



CITY OF NORMAN, OK CITY COUNCIL STUDY SESSION

Development Center, Conference Room A, 225 North Webster, Norman,
OK 73069

Tuesday, January 07, 2025 at 5:00 PM

MINUTES

The City Council Study Session of the City of Norman, Cleveland County, State of Oklahoma, met in Study Session in the Development Center, Conference Room A in the Municipal Building, on Tuesday, January 07, 2025 at 5:00 PM, and notice of the agenda of the meeting was posted at the Norman Municipal Building at 201 West Gray and on the City website at least 24 hours prior to the beginning of the meeting.

CALL TO ORDER

PRESENT

Mayor Larry Heikkila
Councilmember Ward 1 Austin Ball
Councilmember Ward 2 Matthew Peacock
Councilmember Ward 3 Bree Montoya
Councilmember Ward 4 Helen Grant
Councilmember Ward 5 Michael Nash
Councilmember Ward 6 Joshua Hinkle
Councilmember Ward 7 Stephen Holman
Councilmember Ward 8 Scott Dixon

AGENDA ITEMS

1. AIM NORMAN COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE - PARKS MASTER PLAN.

Presenters:

- Jason Olsen, Director of Parks and Recreation
- Molly Hansen, RDG Planning and Design
- Brian Trusty, PROS Consulting (referenced)

Jason Olsen introduced the item and emphasized that the comprehensive plan represents the culmination of more than a year's work with RDG, City staff, ad hoc committees, and community members.

Item 1, continued:

Molly Hansen (RDG) provided an in-depth presentation.

- **Scope of AIM Norman:** Seven elements of the plan (land use, water, wastewater, stormwater, housing, transportation, and parks/recreation/culture).
- **Process:** Site visits to 60+ parks, recreation centers, and cultural facilities; staff and public engagement; recreation program analysis; facility assessments.
- **Public Engagement:**
 - Over 386 survey responses.
 - Key priorities included: native plants/natural areas, expanded trails network, green space, and non-sports recreational programming.
 - Strong support for impact fees (commercial and neighborhood development) to fund trails, beautification, recreation, and cultural programming.
- **Recreation Program Analysis:**
 - Norman's programming distribution aligns with national standards.
 - Opportunities for growth include adult fitness, outdoor/environmental education, community gardens, teen programs, family programming, affordable childcare, and adaptive programs.
- **Facility Assessment:**
 - Independent staff-led blind scoring of cultural/recreation facilities.
 - Findings showed variation between newer facilities (e.g., Westwood Aquatic Center, Young Family Athletic Center) and older cultural/historic sites needing upgrades.
- **Branding:** Parks and Recreation unveiled a new modernized logo to reflect the department's expanded scope.
- **Recommendations:**
 - Prioritize unfinished goals from the 2009 master plan.
 - Continue investment in existing facilities and system maintenance.
 - Improve accessibility, trails, and cultural/arts programming.
 - Align parks goals with broader AIM Norman development principles.
- **Maintenance Standards:** Development of consistent contractor maintenance standards (planting, irrigation, signage, inspections) to streamline processes and ensure quality.
- **Signage Refresh:** Introduction of updated park signage designs consistent with Norman's new branding.
- **Inspections:** Proposal for regular annual inspections across Norman's Park system to ensure ongoing functionality and safety.
- **Synergies:**
 - Integration of transportation, stormwater, and parks planning.
 - Mapping connectivity through bubble diagrams showing park proximity (¼ mile and ½ mile walking distances).

Item 1, continued:

- Emphasis on filling gaps in underserved areas.
 - Alignment with the 2017 Greenbelt Trail System and exploration of expanded regional trail connections.
 - Collaboration with the transportation subcommittee on trail links between neighborhoods, schools, and parks.
- **Stormwater Considerations:** Coordination with watershed and stormwater protection zones (Lake Thunderbird watershed, Canadian River, floodplains) to ensure park planning supports stormwater goals.

Council Comments

- Appreciation was expressed for the park's directory and inventory. Council suggested making it public on the City website.
- Staff shortages were noted; one Councilmember suggested exploring partnerships with homeless/low-income employment programs (such as the cleanup initiative) to support beautification and maintenance.
- Interest in the Adopt-a-Park program and the proposed "watershed song."
- Concerns raised regarding public internet access in recreation facilities, particularly at the Firehouse Art Center and recreation centers. Members emphasized the importance of connectivity for classes and youth.
- A councilmember suggested assigning walk scores to parks, highlighting walkability and trail connectivity. Staff confirmed GIS layers could be used to expand this analysis.
- Discussion of private parks with public access (e.g., in new developments such as Village Park). These do not appear on City maps since they are maintained by HOAs, but Council noted they still provide community benefits.
- Future trail planning was discussed, especially in connection with Cedar Lane and Jenkins Avenue improvements. Council emphasized modernizing the Park Land Dedication Policy (last updated 1976) to incorporate trail requirements. Staff suggested development of a Trails Master Plan.
- Council asked about funding operations and maintenance for growing park assets. Staff explained:
 - Current park development fees are outdated (\$75 per dwelling unit, set in 1994).
 - Example: playgrounds in 1994 cost \$30,000; recent costs exceed \$200,000.
 - Staff recommended updating impact fees and exploring possible commercial fees to fund staff and beautification crews.
 - Current maintenance staff (33 employees) are fully stretched across 69 parks; no dedicated trail crew exists.
 - Options include hiring additional staff or contracting out trail maintenance.

Council agreed on the need for a Trails Master Plan and modernized Park Land Dedication requirements. There was general support for updating impact fee policies to reflect modern costs and support for publicly sharing the parks directory and improving transparency. Council encouraged partnerships to supplement staff capacity, including the expansion of cleanup/employment initiatives.

2. DISCUSSION REGARDING REPAIRS AND OWNERSHIP OF THE WHITTIER RECREATION CENTER.

Jason Olsen, Director of Parks and Recreation, reported on a water leak at the Whittier Recreation Center caused by a faulty hose connection that resulted in flooding and exposed black mold behind the walls. Remediation and removal are underway with a contractor, expected to take approximately four weeks, at an estimated cost of \$150,000–\$200,000, with insurance expected to cover about \$37,000 related to the contractor's error. During the immediate response, after-school programs were temporarily relocated to a school and library space, and the gym has since reopened. Staff recommended repairing only the after-school room and restrooms so that childcare services could continue. Olsen also reiterated prior discussions about transferring ownership of Whittier and Irving Recreation Centers to Norman Public Schools (NPS), which has bond funds allocated for improvements but cannot use them unless they own the facilities. Currently, the City uses the recreation centers primarily for childcare, while other programs have been moved to the Young Family Athletic Center and the 12th Avenue Recreation Center.

Council Questions & Comments

Council members noted that most Norman residents live south of Robinson, and the potential loss of the Irving and Whittier Recreation Centers could reduce recreational access in those neighborhoods. They emphasized that the Young Family Athletic Center and the 12th Avenue Recreation Center are less walkable and bikeable, particularly for low-income areas, making them less accessible alternatives. Council also highlighted the historical benefit of Irving and Whittier being embedded within neighborhoods, which has allowed residents, especially children, to reach the facilities safely without needing to cross major arterials. Staff noted NPS intends to fully program both gyms and that transferring ownership would relieve the City of about \$30,000 annual custodial costs and future maintenance liabilities. There was discussion of possible long-term lease arrangements (e.g., \$1/year) to allow continued low-cost childcare programs in school-owned facilities. Council highlighted the need for future recreation planning in South/Southeast Norman (e.g., potential gym at Reaves Park). The importance of open access to school playgrounds and gyms, noting some are currently locked after hours, was also addressed.

There was a general agreement to pursue ownership transfer of Whittier and Irving Recreation Centers to Norman Public Schools, subject to legal review of bond restrictions and to maintain low-cost childcare programs through lease-back or partnership agreements. Council emphasized future planning for new recreation facilities south of Robinson to ensure equitable access. Direction to continue discussions with NPS regarding joint use of gyms and playgrounds. There was an agreement to revisit the facility transfer discussion after Finance Committee and legal review.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 6:16 p.m.

ATTEST:

City Clerk

Mayor