

PARKS AND RECREATION ADVISORY COMMISSION
STAFFORD COUNTY, VIRGINIA
DRAFT MINUTES
REGULAR MEETING
AUGUST 17, 2026

CALL TO ORDER A regular meeting of the Stafford County Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission was called to order by Jay Rucker, Chairman, at 7:00 p.m. on Monday, August 17, 2026 at the Rowser Annex, 1729 Richmond Highway, Stafford VA.

ROLL CALL The following members were present: Jay Rucker, Chairman; CW Reed, Vice Chair; Stephanie DeMarco; Katherine Schneider; Said Hashemi; Charnell Cassett; Kelsey Caudill; Susan Randall.

Absent was Jennifer Stone.

Also in attendance were Diane Taylor, Commission Secretary; Patrick Workman, Director; Guest Speaker, Kelly Hartland; Guest, Joe Brito.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES The minutes for the July meeting were approved with 4 "aye" votes and 2 abstentions, CW Reed and Stephanie DeMarco were absent from the July meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENT

- **Kelly Hartland (Skate Park Advocacy):** Raised safety concerns regarding the Brooks St. Clair Skate Park. Proposed a multi-sensory "power of presence" protocol across three categories: Preventative Presence; fixed rules/etiquette signage, Proactive Presence; structured beginner, youth, and disabled youth programming via the Heart of Stoke Foundation, and Enduring Presence; rotating ethical messaging to curb bullying.
- **Joe Brito (Cannon Ridge Event Park):** Presented a petition with over 7,500 signatures supporting the creation of a historic events park at Cannon Ridge. The 194-acre property features 7 miles of paved trails and direct public access to an adjacent 1,000 acres of public land.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

- **Bylaws Update:** Director Patrick Workman reported back from the County Attorney regarding proposed modifications. The attorney accepted language permitting virtual attendance during closed sessions but mandated that the quorum requirement remain at a strict majority of four members rather than dropping to three.

- **Action Taken:** Katherine Schneider made a motion to accept the updated bylaws with the quorum remaining at four. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.
- **Stafford Baseball League Contract Renewal:** Reviewed the upcoming facility use contract. Participant fees are adjusting upward to \$6 per player to achieve parity with lacrosse and soccer groups. The commission discussed corporate field signage, in-kind service credits totaling over \$20,000 for Chichester improvements during the World Series, and fields availability.
 - **Action Taken:** Approved entering into the renewed agreement with SBL. The motion passed unanimously and will move to the Board of Supervisors agenda for final October approval.

NEW BUSINESS

- **Cannon Ridge Comprehensive Plan Advocacy:** The commission debated sending an official advisory memo supporting the designation of Cannon Ridge as a future park. Planning Commissioner Kelsey Caudill warned that because the Comprehensive Plan is a non-binding guide heading to the Planning Commission, an official letter might move too slowly and cause delays.
 - **Action Taken:** CW Reed rescinded his initial motion to send a formal board letter. The commission agreed to table the matter under Unfinished Business for next month. In the interim, members will email their respective District Board Supervisors and Planning Commissioners individually to advocate for the park designation.

LIAISON REPORTS

- **School Board (Susan Randall):** All county school buildings successfully opened for the new academic year, though securing the occupancy permits proved challenging and leaves a massive punch list to finalize. Major construction and maintenance projects on school facilities were also completed over the summer to prevent severe disrepair and ensure a smooth start for students and teachers. While school transportation remains an ongoing issue, this is typical for the first two weeks of the academic year and is expected to resolve itself soon. Looking ahead, the school board is transitioning into budget season to establish funding and legislative priorities. A key strength of the School Board is its proactive collaboration with state delegates and senators, which includes a planning summit this coming September to align goals, followed by a debrief session in the spring once the state budget is finalized. Finally, to foster collaboration and find common ground on regional issues, three school board members will participate in a joint meeting with three members of the BOS this coming Thursday, September 3rd.

- **Planning Commission (Kelsey Caudill):** The 2026 Comprehensive Plan update designates parks and recreation as a core economic and quality-of-life priority, responding to public feedback demanding matched infrastructure for county growth. The plan establishes a service standard of 10 acres of usable land per 1,000 residents to guide housing cost calculations and development proffers, revealing an existing county deficit of 552 acres. The plan moves to a full Planning Commission review next week.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

The county attorney reviewed the updated bylaws and approved minor changes regarding virtual attendance in closed sessions but strongly instructed that the quorum must remain a majority of four members rather than dropping to three. Because this requires a deviation from what was previously discussed, the commission needs a motion and approval to finalize the text before County Administration schedules it for Board of Supervisors approval. On the community front, the ongoing public survey closes this coming Friday, September 4, 2026 with 276 responses logged so far, and plans are already locked in for the annual tree lighting festivities on Saturday, November 21, 2026, which features a partnership with Economic Development to host localized business vendors.

Regarding the renewal of the Stafford Baseball League agreement, player fees are currently set at five dollars, but they will eventually increase to six dollars to match the rate paid by lacrosse and align with other user groups. For the recent World Series, the league directly contributed over twenty thousand dollars in facility improvements to Chichester Park, including score tables, cleaning, and dugout work, which the county credited as an in-kind service to cover their tournament rental fees. SBL maintains preferential field treatment primarily because they are the only major baseball group in the area, avoiding the heavy field competition seen among rectangular field sports like soccer and lacrosse. Additionally, a new operational sports partnership with Dr. Smith will successfully expand regional capacity for fall and winter indoor sports, specifically basketball and volleyball. Finally, while field requests and all-star programs are managed directly through their agreement, participant fees for All-Stars are typically covered by team fundraising, and local tournament sponsorships from businesses like Dick's and Five Guys comply with the county's strict policy against naming rights.

COMMISSION MEMBER COMMENTS

- Said Hashemi shared the needs assessment survey with several groups.
- CW Reed expressed requests for an expanded gymnastics facility and building maintenance updates regarding the facility's air conditioning systems.

PUBLIC COMMENT PRESENTATIONS

Kelly Hartland: My name is Kelly Hartland, and I am from the George Washington District. I have lived in the area for over 20 years, during which I have traveled both near and far to better understand and research violence, trauma, and resiliency through the wisdom of those who suffer in silence, both here and abroad. Fifteen years ago, I became a mother, and now I am at a Stafford park nearly every day. For the last eight years, I have watched my children develop their passions at the St. Clair Brooks skate park. There, I have seen them develop courage, community, and character, but also encounter drugs, crime, and bullying. As I look ahead to the time when my son will start driving there independently, I came to address these challenges, to think about law enforcement, and to consider solutions for a new skate park at this old location, known as Brooks. I was once referred to as a "pioneer skate mom" because I actually stayed at the skate park to watch my children. That title told me that Brooks has a history of "drop and run" behavior, severely lacking supervision. This is a park that needs to hear: You have my attention. You will keep my attention. Our standards matter. Not just for the skate park, but for the entire park, we see a clear need for attention to its structures and safety. I believe our solutions lie in the power of presence. I would like to present three forms of presence that highlight prevention, action, and endurance. Understanding that the skate park community often communicates without words, utilizing nonverbal methods alongside written ones is critically important here.

1. Preventative Presence

First, we need a preventative presence to encourage a multi-sensory approach to safety. This includes new, fixed signage specifically at the skate park and even at the bathroom entrances to remind patrons of our Park Watch program and to introduce a sense of surveillance. Printing our Stafford non-emergency number in a much larger font will remind people that we are watching. Thanks to Patrick, we now have three A-frame signs there. The first holds our park rules. If there is a second side to that sleeve, it could hold park etiquette. Etiquette is highly important to skaters; it allows them to see that their own standards and respect are honored, just like the rules of the sport. We also need rotational or randomized signage to sustain momentum, because action demonstrates attention. This could look like a revolving monthly schedule in our second A-frame, and ethical reminders in the third. We need a schedule to structure our time, and ethics to offer accountability for things like bullying awareness, character reminders, and substance prohibition symbols. Going both verbal and nonverbal will help repattern our community and uphold a standard of ethics. It would also be great to introduce the sound and touch of surveillance for both asset protection and actual security. This means county staff and patrons performing regular check-ins or stop-bys on the park grounds. Consider a 16-year-old girl trying to shut

down the park at 8:00 PM when people are still skating at 8:15 PM—how do you think she feels? If we do not have the resources for physical security, a dedicated text line would be incredibly helpful for people to reach out for help. Furthermore, the team sports population right across the parking lot is only growing. Active programming would help buffer uncertainty and smooth out interactions between the skate park and these expanding team sports. Thank you to law enforcement for what has already been done. Please know that establishing new patterns will take repetition and maintenance. The cultural environment of a skate park is historically accustomed to being disregarded, defiant, and even hidden—hence the fill dirt currently piled around it from the stream restoration. While this layout might seem like a success for Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design, new skate parks typically are not built tucked under trees, at the end of a cul-de-sac, in low-visibility areas. Imagine if it had been built in a fully open space near the Stafford Sheriff's Department, or with surveillance cameras in one of our open fields. We need to own our location choice.

2. Proactive Presence

Next, we need a proactive presence to instill new patterns. If you are familiar with the beautiful Embrey Mill turf field complex, think about how it looks on a Saturday in September or October. The parking lot is full, crowds are cheering, and kids are bustling from game to game. If you wiped out all of that programming, what would happen to that space? Who would call their friend and say, "Let's meet for a pickup game," or "Let's see if I can squeak in for training"? Or, who would look at it and say, "This is a neglected space; how can I swoop in?" Brooks needs to be treated more like a sports field than a playground, both to harness its potential and to safeguard its vulnerabilities. It is the central skate park for all three surrounding counties, and it holds great power. Unfortunately, we have a drug-use model in our locality related to skate culture. We have a pro-substance community, leaders who use substances, and skate commerce where teenagers walking into a shop are met with signs telling them that drugs are cool. We need to counter this with clean, positive professionals and messaging to remind them that drugs are not a required part of the sport. We can hire or incentivize volunteers for programming who can pass a drug screening and a background check. For instance, I am connecting with the Heart Foundation on an idea where volunteers could trade 20 hours of work for a new skateboard. This kind of programming creates supervised environments so we can protect our youth and develop a familial skate culture. We can build programs for children, youth, and beginner-level families who want to skate together. We can also reach out to disabled and sensory-sensitive populations who are interested but do not realize they have access. I visited the Disability Research Center, and they were surprised to learn that they could actually use the space. This will help cultivate a healthier future through the active presence of riders and their caregivers, growing both our connection and our safety.

3. Enduring Presence

Lastly, we need an enduring presence to maintain growth. Right now, our challenges are concentrated among adult regulars who appear "park-dependent" for power and identity, relying on unlimited access and maintaining a history of successful bullying. Our kindness must protect the entire community. The park is for skill development; it must show respect. Monday, October 5, 2026 is Worldwide Bullying Prevention Day. We could host an event there with kindness-based incentives to demonstrate our commitment to our values, particularly at this park where people are struggling. Regularity in programming is vital because it maintains our direction. This could include, routine kids' nights, park exploration hours for the very young, which is how my child stayed there for eight years, falling in love with gravity by sliding down ramps and pushing objects down them. Adaptive wheels hours for the disabled, coordinated with the Disability Research Center, adaptive engineers, and groups like the Fredericksburg Area Regional Homeschoolers Association. Youth action sports mentorship (with "action sports" serving as an umbrella term for all skate sports). Advanced rider contests hosted during high-activity hours, which typically occur during the last three hours of busy Fridays and Saturdays. Facilitation at this level does not require an expert; it mainly requires character. Simply being able to post a sign that says "Reserved for a County Event" can help us reestablish county ownership of the space and ensure park neutrality. This matters because we chose this location for our county. It is part of who we are. We have underestimated its potential to weaken our community, but we now have an incredible opportunity to renew this asset into a place that strengthens us. The success of a park is not born from its output of professionals, but from what it cultivates in its people. I will be as present as you need me to be. Thanks.

Joe Brito: You all know me well by now, but you should have a copy of the petition. I am representing about 7,500 people who signed the petition in support of the historic events park at Cannon Ridge. You can see it in the picture there, and the ridge is here. It closed in 2018, and it has basically the only access to over 1,000 acres of public land. There is no other way to get access to it unless we can acquire Cannon Ridge. Cannon Ridge is 194 acres. We have acquired it, and it could be added to the other thousand acres already there. I have about 5,900 online petition signatures; most signatures were gathered either at the Stafford County Fair or at Earth Day at Old Mill Park. We have Scotts Mill, the Falmouth Trail, the Union Balloon Corps site, and a trail to Lake Mooney. There is also a Native American interpretive site, Civil War interpretive sites, and so forth; there is just so much there. Cannon Ridge has 7 miles of paved trails already in place. I believe the trail is about 8 feet wide, and it goes all the way up to Route 17. Near the road, it widens to 9 feet, and it is paved almost all the way to Route 17 with streetlights. Of course, there is a waterfall

nearby. It is about two miles from the golf course, which is an ideal distance. You do not want access to the waterfall to be too close to the parking lot. You want people to walk to it so they are encouraged to dispose of their trash properly rather than carrying it along. Two miles is just about right. It is on public land, but currently, there is no public access. Thank you.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:16pm by Chairman Jay Rucker.