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 21st OF JANUARY, 2026, AT 10:30 AM

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

Administrative Coordinator Olson took roll call. The following members of the Board were present: Carrie Fullerton, Arlington Heights Park District; Erika Strojinc, Buffalo Grove Park District; Ben Curcio, Elk Grove Park District; Steve Bessette, Hanover Park Park District; Craig Talsma, Hoffman Estates Park District; Jim Jarog, Mount Prospect Park District (left at 11:32AM); Ben Rea, Palatine Park District; Ray Doerner, Prospect Heights Park District; Bret Fahnstrom, River Trails Park District; Nick Troy, Rolling Meadows Park District; Diane Hilgers, Salt Creek Park District; Rob Ward, Schaumburg Park District; Jay Morgan, South Barrington Park District; Jeff Janda, Streamwood Park District; Jan Buchs, Wheeling Park District

Absent: Kevin Romejko, Robert Dowling

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; Danielle Olson, Administrative Coordinator

Introduction of Guests
None

Approval of Agenda
Chairperson Janda asked for a motion to approve the agenda dated January 21, 2026. Director Strojinc made the motion and Director Rea seconded the motion to approve the agenda. Upon voice vote, the motion was carried.

Public Comment
None

Approval of Consent Agenda
Chairperson Jarog called for a motion to approve the Consent Agenda of January 21, 2026. Director Fahnstrom made the motion and Director Curcio seconded the motion to approve the Consent Agenda. Upon roll being called the vote was as follows:

AYA: Carrie Fullerton, Erika Strojinc, Ben Curcio, Steve Bessette, Craig Talsma, Jim Jarog, Ben Rea, Ray Doerner, Bret Fahnstrom, Nick Troy, Diane Hilgers, Rob Ward, Jay Morgan, Jeff Janda and Jan Buchs

NAY: None

The motion carried.

Correspondence

Director Griffin shared written correspondence from an NWSRA family who wrote an email thanking NWSRA staff and the Manager of Special Events and Clubs for creating a fun evening that their participant was able to partake in without having them present. A social media post from the C.I.T.Y. of Support group was shared highlighting NWSRA Summer Day Camps and the benefits that their children have experienced by participating in the program.

Staff Reports

Programs and Services

Superintendent Gonzalez reported on the 2025 participation statistics highlighting the over 3332 individuals NWSRA served. Numbers were consistent from 2024 to 2025, with an overall 1.05% increase. Unique individuals are registering for additional programs, the adult population is the largest participation, and disability trends include autism and developmental delay as the top two disabilities represented with the population served. Inclusion had a 2.75% increase, and the summer season continues to be the highest demand. 2025 reflected steady growth, sustained engagement across the lifespan and continued strength in therapeutic recreation services.

Human Resources

Manager Carey shared updates on summer recruiting. The HR department attended the Mount Prospect job fair and will attend a job fair at ISU in February to discuss internships and summer job opportunities. Plans to attend Rolling Meadows, Stevenson High School, Arlington Heights, and Lake Park High School job fairs have also been arranged. The NWSRA Summer Day Camp and Inclusion departments have sent their intent to return to part-time staff, hiring needs will be based off responses. Manager Carey reported that W2s have been sent, ACA and OSHA are under way, the search for potential healthcare brokers continues, and job descriptions will be submitted to HR Source.

Financial

Manager Eckelberry provided an overview of the 2025 fourth quarter financials. Reducing overall expenses contributed to a higher net profit than originally anticipated. The goal is to have the net profit fund future capital needs. Manager Eckelberry reported that the agency ended the year financially strong and reinforced confidence for assumptions used for the 2026 budget.

Communication and Technology

Superintendent Draper reported that the new registration software, RecTrac and ePACT, have both launched. The new software allows for online registration, increases security, and improves finances. Participant information will be shared on iPads in ePACT for part-time staff to access this upcoming program season.

Foundation

Superintendent Kiwala provided a yearly overview for SLSF. The Foundation provided over $357,000 in grants and supported NWSRA capital projects such as the media lab, Vogelei, and the accessible greenhouse. Community contacts have allowed NWSRA to reduce expenses for events, programs, and office supplies. End of the year giving provided around $40,000. The next SLSF event is the fashion show in February which is expected to have 350 in attendance.

Director

Director Griffin gave an update on future adult day programming and the 180-day work plan that was first presented during the Director interview process. Leadership alignment, financial foundation, organizational culture, and communication with stakeholders are reflected in the 2026 agency goals. Strategic plan meetings have begun, with a focus on NWSRA's mission, vision, and values. Stakeholder meetings will take place soon to gather input from everyone. The Admin Board Manual is currently being updated with hopes that all updates will be included and then presented at the March board meeting. Discussion regarding financial efficiency was shared with the board. Director Talsma spoke about the potential of reviewing the timeline of leases to streamline the process. Director Jarog inquired about the plan for established leases. Director Talsma suggested that leases could be brought up to date if everyone agrees with further discussion in the future. Director Griffin shared updates on staff involvement in local organizations.

Old Business

Day Camp Transportation Bid

Superintendent Hubsch provided an overview of the day camp transportation bid from Grand Prairie Transit. Chairperson Janda asked for a motion to approve the day camp transportation bid of $141,712.16 from Grand Prairie Transit. Director Rea made the motion and Director Strojinc seconded the motion to approve the day camp transportation bid of $141,712.16 from Grand Prairie Transit. Upon roll being called the vote was as follows:

AYA: Carrie Fullerton, Erika Strojinc, Ben Curcio, Steve Bessette, Craig Talsma, Jim Jarog, Ben Rea, Ray Doerner, Bret Fahnstrom, Nick Troy, Diane Hilgers, Rob Ward, Jay Morgan, Jeff Janda and Jan Buchs

NAY: None

The motion carried.

Buffalo Grove Media Lab

Superintendent Draper provided an overview of the equipment in the newly created Buffalo Grove media lab and reminded the board of the upcoming open house, scheduled for February 3rd.

New Business

Year in Review

Director Griffin and Superintendent Draper gave a comprehensive presentation on NWSRA's year in review, highlighting the agency's key initiatives, milestones, and accomplishments achieved throughout 2025.

Review of 2025 Agency Goals

Superintendent Hubsch reviewed the 2025 agency goals, emphasizing the four strategic pillars: financial management, operational excellence, leadership development, and outstanding service. Each pillar supports shared efforts with agencies whose missions, visions, and values align with NWSRA.

Review of 2026 Agency Goals

Director Griffin reported on the agency's 2026 goals, outlining a continued focus on financial transparency, accountability, and consistency to ensure real-time updates. Efforts related to operational excellence will prioritize staff retention and strengthen collaboration across all departments. Leadership development initiatives will continue to support the growth of current staff, allow for professional development opportunities, and enhance the Behavior Team's structure and operations to better support participant and staff needs. To advance outstanding service, the agency will seek to increase family evaluation responses and align outreach efforts with the agency's mission.

ADA Compliance Committee

Director Griffin provided an informational update on the ADA Compliance Committee. Noting that the committee has been inactive and is currently outdated but holds potential for growth. It was suggested that a few park district representatives serve on the committee. Director Ward and Director Strojinc suggested inviting park planners to participate. Director Janda and Director Talsma proposed keeping the committee at the staff level with a board member serving as a liaison. Director Bessette was recommended for the liaison role, and two additional park district staff are needed to volunteer to serve on the committee. Director Griffin added that all updates regarding the ADA Compliance Committee will be reflected in the revised Admin Board Manual.

Director Jarog left the meeting at 11:32 a.m. Prior to departing, Director Griffin thanked Director Jarog for serving as Vice Chair over for the past two years. Director Jarog expressed appreciation to Director Talsma for his leadership as former Chair.

Information/Action Items

Recognition of Past Chairperson Craig Talsma

Chairperson Janda presented a proclamation honoring Director Talsma, recognizing his accomplishments, guidance, and leadership as outgoing Chair of the NWSRA Board of Directors.

2026 Budget Approval

Director Griffin asked for a motion to approve the 2026 budget as previously presented at the November board meeting. Director Rea made the motion and Director Fullerton seconded the motion to approve the 2026 budget. Upon roll being called the vote was as follows:

AYA: Carrie Fullerton, Erika Strojinc, Ben Curcio, Steve Bessette, Craig Talsma, Ben Rea, Ray Doerner, Bret Fahnstrom, Nick Troy, Diane Hilgers, Rob Ward, Jay Morgan, Jeff Janda and Jan Buchs

NAY: None

The motion carried.

Recommendation to Continue with Current Legal Counsel

Director Griffin asked for a motion to continue with the current legal counsel of Robbins Schwartz Nicholas Lifton and Taylor Ltd. Director Janda inquired whether there would be any increase in hourly fees, to which Director Griffin confirmed there would be none. Director Strojinc made the motion and Director Fahnstrom seconded the motion to approve the continued retention of Robbins Schwartz Nicholas Lifton and Taylor Ltd. as legal counsel. Upon roll being called the vote was as follows:

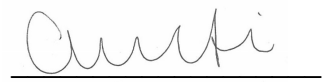
AYA: Carrie Fullerton, Erika Strojinc, Ben Curcio, Steve Bessette, Craig Talsma, Ben Rea, Ray Doerner, Bret Fahnstrom, Nick Troy, Diane Hilgers, Rob Ward, Jay Morgan, Jeff Janda and Jan Buchs

NAY: None

The motion carried.

Adjournment

Director Griffin thanked Director Janda and Director Curcio for serving as the 2026 Chair and Vice Chair of the NWSRA Board of Directors. Director Talsma shared the passing of Sue Leninger and the upcoming schedule of service arrangements. After no further business, Chairperson Janda called for a motion to adjourn. Director Strojinc made the motion and Director Fahnstrom seconded the motion to adjourn the January 21, 2026 NWSRA Board of Directors meeting at 11:38 a.m. Upon voice vote the meeting was adjourned.

Secretary: 

Date: 3/18/2026