



Johnson County Parks & Recreation Department will develop, operate and maintain parks that enrich the quality of life for residents and visitors alike, and preserve greenspace for future generations.

REGULAR BOARD MEETING
Johnson County Park Board of Directors
Johnson County Park Department
Thursday, October 2, 2025

The regular meeting of the Johnson County Park Board was opened at 6:00p.m. by Park Board President, Gary Cooper. Dannette Morgan, Penny Lee, Dan Cartwright and Jeri Thompson were also in attendance. Park staff and audience in attendance: Kevin Leonard, Superintendent; Brad Wisner, Assistant Superintendent; Christy Howe, Recreation Director; Mike Dawson, President of Indiana Dressage Society; Peggy Racke, Indiana Live Steamers and Lisa McDaniel. John Young, Park Board Attorney, joined the meeting by phone.

Roll call was taken of those in attendance.

Gary Cooper requested moving the President's Report to the end of the agenda.

Dan Cartwright moved and Jeri Thompson seconded that the agenda be approved with moving the Presidents Report to the end of the agenda. Motion carried.

Jeri Thompson moved and Mike Weaver seconded that the September 4, 2025 minutes be approved as presented. Motion carried.

Claims for October were presented for approval. **Jeri Thompson moved and Mike Weaver seconded to approve the October claims, as presented for \$69,309.95. Motion carried.**

Legal Report:

- John updated the Board on the new County Ordinance that will change the format of the Board. John explained that the new Board would start in January of 2026. The updated Board would be 5 members made up of two Commissioner appointees, two Council appointees, and one Sherriff appointee. There was lots of discussion amongst the Board. Jeri Thompson stated that with the change, Park employees should attend the Soil and Water Board meetings since they will no longer have a representative on the Park Board. John asked the Board if they would like for him to pursue looking in to the legal options of the new Board. Dan Cartwright recommended to let the situation play out. John stated a motion was not needed for this and he would not pursue the issue.
- Jeri Thompson asked what the by-laws were for the Board. John stated the Board did not have by-laws and just followed Roberts Rule of Order.

Christy Howe's Recreation Director Report:

- The Movie in the Park event was rained out and rescheduled for October 11th at Independence Park. The movie will begin at 8p.m.
- Touch-a-Truck turned out great. The weather was perfect and the Park collected \$95 in donations. Toy hard-hats were handed out to kids who came and only 46 hats were left out of around 400.
- The campers seemed to enjoy the Bingo and Bluegrass event.
- Christy stated she has not been receiving any communication from Silly Safari about having reindeer at the Park. She will work with Brad on the possibility of having horses or ponies at the Deck the Stalls event.
- Camp-O-Ween is scheduled for October 18th. This is a sold out camping weekend and a fun event. Carni-Fall is scheduled for October 25th. This event will we partner with Uniquely You, an organization who helps children with special needs, and the Johnson County Library.
- Christy, Kevin, and Brad met with Hampton Inn to discuss discounted rates for people attending Park events and the Horse Park.



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- Christy has been talking with Columbus Indiana Philharmonic about possibly performing at Johnson County Park in 2026. Christy will keep the Board informed after meeting with them at the end of October.
- Christy informed the Board that she is looking into options to have a fall event in 2026. She has spoken with James McKenna about having Indiana Nut Growers Association help out with the event. The Board seemed very interested in the possible event.
- Christy presented a list of possible smaller events she could put together for 2026 to help fill the calendar and offer more to the public and to the campground. She also stated she has been thinking different ways to utilize the Gatling Gauntlet Course land and building, if it fails to open. Dan Cartwright mentioned a summer concert series would be a good idea to pursue. Mike Weaver suggested targeting the concert series on a certain genre, such as bluegrass, to offer something different to the public. The Board discussed many possible ideas and options.

Brad Wisner's Assistant Superintendent Report:

- There was seven events at the Horse Park in September. All of the shows went well.
- The Indiana Barrel Racing Futurity went really well. The largest one day count for horse stalls was 535. This is the largest recorded stall count for one day at the Horse Park. The total stall count for the weekend 1,258 stalls and 186 tie-outs.
- Brad showed drone photos of the Park including the Horse Park. Brad thanked the Sheriff's Department for providing these. The Board looked them over, was happy with them, and recommended the photos be put on the website.
- October has two events at the Horse Park. The first event of the month is The National Drive. This is a large show that starts on October 6th. Brad invited the Board to drive through the Park during the event to witness the horse carriages throughout the Park.
- Brad updated the Board on the sewer fee changes for the Horse Park. The Park still has to install meters to the restrooms. Once those are complete, we will only be charged sewer fees for the restroom buildings and not the rest of the Horse Park.
- On October 23rd, Brad and Kevin will be attending the Fall Community Advisory Board at the Department of Corrections.
- On October 29th, Brad and Kevin will be giving a tour of the Horse Park to an FFA group. This will be the second year in a row that a group has come down for a tour during the National FFA Convention.
- Brad requested approval for the purchase and installation of new corral panels at the Horse Park for \$13,731.14. **Jeri Thompson moved and Mike Weaver seconded the approval of the purchase and installation of panels for \$13,731.14. Motion carried.**
- Brad presented September Horse Park numbers to the Board. The form also showed invoice projections for the remaining shows in 2025.
- Brad presented the Board with a preliminary 2026 Horse Park Schedule showing the estimated number of shows. Brad requested approval of the 2026 Horse Park Contract that was presented at the September Board meeting. **Dan Cartwright moved and Jeri Thompson seconded the approval of the contract. Motion carried.**

Kevin Leonard's Superintendent Report:

- JC REMC will be at Independence Park on Friday, October 3rd to clean and re-paint the REMC Shelter. Whiteland Academy reached out to the Park and will also be volunteering in the future.
- Independence Park had to be closed down for a few days in order to do repairs to the playgrounds pour in place. Park maintenance took advantage of this and did various jobs at the Park. They demoed the gazebo, bush hogged, and did tree removal. The Board discussed the new gazebo and if a survey would be required. Dan Cartwright stated he did not believe one would be needed for the project.
- The Soil and Water District is conducting another weed wrangle in the Park on Saturday, October 4th.
- Kevin presented the Board with an updated design for the new gazebo at the Park. Kevin asked for the Board to approve the design of the gazebo and the ability to move forward with any permits or surveys necessary. **Dan Cartwright moved and Mike Weaver seconded the Board support of the conceptual design for the new gazebo. Motion carried.**



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- Kevin presented rate changes for 2026 to the Board. This would change the camping rates from \$25 and \$40 per night to \$30 and \$45 per night. Kevin stated the rate change is lower or comparable to surrounding campgrounds. The Board discussed the rate change and discussed having out of season rates. **Jeri Thompson moved and Mike Weaver seconded to change regular campsites to \$30 plus tax per night and full hook-up sites to \$45 plus tax per night during camping season and rates for November through March would be \$25 plus tax per night for regular sites. Motion carried.**
- Kevin recommended the Board remove the early set-up fee option for room rentals, instead, people who rent rooms for multiple days would pay full price for every day. **Jeri Thompson moved and Mike Weaver seconded to remove the early set-up fee option for room rentals. Motion carried.**
- Kevin asked for the Boards opinion on room rental hours. The hours are currently 9 a.m. to 9p.m. Kevin stated the current quiet hours for the campground begins at 11 p.m. The board discussed different options. **Jeri Thompson moved and Mike Weaver seconded to change the room rentals hours to 9 a.m. to 11p.m. Motion carried.**
- Kevin presented dates for Board Meetings in 2026. The dates are all on the first Thursday of the Month except January would be the second month. **Dan Cartwright moved and Jeri Thompson seconded to approve the dates as presented with the exception of moving the October meeting to the second Thursday. Motion carried.**
- Kevin presented the new Department of Corrections contract. The contract is the same as the previous one which expires at the end of the month. **Jeri Thompson moved and Dan Cartwright seconded the approval of the contract. Motion carried.**

Indiana Live Steamer:

- Peggy Racke presented a new building that Indiana Live Steamers would like to build next to their current building. She asked for the Board approval to move forward with the project. There was discussion amongst the Board. Dan Cartwright asked John Young if the ILS would have to pursue bids for the project. John responded that ILS would not need to seek bids for the project but recommended the Board seeing the final proposal before approval. Dan asked that the group make sure there is no drainage issues with the proposed plan. **Dan Cartwright moved and Mike Weaver seconded the approval of the conceptual plan presented by Indiana Live Steamers. Motion carried.**
- Peggy Racke stated that the primary donor for the new building requested a copy of the contract between ILS and the Park to show that the Park did not have intentions of ending the agreement. There was discussion amongst the Board. **Jeri Thompson moved and Mike Weaver seconded to approve a letter signed by Kevin Leonard stating that the Park would honor the contract with Indiana Live Steamers that was went to the National Parks Department. Motion Carried.**
- Peggy Racke stated the Indiana Live Steamers had over 500 riders in the month of September.

From the Floor and More:

- No comment from the floor.

Presidents Report

- Gary Cooper presented a paper to the Board and Park staff with several points to discuss.
- Item one of Gary's report was to open discussion on converting the old Park Office in to a Park Security room. Dan Cartwright informed the Board that the committee met last week and decided it would be best if the room was used for Park security considering the growth of the Park. There would be no income involved with this and it would only be in the old office space and not the Front Room or Columbus Model Railroad room. Dan stated the Sheriff's Department said they would use it for an annex type facility. There was discussion amongst the Board and with John Young. John addressed concerns on the National Parks Service not approving a similar plan in the past. There was further discussion amongst the Board. Penny Lee recommended the Park Security be in the Maples Building. Kevin stated the Maples is already a rental facility and is the most popular space. **Dan Cartwright moved and Jeri Thompson seconded to change the old Park Office to the new Park Security Office. Motion carried.**



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- Penny Lee asked about the possible expansion of the Columbus Model Railroad since they would not be utilizing the old Office space. The Board stated they would be supportive if the Columbus Model Railroad group wanted to bring a plan to the Board.
- Gary Cooper stated that Park staff should provide new Board members with an onboarding packet and orientation which included contact information, calendar of event dates, Park employees with job titles and organizational chart, copy of Park deed, and a guided tour of all facilities. All Board members were supportive of this.
- Gary Cooper recommended the Board should have more oversight responsibilities for individual Board members and more committee groups. This would help with more Board activity and help everyone to be better informed.
- Gary Cooper recommended a sub-committee be formed to begin working on the Parks 5-year plan. He emphasized that it should be focused on what the Board wants the Park to look like in the future. The Board discussed this and were in agreement on the need for a sub-committee to begin working on this. Dan asked if this Park master plan would be hired out. Kevin confirmed it would.
- The Board discussed having more financial visibility and requested Park staff to provide these documents every month.

Dan Cartwright moved the meeting be adjourned at 8:06 p.m. Motion carried.

Penny Lee, Secretary