

**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
May 28, 2026

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 May 28, 2026. The meeting was called to order at 5:00 p.m. by Chairman Michael Polito. Commissioner Marshall Ortego offered the invocation, and Commissioner Murelle Harrison led the Pledge of Allegiance. Roll was taken and a quorum of Commissioners was present, including Michael Polito, Chair; Carl Stages, Treasurer; Dr. Murelle Harrison; Marshall Ortego; David McDavid; Lon Vicknair; and Dustin Yates. Commissioner Collis Temple III arrived at 5:07 p.m. Commissioner Wade Evans was absent. Staff members present were Janet Simmons, Interim Superintendent; Aneatra Boykin, Chief Administrative Officer; Maurice Velasquez, Interim Chief Operating Officer; Johanna Landreneau, Interim Chief Human Resources Officer; Corey Luttrell, Rhonda Williams, Tia Edwards, Wesley Sims, Angela Harms, Steven Knight, RaHarold Lawson, Mike Raby, Robyn Lott, Katrina Coots-Ward, Dina Duplantis, and Brendan Nestor. Jim Raines, legal counsel, was also in attendance. The rest of the audience consisted of other BREC staff, media, and the public.

Public Comment

Chairman Polito 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.

Adoption of Minutes

Resolved, that the reading of the minutes of the Recreation and Park Commission Meeting of April 23, 2026, the Special Meeting of May 7, 2026, and the Special Meeting of May 13, 2026, be dispensed with, and that they be approved as written.

Motion by Mr. Ortego

Second by Dr. Harrison

There being no discussion, Chairman Polito called for the vote with the following results:

Yeas: 7

Nays: 0

The motion was approved unanimously.

Consent Calendar

Under the Consent Calendar, Chairman Polito read the following resolution:

Resolved, that the Commission review and accept the Routine Personnel Transactions from April 8, 2026 through May 8, 2026.

Motion by Mr. Yates

Second by Mr. Stages

There being no discussion, Chairman Polito called for the vote with the following results:

Yeas: 7

Nays: 0

The motion was approved unanimously.

Presentations

The BREC video showcasing upcoming activities for the month of April was played.

Reports of Officers and Standing Committees

Interim Superintendent Simmons presented the April 2026 attendance report and provided updates on community engagement meetings, summer camp enrollment count, automated external defibrillator (AED) device distributions and trainings, City-Brooks Park Master Plan update, social media collaboration with The Advocate, the Better Parks Brighter Future informational initiative, tax renewal, Liberty Lagoon opening, BREC vendor summit, Safety Place ribbon cutting, and upcoming community meetings. She also stated that due to the merger of the Zoo Foundation and the BREC Foundation, two Zoo events, Brew at the Zoo and the Wild Wine Walk, have been combined into a single event to be held in the fall.

Chairman Polito asked for clarification regarding the top performing facilities and how the attendance data is collected. Ms. Simmons stated that the data is collected via cell phone usage at the facilities.

Chairman Polito and Ms. Simmons congratulated Dina Duplantis, Director of Equine Operations, on her work in expanding the programming and use of Farr Park. Chairman Polito also applauded the efforts of the Communications Department and noted the dramatic impact it is having on and in the community.

Commissioner Stages stated that there was a newspaper article about how the City-Parish is utilizing artificial intelligence (AI) to expand their 311 call system and asked if BREC was going to implement something similar in its call center in an effort to keep costs down. Chief Information Officer Steven Knight stated that the platform currently built allows for upscaling to meet any challenges.

Ms. Simmons stated that BREC is partnering with parish law enforcement agencies to ensure that all resources are utilized in the Security Operations Center (SOC). Chairman Polito applauded all efforts by BREC to raise the bar.

Standing Committee Reports

Finance

Chairman Polito recognized Commissioner Stages, chair of the Finance Committee. Commissioner Stages stated that a workshop was held after the Finance Committee meeting on May 26, 2026 so that new and returning committee members would have a chance to understand the work of the Finance Department and its reporting. He stated that committee members offered suggestions and extended the opportunity to offer suggestions or give feedback to the Commission. He stated that there were discussions surrounding zero-based budgeting and how that could be implemented, and that additional information would be forthcoming. Chairman Polito asked if the committee was close to done with the budgeting. Mr. Stages stated that they were not; half of next year's budget would be zero-based, with full implementation beginning in 2028. He also gave an update on the 2025 audit, stating that it was currently underway and that so far, everything was going well. He stated that there was an article in the newspaper that reported negatively on the 2024 audit findings and reminded everyone that the auditors had previously stated in their presentation that since there was no time for corrections between previous audits there would be repeat findings. He then recognized Finance Director Rhonda Williams.

Chairman Polito announced the arrival of Commissioner Temple III and acknowledged the presence of former Commissioner Collis Temple, Jr.

Ms. Williams stated that the 2025 Audit could possibly be completed in six to eight weeks. She also offered to host a workshop for Commissioners similar to the one hosted for the Finance Committee.

Chairman Polito congratulated Ms. Williams and her staff on their hard work.

Chairman Polito asked for a motion to approve the following:

Resolved, that the Commission accept the unaudited monthly Budget Status Report for the month ending and fiscal year-to-date ending April 30, 2026, as presented.

Motion to approve by Mr. Stages

Second by Mr. Temple

There being no discussion, Chairman Polito called for the vote with the following results:

Yeas: 8

Nays: 0

The motion was approved unanimously.

Human Resources

Chairman Polito recognized Commissioner Harrison, chair of the Human Resources Committee. Dr. Harrison stated that the committee reviewed and recommended approval of the realignment proposals, but it would take time for implementation to occur. She then recognized Human Resources Director Corey Luttrell.

Mr. Luttrell presented the Executive Structure Realignment Plan, stating that it was in line with modern recreational agencies. He also stated that there would be a compensation study completed later in the year. Chairman Polito suggested that BREC allow the ability to hire and not hire to be the compensation study as opposed to hiring someone to tell them what they would find out if they went out into the market and discovered that they could not hire. He stated that some of that information could be gleaned without doing an actual study. Mr. Luttrell stated that the compensation study would be bigger than just market data but would also include point-factor analysis internally to be able to determine appropriate hierarchies based on what the positions produce for the organization and make sure that those positions are fairly compensated.

Chairman Polito commented that he still wonders why the Commission needs to be involved in this process and that is something that needs to be worked on. Mr. Luttrell said that the reclassification reduces the number of times it would need to come before the Commission.

Mr. Luttrell read Item a under Human Resources:

Resolved, that the Commission review and approve the proposed Executive Structure Realignment, including the establishment of the Chief Officers, Director (Tier One, Tier Two, and Division Director), and Assistant Director classification; the elimination of Assistant Superintendent classifications and positions; and the implementation of a standardized executive leadership framework, as presented.

Motion to approve by Dr. Harrison

Second by Mr. Vicknair

Commissioner Stages asked for clarification regarding the timeline of the realignment, asking if it would take about three years. Mr. Luttrell stated that the approval serves as proof of concept and would allow the process to move faster. He stated that he would like to have the compensation study begin before the end of the year with an implementation goal of 2027 for any structural changes. He stated that the job classification realignment to be discussed next would

also happen much sooner than that.

Commissioner Stages asked how much of the plan, if approved, would be implemented before the new Superintendent arrives. Mr. Luttrell stated that if approved, the next step would be to begin mapping the positions and depending on how long it takes for that to be completed, implementation would occur after that, so it could possibly take place before the new Superintendent's arrival. Mr. Stages stated that he would want the new Superintendent to look over the plan before implementation to give his/her thoughts and hopes that the process has not gone too far before that happens.

Commissioner Stages asked for clarification regarding the elimination of the Assistant Superintendent position and how that affects those currently holding those positions. Mr. Luttrell stated that their salaries would not be affected; that it would only be a title change, moving them into the Tier Two Director position. He said that the reason for the elimination was to clean up some of the confusion created in the hierarchy. Commissioner Stages asked if there would be any pay raises related to the move; Mr. Luttrell stated that there would not be.

There being no further discussion, Chairman Polito called for the vote with the following results:

Yeas: 8

Nays: 0

The motion was approved unanimously.

Mr. Luttrell read Item b under Human Resources:

Resolved, that the Commission review and approve the proposed Job Classification Realignment initiative, including the establishment of the Coordinator, Generalist, and Supervisor classification structures and associated tier progression framework, as presented.

Motion to approve by Mr. Ortego

Second by Mr. McDavid

Mr. Luttrell stated that there were over 300 job classifications, and the plan reduces that to around fifty. The goal for this realignment is to create larger classifications as well as tiers within those classifications to allow for more flexibility and clear growth pathways. It also allows for hiring at a higher level based on skills. He also presented a model that reflects how an employee would progress through the new classification.

Commissioner Temple stated that the current classifications presented did not look fluid at all and appreciated the efforts to clean it up.

Commissioner Yates asked if the new classifications would allow for a new hire to be placed at a level other than entry within the classification. Mr. Luttrell stated that it would allow BREC to bring people in at a higher level as well as develop current employees to move to higher levels.

Chairman Polito thanked Mr. Luttrell for simplifying the process but stated that it needed to be even simpler.

Commissioner Stages asked for the timeline of implementation. Mr. Luttrell stated that once approved, the mapping process would begin with the next pay period; the approval serves as proof of concept, and the goal is to reduce bureaucracy and make it more efficient and agile. Commissioner Stages asked if it fits this year's budget; Mr. Luttrell affirmed that it did.

Commissioner Stages asked if employee input was considered in this process; Mr. Luttrell affirmed that it was considered. He stated that he also leaned heavily on the Human Resources Committee, saying that some of them had either done something similar or operated under a similar structure.

There being no further discussion, Chairman Polito called for the vote with the following results:

Yeas: 8

Nays: 0

The motion was approved unanimously.

Selection of Professionals

Chairman Polito stated that the Selection of Professionals Committee met before the regular Commission meeting, and all items on the agenda were recommended for approval. He then recognized Planning and Engineering Director Angela Harms.

Ms. Harms read Item a under Selection of Professionals:

Resolved, that the Commission approve a contract not to exceed \$10,000.00 with Buffalo Electric, Inc. for investigation, study, and report of the Highland Road Community Park Tennis Court lighting electrical system to identify electric connection issues, listing the required repairs and estimated costs for suggested repairs; authorize Superintendent to execute appropriate documents pending final legal review.

Motion to approve by Mr. Ortega

Second by Mr. Yates

Ms. Harms stated that there were some issues with the electrical system at the tennis courts at Highland Road Community Park, and that Buffalo was chosen to investigate those issues and explain how to correct them. Chairman Polito clarified that this was an instance where the contractor did not perform and that the company would be charged for the efforts. Ms. Harms stated that the contractor would be relieved of the rest of the contract. Chairman Polito asked if the contract had been terminated; Ms. Harms stated that that had not been done yet, and that a credit change order would be done and the contractor would be charged the full punch list value.

There being no further discussion, Chairman Polito called for the vote with the following results:

Yeas: 8

Nays: 0

The motion was unanimously approved.

Ms. Harms read Item b under Selection of Professionals:

Resolved, that the Commission approve a contract with Tipton Associates to provide architectural design, construction documents, bidding, and construction administration services for Magnolia Mound Visitor Center repairs for a fee of \$162,814.00, based on the BREC fee curve and estimated construction cost of \$1,689,974.00, including any change orders; and additional analysis and pre-design services not to exceed \$5,000.00 for concept iterations and budgetary reviews. Authorize Superintendent to execute appropriate documents pending final legal review.

Ms. Harms stated that the Visitor Center was built several years ago and there were some structural and system issues within the building, and this would address those issues and make the Center what it should be for the public.

Commissioner Temple asked for clarification regarding listed costs. Ms. Harms stated that it was just an estimate, and that it may not necessarily cost that amount. She said that the BREC fee curve is based on cost of construction and that the fee would be adjusted based on that cost.

A motion to approve Item b was made by Mr. Stages and seconded by Mr. McDavid.

There being no further discussion, Chairman Polito called for the vote with the following results:

Yeas: 8

Nays: 0

The motion was approved unanimously.

Ms. Harms read Item c under Selection of Professionals:

Resolved, that the Commission approve a contract with Pivotal Engineering to provide electrical engineering services for the Eugene Young Administrative Offices, including a power analysis, full investigation of current building electrical load and conditions to create as-built drawings, and coordination with Entergy for a new transformer and associated gear for a lump sum fee of \$112,032.00; authorize Superintendent to execute appropriate documents pending final legal review.

Motion to approve by Mr. McDavid

Second by Mr. Temple

Ms. Harms stated that the Womack Building is a highly used facility and that with the recent modifications, it is reaching maximum capacity on the electrical infrastructure; the goal is to work with Entergy and hopefully have them provide the transformer at no cost to BREC.

A member of the public commented on the cost from his seat in the audience. Chairman Polito acknowledged that the statement was made by Coleman Brown and stated that it did seem like a lot of money, but Womack is a large building, so he felt that the number was reasonable.

There being no further discussion, Chairman Polito called for the vote with the following results:

Yeas: 8

Nays: 0

The motion was approved unanimously.

Ms. Harms read Item d under Selection of Professionals:

Resolved, that the Commission approve a contract with Ritter Maher Architects, LLC to perform basic design services for partial schematic design through construction administration and closeout for the Zoo Ambassador Animal Building based on the BREC fee curve and estimated construction cost of \$3,100,000.00, less ten percent (10%) for previously completed schematic design work for \$214,901.10; authorize Superintendent to execute appropriate documents pending final legal review.

Motion to approve by Mr. Yates

Second by Mr. Vicknair

Ms. Harms stated that this involved moving the project to a local firm, different than the firm that began the design process, in order to have more onsite presence going forward through the construction phase.

There being no further discussion, Chairman Polito called for the vote with the following result:

Yeas: 8

Nays: 0

The motion was approved unanimously.

Chairman Polito read Item e under Selection of Professionals:

Resolved, that the Commission approve an amendment to Contract 2022000214 with TBG Partners for \$932,530.69 to perform basic design services for schematic design through construction administration and closeout for Airline Highway Community Park based on the BREC fee curve and estimated construction cost of \$16,000,000.00. The new contract total will be \$2,107,159.69. Authorize Superintendent to execute appropriate documents pending final legal review.

Motion to approve by Mr. Stages

Second by Dr. Harrison

Ms. Harms stated that this resolution was to bring BREC through the rest of the design services, schematic design, and construction administration phase for the revamped master plan for Airline Highway Community Park. She said that bidding will begin hopefully by the end of the year, with construction beginning next year. Chairman Polito asked if consideration was being given to the CMAR (Construction Manager at Risk) process. Ms. Harms stated that BREC was too far into the design process to do that.

Chairman Polito recognized Coleman Brown for public comment. Mr. Brown shared his concerns regarding the increased design fees, construction costs, selection of a design firm from out of the state, and overall project design. He asked if there was any federal funding involved with this project. Ms. Harms stated that federal funding was only for the safe room project, not any other portion of the project. She also addressed the process of selecting design firms. Chairman Polito stated that he would like for everyone to be able to compete regardless of location. Mr. Brown also questioned the distance from the ballfield to the road. Chairman Polito asked Ms. Harms about the distance; she stated it was more than 500 feet.

There being no further discussion, Chairman Polito called for the vote with the following results:

Yeas: 8

Nays: 0

The motion was approved unanimously.

Chairman Polito recognized Park Operations Director Dr. RaHarold Lawson, who presented information on the next agenda item. He stated that aerators were installed in several ponds throughout the parish and recently discovered that some of them need repair. The contract was being amended to cover those costs in addition to adding new aerators for ponds that would be coming online.

Dr. Lawson read Item f under Selection of Professionals:

Resolved, that the Commission approve an amendment to Contract 2025000310 — Aerator Removal and Installation with Cajun Carpentry & Repair, LLC for an amount not to exceed \$125,000.00. Previous contract amount was \$75,000.00.

Motion to approve by Mr. Ortego

Second by Dr. Harrison

There being no discussion, Chairman Polito called for the vote with the following results:

Yeas: 8

Nays: 0

The motion was approved unanimously.

Zoo Assistant Director for Business Operations Kim Lodrigue read Item g under Selection of Professionals:

Resolved, that the Commission approve awarding RFP 244 for Holiday Lighting at BREC's Baton Rouge Zoo to DNE Productions, LLC for the bid amount of \$249,000.00. This will include the design, installation, maintenance, and takedown of all displays, lights, and materials for ZooLights. Authorize the Interim Superintendent to execute the appropriate documents.

Motion to approve by Mr. McDavid

Second by Mr. Vicknair

Ms. Lodrigue stated that this company was chosen because their bid addressed many of the feedback issues they received from the public and included interactive display; the company is also local, which limits downtime during maintenance issues.

Commissioner Stages asked about cost recovery. Ms. Lodrigue stated that the cost recovery from last year was 100%; they estimate to recoup 75% of the costs from this year. Cost recovery for the Zoo as a whole is about 39%.

There being no further discussion, Chairman Polito called for the vote with the following results:

Yeas: 8

Nays: 0

The motion was approved unanimously.

Commissioner Stages remarked that the Planning and Park Resources Committee met on Tuesday, May 26, 2026; they received reports from Friends of the Botanic Garden and the State Fair Foundation as part of their fiduciary responsibility. He also congratulated Ms. Harms on her promotion to Director of Planning and Engineering.

Reports of Special Committees

None

Special Orders

None

Unfinished Business and General Orders

Ms. Boykin read an amended Item A under Unfinished Business and General Orders:

Resolved, that the Commission approve the amended and extended Contract 2025000384 with Clearly Managed Consulting LLC for safety emergency training, including fire drills, situational awareness, and incident response, for a monthly amount of \$16,000.00 for a period of four months, not to exceed \$64,000.00. Previous amount was for \$40,000; subject to legal review.

Motion to approve by Mr. Stages

Second by Mr. Yates

Commissioner Stages asked for an explanation for the change in costs. Interim Chief Operating Officer Maurice Velasquez stated that the original plan was to have a twelve-month plan with the consultants, but upon further review and after further discussion with law enforcement and the Commission, it was decided to take a more phased approach and to only commit to four months. The consultants came up with a four-month game plan and identified what

could be done in four months as opposed to twelve months, so the change reflects that.

Commissioner Stages asked about the information received regarding changes to the scope of the contract. Mr. Velasquez stated that this resolution was to approve the contracts with the consultants to assist in management oversight and set up. He also stated that the original plan was to hire seven to ten agents at a time, but with this phased approach they would only look to hire one to three agents and one contract officer instead of three; the vote was only to settle the contract portion. Commissioner Stages asked if the explanation was a part of Item b; Ms. Simmons and Mr. Velasquez both responded in the affirmative.

Commissioner Stages mentioned an article that referenced a third-party agency that handles minor crashes and incidents in St. George and stated that he hoped BREC would also look into what this company is doing and make any modifications that they can as a way to be more efficient. He said that everyone is in favor of the concept of utilizing cameras in the parks for safety and as treasurer he wants to make sure it's done as cost-efficiently as possible.

Mr. Velasquez stated that BREC is working in conjunction with both the Information Systems Department as well as law enforcement to ensure that happens.

Commissioner Ortego stated that Mr. Knight mentioned in the Communications and Information Systems Committee meeting that BREC was partnering with Flock Safety and asked if there would be any redundancy. Mr. Knight stated that Flock provided the technology, but the consultants were bringing in the knowledge, manpower, and know-how to utilize the tools.

There being no further discussion, Chairman Polito called for the vote with the following results:

Yeas: 8

Nays: 0

The motion was approved unanimously.

Ms. Boykin read an amended Item B under Unfinished Business and General Orders:

Resolved, that the Commission approve the amended and extended Contract 2025000355 with Contingency Consulting, LLC for Security Operations Center integration and workforce alignment, for a monthly amount of \$18,000.00 for a period of four months, not to exceed \$72,000.00. The previous amount was for \$40,000; subject to legal review.

Motion to approve by Mr. Temple

Second by Mr. Vicknair

Commissioner Stages asked about the status of the park rangers. Mr. Velasquez stated that for the time being, they would remain in place; the phased approach would allow them to do a better assessment on how to utilize them going forward. Commissioner Stages stated that they have a role, and there is a need for them at events. Mr. Velasquez agreed.

There being no further discussion, Chairman Polito called for the vote with the following results:

Yeas: 8

Neas: 0

The motion was approved unanimously.

New Business

Chairman Polito made a motion to add a new agenda item to review and approve the

contract for the new Superintendent that has been issued. The motion was seconded by Mr. Temple. There being no objection, the agenda item was added.

Ms. Simmons gave background information on the BREC Scotlandville Parkway and stated that they were requesting to change the name to the Melvin "Kip" Holden Parkway in recognition of his significant contributions to the Scotlandville community and East Baton Rouge Parish.

Chairman Polito read Item A under New Business:

Resolved, that the Commission approve the renaming of BREC Scotlandville Parkway to BREC Melvin "Kip" Holden Parkway.

Motion to approve by Mr. Temple

Second by Mr. Vicknair

Commissioner Vicknair thanked the community for reaching out and bringing the suggestion to do this; this was the least that could be done for the former mayor, and it is absolutely fitting. He thanked Ms. Simmons and her team for moving so quickly to get this accomplished since the goal was to do it before Juneteenth. He thanked everyone and stated that he hoped that the Holden family considers this a good representation and gives a legacy for the future of Baton Rouge to look back and remember what he did for our community and our parish.

Chairman Polito stated that he thinks the former mayor would have loved it; he was a special guy and did a lot of great things. He also stated his desire to see this event heavily promoted and that lots of people are there to do this in his honor. Ms. Simmons stated that Dr. Lawson's team as well as Ms. Harms's team was working diligently to get everything done in time for the event.

There being no further discussion, Chairman Polito called for the vote with the following results:

Yeas: 8

Neas: 0

The motion to defer was approved unanimously.

Chairman Polito asked for a motion to approve the recommended and negotiated contract and give the authority to the Chair for any minor wordsmithing modifications that may need to be made in order to finalize it.

Motion to approve by Mr. Ortego.

Second by Mr. Temple

There being no discussion, Chairman Polito called for the vote with the following results:

Yeas: 8

Nays: 0

The motion was approved unanimously.

Commissioner Stages stated that the Baton Rouge Gallery had their Donor/Patron Party a few weeks ago; it was well attended and recognized the people who support the work of the Gallery. There were good comments made about the partnership between the Gallery and BREC, as well as good comments about the agency itself. He also congratulated Claire Coco on her retirement from BREC after 26 years and said that she had some ideas about how BREC retirees can continue to work and support the organization. Chairman Polito thanked Ms. Coco as the audience applauded.

Audience member Collis Temple IV commented publicly about the good work of the organization and his appreciation for the work done for the community.

Adjournment

Chairman Polito called for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Vicknair made a motion, Commissioner Temple seconded, and the meeting was adjourned at 6:20 p.m. without objection.

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

Michael Polito, Chairman

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