

**RECREATION AND PARK COMMISSION
FOR THE PARISH OF EAST BATON ROUGE**
Regular Meeting – 5:00 p.m.
BREC Administration Building
6201 Florida Boulevard
Baton Rouge, Louisiana
Commission Minutes
August 28, 2025

Call to Order

A regular meeting of the Recreation and Park Commission for the Parish of East Baton Rouge (BREC) was held at BREC's Administrative Offices on August 28, 2025. The meeting was called to order at 5:02 p.m. by Chairwoman Donna Collins Lewis. Chairwoman Lewis offered the invocation and Commissioner Kenneth Pointer led the Pledge of Allegiance. Roll was taken and a quorum of Commissioners was present, including; Donna Collins Lewis, Chair; Clarice Gordon, Vice Chair; Kenneth Pointer, Treasurer; Mike Polito; Collis Temple III; Lon Vicknair; Wade Evans; Carl Stages; and David Dellucci. Commissioners Dwayne Rogers and David McDavid were absent. Staff members present were Janet Simmons, Interim Superintendent; Reed Richard, Assistant Superintendent of System Planning; Maurice Velasquez, Interim Chief Officer; Don Johnson, Chief Financial Officer; Katrina Coots Ward, Tia Edwards, Jim Fleshman, Angela Harms, Steven Knight, RaHarold Lawson, Robyn Lott, and Mike Raby. Chris Marchiafava was in attendance to record the actions of the Commission. Murphy Foster, legal counsel, was also in attendance. The rest of the audience consisted of other BREC staff, sign language interpreters, media, and the public.

Public Comment

Chairwoman Lewis announced that public comment would be allowed prior to a vote being taken on any agenda action item and explained the process to be observed.

Chairwoman Lewis recognized Commissioner Polito who made a motion to add the following two items to the agenda:

to review and approve the Superintendent's recommendations for adding new positions;
to review and approve the new mission statement.

Chairwoman Lewis offered another item for consideration to add the agenda as follows:
Resolved, That the Commission accept the 2023 audit.

After a brief discussion, Commissioner Polito revised his motion to include adding the three aforementioned items to the agenda. Commissioner Temple seconded. There being no further discussion, Chairwoman Lewis called for the vote with the following results:

Yeas: 9

Nays: 0

The motion was approved unanimously.

Adoption of Minutes

Resolved, That the reading of the minutes of the Recreation and Park Regular Commission Meeting of July 24, 2025, and Special Commission Meeting of August 14, 2025, be dispensed with, and that they be approved as written.

Motion by Mr. Evans

Second by Ms. Gordon

There being no discussion, Chairwoman Lewis called for the vote with the following

results:

Yeas: 9

Nays: 0

The motion was approved unanimously.

Consent Calendar

Resolved, That the Commission approve the Routine Personnel Transactions from July 15, 2025, to August 19, 2025.

Motion by Mr. Pointer

Second by Mr. Vicknair

There being no discussion, Chairwoman Lewis called for the vote with the following results:

Yeas: 9

Nays: 0

The motion was approved unanimously

Presentations

Chairwoman Lewis recognized Interim Superintendent Janet Simmons. Interim Superintendent Simmons presented former Commissioners Nathan Rust and Rossie Washington, Jr. with awards in appreciation for their years of service on the Commission. Mr. Washington spoke briefly and offered his continued support for BREC and its mission.

Commissioner Polito spoke briefly praising the contributions of both Mr. Washington and Mr. Rust.

Commissioner Stages thanked Mr. Washington on behalf of the BREC Foundation for serving as the Commission liaison to the Foundation.

The Commission viewed a brief video highlighting various upcoming events throughout the parish during the month of September.

Reports of Officers and Standing Committees

Chairwoman Lewis recognized Interim Superintendent Janet Simmons to present the Superintendent's Report.

Under Communications, Interim Superintendent Simmons reviewed the July 2025 activity report. She invited the Commission to review the remainder of the overall attendance numbers and noted that the rapid response ticketing system will launch on September 8. Interim Superintendent Simmons continued reviewing attendance related to facilities and presented her recent meetings and engagements.

Interim Superintendent Simmons informed the Commission that they would be voting on a new mission statement later on the agenda. She mentioned that about 25% of staff responded to a recent staff survey. She also noted the recent improvements in internal communications. Interim Superintendent Simmons stated that a new call center director had been hired. She continued with information about two ribbon cuttings at Hartley/Vey Gardere Park and Erie Street Park. She mentioned the recent townhalls, media promotions, and summer camp success. She thanked the Commissioners for their attendance at the retreat held the previous day.

The Chair recognized Commissioner Stages who recused himself from participation in the next agenda item regarding an agreement with BREC Foundation.

Chairwoman Lewis read following resolution under Administrative Matters:

Resolved, That the Commission approves the Amended and Restated Cooperative Endeavor Agreement between BREC, Friends of the Baton Rouge Zoo, and the BREC Foundation. This Agreement establishes the BREC Foundation as the sole nonprofit fundraising organization providing support to BREC, including all fundraising and sponsorship efforts related to BREC and the Baton Rouge Zoo. This Agreement remains subject to final legal review.

Motion by Mr. Polito

Second by Mr. Temple

There being no discussion, Chairwoman Lewis called for the vote with the following results:

Yeas: 8

Nays: 0

The motion was approved by majority vote.

Chairwoman Lewis noted Commissioner Stages' recusal on the item.

Chairwoman Lewis recognized Commissioner Polito who expressed his appreciation to Adam Parker and Craig Broome, with the BREC Foundation and Zoo Foundation respectively; Zach Corbin, Chair of the BREC Foundation; and Carl Stages (former Executive Director of BREC Foundation) for working together to form one foundation to be more efficient with fundraising efforts for BREC. Chairwoman Lewis thanked Commissioner Polito for spearheading that effort by bringing everyone together to accomplish this task.

Under Standing Committees, Chairwoman Lewis recognized Commissioner Pointer for the Finance report. Commissioner Pointer asked Don Johnson, Chief Financial Officer, to present the item under Budget Status Report. Mr. Johnson reviewed the item and read the following resolution:

Resolved, That the Commission accept the unaudited monthly Budget Status Report for the month ending and the fiscal year-to-date period ending July 31, 2025, as presented.

Motion by Mr. Pointer

Second by Mr. Evans

There being no discussion, Chairwoman Lewis called for the vote with the following results:

Yeas: 9

Nays: 0

The motion was approved unanimously

Mr. Johnson introduced Rodney Combs and Steven Bearry with EisnerAmper who provided audit services for BREC. Mr. Combs gave a presentation on the 2023 audit. He stated that though there were findings most of the findings were related to the audit being late. He stated that the 2024 audit had been started and will be completed by December 31, 2025. Mr. Combs stated that BREC received an unmodified opinion and noted that most of findings were related to the timeliness of the audit. Mr. Combs noted that documentation showing that BREC had complied with the requirement for the 2024 Budget Publication and Public Hearing, which was one of the findings, was received late by the auditors. He enumerated the various findings and answered questions from the Commissioners. Commissioner Polito asked about findings of noncompliance connected to contracts and Mr. Combs indicated that most were related to internal controls. Commissioner Evans asked to be provided details regarding the noncompliant items related to contracts. Mr. Johnson indicated that the details will be provided. Mr. Combs stated that the Commission will be provided with follow-up information on the findings in the subsequent audit.

Commissioner Evans expressed his appreciation to Mr. Johnson for work required to get the audits to this point. Mr. Johnson thanked his staff for their hard work. Commissioner Pointer also commended the Finance Department staff for their work on the audits. Mr. Johnson introduced Rhonda Williams, Finance Director, and Lesha Woods, Comptroller, and expressed his appreciation for their work.

Under Selection of Professionals, Chairwoman Lewis read the following resolution:

Resolved, That the Commission approve Amendment No. 8 to Contract No. 2020-112 with Sasaki Associates, the prime design professional for Phase 1 of the Greenwood Park and Baton Rouge Zoo Design and Construction project, for an increase in the not-to-exceed (NTE) amount of \$24,000 for Reimbursable Expenses associated with design work for the Ambassador Animal Building. The current Zoo/Greenwood Park/Dumas Golf Course Contract is \$7,060,903 and the new total with Amendment No. 8 is \$7,084,903.

Motion by Mr. Polito

Second by Mr. Pointer

There being no discussion, Chairwoman Lewis called for the vote with the following results:

Yeas: 9

Nays: 0

The motion was approved unanimously

Chairwoman Lewis then read the following resolution:

Resolved, That the Commission approve Amendment No. 1 to Contract No. 2023000337 with Patch Landscape Architecture LLC for additional design work for a new Anna T. Jordan Community Park Playground and Site Improvements due to increased construction budget and added technical requirements, not to exceed \$75,891 and additional services to provide stormwater management plan, \$5,500; hydraulics study, \$10,000; and preliminary USACE permitting, \$2,250. The current contract is \$90,000. The revised total, including Amendment No. 1, is \$183,641.

Motion by Mr. Polito

Second by Mr. Temple

There being no discussion, Chairwoman Lewis called for the vote with the following results:

Yeas: 9

Nays: 0

The motion was approved unanimously

Chairwoman Lewis then read the following resolution:

Resolved, That the Commission approve an amendment to Contract No. 2023000142 with Benchmark Group L.L.C. for BREC's Grove to Mall Trail Segment, increasing the contract amount by \$44,555.00, inclusive of all amendments. This amendment includes: Incorporation of a long retaining wall into the trail design to accommodate the grading requirements of the adjacent landowner. Revisions to the plan set are based on new information and coordination with the adjacent land developer. Division of the project into two phases (multiple bid packages) to allow expedited construction of Phase 1 while servitude acquisition efforts continue. Adjustment of the estimated construction cost from \$608,700 to \$909,576. The original contract amount was \$63,000 for a new total of \$107,555, including all amendments added to the contract.

Motion by Mr. Temple

Second by Mr. Stages

There being no discussion, Chairwoman Lewis called for the vote with the following results:

Yeas: 9

Nays: 0

The motion was approved unanimously

Chairwoman Lewis then read the following resolution:

Resolved, that the Commission approve the amendment to Contract #2025000199 with SELA Aquatics, LLC, to increase the contract amount from \$38,700 to \$58,700 for the completion of maintenance, including but not limited to pump maintenance, backwashing, water treatment, and water balancing at Liberty Lagoon; the contract term remains through December 31, 2025.

Motion by Mr. Pointer

Second by Mr. Temple

There being no discussion, Chairwoman Lewis called for the vote with the following results:

Yeas: 9

Nays: 0

The motion was approved unanimously

Mr. Johnson asked that a technical adjustment be noted in the record related to the item approved for Sasaki Associates. He stated that the amendment to the contract approved on January 25, 2025 was incorrectly noted as Amendment 8 and should have been listed as Amendment 7. He also stated that a technical adjustment related to language that was omitted where there was a redistribution of reimbursable expenses that were moved over to the design fees which had a net zero impact on the contract. Chairwoman Lewis asked that the corrections be noted in the minutes.

Reports of Special Committees

Chairwoman Lewis appointed Commissioner Evans to the Golf Advisory Committee and Commissioner Stages to the Selection of Professionals Committee¹.

Special Orders

None

Unfinished Business and General Orders

Chairwoman Lewis read the following resolution:

Resolved, that the Commission hereby approves the amended agreement with Junbi, LLC, represented by Janet Simmons, where she shall serve in the capacity of Interim Superintendent for a term not to exceed 18 months.

Motion by Mr. Evans

Second by Mr. Polito

Commissioner Evans stated that he wanted to propose an amendment to the contract on page one under the Now Therefore section to add item F stating that BREC shall pay the monthly dues throughout the term of the contract in connection with the consultant's membership to the Baton Rouge City Club and Rotary Club for networking opportunities.

Legal Counsel Murphy Foster asked for a point of order. He stated that Louisiana ethics laws prohibit BREC from paying for memberships in such clubs. Commissioner Evans rescinded his amendment. Commissioner Polito asked if an allowance can be provided so that the Interim

¹ Subsequent to the meeting, Chairwoman Lewis clarified that she misspoke and that Commissioner Stages is appointed to serve as the Chair of the Planning and Engineering Advisory Committee.

Superintendent can represent BREC in the community. Mr. Foster said he researched this for the former Superintendent and would be prepared to address this at the next meeting. Commissioner Evans restated that he would rescind his motion to amend the contract and would let his original motion to approve the contract stand.

Commissioner Stages stated that on page two of the contract the item D was repetitive and would need to be deleted. It was determined that the contract Commissioner Stages was referring to was a previous version that has since been corrected. The Commission members were then provided with a printed copy of the current version of the contract. The printed contract was recommended for approval by the Selection of Professionals Committee.

Chairwoman Lewis clarified that the version being recommended was the printed contract that had been handed out and provided for the record. There was a motion and a second to approve. There being no further discussion, Chairwoman Lewis called for the vote with the following results:

Yeas: 8

Nays: 0

The motion was approved unanimously

Chairwoman Lewis read the following resolution:

Resolved, That the Commission select the highest-scoring executive search firm to assist with the recruitment and evaluation of candidates for the Superintendent position.

Commissioner Evans made a motion to defer the item for three months. The motion died for lack of a second.

Chairwoman Lewis recognized Commissioner Stages who stated that he believed if action was not taken at this meeting the RFP (Request for Proposals) would expire. Chairwoman Lewis asked if there was a motion. Commissioner Gordon made a motion to approve. Chairwoman Lewis restated the resolution including the name of the highest scoring firm as follows:

Resolved, That the Commission select the highest-scoring executive search firm, MGT, to assist with the recruitment and evaluation of candidates for the Superintendent position.

Commissioner Pointer seconded the motion.

Under discussion, Commissioner Polito stated that he did not see the point in hiring a search firm since the Commission had just extended the contract with the Interim Superintendent. He also stated that once the council receives an opinion from the Attorney General on their questions about new law, he would assume that they will appoint four new Commissioners and that a search under that premise would not yield good results.

Commissioner Evans expressed his concern about the hiring a search firm was that we need to get the house in order and have the audits in compliance before searching for a new Superintendent. He continued that he would not have voted to continue paying the former Superintendent once he indicated that he was not going to renew his contract. He stated that since all of the proposals were under \$50,000 we could chose to move forward in the future.

Commissioner Gordon requested and received clarification from Mr. Foster regarding the RFP process moving forward. She stated that Commission has the ability to set the timeline and begin with preliminary work with the consultant until the 2024 audit is complete.

Chairwoman Lewis stated that the Commission would have the authority to terminate the

contract. She recapped the process used to get to the point of choosing a search firm. She stated that she thought we needed to put the search process in place at this time.

Commissioner Evans stated that each of the search firms stated that they would be able to have a slate of candidates in 60 days. Commissioner Gordon asked for a point of order and stated that the Commission had requested the timeline in the RFP. Commissioner Polito clarified that the timeline was not included in the RFP and that BREC requested a timeline in the interview process. Commissioner Polito clarified with Mr. Foster that the contract could be written for the search to start at the pleasure of BREC.

Mr. Foster clarified that the vote is on the original motion.

Chairwoman Lewis called for a roll call vote with the following results:

Yeas: 3 Ms. Lewis, Ms. Gordon, Mr. Stages

Nays: 5 Mr. Pointer, Mr. Polito, Mr. Vicknair, Mr. Evans, Mr. Dellucci

Absent: 3 Mr. Rogers, Mr. Temple, Mr. McDavid

The motion failed.

New Business

Chairwoman Lewis noted that the Commission would take up the items added to the agenda with the exception of the item related to new job descriptions. She recognized Commissioner Gordon to offer an explanation. Commissioner Gordon stated that the job descriptions referenced a salary grade no longer in use and that a salary range needs to be included with the job description. Commissioner Gordon stated that the Human Resources Committee was planning to meet and she wanted to bring this item to the next Commission meeting.

Commissioner Polito asked Mr. Foster why the Commission is worried about salary ranges. Mr. Foster explained that the Commission hired a firm to do a study to determine salary ranges for all the positions employed by the Commission. Commissioner Polito asked that since the Commission is not supposed to meddle in staff positions, why should they approve salary ranges. Commissioner Polito indicated that he would like the Commission to eliminate the salary schedule.

After some further discussion, Commissioner Evans asked who prepared the job descriptions and asked a representative from Human Resources to come forward to answer some questions. Shanda Crosby, Assistant Director of Human Resources, came forward. Commissioner Evans asked about the salary grade listed on the job description and who prepared the documents. Ms. Crosby stated that the salary grade listed had not been in use since June 24, 2024 and that she had not participated in the preparation of the job descriptions. Interim Superintendent stated that Johanna (Landreneau, Interim Chief Human Resource Officer) prepared the job descriptions.

There was additional discussion about the job descriptions and Commissioner Stages identified another discrepancy in one of the job descriptions. Interim Superintendent Simmons suggested moving forward with deferring the item. Commissioner Gordon clarified that her motion was to defer the item, Commissioner Evans seconded. There being no further discussion, Chairwoman Lewis called for the vote with the following results:

Yeas: 8

Nays: 0

The motion was approved unanimously

The Chairwoman stated that the next item was the acceptance of the 2023 audit.

Motion by Mr. Polito

Second by Ms. Gordon

There being no discussion, Chairwoman Lewis called for the vote with the following results:

Yeas: 8

Nays: 0

The motion was approved unanimously

Chairwoman Lewis recognized Commissioner Stages who asked if the special meetings needed to continue since the Commission was no longer moving forward in the Superintendent search.

Commissioner Polito explained that the special meetings were put in place to also help in the transition process and that they are still needed for that purpose.

Chairwoman Lewis read the following resolution:

Resolved, That the Commission approve one of the following as the new mission statement for BREC:

Enriching lives through parks, recreation, and nature.

Better parks. Stronger community. Brighter future.

Parks that connect, inspire, and grow community.

Chairwoman Lewis asked Interim Superintendent Simmons to present the choices for the new mission statement.

Commissioner Pointer made a motion to approve the following mission statement:

Enriching lives through parks, recreation, and nature.

Commissioner Evans seconded.

There being no further discussion, Chairwoman Lewis called for the vote with the following results:

Yeas: 8

Nays: 0

The motion was approved unanimously

Adjournment

Chairwoman Lewis made a motion to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Pointer and the meeting was adjourned at 6:46 p.m. without objection.

Janet C. Simmons, Interim Superintendent
and Ex-Officio Secretary

Donna Collins Lewis, Chairwoman

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