Call to Order: President Tiesenga called the meeting to order at 6:30 PM.

Commissioners Present: Jason Heisler, Richard Hickey, Michael Jacobson, Karen Johnson, Keith Nisenson, Frederick Tiesenga

Absent: Cathy Cagle

Legal Counsel: Eric Anderson, Staub Anderson LLC

Staff: Jason Herbster, Executive Director, Erik Jakubowski, Superintendent of Park Services, Amy Olson Manager of Park Planning and Development/ADA Coordinator, Tina Becke, Superintendent of Business Services, Kurt Reckamp, Superintendent of Recreation Programs and Facility Services, Jenny Leech, Superintendent of Marketing and Communication Services, Anne Sandor, Recording Secretary

Citizens: Debbie Gallagher, Susan Platek, Cheryl Carper, Brad Fennessy, Bruce Mazurkiewsicz, John Labaj, Carolyn Schofield, KL Daley, Bonnie Johnson, Shawn Zimmerman, Tom Burney, Stiles Meredith, Marc Sparber, Jennifer MacDonald, Pat Dieckhoff, Heidi Singer, Kim Hankins, Joe Watters, Kristen Davis, Sue Warner, Heather Petersen, Jon Prolek, Heather Mance, Marie Walters,

Pledge of Allegiance: The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Approval of the Agenda: Commissioner Hickey moved to approve the agenda, as presented. Seconded by Commissioner Jacobson. All were in favor.

Matters from the Public:
Debbie Gallagher inquired whether the message included in the Popular Financial Annual Report was reviewed and approved by the full Board and whether it reflects the collective position of the Board, citing Board Policy 4.2 regarding unified Board action and communication. Concerns were expressed about the tone of the message, and reference was made to a published letter to the editor offering additional perspective. The speaker emphasized the importance of supporting majority Board decisions, expressed appreciation for tax-funded public services, and encouraged adherence to Board policy in future communications. Her full comments are attached.

Sue Platek shared a Facebook post from Mayor Haig about the January 16, 2026, Park Board meeting. The Mayor stressed the importance of respectful public service and working for the community. He expressed concern about how some Board members acted, interrupting speakers, not respecting staff or fellow members, and misusing public resources and noted that this behavior hurts both Park District staff and the community. Her full comments are attached.

Brad Fennessey addressed the Board President, expressing concerns regarding leadership and accountability. He referenced prior remarks suggesting residents should "watch and not disrupt" and cited language in the Annual Financial Report he felt inappropriately compared Board leadership to a monarchy and taxpayers to "serfs." He questioned recent leadership decisions, including the hiring of Eric Anderson and reported comments regarding the search for a new Executive Director following Executive Director Jason Herbster's retirement. Mr. Fennessey called for a transparent, public search process to ensure strong, independent leadership and urged the Board to provide appropriate oversight. He emphasized that residents are closely monitoring the process and that attention extends to the state level in Illinois. His full comments are attached.

Bruce Mazurkiewicz emphasized that the Board serves all residents of Crystal Lake and urged respect for First Amendment rights during public comment. He expressed concern about perceived limitations on free speech, stated that legal counsel represents the citizens rather than individual Board members, noted that officials are accountable to voters, and conveyed a willingness to work collaboratively to uphold the community's standards. His full comments are attached.

Marc Sparber addressed the Board regarding the Annual Financial Report. He expressed concern over the characterization of $6.2 million in reserve funds as "unassigned," noting that the funds are allocated across various categories and serve as financial safeguards for emergencies. He emphasized the importance of responsible fiscal stewardship and cited the COVID-19 pandemic and McHenry County's recent shortfall as examples of the need for proper reserves. Mr. Sparber also thanked Executive Director Jason Herbster for his service and dedication to the Park District's financial management and long-term planning.

Caroline Schofield addressed the Board seeking clarification on several matters. She questioned President Tiesenga's practice of voting only in the event of a tie, noting that under *Robert's Rules of Order* this typically applies to at-large, elected chairs rather than presidents nominated by peers, and cited an instance in which the President did vote, questioning the consistency of this practice. She raised concerns regarding enforcement of the Park District's Public Input Policy (Policy 5.17), noting that comments cited by the President did not meet the policy's definitions of "threatening, slanderous, or disorderly." Ms. Schofield emphasized that these are meetings of a public body, not the President personally, and stressed that the President's role is to conduct meetings fairly, not control them, while ensuring that the public's right to participate is always respected.

Kathy Daley addressed the Board regarding the enforcement of Policy 5.17, which allows removal of individuals who are threatening, slanderous, or disorderly. She stated that the policy does not authorize the President to turn off microphones at will and expressed concern that individuals asked to leave meetings had not violated the policy. She noted that at the January 19th meeting, only one attendee behaved in a condescending or disorderly manner. The speaker urged the Board to use the President's report to address these concerns and to ensure that meetings are conducted fairly, in accordance with policy, and with respect for public participation.

Tom Burney addressed the Board regarding the President's conduct, noting that cutting off speakers and turning off microphones is not authorized under Policy 5.17. He expressed concern that such actions could violate First Amendment rights and create potential liability under 42 U.S.C. § 1983. Mr. Burney requested that the President acknowledge correspondence from the McHenry County Treasurer's Office regarding alleged homestead exemption discrepancies and clarify repayment, and that apologies be issued to individuals who were interrupted. He noted that the incidents were reported to the Park District's Risk Management Association and urged the Board to ensure meetings are conducted fairly and in accordance with policy and the law.

Tad Walters spoke to the Board about the Butternut Preserve located next to his property. He thanked staff for their recent work, including controlled burns and clearing weeds, but noted that the waterway running from his property through the preserve to the river is blocked by large trees and debris. He asked the Board to visit the site, see the area for themselves, and consider additional clearing to help the water flow, while noting the beauty of the 12-acre preserve.

Unfinished Business: None.

Consent Agenda:

A. Approval: The Voucher Expenses for the month ending, January 31, 2026, in the amount of $491,300.81.
B. Approval: The Interim Voucher Expenses for the month ending, February 28, 2026, in the amount of $30,345.56
C. Accept: The Treasurer's Report for the month ending, January 31, 2026, in the amount of $14,169,796.55
D. Approval: Regular Meeting Minutes January 19, 2026
E. Approval: Chicago Area Orienteering Request

Commissioner Nisenson moved to approve the consent agenda, as presented.
Seconded by Commissioner Johnson.
Roll Call: Ayes: 6 (Heisler, Hickey, Jacobson, Johnson, Nisenson, Tiesenga) Nays: 0

Items Removed from Consent Agenda

Agenda Items

A. Hill Farm Barn Lean To Bid Acceptance
   Commissioner Hickey moved to accept the lowest responsible, responsive bid for the Hill Farm lean-to removal submitted by CJM Construction, in the amount of $86,430.00.
   Seconded by Commissioner Jacobson.
   Roll Call: Ayes: 6(Heisler, Hickey, Jacobson, Johnson, Nisenson) Present: 1(Tiesenga)

B. Woodcreek Project Bid Acceptance
   Commissioner Nisenson moved to accept the lowest responsive, responsible bid submitted by Carmichael Construction, Inc., for the Woodscreek Park Courts Renovation Project to a total amount of $661,383.00 (Base Bid Price) and approve the project budget of $732,000.00.
   Seconded by Commissioner Johnson.
   Roll Call: Ayes: 6 (Jacobson, Johnson, Nisenson, Heisler, Hickey) Present: 1(Tiesenga)

C. Stump Grinder Purchase
   Commissioner Jacobson moved to approve the purchase of one Vermeer Stump Grinder in the amount of $34,286.00 from Vermeer Midwest, Sourcewell National Joint Purchase.
   Seconded by Commissioner Nisenson.
   Roll Call: Ayes: 6 (Johnson, Nisenson, Heisler, Hickey, Jacobson) Present: 1 (Tiesenga)

Reports to the Board:

Legal Counsel

Attorney Anderson explained Section 1983 (42 U.S.C. § 1983), which allows individuals to bring civil rights claims against public bodies. He also addressed the notice received from the Illinois Attorney General. He stated that Ms. Thimios had filed concerns regarding whether the Park Board's decision to limit an individual's participation, when the Board believed it was necessary to maintain order and decorum, was appropriate. Videos of past proceedings were shared, and the Board will await guidance from the Attorney General before taking any further action.

Executive Director Herbster

- The Board discussed rescheduling the March 16th meeting due to the March 17th election at Main Beach, which serves as a major polling location. Options considered included moving the meeting to the Administrative Office on March 16th or reschedule the meeting to March 18th at Main Beach.
- The Annual Budget meeting will be held on Monday, March 2nd. Budget Binders will be delivered the Board members on Friday, February 20th. Please contact Executive Director Herbster with any questions.

Erik Jakubowski, Superintendent of Park Services

- A kick-off meeting with Williams Architects will be held on Tuesday, February 24th. Plans for the new maintenance facility will be discussed.

Matters from the Board:

- Board Commissioner Mike Jacobson shared his disappointment with the Board's current direction. A lifelong resident of Crystal Lake, he stressed his commitment to serving the community fairly and ethically, making sure taxpayers get good value, and keeping the parks safe and welcoming. He noted that recent Board actions haven't met community expectations and acknowledged his own part in past decisions. He also expressed concern about staff morale, pointing out that employees seem less open during reports, which makes it harder for the Board to make informed decisions. Commissioner Jacobson suggested the Board get more training on things like FOIA requests, Roberts Rules, the Open Meetings Act, and their roles and limits as members, to reduce misunderstandings and improve how the Board works. He ended by encouraging the Board to act transparently and thoughtfully to better serve the community and support the Crystal Lake Park District. His full comments are attached.

Executive Session:
Commissioner Tiesenga moved to enter Executive Session at 7:05 pm, to discuss Personnel 2 (c) 1, Sale or Lease 2 (c) 6 and Review of Minutes Including Semi-annual Review to Release 2 (c) 2.

Reconvene at 7:32 pm

Action from Executive Session
Commissioner Nisenson moved to approve Resolution 25.26.04, Semi Annual Review and Release of Closed Session Minutes. Seconded by Commissioner Heisler.
Roll Call: Ayes: 5 (Hickey, Jacobson, Johnson, Nisenson, Heisler) Present: 1 (Tiesenga)

Commissioner Nisenson moved to approve hiring MGT for the Executive Director Search in an amount not to exceed $26,000.00. Seconded by Commissioner Heisler.
Roll Call: Ayes: 6 (Hickey, Jacobson, Johnson, Niesenson, Heisler, Tiesenga) Nays: 0
Adjourn: Commissioner Tiesenga adjourned the meeting at 7:33 pm.

Approve: _____ Attest:_____
President Secretary

Good evening,

I would like to respectfully ask the Board whether the message included in the Popular Financial Annual Report was reviewed and approved by the full Board, and whether it reflects the collective position of the Board.

As outlined in Park District Policy 4.2: Functions of the Board:

"In the discharge of their duties, Commissioners act as a board and not as individuals. The individual Commissioner has no more authority over park and recreation policies or personnel than any other citizen. He/she has no legal or moral right to speak for the Board unless specifically authorized to do so by action of the Board."

I believe it is important that any message presented as coming from the Board clearly represents the unified voice of the Board as a whole.

Several community members, including myself, had concerns about the tone of the message. In response, resident Mike Eckel submitted a letter to the editor of the Northwest Herald offering his perspective. In his letter, he noted that the report highlights a Park District that continues to move forward. He wrote: "This year's report is no exception, presenting a Park District that is moving onward and upward. But in his introduction to the document, Park Board President Frederick Tiesenga whines about how five Park Board members and "vocal residents" are responsible for a tax increase. A vote by elected officials and the participation of citizens? What nerve!"

The same Park District Policy also states:

"Board members should abide by the majority vote and support the actions of the Executive Director when those actions have received the support of the Board via official voting."

This reinforces the importance of respecting majority decisions and presenting a united front once votes have been taken.

I would also like to emphasize my appreciation for the essential services funded through taxes. Unlike 1000 years ago, today we all benefit from taxes paid by receiving excellent schools, beautiful parks and amenities, police and fire protection, well-maintained streets, libraries, and conservation areas. These services improve our quality of life and strengthen property values. This vocal resident is grateful.

In closing, I ask again: does the message in the report reflect the collective voice of this Board? If not, I encourage thoughtful consideration on future communications and urge the Board to follow its policy manual.

Thank you.

Debbie Gallagher

2-17-2026

Hi,
I'm Sue Platek, a resident of Crystal Lake for over 40 years. Mayor Haig recently posted on Facebook addressing what happened at the last park board meeting and I would like to share this with you.

"I've been thinking a lot after viewing the 1/19/26 Park Board meeting video. Just to preface my thoughts, I've been in some form of public service in this community for the past 30 years. I do it for only one reason and that is to give back. Crystal Lake has a great City Council that is respectful of each other, respectful of our residents, and though we don't always agree (we shouldn't) we all share one common mantra, which is what is best for our community. There is always more than one view and we respect that. We have no special personal agenda or ulterior motives. That would disrespect the oath we took and our own reputation. Once you have a bad reputation it's damn near impossible to regain one's respect. The takeaway is this. We have a great solid core in this community. There are a lot of very generous and philanthropic folks that get the job done under the radar, without fanfare, for the common good of all."

He goes on to talk about community members, Paul and Marilyn Georgy, who volunteered tirelessly at the Crystal Lake Food Pantry and others who have given back. Then wrote:

"It reminds me of a JFK quote "Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country". Which leads me to viewing the 1/16 Park Board stream. To say I was dismayed and infuriated on the treatment of the public by the "block of four" is an understatement. The public are your clients. You were elected to serve all the citizens you represent. Judging by what I viewed you are doing quite the opposite using the public to serve your own interests. Whether it's cutting off mics mid sentence, ditching DEI's, disrespecting fellow board members, cutting weeds on your properties, squandering public funds on obscene legal rates, metal detectors, and unnecessary law enforcement when none is needed, cheating on property taxes (that's cheating on the very entity you represent and all the taxing bodies in your tax district and three years is not an

oversight). This just proves ineptitude and failure to truly embrace your roles as leaders, which from my viewpoint you are anything but. Your reputations and respect have been ruined by your actions. Sadly that's how you'll always be remembered in this community. But, that's by your conscious choice. And by the way, you are not the victim. We are. Not only have your actions alienated the electorate, they have instilled doubt, fear, insecurity in the Park District staff, and those many that are employed by the Park District. Enough of this childish behavior. Shame on you. It's truly depressing, infuriating, and should be unnecessary to spend an hour addressing that adolescent behavior. Enough!"

These are the words written by the Mayor of Crystal Lake.

2-17-2026

2/17/2026 Good evening, Commissioners.

President Tiesenga, in December, I listened as a concerned citizen when you told the people in this room that our job is to **"watch and not disrupt."** In January, you lectured us that as a professor, you often have to repeat things **seven times** for them to "sink in." **[PAUSE]**

Should I repeat this seven times so you understand? The "friction" in this room doesn't come from the vocal residents here every month. It comes from a leadership style that treats accountability as a threat. We see it in the Annual Financial Report, where you used a public document to compare yourself to **William the Conqueror** and the taxpayers of Crystal Lake to 11th-century serfs.

In your medieval analogy, the King owns the resources while the people hide their "chickens and goats." **But in 2026, the citizens are the owners of this Park District.** Every acre of our parks and every gallon of water in that lake belongs to the public—**not the "Crown." [PAUSE]**

I have to ask the rest of this Board: Do you really stand behind Fred's most recent message to the public? Do you agree that the people who **entrust you with their tax dollars** are "serfs" who should stay silent and "watch" while their assets are managed by a self-appointed "Conqueror"?

Because while Fred is playing historian, you're allowing him to make very modern power moves. We saw it with the unvetted hiring of **Eric Anderson and Fred's need for added security**. And now, word has spread through the community about a conversation Fred had at a **Super Bowl party last week**. **[SLOW DOWN]** He was reportedly overheard running his mouth about the search for our next Executive Director, stating his intent is to hire someone who is **"powerless"** to stop his agenda.

Jason Herbster is retiring after sixteen years of professional stewardship to this park district as Executive Director. To replace him with a "powerless" puppet isn't leadership; **it's a continued hostile takeover. [PAUSE]**

This board has a choice. You can be the "watchers" who let one man turn our Park District into a private fiefdom, or you can provide the oversight we elected you for. We don't want a King, and we don't want a "powerless" placeholder.

We want a transparent, public search for a Director with a backbone, someone who answers to the board as a whole, not to the person at the head of this table.

Look up, President Tiesenga. The 'vocal residents' you complain about are watching your search. We aren't just watching here in this room—we are ensuring that the state of Illinois is watching too. Our message will continue to repeat itself... until you pick up what we're throwing down. Thank you.

BF

I WILL BE EXTREMELY BRIEF TONIGHT TO YOUR BENEFIT. I HAVE APPROXIMATELY THIRTY FOUR MORE MEETING TO ATTEND WHICH I'M SURE WILL SUPPLY AN AMPLE AMOUNT OF MATERIAL FOR SPEAKING.

YOU ALL NEED TO START UNDERSTANDING THAT YOU WORK FOR ALL THESE FOLKS BEHIND ME, IN ADDITION TO ABOUT FORTY THOUSAND OTHER PEOPLE. I WOULD CAUTION YOU TO NOT BE DISRESPECTFUL, AND TO ALLOW US OUR OUR FIRST AMENDANT RIGHTS TO SPEAK FREELY ALONG WITH PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY. TO DATE YOU HAVE ATTEMPTED TO CONTROL WHAT WE SAY. THE SUPREME COURT HAS RULED THAT THE FIRST AMENDMENT DOES NOT PROTECT CERTAIN TYPES OF SPEECH WHICH INCLUDES OBSCENITY, LIBEL/SLANDER, FRAUD, INCITEMENT, AND TRUE THREATS, NONE OF

WHICH HAVE OCCURRED AT ANY OF THESE MEETINGS.

YOU HAVE ALSO FAILED TO COMPREHEND THAT YOUR LEGAL COUNSEL DOES NOT REPRESENT ANY OF YOU AS INDIVIDUALS, LEGAL COUNSEL REPRESENTS THE CITIZENS OF CRYSTAL LAKE.

THIS BOARD NEEDS TO TURN AROUND AND WORK FOR THE CITIZENS OR WE WILL SLOWLY TERMINATE EACH OF YOU WHEN YOUR TERMS EXPIRE.

WE WILL WORK WITH YOU TO CONTINUE TO ENSURE THAT CRYSTAL LAKE MEETS THE STANDARDS OF EXCELLENCE THAT WE HAVE ALL COME TO EXPECT.

Bruce Mazurkiewicz
217 Sunset Terrace
Crystal Lake
847-545-6085

My name is Marc Sparber. I live at 882 Coventry Lane. I have been a proud vocal resident of Crystal lake since October of 1990. My house backs up to Knack Park where I enjoy passive recreation every morning when I look out my back window past my bird feeders into the park.

I want to address Fred's message to the public in the annual financial report. Thank you for the breakdown of the 6.297% tax increase for the next fiscal year.

What I disagree with is your statement about the 6.2 million dollars in unassigned funds. One of the responsibilities of being a park commissioner is being a proper Steward of the park district and being financially responsible and always looking to the future of the park district. This money in reserve serves that purpose. It is not unassigned .It has specific allotted destinations. In my research I have found different categories where the money has been placed. The corporate fund has 30% reserve, the recreation fund has 25% reserves, the museum fund the golf fund and racquet club have 20% reserves and imrf which is the Illinois municipal retirement fund has 10% reserves in it.

This is done because just as we all have accounts we put extra money in case of emergencies, the park district has put money aside for emergencies. An example very quickly is what happened during covid. I hope all of you as being good stewards, will not follow the example of the McHenry county board which has not funded the county properly the past 3 years causing a 3.5 million dollar shortfall that cannot be fixed by cutting services alone.

One final quick note I want to thank executive director Jason Herbster for your great public service here at the Crystal lake Park district. You make all of us residents proud of our Park District and thank you for having the foresight to keep looking to the Future by keeping the park district financially responsible. I hope you enjoy your long, happy and well deserved retirement.

Thank you

Comments to the Park Board 2/17/26

I would like to take this opportunity to express my deep disappointment of where this board is currently and the direction that it has taken. I have been living in Crystal Lake for most of my life beginning in 1965. I have been proud to call the City of Crystal Lake my home town for nearly my entire life. This is the reason why I decided to become a serving member on this board to represent the community that has been here for my family, my friends, and many of my working colleagues for the last 60 years.

When I was sworn in to take my seat on this board I was determined to represent my community with integrity and with honesty, it is what my heart tells me to do. I realize that my role on this board is to serve the people that I represent and that I must address their interests fairly, responsibly, and with diplomatic resolve. It is in my nature to consider any decision that is made by me to be in the best interests of the majority of my community, but also to make sure that my decisions are ethical and something that I am willing to stake my reputation on.

I have no hidden agenda other than fairness and allowing our park district to continue to be the great government body that has existed since 1921! My duty is to make decisions that allow the employees of the park district to thrive in a good and productive working environment. I am determined that the taxpayers get a good bang for the buck, but I am also aware that to provide a quality product that at times it requires enough allocation in the budget to make sure that the services that we provide are accessible to all of our citizens and that they can feel safe and welcome in our parks, no matter who they are and where they live.

With that being said, I want to strongly express the idea that we should all be able to look ourselves in the mirror and ask ourselves whether the collective actions of this board meet the high level of standards that our community deserves and asks for. At this time, it is my opinion that what our community is getting out of our decisions as a board is not at the level that they expect from us, and it has been very clear based on the level of discontent that is brought to our attention at the meetings during the public commentary. In my opinion, we have fallen short, and I am willing to take my share of the responsibility for the actions that I have taken and voted on, but the question is how about the rest of us?

MT

Another major disappointment for me has been the deterioration of the climate and the morale of our staff. It has become completely clear to me when we have our reports to the board in our meetings. Our staff has been visibly reluctant to share what is going on in their respective departments and the information that we would normally get from them is valuable because it helps us to be more fully informed so that we can make sound decisions. I know this because I have witnessed these types of interactions from our staff in our meetings previously, and now it seems to be muted and it lacks an organic element that comes out of reports from our excellent employees that are proud to represent our park district that they are happy to work for.

At this time, I am going to recommend that one of the things that we can do as a board is to be trained to become more informed on the following areas of responsibility that we take on as serving members of our board so that we can have less negative interactions with the public as they witness the business that we conduct during our meetings. We need to be better informed about FOIA requests, Roberts Rules, The Open Meetings Act, and the roles and limitations of our positions on the board. It appears that many of the tensions that have arisen during our meetings are a direct result of misunderstandings about what all of these specific elements are and how they should be interpreted and allow us to guide the board in the proper direction, a direction that our constituents approve of!

We can do better, and the citizens deserve much more from us than they have been observing since the inauguration of our new board members. It is up to us how we decide to move forward. We have the opportunity to evolve and finally transform our actions into ones that are thoughtful, transparent, insightful, and ones that reflect integrity and love for the Crystal Lake Park District!

It is up to us as a board how we can collectively serve our community in the most diplomatic way possible, and in the end that remains to be seen!

We can do better!!

MJ