

Date: February 10, 2026 Location: Annex Office/Parks Department

STARKE COUNTY PARKS DEPARTMENT MEETING MINUTES

I. ADMINISTRATIVE LOGISTICS

The Starke County Parks Department Board of Directors convened for a regular session to conduct departmental business and establish seasonal protocols. The meeting was formally called to order by the Board President, followed by the assembly reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

Roll Call

- **Present:** Richard Ballard, Tom Busch, David Sinn, Teresa Trout.
- **Also Present:** Beth Watts, Gary Laiter, Joel Johnson (Johnson and Sons Piers)
- **Absent:** Sam Byer (Recuperating).

A quorum being present, the Board proceeded to the established agenda.

II. APPROVAL OF PREVIOUS MINUTES

The maintenance of accurate and comprehensive meeting minutes is a strategic necessity for municipal continuity, ensuring all legislative actions and administrative decisions are preserved for future reference and public transparency. The Board reviewed the minutes from the regular meeting held on January 13, 2026.

- **MOTION:** T. Busch moved to approve the January 13th minutes as presented, seconded by T. Trout.
 - **RESULT:** Passed unanimously (4-0).
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III. 2026 MEETING SCHEDULE

Establishing a predictable and publicized meeting schedule is vital for ensuring public access to government proceedings and maintaining consistent board attendance. The Board evaluated the proposed 2026 meeting dates, specifically reviewing the November schedule to ensure no conflict existed with the Veterans Day holiday. A discussion occurred regarding the necessity of a December meeting given the lower volume of departmental activity during that month. While the Board considered the option of an ad-hoc session, the consensus was to retain the December date for administrative ease, noting the procedural burden of meeting posting requirements for emergency sessions.

- **MOTION:** T. Trout moved to approve the 2026 meeting dates as proposed, seconded by D. Sinn.
 - **RESULT:** Passed unanimously (4-0).
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IV. WINTER PIER MAINTENANCE & CONSTRUCTION CONTRACTS

Proactive seasonal maintenance is essential for extending the longevity of county-owned assets and ensuring the safety of the public utilizing these facilities.

Maintenance Contract The Board reviewed a contract with Joel Johnson of Johnson and Sons Piers for spring installation and general maintenance. The contract is valued at \$6,298.36. The Board reaffirmed the department policy regarding payment terms (Rule #3), noting that the county does not pay late fees or interest on vendor agreements.

- **MOTION:** D. Sinn moved to approve the pier installation contract with Johnson and Sons Piers for \$6,298.36, seconded by T. Trout.

- **RESULT:** Passed unanimously (4-0).

South Pier Construction The Board discussed a second agreement regarding the construction of "fingers" for the South Pier. Technical specifications call for 20-foot finger lengths comprised of two 10-foot sections. The width will be maintained at 32 inches to ensure compliance with existing permit configurations. The Board requested, and the contractor agreed, to confirm the exact width measurement (verifying against 30-inch or 32-inch existing structures) before billing to ensure a perfect match.

- **MOTION:** T. Busch moved to approve the pier construction agreement for the South Pier fingers, seconded by D. Sinn.

- **RESULT:** Passed unanimously (4-0).

V. 2026 BASS LAKE BEACH PIER AGREEMENT

Updating lease agreements is a critical administrative function that protects the county from liability, ensures consistent revenue streams, and guarantees fair access to public resources.

The Board synthesized several updates for the 2026 lease season:

- **Rent and Deadlines:** Payments are due by April 15, 2026, and must be sent to the Annex office address.

- **Documentation:** Renters must provide a cell phone number, email address, and proof of boat insurance. Paperwork is required for every individual craft (e.g., each jet ski) utilizing a slip.

- **Operational Dates:** The lease runs Memorial Day to Labor Day. Boats/Wave runners are permitted in mooring areas starting May 9th, weather permitting.

- **Slip Policies:** The department has eliminated "half-slips." Every slip is now one unit; the full rental amount applies regardless of the number of craft occupying the space.

- **Prohibited Uses:** Subleasing and commercial uses—including advertising a boat to the public for rent or Airbnb-style use—are strictly prohibited. Leased spots may only be used by the owner of the craft.

- **Removal Deadlines:** Boats must be out by October 1st; shore stations and hoists must be out by October 15th. The Board established Monday, October 19th, as the final leeway date.

- **Late Fees:** A \$25/day fee will be assessed for late removals. This enforcement mechanism was implemented to provide the department with the necessary "muscle" to ensure seasonal maintenance is not delayed by abandoned equipment. The Board deliberated on Item #21 regarding vacant slips. It was determined that if a slip is paid in full, the department's primary interest is satisfied. The administrative burden of monitoring frequency of occupancy outweighs the benefit of enforcement; therefore, the item was removed.
- **MOTION:** T. Busch moved to accept the 2026 Bass Lake Beach Pier Agreement with the specific amendment to remove item #21, seconded by D. Sinn.
- **RESULT:** Passed unanimously (4-0).

VI. BASS LAKE RENOVATION PROJECT UPDATE

Resolving outstanding financial obligations is vital to concluding major renovation phases and maintaining the department's credit standing with regional contractors. There is an outstanding invoice of \$42,000 due to Brown and Brown for completed work. This has been identified as a reconciliation discrepancy currently under internal investigation in coordination with the Auditor's office. The department is also awaiting state-ordered signage to finalize the project site. Resolving this debt remains a strategic priority to conclude the renovation phase and avoid further contractor inquiries.

VII. SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

The operational health and community engagement of the Parks Department remain strong despite ongoing personnel challenges.

- **Personnel:** Sam is currently recuperating at Wintersong. He is expected to transition to his son's residence soon, with a projected return to duty in late spring.
- **Financial Administration:** The department is requesting the establishment of a "clearing account" to facilitate online reservations. This account would allow for more efficient fund transfers to County Treasurer Kelly Graham without permitting external check-writing.
- **Community Activity:** Ice fishing engagement is currently high. The Koontz Lake/Kramer's Beach Winter Fest was successful, with approximately 250–300 attendees.
- **Development:** The department met with "Kompan" regarding playground equipment for older children and potential adult outdoor exercise stations for future development.

VIII. FINANCIAL REPORT

Fiscal transparency is the cornerstone of government accountability, ensuring expenditures align with the public interest.

The current ledger shows consistent revenue, with all campground spots reported as full. A \$500 allocation has been established for "printing and duplicating." A current discrepancy regarding funds for the water softener and mini-split units is attributed to a processing delay between the Auditor's office and the State.

IX. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the Board moved to conclude the meeting.

- **MOTION:** T. Busch moved to adjourn, seconded by T. Trout.
- **RESULT:** Passed unanimously (4-0).