

MARION COUNTY Parks Commission Meeting Minutes

Date: Thursday, July 16, 2026
Time: 2:00pm – 4:00 pm
Location: Teams or North Santiam Conference Room at Public Works, 5155 Silverton Road NE

Present: **Members:** Alton (Al) Hoover, Tabitha Henricksen (Teams), Wayne Rawlins, Amanda Arthurs (Teams)

Staff: Kevin Thompson, Whitney Ned, Brian Nicholas, Toni Whitler – Boards Office

Guests: Kathy Rogers, Sharon Dunn, Dino Venti (Teams)

Absent: **Excused:** Hunter McClure

Unexcused:

Quorum: **Yes**

ADMINISTRATIVE (Information/Discussion/Action)

Alton Hoover called the meeting to order at 2:04 pm.

Introductions: Commission members, staff, and guests were introduced.

Attendance/Roll Call: Done.

Agenda Changes: Due to work obligations, Hunter will be presenting an update on Parks Ambassador's vests at the next meeting.

Approval of May 21, 2026 Meeting Minutes

Motion: Al made a motion to accept minutes. Wayne seconded.

Discussion: None

Result: A voice vote is unanimous – motion passes.

Public Input:

Sharon and Kathy shared observations from recent visits to several parks, including Parkdale, Denny Park, and Santana Village Park (not a MC park).

Topics discussed included:

- The need for additional shade trees and shaded structures, particularly at Parkdale.
- Playground equipment becoming too hot for children during summer months.
 - An awning was recommended.
- Positive feedback from community members regarding removal of the unused horseshoe pits at Denny Park, creating additional open play space.

- Continued concerns regarding graffiti, vandalism, and occasional law enforcement activity at Denny Park.
- General support for incorporating additional trees and shade into future park improvements.

A discussion also occurred regarding dogs in county parks.

Key points included:

- Concerns over off-leash dogs creating safety issues for children and other park users.
- Clarification that Marion County parks do not currently have a leash ordinance requiring dogs to remain leashed; existing rules require dogs to be under control.
- Staff explained maintenance and operational challenges associated with constructing and maintaining dedicated dog parks or enclosed dog-run areas.

Upcoming Parks Tour

Staff confirmed that the next Parks Commission tour is scheduled for September 25, 2026.

Commissioners reported the first tour was successful and educational and a similar format will be used for the second tour.

Parks Ambassador Reports

Vest Updates – This agenda item was postponed until the next meeting.

Wayne – Bonesteele

Highlights include:

- Park history and natural resource significance.
- Overview of existing amenities and property layout.
- Heritage park concepts from the 2010 Master Plan.
- Native prairie restoration efforts.
- Long-term habitat restoration goals.
- Existing challenges including invasive species management and limited staffing.

Discussion included:

- Current maintenance activities performed by Parks staff.
- Restoration priorities.
- Future opportunities to develop interpretive signage and educational resources.
- Potential alignment with heritage conservation principles.

Hunter's scheduled report was postponed due to work obligations.

Tabitha requested additional preparation time and will provide her presentation at the next meeting.

Work Session Updates

Kevin summarized the June 11 Work Session with the Board of Commissioners.

Topics included:

- Progress made within the Parks Division over the past 2.5 years.
- Current park improvement projects.
- Long-term funding concerns as the Parks Fund approaches depletion.
- Service level assessments across the park system.
- Future Board discussion regarding sustainable funding strategies.

A dedicated Work Session focused on Parks funding is scheduled for August 13, 2026.

An update regarding Niagara Park was also presented.

Highlights included:

- The park remains closed due to instability of the slope supporting the historic staircase.
- Geotechnical evaluations identified several possible stabilization alternatives, with estimated costs ranging from approximately \$150,000 to \$500,000.
- Staff are developing a phased reopening plan that would reopen much of the park while keeping the staircase closed.
- Additional safety concerns exist around historic stone structures with significant drop-offs.
- FEMA funding limitations continue to affect reconstruction options.

Commissioners discussed balancing public access with long-term safety and liability considerations.

Kevin reviewed previous Board discussions regarding possible improvements at Parkdale Park, including:

- Shade structures
- Additional trees
- Horseshoe pits
- Basketball court
- Other recreational amenities

Staff reported approximately \$30,000 remains available from existing project funding, although no direction has yet been received from the Board regarding future improvements.

Parks Newsletter Update

Tabitha provided an update on the new Parks Newsletter.

Highlights included:

- Newsletter sign-up is available through the Marion County website.
- Initial distribution will occur quarterly.
- Commissioners were encouraged to submit story ideas, ambassador observations, and park highlights.
- Erin Burt (Marion County Public Works Communications Coordinator) continues expanding public outreach through social media, photography, and newsletter content.

Project Updates

Bear Creek Campground

Kevin Thompson reported:

- Day-use access remains open.
- Engineering design is approximately 60% complete.
- A \$1.25 million grant has been secured.
- An additional Oregon Parks and Recreation Department grant application has been submitted.
- Planned improvements include:
 - RV campsites
 - Tent camping
 - Utility upgrades
 - Electrical improvements
 - Expanded parking
 - Water service improvements
 - Additional visitor amenities if supplemental funding is awarded.

Abiqua Falls Collaboration

Staff participated in an interagency meeting with Oregon State Parks, ODF, the Forest Service, and other partners regarding future ownership and management opportunities. Potential future maintenance partnerships remain under discussion.

North Fork Recreation Area

Updates included:

- North Fork Road remains closed at Milepost 5 for the summer.
- Public information campaigns continue directing visitors to alternate recreation sites.
- A public survey has been launched as part of the North Fork Corridor Collaborative Management Plan.

Scotts Mills Park Parking Study

Kevin summarized results from recent community surveys regarding parking improvements.

Findings indicated:

- Most respondents did not believe additional parking would substantially improve park experiences.
- Additional survey information will continue to be reviewed before recommendations are presented to the Board.

Undeveloped Land

Kevin reported detail about two properties of undeveloped land.

Cain property:

- Around 10 acres
- Lots of topography and vegetation

- Identified and dedicated as a park in 1962.
- Access to the property is challenging with existing neighbors.
- In 2016 the Parks Commission recommended to sell the property but nothing official has been decided.

Wiseman Island:

- Over 120 acres, with multiple parcels, deeded to Marion County in 1961.
- No good access
- Potential wildlife viewing area but presents multiple challenges

Neither property requires any maintenance currently.

Fire Memorial Plaque

Two plaque options were presented to the Commission, with the final decision falling to the Board of Commissioners.

Commissioners' Roundtable

Amanda shared there may be potential for a partnership with local native plant sellers.

Meeting adjourned at 3:41 pm

NEXT MEETING: Thursday, September 17, 2026 @ 2:00 p.m.