

City of Milton-Freewater

Parks & Recreation Committee Minutes

Members: George Gillette, John Mitchell, Danny Sanchez, Ryan Westman & Kate Winters.

Meeting Date/Time: April 21, 2026 / 5:00 pm

Meeting Location: Public Library, Albee Room

OPENING

- a. Chair George Gillette welcomed everyone and opened the meeting at 5:00 p.m.

Committee member(s) present: George Gillette, John Mitchell, Danny Sanchez, Ryan Westman, and Kate Winters arrived after the approval of minutes was done, resulting in 4 members present for the vote to approve minutes.

Committee member(s) absent: none.

City staff present: Public Works Assistant/Project Aide Krista Gannon and Interim City Manager Tim Johnson

Elected Officials present: Mayor Odman and Councilor Wes Koklich (who exited the meeting at 5:40 pm)

Citizen(s) present: Jim Rowan, JeanAnn Mitchell, Jon Campbell, and an unidentified female not on the sign-in sheet.

- b. Adoption of Agenda – The agenda was approved as presented.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Mr. Westman asked that the minutes from the March 17, 2026, meeting be amended to notate that, since the meeting on March 17, staff have reported to him that the tennis courts at Yantis could be striped for both tennis and pickleball. Mr. Mitchell moved to approve the minutes from March 17, 2026, with such added notation. Mr. Westman seconded the motion. The motion carried 4 yes, 0 no.

3. PRESENTATIONS

- a. Planning of City-wide Trails System & Discussion – Mayor Odman

Mayor Odman opened the presentation. He shared that he wanted this to be an informal discussion about where we are on trails. Where we want to go and what has been done by others before now. Some discussion ensued about other communities and what they have done, such as Pendleton, Lincoln City, Tigard, and even the Tri-Cities area. He shared that we want to look at others' challenges, successes, and even failures, along with phased possible construction, along with maintenance and sustainability of paths and trails, as well as partnerships.

At the first meeting, the mayor shared that it was necessary to address what we have. What we want for trails and signage, not where, which would come at future meetings. The where would be based on publicly-owned land and rights-of-way only.

Mayor Odman asked if anyone had heard of the trails group out of Pendleton or used the trails.

Mr. Westman shared that he used to live in Pendleton and was one house away from the Riverwalk trail, and they used it daily. He shared that he realizes Milton-Freewater has more challenges with its levee than Pendleton.

Mayor Odman shared that the trails he was referring to are up by the airport and can be used by mountain bikers and hikers.

Mr. Mitchell stated that most of our trails are in the city as bike trails.

Mr. Gillette shared that he would like to see a future community meeting similar to those when the Parks and Recreation Master Plan was being created.

Jean Ann Mitchell shared that they would like a trail along the road of SE 9th Ave across the now-closed bridge to the cemetery. She stated she had spoken to Tom Fellowes with Umatilla County about replacing the bridge. There would be a concern for safety when a new bridge is constructed

Mr. Mitchell shared that a group built a new trail up the hill at Marie Dorion to the monument, but there has been no long-term maintenance

Mr. Westman shared that volunteers worked on the trail and also worked on the installation of a frisbee golf course at Marie Dorion, but the city has struggled with long-term maintenance.

Mayor Odman asked if there was collaboration with the city upfront or after such projects were done.

Mr. Westman said no. The Blue Mountain Land Trust and Blues Crew, led by Greg Brown were the volunteer group that worked on the trail at Marie Dorian, which is all volunteers.

Jean Ann Mitchell shared that she feels outside city limits property owners need to be contacted due to the unmatched views, such as a trail up to ridgetops to areas such as the Freemont overlook, but there is no access to these areas because they are private property. She shared that the old Piper property and Joe Frazier property both offered and allowed for access and that she wants to go in with the Blues Crew and survey and they could be all set but they would need to work with the city for a culvert to be placed for stormwater along cemetery road adjacent to the Frazier property for accessibility from the bottom of Cemetery Rd by the now closed cemetery bridge. She shared that the Parks and Recreation Mast Plan focuses on areas within the UGB as areas of consideration, with rim trails as a goal and connecting parks. She shared that signage is important with interpretive information as well as directional signs. To include natural areas around and allowance of use of land, such as access to the levee along the Walla Walla River, is being considered as vital access.

Mr. Westman asked if Ms. Mitchell was referring to the Frazier land to the north of the cemetery that would also include views of the river and private property owners, such as Joe Frazier, Schmidt Nursery, which would be a feasible route, possibly if access were to be granted for a walking path by property owners. He shared that this would still allow possibilities with fewer property owners to deal with in comparison to the levee itself.

Ms. Mitchell shared that the levee south of Gib Olinger Elementary on the west side of the river is not marked "No Trespassing" on the fence, so they walk it.

Mr. Gillette shared that he served on the Water Control Board for 20+ years, and access is certainly an issue; several private property owners do not want people walking along the levee or accessing their properties from the levee, as well as dumping trash. He shared that there was a lot of funding invested in the levee during the FEMA flood designation fight; many worked hard to get the community out of the flood zone rating. He shared that the adjacent property owners are not even allowed to use the levee.

Ms. Mitchell shared she would like to concentrate on the beauty of our natural resource, the river, which she felt many do not even know is there.

Mr. Gillette shared that the Corps of Engineers does not want degradation of the levee infrastructure within the toe of the levee. He shared that there are lots of legalities associated with any work on or to the levee and that he feels that the focus should be on feasible ideas that are able to be done.

Mr. Westman shared that the easterly bluff above the river at Cemetery Road would be a possible successful project, as users have shared the support of a levee trail.

Ms. Mitchell shared that she had spoken with the Corps of Engineers, and they said they do not restrict access to the levee, and they do not own the levee but manage it for maintenance.

Mr. Westman shared that he agrees with an approach of looking at doable projects rather than pushing anything down anyone's throats, such as adjacent property owners with the levee.

Mayor Odman shared that maybe the property owners willing to allow access could be worked with in order to advance a project in the future.

Ms. Mitchell shared that she would like attention to the river and that the public owns the levee, and she feels there is an incomplete understanding of the levee.

Mr. Gillette shared some history that the Corps of Engineers has info on the levee, which was originally constructed in 1948 and originally went as far as Marie Dorian Park and ended, as former descendants of property owners to the southeast would not allow the construction of the levee through their property. He shared that the construction was intended to protect the community from flood events, and the levee was built on a specific use easement through private properties to allow for the protection of the community as a whole. The current tax district doesn't bring in nearly enough funding to cover necessary maintenance as is. He shared that the focus should be concentrated on the realistic options that are capable of happening.

Ms. Mitchell shared that they use the Piper property to walk between the lookout above Yantis Park and the golf course.

Mayor Odman shared that he has been in contact with the new owner of the former Piper property, who has shared that all trespassers would be prosecuted and that they were possibly open to selling the property for a trail at the current market value.

Mr. Westman stated that there were a lot of areas that had some potential for expansion, currently owned by the city. He shared that there may be potential to use city and school properties.

Discussion ensued, and it was decided to be carried forward at a future meeting.

4. OPPORTUNITY FOR CITIZENS TO APPROACH THE COMMITTEE

Nothing identified.

5. STAFF REPORT/BUSINESS ITEMS

a. Old Business –

1. Freewater Park Improvements – Ms. Gannon shared that the improvements are nearing completion and a ribbon cutting was planned for May 20 at the park.
2. Marie Dorion Park Improvements – Ms. Gannon shared that the playground equipment was ordered and staff would begin with the playground area improvements and ADA accessibility. She shared that this project must be complete as per the terms of the grant before the end of December of this year.
3. Pool – Ms. Gannon shared that the pool was on track for opening with a soft opening on June 6 and that there were enough guards to open the facility, but that the city would like to have a couple more to meet the desired staffing level.
4. Tennis Court Improvements – Ms. Gannon shared that the grant for Oregon Parks and Recreation would be submitted by staff in June and that the city should hear back in late summer or early fall on whether we were awarded the funding or not.

6. COMMITTEE REPORTS/BUSINESS ITEMS

7. ADJOURNMENT

Being no further business, the meeting was adjourned by Chair George Gillette.

Approved as read this 21 day of July, 2026.

By: George Gillette - Parks and Recreation Committee Chair