

Starke County Park Board

Regular Meeting Minutes

Date: January 13, 2026

Time: 6:00 p.m.

Location: Annex 1, meeting room

1. Call to Order

The regular meeting of the Stark County Park Board was called to order by President Richard Ballard.

2. Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

3. Roll Call

Board members present:

- Richard Ballard
- Tom Busch
- David Sinn
- Teresa Trout

Board members absent:

- Sam Byer

Staff present:

- Amie Flora, Park Superintendent
- Bev Watts
- Bruce Wakeland
- Gary Laiter

A quorum was declared.

4. Approval of Minutes

December 9, 2025 Park Board Meeting Minutes

Motion by T. Busch, second by D. Sinn, to approve the December 9, 2025 Park Board meeting minutes as presented.

Vote: Motion carried unanimously.

5. Reorganization of Park Board (2026)

The Park Superintendent reviewed board member term expiration dates and the need for annual reorganization.

President:

Motion by D. Sinn, second by T. Trout, to continue Richard Ballard as President.

Vote: Motion carried unanimously.

Vice President:

Motion by D. Sinn, second by T. Trout, to continue T. Busch as Vice President.

Vote: Motion carried unanimously.

No additional officer appointments were requested. Nominations were closed.

6. Approval of Meeting Norms and 2026 Meeting Dates

Meeting dates for 2026 were discussed. Veterans Day may impact the November meeting date. The Board agreed to revisit and vote on meeting dates at the February meeting once final dates are confirmed.

7. Discussion of 2026 Financials and Budget

The Park Superintendent presented a financial overview for 2025 and comparative data for 2022–2024, noting:

- Continued upward revenue trends
- The Park Department is fully self-funded through beach, campground, and fundraising activities
- No county stipend since 2023
- Overview of properties overseen by the Park Board:
 - Bass Lake Beach
 - Bass Lake Campground
 - Starke County Forest (self-funded)
 - Starke County Veterans War Memorial (self-funded)
 - Kramer’s Beach
 - Kayak launches

Capital improvements funded through the Land and Water Conservation Grant were reviewed, including accessibility upgrades, playground improvements, and restroom renovations.

Board discussion followed regarding long-term funding sustainability and the benefit of a future county stipend for capital projects.

8. Starke County Forest Fund Report

Bruce Wakeland reported on the Starke County Forest Fund:

- Current balance approximately **\$30,500**
- Annual USDA subsidy of **\$1,325** (expiring in 4–5 years)
- Timber sales to date have been improvement cuts
- Future walnut harvests (15–20 years) expected to generate significant revenue

Concern was raised that funds are held in a non-interest-bearing account. Bruce requested the Board explore legal options for moving excess funds into an interest-bearing account.

Action: The Park Superintendent will consult with the County Auditor and legal counsel to determine if interest-bearing accounts are permitted.

9. Park Department Job Descriptions and Salary Scale

Discussion was held regarding part-time employee pay ranges and job descriptions, specifically:

- Current county ordinance caps part-time wages
- Increased responsibilities of certain staff members
- Need for clarification of allowable wage ranges within county policy

Action: The Park Superintendent will consult with county HR/administration to determine permissible options and report back to the Board.

10. Pier Maintenance and Repairs

a. Pier Installation Proposal

A proposal from Joel Johnson of Johnson and Sons Piers was presented by Superintendent Flora for spring pier installation. The Board requested time to review the proposal.

Action: Item tabled until the next meeting. Copies to be distributed to Board members in advance.

b. South Pier Finger Replacement Proposal

A proposal was presented for replacing deteriorating wooden pier fingers on the south pier using higher-quality materials.

Board discussion included:

- Durability and maintenance benefits
- Consistency with existing pier dimensions
- ADA considerations
- Permit compliance
- Phased replacement approach

Action Items:

- Invite Joel Johnson to attend the next meeting for discussion
- Confirm whether bidding is required under county procurement rules
- Request cost comparisons if dimensions are adjusted
- Determine deadline for spring installation decisions

11. Final Update – Bass Lake Beach Renovation Project

The Park Superintendent reported the renovation work is complete with minor outstanding items.

Issues discussed:

- Incorrect allocation of payments between grant and county funds
- Outstanding balance of approximately **\$40,000**
- Additional cost for ADA Mobi-Mat (estimated \$900–\$1,700)

12. Campground Electrical System Discussion

The Board reviewed the electrical inspection report outlining upgrade options.

Key points:

- No immediate safety hazards
- Existing infrastructure lacks capacity for future needs
- Major upgrades require engineered plans and formal RFP
- Estimated engineering costs ~\$17,000
- County Council previously declined funding requests

Action:

The Park Superintendent will request placement on the February County Council agenda to discuss funding and compliance requirements.

13. Superintendent’s Report

The Park Superintendent provided updates including:

- 2026 tentative event calendar
- Discussed possible community programs and fundraisers in addition to the listed events
- DNR educational event in September

- Seasonal campground occupancy (10 of 13 unoccupied spots filled)
- Upcoming leave (last week of January)

Board members provided suggestions and support for upcoming programs.

14. Logo Discussion

Bruce Wakeland raised concerns that the current logo does not accurately reflect Starke County ecology. After some discussion, the Board agreed to consider the issue further at a later date.

No action taken.

15. Other Business

A discussion was held regarding potential Park Board representation on the Plan Commission. The Board agreed to consider the matter in the future pending further clarification from county officials.

16. Adjournment

Motion by T. Trout, second by D. Sinn, to adjourn the meeting.

Vote: Motion carried unanimously