

**MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF
NORTHWEST SPECIAL RECREATION ASSOCIATION
HELD AT PARK CENTRAL;
3000 CENTRAL ROAD, ROLLING MEADOWS, IL
ON THE 18th OF MARCH, 2026, AT 10:30 AM**

Chairperson Janda called the meeting to order at 10:30 a.m.

Superintendent Hubsch took roll call. The following members of the Board were present: Carrie Fullerton, Arlington Heights Park District; Joe Zimmermann, Buffalo Grove Park District; Ben Curcio, Elk Grove Park District; Steve Bessette, Hanover Park Park District (arrived at 10:41AM); Craig Talsma, Hoffman Estates Park District; Ben Rea, Palatine Park District; Christina Ferraro, Prospect Heights Park District; Bret Fahnstrom, River Trails Park District; Nick Troy, Rolling Meadows Park District; Diane Hilgers, Salt Creek Park District; Tony LaFrener, Schaumburg Park District; Jay Morgan, South Barrington Park District; Jeff Janda, Streamwood Park District; Jan Buchs, Wheeling Park District

Absent: Kevin Romejko, Robert Dowling, Jim Jarog

Also present: Andrea Griffin, Executive Director; Rachel Hubsch, Victoria Gonzalez, Superintendents of Recreation; Tom Draper, Superintendent of Communications and Technology; Anne Kiwala, Superintendent of Development; Sara Carey, Manager of Human Resources; Nick Eckelberry, Manager of Finance

Introduction of Guests

None

Approval of Agenda

Chairperson Janda asked for a motion to approve the agenda dated March 18, 2026. Director Talsma made the motion and Director Morgan seconded the motion to approve the agenda. Upon voice vote, the motion was carried.

Public Comment

None

Approval of Consent Agenda

Chairperson Janda called for a motion to approve the Consent Agenda of March 18, 2026. Director Fullerton made the motion and Director Fahnstrom seconded the motion to approve the Consent Agenda. Upon roll being called the vote was as follows:

AYE: Carrie Fullerton, Joe Zimmermann, Ben Curcio, Craig Talsma, Ben Rea, Christina Ferraro, Bret Fahnstrom, Nick Troy, Diane Hilgers, Tony LaFrener, Jay Morgan, Jeff Janda and Jan Buchs

NAY: None

The motion carried.

Correspondence

Director Griffin expressed her condolences and appreciation for the thank you card received following services for an NWSRA participant. Written correspondence from WINGS was also shared, expressing gratitude to the agency for the items collected and donated through the Staff Enrichment Committee's pantry supply drive.

Staff Reports

Programs and Services

Superintendent Gonzalez highlighted the winter program season by sharing the strong engagement received within 60 therapeutic recreation programs. Leisure Education school outings continue to utilize member district facilities and strengthen partnerships. There were 4 large special events that occurred in January in February, allowing both youth and adult participants to connect socially. Athletics had a successful Winter Games where 9 medals were received, basketball advanced to State competition, and swim along with gymnastics advanced to regional qualifiers. Day Camp has begun preparing for the upcoming season with 165 returning staff, 200 campers registered, and the addition of a Rover position to support staff across sites throughout the summer. Through financial support from the foundation, the Buffalo Grove Media Lab and Rolling Meadows Music Room are expanding which provides participants with more individualized creative programming options. There has been an increase with Snoezelen sensory room field trips through school partnerships. Inclusion trained 45 Inclusion Aides, with a focus on crisis response, behavior support, and advocacy. The Inclusion team also presented at the annual IPRA Conference and provided Inclusion training for over 110 staff at the Palatine Public Library. Superintendent Gonzalez reported that these highlights represent the focus on program quality and participant growth within therapeutic recreation services.

Human Resources

Manager Carey reported that the department continues with recruitment efforts by attending multiple job fairs, while noting that the upcoming Spring Break job fair will be hosted by Rolling Meadows Park District and will mark a total of 9 job fairs attended this year. The agency will also be fully staffed once the new Recreation Specialist begins in May. Team engagement and morale has been a focus by planning activities for National Employee Appreciation Day and a March Madness event. Selection for a health benefits broker has been narrowed down to Stumm Insurance and Gallagher. A final selection is expected to be finalized by the end of March/early April. Manager Carey and Director Griffin submitted updated full-time job descriptions and launched the HR Source Compensation Survey in February. Results from the survey are currently being reviewed with the goal of ensuring market alignment, competitive pay, improved retention, while providing a summary of the approach used to analyze the data and how it was adjusted or weighted to provide comparisons between Park Districts and SRAs.

Financial

Manager Eckelberry relayed that the setup process for BS&A financial software has started with a focus on staff permission levels, finalizing the chart of accounts, and ensuring information is transferred over properly. The agency is scheduled to go live with the software on April 6th with a BS&A staff on site to provide support until April 17th. Access to AccuFund financial software will still be available until the end of 2nd quarter, guaranteeing that all information is fully transitioned over to BS&A. Manager Eckelberry stated that the audit was completed successfully and that the process went smoothly due to thorough preparation. Director Talsma congratulated the agency on a successful audit and asked if January and February balances will

be inputted into BS&A to settle finances. Director Griffin stated that an update will be provided to the Board upon further research for pricing.

Communication and Technology

Superintendent Draper provided an update on improvements made to the registration process to increase efficiency and enhance service to participants. Families may now register for programs online through RecTrac or in person at the office. This updated process enables real time registration entry, more effective management of waitlists, and allows staff to proactively address staffing and facility needs prior to the start of each program season.

Additionally, RecTrac offers enhanced household setup features to help ensure participants are enrolled in the appropriate programs, while also supporting installment billing. Going forward, separate registration periods will be scheduled for residents and non-residents, allowing the process to be more automated and ensuring participants are placed on waitlists once programs reach capacity.

Foundation

Superintendent Kiwala gave an update on SLSF by reporting a strong start to the year, highlighted by the successful 36th annual fashion show held at the end of February. The event featured 49 models, drew nearly 450 attendees, and generated a record breaking \$78,000 in support. Superintendent Kiwala thanked board members, volunteers, and sponsors for their continued support. For 2026, SLSF budgeted \$400,000 in grant support to NWSRA, representing a \$50,000 increase from last year. Additionally, SLSF is directly supporting professional development and outreach initiatives outside of the agency's budget. These efforts have led to promising new partnerships, including discussions with Ascension Healthcare to assist with reviving the Sibshops program and potential grant opportunities. Individual donations, excluding event revenue, have exceeded \$54,000, driven in part by strong memorial giving early in the year. Superintendent Kiwala also announced the start of golf outing season, encouraging support through promotional efforts for early bird business sponsorship packages covering all six outings, and the Kevin's Club VIP program for participants registering for three or more outings. Superintendent Kiwala reported that the SLSF Board Meeting was held last night, following a transition to quarterly meetings. During the meeting, Director Rea and Hilgers were inducted as trustees for 2-year terms, along with an additional community partner. SLSF also approved updates to its board and admin policy manual, including a revised investment policy statement.

Director

Director Griffin provided an update on the THRIVE program, stating that staff are exploring additional program options for fall, including traveling programs to better serve individuals currently on the waitlist. Director Griffin along with Superintendents Hubsch and Gonzalez, are also evaluating the feasibility of making therapeutic recreation (TR) a billable service under Medicaid. Currently, there are a few states billing for TR services, and a meeting has been scheduled with the Legislative Director at American Therapeutic Recreation Association (ATRA) and the TR department in the state of Utah to better understand the process. Director Griffin will provide updates as discussions progress as this initiative is in early stages and will involve legislative action. Director Griffin also gave an update on park district leases; staff are working with legal counsel to develop a standardized lease agreement across all districts. Drafts will be shared for review, with a goal of completion by May. Director Griffin recognized Superintendent

Hubsch and the Manager of Day Camp for presenting on the Fire Academy program to the Illinois Fire Chiefs Association, another Special Recreation Association (SRA) has since adopted the program model. Additional updates included coordination with Arlington Heights Park District for the annual Walk and Roll event to support Autism Awareness Month, with proceeds benefiting NWSRA. Director Griffin also reported ongoing outreach with member park districts and expressed appreciation for invitations to attend future community events.

Old Business

Board & Admin Manual Updates

Director Griffin asked for a motion to approve the Board and Admin Policy Manual updates as presented. Upon approval, the revised document will be submitted for legal review. Director Griffin highlighted the update to the audit section, requiring completion of the audit by a Certified Public Accountant (CPA). Additionally, a revision to the Employment of Relatives of Board Members section was proposed to allow relatives of board members the opportunity to volunteer and work part-time for NWSRA. Director Bessette made the motion and Director Fullerton seconded the motion to approve the Board and Admin Policy Manual updates. Upon roll being called the vote was as follows:

AYE: Carrie Fullerton, Ben Curcio, Steve Bessette, Craig Talsma, Ben Rea, Christina Ferraro, Bret Fahnstrom, Nick Troy, Diane Hilgers, Tony LaFrenere, Jay Morgan, Jeff Janda and Jan Buchs

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: Joe Zimmermann

The motion carried.

New Business

Capital Budget Funding

Director Griffin introduced discussion regarding the agency's capital budget and long-term funding strategies while providing an overview of the current capital plan. Director Griffin highlighted projected increases in expenses beyond 2027, which are not matched by corresponding revenue growth. Director Griffin also reported that the agency will receive overlapping revenue related to the Pursuit program, resulting in a temporary increase in revenue for 2026. This is not expected to continue in the future as revenue will return to a standard cycle. Director LaFrenere noted that an annual funding approach may provide greater flexibility to address unforeseen repairs, and allow capital needs to be evaluated each year based on current conditions rather than long term projections. Director Fullerton inquired on the viability of leasing agency vehicles as an alternative to purchasing. Director Griffin noted that research has previously been conducted but added that Superintendent Hubsch will further review with the goal of providing an update at the May meeting. Director Talsma mentioned the current capital asset threshold and related administrative processes. Suggesting that the existing threshold may be too low and could create inefficiencies in tracking and surplus procedures for lower value items. Director Talsma encouraged staff to review and recommend a more appropriate capital threshold while focusing on major assets such as vehicles, equipment, and facility improvements. Director Griffin conveyed that staff would conduct further review and return with recommendations at the May meeting to continue the discussion.

Information/Action Items

Part-Time Employee Classifications

Director Griffin presented 3 part-time classifications based on average weekly hours worked and outlined the proposed benefits structure, noting that the health insurance cost estimates are based on actual employee data from incoming staff. Director Janda asked if future part-time classification 3 employees would have the option to enroll in health insurance coverage for themselves and their families. Director Griffin noted that eligible part-time employees may elect coverage options including employee only, employee plus spouse, or employee plus children.

Part-Time Employee Health Benefits

Director Griffin noted additional benefits include dental, vision, flexible spending, and an employee assistance program. Board members discussed differences between part-time and full-time benefit offerings, including plan types and eligibility thresholds. Director Talsma raised the idea of reviewing the amount of paid leave provided to part-time classification 3 employees. Director Rea expressed that this is the initial implementation and may be adjusted in the future if needed. With no further discussion or questions, Chairperson Janda requested a motion to approve the part-time employee health benefits policy as presented. Director LaFrenere made the motion and Director Rea seconded the motion to approve the part-time employee health benefits policy as presented. Upon roll being called the vote was as follows:

AYE: Carrie Fullerton, Ben Curcio, Steve Bessette, Craig Talsma, Ben Rea, Christina Ferraro, Bret Fahnstrom, Nick Troy, Diane Hilgers, Tony LaFrenere, Jay Morgan, Jeff Janda and Jan Buchs

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: Joe Zimmermann

The motion carried.

Upon approval for the part-time employee health benefits policy, Chairperson Janda asked for a motion to sign the resolution authorizing health insurance offerings for eligible part-time employees. Director LaFrenere made the motion Director Fahnstrom seconded the motion to sign the resolution. Upon roll being called the vote was as follows:

AYE: Carrie Fullerton, Ben Curcio, Steve Bessette, Craig Talsma, Ben Rea, Christina Ferraro, Bret Fahnstrom, Nick Troy, Diane Hilgers, Tony LaFrenere, Jay Morgan, Jeff Janda and Jan Buchs

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: Joe Zimmermann

The motion carried.

Closed Session

Chairperson Janda requested a motion for adjournment to closed session for the purpose of discussing personnel. Director Fullerton made the motion and Director Fahnstrom seconded the motion for adjournment to closed session. Upon roll being called the vote was as follows:

AYE: Carrie Fullerton, Joe Zimmermann, Ben Curcio, Steve Bessette, Craig Talsma, Ben Rea, Christina Ferraro, Bret Fahnstrom, Nick Troy, Diane Hilgers, Tony LaFrenere, Jay Morgan, Jeff Janda and Jan Buchs

NAY: None

The motion carried.

Adjournment

After no further business, Chairperson Janda called for a motion to adjourn. Director Curcio made the motion and Director Fahnstrom seconded the motion to adjourn the March 18, 2026 NWSRA Board of Directors meeting at 11:32 a.m. Upon voice vote the meeting was adjourned.

Secretary: 

Date: 5/20/2026