

MINUTES
PARKS & TREE COMMISSION
June 09, 2026

1. Chair Bradley called the meeting to order at 4:05pm in the City Hall Conference Room.
2. Roll Call:
Present: Chair Matthew Bradley, Vicechair Bunny LaDuke, Cory Redder, Terry Pickett, Superintendent Bob Nieuwenhuis and City Manager Justin Lakamper.
Excused: Councilmember Lori Steele
3. Approval of Minutes:
A motion by LaDuke, seconded by Bradley, to accept and place on file the Parks & Trees Meeting Minutes of the 04/14/2026 regular meeting. On a voice vote, all voted in favor. Motion passed.
4. Public Comment: None.
5. Chairman's Report: Chair Bradley welcomed new member Terry Pickett, thanking him for stepping up to represent Plainwell. He shared that the Parks & Tree Commission is an integral part of the City of Plainwell, serving as a group of volunteers that identify needs, make recommendations to City Council, and report on upkeep and project progress in community spaces. He discussed the projects that the Parks & Tree Commission have spearheaded and/or helped facilitate, like the Dog Park, the annual Arbor Day celebration, city wide flower beds and pollinator gardens and the 5 year Recreational Plan. He shared that the Commission is important and has a lot to offer to Plainwell.
6. Park Reports:
General Update – Bob Nieuwenhuis
Bob discussed bank erosion along the Mill race, near the culvert at Hicks Park. He noted that erosion is worse when the river is high, like it was this spring. The Commission discussed potential ways to manage erosion, such as native plantings along the bank, or reaching out to EGLE or similar groups for best practice ideas, or potential grant funding.
Terry asked for an update on the dam conversion project. Justin replied that we are still waiting for the landowner's permission.
Bob stated that the new location for the Farmer's Market, Hick's Park, is working out great and has had a lot of positive feedback.
Sherwood Park Maintenance Report – Terry Pickett
Terry reported that new flags were added to the Veteran's Memorial.
Pell Park Maintenance Report – Bob Nieuwenhuis
Bob reported that the kayak company business seems slower this year. He notes that DPW will be adding another cement pad and picnic table to Pell Park. Justin shared that the Kalamazoo Nature Center had reached out to the city and asked if we would be interested in being added to a grant request they are submitting to NIFWF for soil erosion along the riverbanks. He said if the grant is approved, the Nature Center has a team that would plant native plants along the banks.
Hicks Park Maintenance Report – Matthew Bradley
Matthew reported that flowers are popping up and the Christmas ferns look great. He wonders if ferns could be planted around other trees in the park, noting that Hick's Park is a peaceful spot to spend time in.
Cook Park Maintenance Report – Cory Redder
Cory reported the park up top is still bare. The new playground equipment will be installed there soon.
Cory asked if we were able to use any of the secondhand playground equipment from Cooper, to which Bob replied that the cement on those pieces makes that difficult. After Bob and his staff build and install the new playground equipment, he hopes to have a better understanding of the process and to determine if that equipment can be used.
Kenyon Park Maintenance Report – Bob Nieuwenhuis
Bob reported that the football season will start soon.
Bunny asked Cory and Terry about the Kenyon Park walking trail- both replied it could be done. Terry shared he has worked on it a little bit this year, as he enjoys walking his dogs out there. Cory asked about potential development at Kenyon, and Justin replied, no, not right now. Kenyon Park is meant for recreational use, and if the City were to use

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any of that land for something different, we would need to designate the same amount of land somewhere else as recreational. It needs to be a one-to-one trade.

Darrow Park Maintenance Report – Bunny LaDuke

Bunny shared that there is some erosion at Darrow Park as well.

Riverwalk, Band Shell & CBD Maintenance Report – Cory Redder

Cory noted no problems with the Riverwalk, and he had recently used the Trestle Bridge near Dean's Ice cream. Matthew provided an update on the Bandshell, noting that his band had performed there. He said several of the lights have bird nests on them, and the covers are dirty, limiting the light provided to the stage. He shared that the Plainwell Music Society should consider adding a second port-a-potty as the events draw a lot of people.

7. Recommendations and Reports:

- A. Add Masterplan Review (5-year plan-due 2027) discussion to next month's Agenda (focusing on the Parks and Recreation section).
- B. Add Chapter 15: Parks & Tree Commission from the Code of Ordinances to next month's Agenda for review, discussion and amending as needed.
- C. Add Parks & Recreation Plan (5-year plan-due 2027) discussion to next month's Agenda.

8. Staff Comments: Justin handed out Chapter 15: Parks & Tree Commission from the Code of Ordinances, sharing that the Commission should review the information and make changes or updates as needed at next month's meeting. He asked that Bob be removed from the Commission, noting this this allows more representation from the community and that Bob will still be available to attend meetings if necessary.

Bunny asked if the Commission could provide its own secretary to take minutes, and Justin answered, yes, it can.

Cory asked if a Council member had to be on the Commission, noting that there had been some friction between the board and Council representatives in the past. Justin stated that Cathy Green had volunteered to join as the Council liaison, and that yes, it is policy and common practice for Council to have a representative on all Boards.

9. Commissioners' Comments: Terry stated that Council works for the taxpayers- that's what they are paid to do. He feels Cathy will be a good fit, and noted that this board is intended to provide input from the community to City Council.

Bunny asked if Parks & Tree can pursue grant funding, and Justin said absolutely, that is fine. She asked about fund raisers and was told that is fine too. She shared that Chula Vista had put up a new 250-year celebration flag in the Blue Star memorial garden on Acorn St. She asked Bob about the possibility of installing sprinkler systems in the four flower beds near Industrial Park, and Bob said he would look into that. Bunny said currently the volunteers drag a long, heavy hose to do the watering, and sprinklers would be helpful and appreciated.

10. Adjournment:

A motion by Redder, seconded by Bradley, to adjourn the meeting at 5:35pm. On a voice vote, all voted in favor. Motion passed.

Minutes respectfully submitted by JoAnn Leonard