

**West Suburban Special Recreation Association**

**March 10, 2026**

**WSSRA**

**2915 Maple St, Franklin Park, IL**

**MINUTES**

**I. Chairperson Ted Gruber called the meeting to order at 4:01pm those present included:**

Jan Arnold, Park District of Oak Park

Jackie Iovinelli, Park District of Forest Park

Dan LoCascio, Park District of Franklin Park

Ron Malchiodi, Village of Riverside

Anna Wegrecki, Village of Harwood Heights arrived

Mike Sletten, River Forest Park District 4:05

Greg Stanczyk, Veterans Park District

Veronica Cortes, North Berwyn Park District 4:20

Nate Brown, Norridge Park District

Katie Muellner, Village of River Grove

Jeanmarie Hajer-O'Connor, Village of North Riverside

Ted Gruber, Village of Elmwood Park

Cathy Fallon, Berwyn Park District **remote**

**Others in Attendance:** WSSRA staff: Annie Hart, April Michalski, Christine Nakatsuka, Marianne Birko

**I. Approval of Remote Attendees meeting Qualifying Event: Iovinelli/Brown motioned to approve Fallon of Berwyn Park District, and the vote was unanimously approved**

**II. Approval of Agenda Arnold/Iovinelli motioned to approve the agenda. The motion was unanimously approved.**

**III. Approval of the Consent Agenda Arnold/Iovinelli motioned to approve the Consent Agenda including the January 14, 2026, Minutes, January & February Financial Report, and Disbursements for January, February, and March 2026. Roll call vote showed 13 yes votes, and the motion was approved**

**IV. Public Comment: No Public Comment**

**V. Under the Foundation Nakatsuka reported for the WSSRF, the 2026 Bocce Tournament took place January 31, 2026, at the Village of Elmwood Park's State- of- the- Art CRC indoor Bocce courts. WE had a record-breaking turnout with 18 teams participating and over 100 guests and 48 raffle prizes for guests to win. None of this would have been possible without the support of Skip Saviano and Ted Gruber. Ted single handedly brought in 40 raffle prizes! As a result the Foundation increased its profits, bringing in \$15,274. Thank you to Elmwood Park and Ted for your ongoing support of this event! The Foundation is also preparing for the 2026 Derby Gala planned for Saturday, May 2, 2026. In celebration of **WSSRA's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary** we are moving to a NEW Location to Robert's Westside located in Forest Park from 4 – 7:00pm. You can participate in a variety of ways. Be an Ad Sponsor, donate items to the Silent Auction such as Birthday parties, Pool & Ice skating rink day passes, Bocce or Golf time or any other ideas that you might have. All donations are welcome. We would love to see you all there. Tickets and sponsorships and raffle tickets are available on the Derby Gala website. Go to [www.wssra.net](http://www.wssra.net) and click on the Derby Gala link. Thank you for being a part! The Foundation continues to support WSSRA with hiring assistance The Foundation is committed to support WSSRA by helping get the word out about our staff hiring opportunities for programs and summer day camp. WSSRF once again thanks you for your continued support throughout the year!**

**VI. Under Committee Reports No Reports**

**VII. Unfinished Business**

**A. Park District of Forest Park Building Updates Iovinelli reported the Park District of Forest Park Board has added Community Collaborations to the Board Agenda so that monthly they can talk about "indoor space" potential in local school building collaborations that can be discussed at regular board meetings. Iovinelli also shared that she has met with the Interim School Superintendent of Forest Park Schools to discuss other building collaborative opportunities other than Grant White School.**

**B. No Other**

**VIII. Under New Business**

**A. Bus Lease Approval Birko shared WSSRA will have three bus leases expire in August 2026 and November 2026 and January 2027. Staff met with Central States Bus Leasing and Best Bus Sales and were informed of the current lease options based on the Ford MICROBIRD DS Accessible Series and the Endera ADA Bus Ford E50. Both have the same Chasse as our current buses. Birko discussed the comparison and shared WSSRA has been very satisfied with the Ford MICROBIRD DS-Series buses and sees very little differences between the 2 vehicles. Central States requires a 6-month lead on orders and Best Bus 1-month. Staff and Board discussed further the benefits of purchasing vs. leasing. Sletten shared WSSRA got into**

the leasing of vehicles because it was a confirmed amount annually to maintain the bus fleet. Birko agreed WSSRA was in a very different situation financially when WSSRA transitioned from buying to leasing. She said WSSRA is able to afford the purchase of one vehicle but is not willing to commit to all buses being purchased in the future as it is a huge financial commitment. Arnold asked if WSSRA is comfortable in purchasing or leasing this vehicle or consider extending the lease. Hart stated she would not recommend extending the lease on this vehicle as it is showing signs of repairs needed. Birko shared she was open to the purchase of the Accessible vehicle as long as the warranty covers the lift as there is greater risk of repairs needed for an accessible vehicle.

**Arnold/Sletten motioned by roll call vote to approve the purchase of the Best Bus Sales Endera ADA bus at a sales price of \$114,970. By roll call vote the motion was unanimously approved.**

**B.No Other**

**IX. Under Correspondence No Comments**

- X. Under Board Reports** **Malchiodi reported the Village of Riverside's** summer day camp is full and they are looking to expand to eliminate the waitlist. They are still hiring camp staff as well. They are hosting two egg hunts at end of the month, basketball is ending and the soccer season is about to begin. They just put the finishing touches on the playground design and are going out to bid shortly. **Hajer-O'Connor reported the Village of North Riverside** is hosting their Bunny Bingo for 250 guests on March 27 and an Adult egg hunt on 3/28. They are excited to have hired their camp staff ahead of schedule and this season hosted 100 people in pickleball on the two indoor gym courts. **Sletten reported the River Forest Park District's** two park projects are moving along due to the break in the weather. They just signed a contract for the turf project at Keystone and are working with the River Forest Township on the Community Center design with a possible referendum in November. Currently they are working on a community survey to gather community feedback to help with the planning process. **Brown reported the Norridge Park District is hosting their** egg hunt and Bunny Bonanza on 3/28. Their March Madness Watch Party takes place on 3/20. They are finalizing the concession stand and visiting all local schools to discuss e-bikes and scooters. The bocce courts are scheduled for a May 1<sup>st</sup> opening and Leyden Basketball league playoffs start this week. **Muellner reported the Village of River Grove** is hosting the Mother and son Bowling night on March 31 with 60 families signed up. They are also busy preparing for opening day on April 15 and the River Front Fest on May 28 – 31. **Arnold reported the Park District of Oak Park's** Longfellow Park Improvement project is fenced in and is expected to be completed by December 1<sup>st</sup>. The playground was donated to "Kids Around the World." Arnold encouraged others to consider upcycling their playgrounds to this group when they transition to new ones. Field Center, they are working with rammed earth contractors as the demo is approved and the new center will be completed later this summer, with a playground to follow. Andersen Park ribbon cutting is scheduled for Saturday, May 23 followed by the Rehm Pool ribbon cutting on Saturday, May 30. PDOP will be hosting the Ice Show on March 20 -22 and an Egg Dash on April 4<sup>th</sup>. Spring Registration is underway and they have doubled their numbers from last year! Marianne will be sharing the WSSRA Annual report at the upcoming PDOP board meeting on 3/19 and just in case you were wondering there are only 6 more days until the pool referendum vote. **Iovinelli reported the Park District of Forest Park** is adding an adult egg hunt to their series of spring activities. Forest Park's summer day camp registration opened this week for residents and they are already almost full. Iovinelli reported they received another OSLAD grant to redo the turf on the soccer field and other amenities in the park. They are currently hiring for summer with a 70% return rate! Forest Park is also updating all contractual services which they do every three years. Iovinelli stated while it is a lot of work it is well worth the benefits to the park district! **Cortes reported the North Berwyn Park District** is hosting a March Madness Free Throw contest on March 21, an Egg Hunt, Eggstravaganza and Parade on April 4, a Recycled Fashion Workshop and Show on 4/25. Cortes also noted Marianne will be coming to their April board meeting and they will have a ribbon cutting for the park adjacent to the Joseph C. Vallez Activity Center coming soon. **LoCascio reported the Park District of Franklin Park** went to a digital brochure. There are limited hard copies available at facilities for consumers to pick up. **Wegrecki reported the Village of Harwood Heights is hosting a** Kids cooking class 3/20 and their Eggstravaganza Event on 3/28. Opening day for baseball is 4/26. **Stanczyk reported the Veterans Park District is busy** wrapping up the summer program guide and summer timelines. They have less staff returning so they are busy hiring for summer. They are hosting four exciting Easter events including a Flashlight Egg Hunt on 3/26 and Egg Scrambler on 3/27, an Egg and Candy Hunt 3/28 at Trumbull Park and their "EGG" stravaganza on 3/28 at Grant Park. Join in the fun as there is something for everyone! **Fallon reported the Berwyn Park District** will host their Egg Hunt on March 21; their camp registration is going well with some weeks having a wait list. They too are working on summer hiring and they have a pond construction project starting March 30. **Gruber reported the**

**Village of Elmwood Park's** Camp registration opens 4/1, and they are hosting an indoor carnival this Saturday and expect a BIG crowd! The construction of the outdoor pickleball courts has started and they are expected to open on time 6/1. Back by popular demand is the "Bocce with the Bunny" event on 4/3 with 50 children registered!

**XI. Executive Director's Report** Birko Reported

- A. **WSSRA Co-Hosts A Successful Legislative Luncheon** This year's event was a great success with 51 persons present including Representative Norma Hernandez. While we had 6 legislators confirmed the funeral of Reverend Jesse Jackson had several last minute cancellations by Legislators. A BIG thank you to the Park District of Franklin Park for hosting the event at their beautiful "Centre at North Park" in Franklin Park. Thank you to all who came! It gave us a moment to discuss the pending bill that proposes an increase in minimum wage over the next 10 years. Jason Anselment from IAPD reassured everyone that they are a long way from moving the bill forward as it is.
- B. **2026 John Lannefeld Memorial Bocce Tournament Success!** A Huge shout out to the Village of Elmwood Park and Ted Gruber for hosting the John Lannefeld Memorial Bocce Tournament on January 31. 18 Teams participated in a very successful day of Bocce Fun including great food and 48 Raffle prizes! Through Ted's efforts we raised nearly \$15,000 in profits! We so appreciate him and everyone's support!
- C. **WSSRA Derby Gala 2026** Mark your calendars for Saturday, May 2, 2026, when the WSSRA/WSSRF will host the 25th year of this very successful event. For WSSRA's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary we have moved the event to **Robert's Westside in Forest Park from 4:00 -7:00pm**. We need all WSSRA Partners to be a supporter through sponsorships, donating raffle items to the Silent Auction and plan to attend the event! Mark your calendars and come celebrate WSSRA's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary year by attending the event!
- D. **Partner Annual Presentations** Call or email Birko with dates and times that work for you in 2026. Coming up Birko will be presenting to the River Forest Park District Board and the Park District of Oak Park Board in March and Berwyn and North Berwyn Park Districts Boards in April.
- E. **2025 Audit Update** The 2025 Audit conducted by Lauterbach & Amen is currently underway. Hannah Cullerton and Chris Quevedo did their Field work March 4 & 5 and they expect to have a draft report by the beginning of April and final presentation of the audit expected at the May 12<sup>th</sup> Board meeting.
- F. **Records Disposal Update** Birko is working with staff to get all of the Agency Disposal records up to date. Staff met with the Field Representative with the State Archives, Steve Colaizzi, who was extremely helpful.
- G. **Staff Attend IAPD Legislative Conference** Birko and Hart plan to head to Springfield May 5 & 6 for Parks Day and the Legislative Conference. Birko typically organizes dinner and will send out notice if anyone cares to join us.
- H. **Staff Report: April Michalski, Superintendent of Recreation reported**
  - 1. **Programs and Day Camp** Winter programs end on March 28, and spring programs will begin on April 6 and run through May 16. Staff are preparing for summer. We held our Summer Day Camp lottery and have accepted 111 participants into camp including our Community Cruisers Adult camp, with 19 participants remaining on the waitlist. The waitlist will be reviewed weekly, and additional campers will be added as staff are hired. Camp will be divided into two sessions running June 8 through July 24. We anticipate running eight camps. We are currently working on securing more facility space. North School in Franklin Park, John Mills School in Elmwood Park, Freedom School in Berwyn, the Park District of Forest Park and the Cheney Mansion in Oak Park have been confirmed. We also held the lottery for our adult day Community Cruisers Program and accepted 20 participants. The program will be held at the Cheney Mansion in Oak Park bringing the total served in camps to 131.
  - 2. **Special Olympics** WSSRA has four athletes competing in the Special Olympics Regional Rhythmic Gymnastics Competition on March 8 at Palatine High School. Additionally, 13 athletes are competing in the Special Olympics Regional Swim Meet on March 26, at Metea Valley High School in Aurora, and nine athletes are competing in the Special Olympics Regional Powerlifting Tournament on March 28-29 at Marmion High School in Aurora. Gold medalists from each competition will advance to the State Summer Games in June.
  - 3. **Inclusion** Our Inclusion Team is hosting an Inclusion Workshop for our partner districts on Wednesday, April 8, from 9:30-11:30am at the Park District of Forest Park. The workshop will include a review of the inclusion process and a focus on summer-related topics, including how to set up an inclusive camp or program, behavior management techniques, and more. We encourage each district to send a representative to attend.
  - 4. **Upcoming Events**

- **Family Trivia Night** We are hosting a Family Trivia Night on Friday, April 10 at the Park District of Forest Park. Families will be joined by the Chicago Trivia Guys to test their knowledge and compete in a fun evening of trivia.
- **Flap Jack Bunny Hop**- WSSRA is hosting our annual pancake breakfast on Saturday, March 21 at North Riverside Recreation Center from 9:00-11:00am. Families will enjoy a visit with the bunny, crafts, games, a caricature artist, egg hunt, and a pancake breakfast.
- **Sensory Sensitive Treats with the Bunny**- The Park District of Oak Park and WSSRA are offering a sensory friendly spring event at the Cheney Mansion on Saturday, March 28. Families will enjoy crafts, treats, and a visit with the bunny!

H. **Staff Report: Annie Hart, Superintendent of Business reported**

1. **Payroll** WSSRA has been selected by the Bureau of Labor and Statistics (BLS), to report on WSSRA's employee payroll records. This will help with determining the nation's monthly counts of employment. Hart will need to report monthly for 18 plus months. The data collector, Jean St. Jean, informed Hart that our company was randomly chosen. Hart will need to report the following pieces of information on the payroll that includes the 12<sup>th</sup> of the month.

1. **Employee Count**
2. **Women Employee Count**
3. **Payroll, excluding commissions (whole dollars)**
4. **Commissions, paid at least once a month (whole dollars)**
5. **Hours, Including Overtime (whole dollars)**

Hart is curious if anyone has been through this or has any concerns with her moving forward? Hart has included the letter I received for reference. WSSRA is exploring some additional features with Paylocity to possibly use for our scheduling tool. We currently use, Shiftboard. Our Staff Manager, Joe Juhasz, is interested in seeing if this helps mainstream his communications by eliminating the additional system used.

2. **Summer Hiring** We are currently working to hire summer staff. We currently have about 50% hired from returning and new seasonal staff with 5-6 happening by the end of this week. Our Staff Manager, Joe Juhasz, has attended an OPRF job fair as well as visited their Best Buddies program. Joe is planning to attend 4-6 more including the East and West Leyden Job fairs as well as Ridgewood Highschool. Joe has reached out to other Best Buddie programs within our communities as well

XII. **Closed Session None**

XIII. **Adjournment Arnold/Iovinelli motioned to adjourn the meeting at 5:00pm. Motion was unanimously approved**

Respectfully submitted,

*Marianne Birko*

Marianne Birko,

Executive Director, mb/ March 26 minutes