 2: Performance & Accountability

- Establishing measurable performance systems (KPIs)
- Developing dashboards and data tracking
- Modernizing administrative policies
- Creating an environmental sustainability scorecard

Board discussion included:

- Defining measurable success beyond financial metrics
- Exploring environmental impact tracking (e.g., water use, solar energy)
- Clarifying “performance systems” as data-driven evaluation tools

Priority 3: Public Value & Engagement

- CAPRA accreditation process
- Increased use of technology and AI policy development
- Expansion of programming and public engagement
- Planning for Jubilee Day and summer initiatives

Trustees discussed incorporating public feedback into performance evaluation and confirmed a Board/Staff retreat planned for late April to further review strategic priorities.

8.B. IAPD Conference Presentation

Jennifer Swanson, Supervisor of Advancement & Communications, and Brittany Moldenhauer, Marketing Manager, presented an overview of the session they delivered at the 2026 Illinois Association of Park Districts (IAPD) Conference. The presentation focused on developing and implementing a scalable, strategic approach to social media and digital communications for park and recreation agencies.

Jennifer began by providing context on her professional background, noting over 30 years of experience in marketing, including graphic design, corporate communications, digital marketing, and event promotion. She emphasized that the session was designed to help agencies of varying sizes build sustainable communication strategies that align with organizational mission, staffing capacity, and available resources.

Jennifer and Brittany explained that the core objective of their session was to provide a repeatable framework for planning, executing, and evaluating social media content that can be adapted across departments and maintained over time, regardless of staffing changes.

Key components of the framework included:

1. Scalable Content Planning Framework

- Development of a structured but flexible content calendar
- Use of recurring monthly themes (e.g., “Plan!” in January, “Earth Month” in April, “Zootober” in October) to guide messaging
- Alignment of content with organizational priorities such as programming, sustainability, community engagement, and DEIA initiatives
- Emphasis on maintaining a consistent brand voice while allowing adaptability across departments

They noted that a “scalable” approach ensures that content strategies can be sustained whether managed by one staff member or a larger team.

2. Storytelling and Visual Communication

- Use of visual content to communicate the Park District’s impact in a clear and engaging way
- Integration of photos, videos, and themed campaigns to highlight programs, facilities, and community experiences
- Focus on telling a cohesive story about the District’s value to the community

Emphasized was that visual storytelling plays a critical role in increasing engagement and helping the public better understand the breadth of services provided.

3. Data-Driven Decision Making

Brittany discussed how staff evaluates performance using practical, accessible data metrics, noting that:

- Engagement metrics (likes, shares, comments, clicks) are more meaningful than total follower counts
- Success varies depending on the purpose of each post (e.g., awareness vs. program registration)
- Trends over time are more valuable than one-time high-performing posts

She emphasized that data should be used as a tool for continuous improvement, not as a barrier, stating that “better than last time is still success.”

Examples were provided to illustrate how content type and subject matter influence engagement, including notably strong performance of certain types of animal-related content on Zoo platforms.

4. Performance Outcomes

Shared measurable results demonstrating the effectiveness of their approach:

- Social media engagement rate increased from 4.43% in 2024 to 6.41% in 2025
- This significantly exceeds the public sector industry average of approximately 1.5%
- Growth in followers across multiple platforms, including:
 - Peoria Park District: ~17,000
 - Peoria Zoo: ~33,000
 - Forest Park Nature Center: ~23,000
 - RiverFront: ~33,000

They noted that these results reflect a deliberate shift toward strategic, mission-driven content rather than reactive or trend-based posting.

Trustees expressed strong support and appreciation for the presentation and the work of the Marketing & Communications team.

President Johnson commended staff for representing the Peoria Park District at a statewide level and noted that the professionalism and clarity of the presentation reflect positively on the organization as a whole.

Trustees acknowledged the importance of effective communication in demonstrating the District's value to the community and recognized the measurable success achieved through the team's strategic approach.

Several Trustees commented on:

- The strength of the data presented and the clear improvement in engagement metrics
- The ability of staff to translate complex information into practical strategies
- The importance of aligning communication efforts with broader organizational goals

The Board further noted that strong communication and storytelling are essential components of building public trust, increasing participation, and supporting long-term strategic initiatives.

9. COMMITTEE REPORTS

9.A. Finance Committee – Approval of Accounts Payable

Trustee and Finance Committee Chair Slover stated that the Finance Committee has examined the bills and MOVES that the President and the Secretary be authorized to issue orders on the Treasurer for the several amounts. Motion seconded by Trustee Silver and carried unanimously on roll call vote.

10. NEW BUSINESS

10.A. Rental Policy Public Demonstrations

Approval

Trustee Harant MOVED TO APPROVE the Rental Policy Public Demonstrations. Motion seconded by Trustee Silver and carried unanimously on roll call vote.

10.B. Parental Leave Policy

First Read

Shalesse Pie presented the policy for initial review. Final approval is anticipated at the next meeting on April 8.

10.C. Illinois American Water Update

Executive Director Cahill introduced the item, noting that the Park District has been engaged in ongoing discussions regarding the increasing cost of water and its significant operational impact across the District. She emphasized that water usage represents a major and growing expense, particularly for irrigation, zoo operations, and aquatic facilities.

Superintendent of Finance Karrie Ross then provided a detailed presentation outlining the structure of Illinois American Water billing, which includes multiple components such as base service charges tied to meter size, tiered usage rates, surcharges related to infrastructure investment and capital recovery, and applicable taxes. She explained that these layered components contribute to the complexity and rising cost of water service.

Superintendent Ross presented historical usage and expense data, noting that:

- The Park District maintains water service at 36 locations with 64 meters
- Total water expenses have increased significantly in recent years, reaching over \$900,000 in 2025
- Golf course Irrigation accounts for the majority of water usage, followed by Peoria Zoo and aquatic facilities

She further explained that Illinois American Water has proposed additional rate increases currently under review by the Illinois Commerce Commission (ICC). Based on current usage trends, staff estimates that, if approved, these increases could result in an additional \$190,000 annually in water expenses, with higher impacts possible during drought conditions.

Superintendent Ross and Executive Director Cahill outlined ongoing and potential mitigation strategies, including:

- Continued improvements to irrigation efficiency through upgraded technology and equipment
- Evaluation of alternative water sources, including gray water, reclaimed water, and on-site storage solutions
- Exploration of drilling wells at certain golf courses, where feasible
- Engagement with external consultants to assess long-term cost-benefit scenarios

Executive Director Cahill emphasized that while staff has made meaningful progress in identifying operational efficiencies, these measures alone are unlikely to offset the magnitude of projected cost increases. As a result, she presented additional strategic options for Board consideration, including:

- Filing a formal petition to intervene in the ICC rate case to provide testimony and advocate for relief
- Collaborating with state legislators to pursue policy changes, including increased transparency in rate-setting, aggregation of accounts for public entities, and recognition of recreational water use as distinct from commercial consumption

President Johnson expressed concern regarding the magnitude and trajectory of water-related expenses, stating that the projected increases present a significant and ongoing financial challenge for the District. He emphasized the need for proactive planning and acknowledged that difficult operational decisions may be required if costs continue to escalate.

President Johnson stated that the Board must begin evaluating long-term sustainability across all facilities and programs, specifically noting that water-intensive operations—particularly golf courses—may need to be reassessed. He further stated that, if conditions do not improve, the District may ultimately need to consider closing or modifying operations at one or more golf courses due to the cost of irrigation.

Trustees discussed the importance of addressing the issue through both operational efficiencies and broader policy-level engagement. Discussion included:

- The need for increased transparency and accountability in utility rate-setting
- The potential value of advocating for legislative or regulatory changes
- Continued evaluation of alternative water sources and conservation measures
- Focused analysis on high-use facilities, particularly golf operations

Following discussion, there was general consensus of the Board to:

- Direct staff to continue evaluating and implementing operational strategies to reduce water usage and improve efficiency across District facilities
- Direct staff to further analyze long-term sustainability of high water-use operations, including golf courses, and report back with potential options and impacts

- Direct staff to explore participation in the Illinois Commerce Commission (ICC) rate case, including the feasibility of filing a petition to intervene or otherwise advocate on behalf of the District
- Direct staff to evaluate potential legislative advocacy strategies, including coordination with state legislators and peer agencies to address water rate concerns impacting public entities
- Request that staff return to the Board with additional analysis and recommendations, including financial projections and potential policy options, as more information becomes available

No formal vote could be taken at this time; however, the Board expressed clear support for staff to proceed with the above actions and to continue bringing updates forward for consideration.

11. CALENDAR OF CONSENT ITEMS

11.A. Bid – ASV Mulching Head

11.B. Proposal for June 19, 2026 Event Drone Show

11.C. Purchase of a Crown CG35S-7 Forklift per Sourcewell Contract

Vice President Montez requested item 11.A. be pulled for questions.

Trustee Sierra MOVED TO APPROVE Calendar of Consent items 11.B. and 11.C. Motion seconded by Trustee Harant and carried unanimously on roll call vote.

Vice President Montez MOVED TO APPROVE Calendar of Consent item 11.A. Motion seconded by Trustee Sierra and carried unanimously on roll call vote.

12. PENDING BUSINESS

None.

13. COMMUNICATIONS

13.A. Thank You

A thank you note was received concerning the Freedom Remembrance Memorial Project.

14. ACTION STEPS REVIEW

No formal action steps were identified.

15. OTHER BUSINESS

15.A. Approval to Convene into Closed Session Pursuant to Section 2(c)(1) The Appointment, Employment, Compensation, Discipline, Performance, or Dismissal of Specific Employees of the Public Body.

At 8:35 PM Trustee Sierra moved to Convene into Closed Session Pursuant to Section 2(c)(1) The Appointment, Employment, Compensation, Discipline, Performance, or Dismissal of Specific Employees of the Public Body. Motion seconded by Trustee Silver and carried unanimously on roll call vote.

At 9:59 PM President Johnson reconvened the Regular Board meeting.

15. ADJOURNMENT

At 10:01 PM Trustee Slover MOVED TO ADJOURN. Motion seconded by Trustee Harant and carried unanimously on voice vote.

Full discussion can be viewed at the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XvKlFrHojhs>

Submitted by Alicia Woodworth
Executive Assistant and Board Secretary