

Town of Swansboro
Swansboro Parks & Recreation Advisory Board
November 19, 2025

- I. Call to Order & Roll Call-** The meeting of the Swansboro Parks and Recreation Advisory Board for November 19th was called to order at 5:33 PM by Deb. P. Roll call was conducted with the following members present: Deb Pylpiw, Matthew Prane, Jennifer Steele, Elena Messenger, Bets Love, and Ryan Swans. All board members were in attendance.

II. Adoption of Minutes

- a. Adoption of October 22, 2025, Meeting Minutes- The board reviewed the minutes from the October meeting. Jennifer Steele noted that she had been marked absent in the previous minutes when she had been present at the meeting. The chairperson acknowledged this correction, explaining that the secretary had been using new software to help with minute-taking, which sometimes resulted in small oversights like attendance tracking. The board discussed how the secretary usually takes detailed notes during meetings to avoid such issues, but this detail was missing.

After acknowledging the correction to show Jennifer Steele as present at the October meeting, the chairperson asked if there were any other changes needed to the minutes. When no additional corrections were raised, a motion was made to accept the minutes as amended.

Motion to accept the October minutes with the correction of Jennifer Steele being marked as present was made, seconded, and approved unanimously.

III. Reports

a. Monthly Report-

The board acknowledged receipt of the October monthly report included in their packet. A brief question was raised about the staff interviews mentioned in the report. The Director clarified that they were in the process of hiring a new staff member, who is a park and recreation major currently in school. The hiring process has been delayed due to new state requirements for fingerprinting employees who work with children. The new hire will be able to offer yoga classes as she is a certified yoga instructor.

b. Upcoming Programs/Events

Sara reported on several upcoming programs and events. A pickleball tournament was scheduled for Saturday with 50 participants registered, which is 6-8 more than the previous tournament. The Sprout Scouts and Tiny Truckers programs were continuing as usual, though Sprouts would only run one session this month due to the holidays. Santa Fest will be held at the recreation center on December 6th as a family event featuring crafts, games, hot cocoa, and photos with Santa and Mrs. Claus.

Other upcoming programs included a theater trip to see Anastasia, which had recently run successfully with new participants; an ugly sweater pickleball smash, several

Christmas-themed programs including a wreath class. The holiday canvas program will run for a week, and people can vote for their favorite holiday artwork.

Elena M. asked if the theater trips were successful and if were consistently booked. Deb P., who runs those programs, replied that most of the time they are booked, but every so often a trip may have to be cancelled due to lack of enrollment.

c. Updates

Updates focused primarily on the Christmas Flotilla preparations. With 14 boats registered compared to 17 the previous year, staff planned to reach out to regular participants from past years to encourage additional registrations. They typically received a few more registrations in the final week, and sometimes boats registered on the day of the event. The Director also reported that they had 13 vendors confirmed for the flotilla event, including food vendors offering a variety of options. She noted that nonprofit vendors participate for free as a fundraising opportunity.

The discussion turned to the optimal number of boats for the event. While everyone wanted to see many boats, too many created navigation challenges in the harbor. The board discussed the inherent challenges of the flotilla, including darkness, tides, currents, and the disorienting effects of boat lights. Support was provided by the fire department, Lady Swan (which conducts a cruise while serving as a turn marker), and the Coast Guard. However, boats often ignored instructions to go past Ward Farm before turning, which would create a larger, easier circle. Instead, many cut the turn short, creating a tighter, more dangerous circuit.

The board engaged in a lengthy discussion about whether a traditional Christmas parade might be a viable alternative or addition to the flotilla in the future. Some board members suggested that a land parade might allow for greater participation from school groups and community organizations, while others emphasized the unique nautical tradition of the flotilla and its importance to the town's identity. Concerns about staffing requirements and the tradition of the event were discussed. No formal decision was made to change the current format. Matthew countered that he was suggesting replacing the flotilla, not adding to it. He argued a parade might increase participation by including high school bands, winter sports teams, women's wrestling programs, and swimmers who could not participate in boat events. He felt increased community involvement justified considering the change. The discussion revealed that in past years, the event had included more community participation with Swansboro Dance Studio performing the Nutcracker and choir groups participating, though the holiday weekend timing had made sustaining this involvement difficult. Some board members suggested compromises like incorporating band performances on barges or seeking other creative solutions to increase community involvement while maintaining the maritime tradition.

Those opposing the change emphasized the 30-year tradition of the flotilla and its unique character as a Swansboro tradition. They worried about community backlash if such a beloved tradition were altered. The chairperson noted that while there had been some community chatter about adding a parade component, staffing constraints made adding another major event challenging without eliminating something else. She also pointed out that finding volunteers for town events was already difficult.

Regarding Mini Mullet Festival feedback, a board member raised concerns about parking challenges during the event. Many potential parking areas were blocked off, including the trail entrance parking and the closed Family Dollar property. Staff explained these were private properties outside town control. The property owner near the trail had been contacted but refused access. The large lot behind another building was designated for handicapped parking only. The situation highlighted ongoing challenges with event parking, as Ward Farm shuttle service was underutilized despite parking shortages downtown. There was discussion about one property owner eventually charging \$5-10 for parking after initially blocking access completely.

IV. New Business- No new business was discussed during the meeting.

V. Old Business

a. Pickleball Courts Project

The Director provided an update on the pickleball courts project, addressing concerns about misinformation being circulated on chat forums and emphasizing the importance of accurate communication about project. She had noticed social media "chitter chatter" containing misinformation about what would be included in the project. Specifically, she had seen posts claiming lights would be included in the proposal, which was incorrect. While they might explore options with Duke Energy for basic lighting, professional court lighting was not in the current scope. She stressed the importance of board members accurately representing the project scope when discussing it publicly to avoid creating false expectations. The Director is proposing to add six regulation sized pickleball courts with fencing and windscreens to Municipal Park. Other court amenities could include benches, shading, storage, paddle racks, and message boards, but is all dependent on budget availability.

The Director has created a detailed draft with bullet points covering all project elements and provided it to the Town Manager for review. She has begun expanding each section into full written format. She will review again with the Town Manager after the revision of the drafted RFP. Director Stanley stated the RFP would be posted

on government sites, the North Carolina Recreation and Park Association website, and the town website. Several companies have already expressed interest in the project.

Board members expressed concern about the pace of progress on the project, noting that the concept of six dedicated courts with fencing had been agreed upon months ago. There was discussion about the RFP process and the level of detail needed in the specifications to ensure quality proposals.

Bets Love explained that oversimplifying the RFP could result in bids ranging from \$800 to \$800,000 due to variations in materials, court sizing, line specifications, fencing quality, and other factors. Proper specifications were necessary to ensure comparable, regulation-compliant bids.

The Director also mentioned that she had not yet received a response from the state regarding the removal of the skate park equipment.

b. Pool Committee

Matthew reported that survey responses had reached 418, up from 401 the previous month, indicating a plateau in participation. He had not yet received the data analysis despite requesting it from the fire chief. He acknowledged that promotion opportunities were limited and that the special committee meeting scheduled for the day after the last board meeting had never been confirmed and therefore did not occur.

Matthew noted that while they had exceeded 3% of the town population (a good response rate in marketing terms), many responses likely came from Hubert and surrounding areas. When asked about goals for Swansboro-only responses, he explained he did not have such a goal because if the data showed sustainability, it should not matter whether funding came from Swansboro or surrounding communities. He referenced previous discussions noting that most Parks and Recreation event participants came from Hubert anyway. There is a question in the survey that can identify Swansboro residents and will be able separate that information.

The board discussed promotion strategies, with Matthew explaining he had been told not to respond to social media as the committee chairman. Board members suggested various approaches including placing QR codes at fitness facilities, libraries, and restaurants, and having swim team members distribute codes at town events. The distinction was made between responding to social media posts (which he should avoid) versus promoting the survey (which seemed acceptable).

Ideas proliferated for increasing participation, including having Special Olympics teams and swimmers distribute QR codes at upcoming events like the Flotilla and Santa Fest,

putting codes on swim team apparel, and creating promotional materials. The discussion emphasized finding creative, non-confrontational ways to gather more data before presenting to the newly elected commissioners.

Matthew confirmed he had asked to keep the survey open through swimming season and would continue seeking ways to increase participation while obtaining and analyzing existing data.

VI. Comments

An individual from the audience opened the comments section by addressing the misinformation issue, suggesting it stemmed from lack of information rather than malicious intent. She proposed that staff post updates on their group communication channel to ensure accurate information dissemination, preventing board members from inadvertently spreading incorrect details when updating others after meetings. While acknowledging that agenda and minutes were posted online, she noted people might not actively seek these documents. Sara suggested Pickleball Members read minutes from the meetings online to receive the most updated information.

The same individual then asked about the RFP, initially struggling with the acronym until it was explained as "Request for Proposal." She sought clarification on whether plans were already drawn for the courts, learning that plans would come from the bidders based on the RFP specifications. She inquired about the bid evaluation process, learning that companies would submit proposals knowing exactly what they were bidding on (six courts with fencing and specified amenities).

The same individual also raised safety concerns about the abandoned skate park, noting that despite fencing and no trespassing signs, kids were still accessing the facility by climbing over and under barriers and tearing apart fencing. Staff confirmed awareness of the issue, noting that police could be called and trespassers cited. Matthew suggested this safety issue justified following up with the state more aggressively about removal approval, as someone could be seriously injured. The board agreed the liability risk was significant given the facility's condition and continued unauthorized use.

Another individual from the audience followed up on the design question, confirming his understanding that bidders would provide their own designs and specifications for aspects like asphalt thickness and fencing weight based on the town's requirements. He expressed concern about quality, referencing how courts at another facility had cracked within ten months. The discussion confirmed that bid evaluation would consider factors like longevity and quality, not just price.

VII. Adjournment

The board briefly discussed whether to hold a December meeting, traditionally not held during the holidays. The December meeting will fall on the 17th. After debating whether to tentatively schedule it and cancel if unneeded or cancel it outright with the option to reschedule if pressing matters arose, the board decided on the latter approach. Board members noted the challenges of holiday travel and activities.

Motion to cancel the December 17th meeting was made by Matthew P, seconded by Elena M, and approved unanimously.

Motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Matthew, seconded Elena M, and approved unanimously.