


Parks & Recreation Board

DEPARTMENT: Parks and Recreation
FROM: Allison Smith, Deputy Director of Recreation
MEETING: April 16, 2026

SUBJECT:

Receive a report on the Recreation Department's efforts and initiatives to support inclusive and accessible programming and events for individuals with disabilities and special needs, including next steps for continued improvement. *(Staff Contact: Allison Smith, Deputy Director of Recreation)*

STRATEGIC PRIORITY AND GOAL(S):

Strategic Priority	Strategic Goal
 <p>Great Place to Live Through Expanded Quality of Life Amenities</p>	<p>4.2 Provide high-quality recreation opportunities, events and facilities for residents 4.3 Provide outstanding cultural, educational and entertainment opportunities</p>

SUMMARY:

The Parks and Recreation Department will provide a comprehensive update on current efforts and initiatives designed to support inclusive and accessible programming for individuals with disabilities and special needs. The report outlines existing programs and event accommodations, including designated special needs programming at community events, sensory-friendly activities, respite spaces, adaptive recreation programs, and partnerships that support individuals with different abilities.

Ongoing and recently implemented offerings include a designated special needs egg hunt at Bunny Daze, a respite area at Boo Bash, sensory hours at the Splash Pad, sensory-friendly family nights at the BRiCk, programs for individuals with different abilities, and weekly partnerships with Burleson ISD Adult Transition students at Russell Farm. Also, the recent addition of a Sensory Time at the Aqua Egg Hunt, which was implemented in direct response to community feedback.

In August 2025, Burleson ISD Special Education initiated conversations with the Recreation team to explore expanded partnership opportunities aimed at better serving individuals with special needs. These discussions highlighted the need for a broader, more coordinated approach, bringing together special education professionals, advocates, recreation staff, and youth sports organizations, all with a shared commitment to improving community access and inclusion.

In response, over the past six months, the Recreation team established a Special Needs Cohort, a collaborative group designed to align goals, identify service gaps, and explore opportunities to enhance inclusive and accessible programming across the city. The cohort includes representatives from the Burleson Recreation Department, Burleson ISD, the Center for ASD, with invitations extended to local youth sports organizations.

The cohort has met twice to date, on October 28 and March 5, and will reconvene on April 23 to continue advancing this work.

Key discussion topics from the cohort meetings, including building a shared understanding of who is being served, identifying opportunities for immediate collaboration, exploring methods for community input, and discussing strategies to improve communication and outreach so families and individuals are aware of available programs and services.

Next steps include a comprehensive review of Recreation Department programs and events through the lens of accessibility and inclusion at the April 23 meeting. The Special Needs Cohort will assist in identifying service gaps, potential program modifications, and new opportunities to better serve individuals with disabilities and special needs. Staff will then present recommendations to the Advisory Committee on People with Disabilities for review, followed by updates to the Park Board and future Council consideration and discussion.

RECOMMENDATION:

N/A

PRIOR ACTION/INPUT (Council, Boards, Citizens):

N/A

REFERENCE:

N/A

FISCAL IMPACT:

Proposed Expenditure/Revenue:

Account Number(s):

Fund:

Account Description:

Procurement Method:

STAFF CONTACT:

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