

Town of Swansboro
Swansboro Parks & Recreation Advisory Board
Special Meeting July 08, 2026

I. Call to Order & Roll Call

The Swansboro Parks & Recreation Advisory Board Special Meeting was called to order at 5:30 PM on Wednesday, July 8, 2026. Roll call was conducted and the following members were recorded as present: Betts Love, Elena Messenger, Jennifer Steele, and Ryan Swanson. Members absent were Deb Pylypiw and Matthew Prane.

II. Adoption of Minutes

- a. Adoption of June 17, 2026 Minutes- The Chair invited the Board to confirm that members had reviewed the minutes from the previous meeting. A motion was made to approve the June 17, 2026 minutes.

Motion to approve the June 17, 2026 minutes was made by Jennifer Steele and seconded by Betts Love. The motion carried unanimously.

III. New Business

- a. RFQ-Proposals for Grant Writing Services- Staff presented background on a proposed municipal park improvement project that had previously been brought before the Board of Commissioners. The project concept involves combining several park improvement initiatives into a single grant application effort, with the goal of scoring higher on competitive grant criteria by including multiple facilities or amenities. The proposed improvements include dedicated pickleball courts, resurfacing the existing tennis courts, replacement of the tot lot, and a potential conversion of the skateboard area. Staff noted that grant scoring criteria favor applications encompassing three or more facilities, making the consolidated approach strategically advantageous.

Staff explained that two primary grant programs were being targeted: the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), which allows a maximum request of \$750,000, and the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund (PARTF), which allows up to \$500,000. Both grants require a dollar-for-dollar match. In a best-case scenario, receiving both grants could result in little to no cost to the Town. Staff further noted that the project allows up to three years for completion, which would enable any required Town contribution to be spread across multiple fiscal years rather than absorbed in a single budget cycle. The Town had already set aside \$150,000 in capital reserve funds to cover consulting costs.

The RFQ was advertised for approximately two weeks through the Town's communications channels and through the North Carolina Recreation and Parks Association, and two proposals were received in response.

Coastal Planning Services was the first firm reviewed. Staff noted that this firm, led by Kathy Vinson, is currently on retainer with the Town and has a demonstrated track record of successful grant writing on behalf of Swansboro, including grants for the boardwalk extension, the renovation of a local park with a new pavilion, fishing station, and kayak launch, as well as stormwater and CAMA-related work. Staff indicated that a follow-up question would be needed to confirm whether Coastal Planning Services had specifically written and been awarded both PARTF and LWCF grants in combination.

Withers & Ravenel was the second firm reviewed. Staff noted that while there was no prior direct working relationship with this firm through the Parks and Recreation department, the Town is currently engaged with them on a stormwater management plan nearing completion, representing an existing working relationship with the Town. Staff had connected with a representative from this firm at a directors' conference, where they presented on the topic of leveraging and matching grant funds — the exact type of work being contemplated. Staff noted that their preliminary conversations indicated a cost in the range of \$20,000 to \$30,000 for their services, and that the firm provided a detailed proposal that closely followed the RFQ requirements. Their scope of services included preparation of all public meeting materials, letters of recommendation, environmental surveys, and coordination of required community presentations, with the ability to manage both grant applications simultaneously to avoid duplicated public process requirements.

Board member Elena Messenger commented that while the existing relationship with Coastal Planning Services was a meaningful consideration, the size and scope of this particular grant effort warranted careful scrutiny of each firm's specific experience with LWCF and PARTF. She noted that Withers & Ravenel's proposal clearly highlighted their experience with these specific grant programs, citing over 47 projects and more than \$19 million in grants managed, with a dedicated section addressing the matching and partnership of LWCF and PARTF together. She observed that the relevant experience and dollar amounts presented by Withers & Ravenel more closely aligned with the scale of what the Town was seeking. She further noted that the absence of specific LWCF and PARTF combined experience in Coastal Planning Services' proposal gave her pause, as she would have expected such relevant experience to be included if it existed.

A board member asked whether the lack of confirmed PARTF and LWCF combined experience from Coastal Planning Services would affect the outcome of a vote, noting that confirmation of such experience might improve confidence in that firm, though likely would not fully change the direction of the recommendation given the difference in scale and specificity of experience presented.

Staff noted the urgency of moving forward, as the LWCF application deadline falls in November and delay could require separating the two grant applications rather than submitting them concurrently. Staff indicated the intent was to bring the Board's recommendation to the Board of Commissioners at their next meeting the following Tuesday.

Motion to recommend Withers & Ravenel as the Town's grant consultant for the LWCF and PARTF grant application process was made by Elena Messenger and seconded by Ryan Swanson. The motion carried unanimously.

IV. Old Business

- a. Pumpkin Derby- Board member Elena Messenger provided an update on the planning status of the Pumpkin Derby event, which is scheduled to coincide with the Halloweenie Roast on the Waterfront event in October. After receiving event mapping and venue

logistics information from staff, she conducted an on-site walk-through with staff to assess feasibility.

She outlined several challenges considered during the planning process. The originally preferred grass location would require specialty surfacing materials to create a suitable racing surface, which would increase the cost of the event and potentially price it out of reach for participants. Alternatives were explored, including use of a nearby parking lot, but concerns were raised about safety given active vehicle traffic, spectator proximity, and the number of parking spaces that would need to be removed from an already heavily attended event. Staff noted that over 1,000 attendees came through the event the prior year, making preservation of parking capacity an important consideration. Other locations were discussed and ruled out due to being too far removed from the main event area or having insufficient width.

The board ultimately agreed to pursue use of the grass area with a flat surface solution using available plywood boards, which staff indicated may be accessible through the Town's existing supply of hurricane boards maintained by the public works department. Staff noted the need to confirm availability with the appropriate department. Seam concerns with plywood sheets were discussed and considered manageable with minor bracketing. Hay bales used for other event features could potentially be shared for use as lane borders. Staff indicated a willingness to work through the logistics and cost considerations to make the event viable without passing undue costs to participants or drawing on public funds outside of what had already been agreed upon.

The board discussed the event structure, including a bracket-style heat format with three participants racing at a time. For the first year, it was agreed to cap participation at 15 to 18 pumpkins to keep the event manageable within the allotted time window and avoid conflicts with other programmed activities. Award categories were noted as items to be finalized, with common options including fastest, spookiest, and funniest. The event was confirmed as open to all ages and abilities with no restrictions.

Staff confirmed that the Halloweenie Roast is scheduled for Friday, October 23, and that event registration would be set up through the Town's recreation management software. Staff agreed to work with the board member to get the event listed and to provide a sponsorship packet that could be shared with potential donors. Any sponsor contributions designated specifically for the Pumpkin Derby ramp or related expenses would need to be clearly noted on the donation to be allocated accordingly.

b. Advisory Board Documents- No discussion was recorded for this item.

V. Comments- A member of the public thanked the board for their time and commitment. He noted prior experience serving on the board from 2010 to 2013 and expressed appreciation for the board's persistence in advocating for park improvements and community events. He indicated that the grant initiative discussed earlier in the meeting represented significant potential benefit for the community and commended the quality and relevance of the data presented during the discussion.

Staff announced that the upcoming Board of Commissioners meeting the following Tuesday would include a Parks and Recreation presentation for the Arts by the Seat Taste of the Town awards, as well as recognition of sponsors, volunteers, board members, and staff in observance of Parks and Recreation Month in July. Board members were encouraged to attend.

Staff also noted that beginning with the next meeting, the agenda format would be adjusted to include more focused items such as Capital Improvement Plan updates and budget reviews, as the Town's budget had recently been approved.

VI. Adjournment- Motion to adjourn was made by Betts Love and seconded by Ryan Swanon. The meeting was adjourned at 6:19 PM.

Next Meeting August 19, 2026, 5:30 PM