

CITY OF WILLARD, MISSOURI

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To: Board of Aldermen; Park and Recreation Advisory Board

Subject: Clarifying the Role, Responsibilities, and Suggesting Guardrails for the Park and Recreation Advisory Board

Date: 12/31/2025

Purpose of This Memo

The upcoming joint meeting of the Board of Aldermen and the Park and Recreation Advisory Board provides an important opportunity to realign expectations and practices with the Park Board's adopted bylaws. This memo is intended to:

1. Clearly restate what the Park and Recreation Advisory Board *is charged to do* under its bylaws;
2. Identify how current operating practices appear to have drifted from that framework;
3. Explain how fuller engagement by the Park Board strengthens governance, transparency, and financial sustainability; and
4. Propose practical guardrails to ensure the Park Board's involvement supports efforts toward budgetary balance and effective oversight without crossing into staff management.

This is not intended to be corrective in tone, simply directional in purpose: the City benefits most when each body fulfills its defined role.

The Park Board's Role Under Its Bylaws

The Park and Recreation Advisory Board is not designed to function solely as a passive advisory group responding to staff updates as evidenced by bylaws that have been approved and renewed over time. These bylaws establish a more active governance and policy role, particularly in planning, budgeting, and long-term stewardship.

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Key responsibilities include:

1. Policy Guidance and Community Interpretation

The Park Board is tasked with evaluating programs and services in light of community needs and conveying those needs to the Board of Alders. This requires independent evaluation, not simply endorsement of staff proposals.

2. Budget Development and Financial Recommendations

The bylaws explicitly assign the Park Board responsibility to:

- Present an annual budget recommendation sufficient to finance recreation and park services within applicable financial constraints established by the finance department;
- Recommend capital improvements and long-term investments consistent with a master plan;
- Review, deliberate, and formally recommend proposed programs, expenditures, and initiatives with financial impact prior to their inclusion in the annual budget or submission to the Board of Aldermen for consideration.

This places the Park Board squarely in a *budget-shaping* role, not merely a budget-review role.

3. Program and Performance Evaluation

The Park Board is charged with periodically evaluating:

- Maintenance standards;
- Program operations, effectiveness and service delivery;
- Alignment of services with community needs.

This evaluative role is essential for informed budgeting and policy recommendations.

4. Strategic Planning and Capital Direction

The bylaws require preparation of a master plan for park acquisition, development, and improvement. This function ensures that annual budgets are connected to longer-term priorities rather than incremental or reactive decisions. While I understand a master plan exists, it is likely needing some updates to ensure it remains current. The Parks Board should make applicable updates to ensure long term priorities are identified and worked toward.



Board Membership, Appointments, and Officer Elections

In addition to functional responsibilities, the bylaws and enabling ordinance establish clear expectations around board composition, appointments, and internal leadership that warrant attention.

Member Appointments and Term Expiration

Park Board members serve defined three-year terms. City records indicate that one or more appointments may be expired or approaching expiration. As part of a broader governance cleanup and reset, it is appropriate for the Board of Alders to:

- Formally renew appointments where members remain willing to serve and continue to be desirable to the Board of Alders; and/or
- Solicit new applications to ensure the Park Board reflects current community interests, skills, and needs.

Regularly affirming appointments reinforces accountability, clarifies authority, and avoids ambiguity.

Annual Election of Officers

The bylaws require the Park Board, each June, to elect or re-elect its President, Vice-President, and Secretary. It is not clear from existing records that this has been done routinely.

Annual officer elections are not merely procedural. They:

- Reinforce shared leadership and responsibility;
- Provide an opportunity to reset expectations;
- Ensure clarity in who is responsible for agenda setting, meeting conduct, and coordination.

As part of realignment with the bylaws, the Park Board should resume formal annual officer elections and ensure the results are clearly documented.

Where Current Practice Has Drifted

At present, it appears that:

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- The Parks Director appears to often approach the Park Board seeking affirmation rather than guidance;
- The Park Board appears to primarily receive information rather than shaping direction;
- Budget discussions appear to focus on explaining deficits rather than actively guiding the department toward financial balance.

This dynamic unintentionally inverts the relationship envisioned by the bylaws. The Park Board becomes reactive, while the Director is left without the policy-level guidance the bylaws anticipate.

Why Full Engagement Benefits the City

Re-centering the Park Board's role delivers tangible benefits:

- **Stronger Financial Stewardship:** Independent budget development and review improves credibility and reduces surprises at the Board of Alders level.
- **Clearer Accountability:** The Director operates with defined and documented direction rather than informal expectations.
- **Better Long-Term Planning:** Capital decisions align with adopted priorities rather than short-term pressures.
- **Improved Public Confidence:** A visibly engaged board reinforces transparency and shared responsibility.

In short, a properly functioning Park Board acts as a stabilizing force, not an additional obstacle.



Guardrails to Support Budgetary Balance and Good Governance

While not explicitly enumerated in the bylaws, the following guardrails are intended to guide how the Park Board carries out its bylaw responsibilities. To ensure the Park Board's involvement is constructive and aligned with City goals, the following guardrails are recommended:

1. Policy, Not Personnel

The Park Board provides direction on goals, priorities, and budgets; not day-to-day operations or staff supervision.

2. Early Budget Engagement

The Park Board should review revenues, expenditures, and assumptions *early* in the budget cycle, making adjustments and/or recommendations before deficits are baked in.

3. Net-Neutral Expectation

As a guiding principle, the Park Board should work toward programs and service levels that are net-neutral or clearly justified when subsidized.

4. Program-by-Program Review

New or expanded programs should include:

- Cost estimates;
- Revenue expectations;
- Clear public benefit rationale.
- Existing programs should review applicable input costs against collected revenues.

5. Capital Before Comfort

Routine operational enhancements should not crowd out maintenance, asset preservation, or long-term infrastructure needs.

6. Clear Recommendations to Aldermen

The Park Board should transmit written recommendations to the Board of Aldermen that reflect deliberation, alternatives considered, and financial implications.

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Closing

The Park and Recreation Advisory Board's bylaws envision an engaged, informed, and forward-looking body that helps shape the City's recreation system; not one that merely receives updates. Re-aligning practice with those bylaws will strengthen both boards, improve efforts toward better financial outcomes, and provide clearer direction to staff.

The joint meeting is an opportunity to reset expectations and recommit to those roles; collectively and constructively.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Wesley Young', is written over a faint, larger blue outline of the same signature.

Wesley Young, MPA, CPM
City Administrator
City of Willard