

MINUTES
PARKS & TREE COMMISSION
July 14, 2026

1. Chair Bradley called the meeting to order at 4:00pm in the City Hall Conference Room.
2. Roll Call:
Present: Chair Matthew Bradley, Vicechair Bunny LaDuke, Terry Pickett, Councilmember Cathy Green and City Manager Justin Lakamper.
Excused: Cory Redder and Superintendent Bob Nieuwenhuis
3. Approval of Minutes: Chairman Bradley noted an amendment to the meeting minutes concerning having a second port-a-potty for the bandshell. It would be provided by the Plainwell Music Society, who provide the one there now, not by the City.
A motion by Bradley, seconded by LaDuke, to accept and place on file the amended Parks & Trees Meeting Minutes of the 06/09/2026 regular meeting. On a voice vote, all voted in favor. Motion passed.
4. Public Comment: None.
5. Chairman's Report and group discussion: Chair Bradley discussed the Interurban/River to River trail, a project that had started several years ago. He hopes to see it come to Plainwell and shared ideas of how that might look. Plainwell would need to repair the Trestle Bridge by Dean's in Sherwood Park to allow bike traffic as well as pedestrians and take advantage of trail traffic. The City could place signs advertising downtown businesses and points of interest to appeal to anyone using the trail. Green asked who at the City was working on the Interurban/River to River Trail project, and no one was sure. A local business owner had pushed for it, but he is gone now.
Green asked if Home Depot was still going to help redo the riverwalk? LaDuke answered that last month Lakamper stated that Home Depot is not returning calls, and it seems the project has been dropped. LaDuke shared that Home Depot has provided grant money in the past, maybe we could reach out to them again?
LaDuke asked if flowers could be placed on the empty lot for sale corner of Prince St, in front of the laundry mat, to dress it up a little. Lakamper said that it is private property, and the owner is in the process of renting it out, so he isn't sure if it would work.
Bradley then discussed a potential linear green space in front of Classic Auto Mill, potentially tied to the interurban trail when it arrives, stating that the owner, Darius, seemed interested in Parks & Tree in general, and supportive of projects that beautify the city. Maybe local businesses would be interested in supporting projects like this. Bradley feels that inviting local business owners to Parks & Tree meeting would be a good idea to build relationships and possible funding sources for projects.
The group discussed openings on the Commission, and people who may be willing to join. Interested people can pick up an application at City Hall, or email jleonard@plainwell.org for an application. Commission members can also provide applications to people they feel would be good for the group.
LaDuke asked how communication to and from Bob would work if he wasn't part of the Commission, as she had some questions for him about the sprinkler system installed in the flower bed on Acorn Street. It doesn't reach to the end of the flower bed, and the sprinkler system uses the only spicket available, so volunteers can't water the Blue Star flower bed. Can something be done to allow a spicket there for a hose to be used to water the other flower bed, like a splitter? Or can the sprinkler system be extended to fully cover both beds? There is a flower container and tree there that need to be watered as well.
6. Park Reports:
General Update – None
Sherwood Park Maintenance Report – Terry Pickett
Pickett reported that the park was busy, lots of families there with little kids- even kids fishing. The basketball courts are used often. The group discussed the possibility of a skating rink in winter, but it seems like without a pavilion to keep snow off, it would be too difficult to maintain.
Pell Park Maintenance Report – Cathy Green
Cathy reported the Park looks good, but some sections of the riverwalk are in rough shape. She asked if we were considering installing another fishing dock, and Lakamper said not right now. The old one rotted out and had to be removed.

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Hicks Park Maintenance Report – Matthew Bradley

Matthew reported that he loves the Christmas ferns, they are just great as ground cover under the trees. Some of the metal benches downtown could use a coat of paint, as they are rusting.

Cook Park Maintenance Report –

LaDuke said when she goes, there is always someone walking a dog. Lakamper stated the new playground equipment will be installed soon.

Kenyon Park Maintenance Report – Terry Pickett

Pickett reported that the pavilion could use some touch up paint. He shared that the Rotary club built the pavilion, and maybe they would be willing to help with paint. The ball fields are in bad shape. He walks his dog in the park often.

Darrow Park Maintenance Report – Bunny LaDuke

LaDuke reported that the approach to the launch is so steep that it is dangerous. She wonders if there is a way to make it more level and less slippery, like maybe adding railroad ties to create stairs.

Riverwalk, Band Shell & CBD Maintenance Report –

Bradley said several of the lights have bird nests on them, and the covers are dirty, limiting the light provided to the stage. The bandshell could also use some paint. Maybe the Plainwell Music Society should be invited to Parks & Tree meetings as well. The group discussed fund raising, as well as the Kenyon Park walking Trail.

7. Recommendations and Reports:

- A. Masterplan Review (5-year plan-due 2027) **Moved to next month's meeting**
- B. Recreation Plan Review (5-year plan-due 2027) **Moved to next month's meeting**
- C. Chapter 15: Parks & Tree Commission Ordinance Amendment discussion
 - i. Remove Superintendent Nieuwenhuis

The Commission discussed removing Superintendent Nieuwenhuis, and how that would create another open seat on the Commission. The draft will be amended to update the membership to 7 individuals with alternating terms. **Other potential changes will be discussed at next month's meeting.**

8. Staff Comments: None.

9. Commissioners' Comments:

LaDuke said that someone needs to create a list of topics that the group discusses, separate from the meeting minutes. Lakamper said that is a great idea for a Commission member, as the group needs to choose a new Secretary to replace Leonard.

Topics discussed at this meeting:

- Splitter for the Acorn flower bed to allow a hose connection
- Linear green space in front of CAM
- Interurban/River to River Trail
- Painting the pavilion and bandshell
- Cleaning the light fixtures in the bandshell
- Walking Trail at Kenyon Park
- Fundraising capabilities and handling contributions
- Inviting local businesses and interest groups to P&T meetings

Bradley and Pickett thanked Cathy for joining the Commission.

LaDuke said she may be able to get Chula Vista to cover some of the sprinkler cost. She also asked about fundraising-how can donations be handled? How can we set aside money for more expensive projects over the long term? Is there a Parks & Tree fund? Lakamper said no, any funds raised would be earmarked for Parks & Trees and put in the General Fund.

Pickett asked what rules were in place to make sure the money would go to what it was intended for? Lakamper said Council could restrict the funds by Resolution.

LaDuke stated it is long-term projects that are the ones that are difficult to keep track of the funding for. Anything longer than a year can be tough.

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The group discussed grant funding possibilities.

10. Adjournment:

A motion by Green, 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