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
June 25, 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 June 25, 2026. The meeting was called to order at 5:00 p.m. by Chairman Michael Polito. Commissioner Wade Evans offered the invocation, and Commissioner Dustin Yates led the Pledge of Allegiance. Roll was taken and a quorum of Commissioners was present, including Michael Polito, Chair; Wade Evans, Vice-Chair; Carl Stages, Treasurer; Dr. Murelle Harrison; David McDavid; Marshall Ortego; Lon Vicknair; and Dustin Yates. Commissioner Collis Temple III was absent. Staff members present were Janet Simmons, Interim Superintendent; Maurice Velasquez, Interim Chief Operating Officer; Johanna Landreneau, Interim Chief Human Resources Officer; Steven Knight, Chief Information Officer; Katrina Coots-Ward, Dina Duplantis, Tia Edwards, Jim Fleshman, Angela Harms, RaHarold Lawson, Corey Luttrell, Michael Raby, Wesley Sims, and Rhonda Williams. Chris Marchiafava was in attendance to record the actions of the Commission. Dr. Evante Topp, BREC Foundation Executive Director, and Murphy Foster, legal counsel, were 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 May 28, 2026 be dispensed with, and that they be approved as written.

The Chairman recognized Commissioner Carl Stages for a motion on the minutes. Commissioner Stages stated that a member of the public who commented at last month's meeting wanted to clarify what they said and he recognized Chris Marchiafava, who stated that the words "the increased design fees" could be added to cover an amendment to the minutes. Chairman Polito stated, for the audience, that Coleman Brown had commented and had objected to the increased design fees and wanted the change made for the record. Chairman Polito made the amendment a part of the motion.

Second by Mr. Evans

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

Yeas: 8
Nays: 0
The minutes were unanimously approved, as amended.

Consent Calendar

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

Resolved, that the Commission review and accept the Routine Personnel Transactions from May 9, 2026 through June 8, 2026.

Motion to approve by Mr. Vicknair
Second by Mr. Yates
There being no discussion, Chairman Polito called for the vote with the following results:
Yeas: 8
Nays: 0
The motion was approved unanimously.

Presentations

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

Reports of Officers and Standing Committees

Interim Superintendent Simmons presented the May 2026 attendance report and provided updates on community engagement meetings attended. She recognized Rodney Combs from EisnerAmper, who gave a report on the 2025 Audit.

Commissioner Evans stated that he wanted to echo Mr. Combs's statement that the findings on this audit will be repeated from earlier audits due to the lack of time between them to implement any changes, but the findings related to timeliness will fall off. He commended Finance Director Ms. Rhonda Williams, her team, and the management team on their work in ensuring BREC is in financial compliance. The Commission and the audience applauded. Commissioner Evans spoke about empowering staff and celebrating their accomplishments, and he looks forward to BREC implementing the necessary steps to prevent further findings and to making the organization better.

Ms. Simmons recognized Johanna Landreneau, who gave an update on BREC's pension plan (City-Parish Employees Retirement System: CPERS) and changes being considered. She gave the history of BREC's participation in the plan, stating that it is a defined benefit plan in which participation is required for full time employees; they cannot opt out and BREC cannot switch current employees to a different plan. She stated that the plan is very expensive because CPERS has Unfunded Accrued Liabilities (UAL), of about $751,000,000 system-wide with total assets around $1.3 billion. The annual bill to fund CPERS is rising for all participating agencies. She stated that BREC's mandatory employer contribution rate for 2026 is 38.2%of payroll, with employee contribution at the maximum rate of 9.5%. She stated that according to CPERS, BREC's rate will increase to 39.92% in 2027, with the system-wide average being 38.1%. She said that the employee rate will remain unchanged. Ms. Landreneau stated that an actuary has been hired and they are building out solid options to bring before the Commission and employees for consideration; nothing has been finalized. She read Goal 24 from the Strategic Plan entitled "Financial Resilience", which mentioned proposing alternative pension contribution plans and recapturing contributions made for those employees who depart the organization with less than ten years of service; currently, the City-Parish retains those contributions.

Commissioner Evans stated that he learned during the previous evening's parish council meeting that the UAL is around 60%, and most public pensions want to remain between 80 and 90 percent. He stated that this is a failing plan, and there is no way to make up the loss without the state stepping in and bonding it similar to the pension plan for police officers.

Chairman Polito noted that about two weeks prior, he and Ms. Landreneau met with CPERS, who informed them that the 2027 rates would go down, only to find out now that they will go up. He stated that this is just another example of total mismanagement on their part. He thanked Ms. Landreneau for her efforts and encouraged her to keep pushing forward.

Commissioner Vicknair asked Ms. Landreneau if CPERS had given her the amount of BREC's portion of the UAL. She stated that it has been requested but not received; CPERS promised to deliver the data by July 10, 2026. She said that a letter was received in January 2026 stating that BREC's portion of the UAL amounted to around $112 million but BREC was recently informed that this amount was a high-level estimation. She stated that a pension attorney has also been hired. Commissioner Vicknair cautioned that these numbers should be investigated thoroughly since they change so rapidly as they are based on estimations. He stated that other employer participants are making inquiries as well, and that employees deserve a better system.

Chairman Polito recognized Linton Naquin for public comment. Mr. Naquin stated that based on his understanding, the employee who left before becoming vested would receive the principal only, and that a new plan was probably better for them.

Commissioner Stages inquired about BREC's turnover rate; Human Resources Director Corey Luttrell stated that it was substantial. The average time employees stay is closer to five years, so the problem does occur frequently. Commissioner Stages asked how this information was being transmitted to employees; he wants to make sure that they receive correct information. Mr. Luttrell stated that they communicate through town halls; he said that he has an upcoming meeting scheduled with two retirees to start discussing a retirement coalition to make sure that they receive all information involving them. He reiterated that this is still in the early stages, and there is not a lot of information to share; surveys have been conducted, and concerns are being addressed as they are raised. Ms. Landreneau stated that the plan is to have a special meeting of the Commission where employees are able to come and ask questions. She stated that she should have more information at the August Commission meeting.

Chairman Polito asked for clarification regarding plan contributions from retirees, employees who have vested, and all current employees and their ability to keep what they have contributed. Ms. Landreneau stated that they will get all their benefits. She stated that of the 38.2% contributed by BREC, only 5.9% of that goes to the employee; the rest goes to pay the UAL. She said that she wanted employees to know that if BREC withdrew from CPERS, they would not lose that payment because they would have never received all of that payment. Chairman Polito stated that it is "when" we withdraw.

Commissioner Evans stated that in theory employees could continue with the 9.5% rate and with a dollar-for-dollar match, they could earn more than they would if they continued with the current plan, which would be less expensive for BREC and possibly allow for a larger payment toward the insurance.

Commissioner Vicknair stated that the Department of Defense went through the process, and it was a significant improvement for the employees, so BREC could leverage what they learned since it would be a similar process that would benefit everyone, including the citizens of East Baton Rouge Parish.

Ms. Simmons concluded her report by presenting an update on the City-Brooks Park planned community meeting on July 14, 2026; the "Better Parks. Brighter Future" initiative; the Baker press announcement regarding the Baker ballfields project; the tax renewal on June 27, 2026; the Freedom Heritage Trail ribbon cutting; the pollinator garden grant extension received by the Zoo; the Jordan Seaton Football Camp at Memorial Stadium; Parks & Recreation Month in July; and International Yoga Day on June 27, 2026. Ms. Simmons commended Dr. RaHarold Lawson and the Park Operations Department for their work in preparing Memorial Stadium for the football camp.

Commissioner Evans congratulated both the Park Operations and the Equine Operations teams for the Shady Park arena cover, stating that it was an asset to the community and hopes that the park will eventually be listed as an equestrian center due to its great potential.

Chairman Polito read Item 1 a under Superintendent's Report:

Resolved, that the Commission approve The Advocate as the Official Journal of Record for the Recreation and Park Commission for the Parish of East Baton Rouge and approve a contract from July 1, 2026 through June 30, 2027 to be used for the public posting of minutes, resolutions, budgets, and other official proceedings and announcements of said commission as required by law for the price of $.33/agate line or less and $25 per affidavit with the same terms and conditions.

Motion to approve by Mr. Evans

Second by Dr. Harrison

Chairman Polito recognized Pennie Landry for public comment. She expressed concerns about public notice information not being accessible to the public due to online paywalls. Commissioner Evans noted that there was legislation this past session that would allow agencies to use their websites as official journals to avoid paywalls but due to the influence of the newspaper lobby the legislation was not advanced. He also expressed his desire for everyone to rally and support the legislation next year.

Commissioner Stages recognized Ms. Marchiafava, who clarified that public notices are available to everyone and are not behind a paywall. Commissioner Stages inquired about the feasibility of placing information such as public bids on BREC's website. Commissioner Evans stated that the minutes and agendas are on the website but are somewhat difficult to access; he expressed his thoughts on access to the public notices suggesting a separate banner or tab on the website.

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

Yeas: 8

Nays: 0

The motion was approved unanimously.

<u>Standing Committee Reports</u>

Chairman Polito recognized Commissioner Stages, chair of the Finance Committee. Commissioner Stages stated that the Finance Committee met on June 23, 2026 and recognized Finance Director Rhonda Williams, who presented the monthly Budget Status Report.

Ms. Williams read Item 1 under New Business:

Resolved, that the Commission accept the unaudited monthly Budget Status Report for the month ending and fiscal year-to-date ending May 31, 2026, as presented.

Motion to approve by Mr. Evans

Second by Mr. McDavid

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

Yeas: 8

Nays: 0

The motion was approved unanimously.

Ms. Williams read Item 1 under Contracts and Bids:

Resolved, that the Commission approve awarding SB 1863 – Liberty Lagoon Aquatic

Repairs to the lowest responsive bidder, Francise Horticultural Services, Inc., for an amount not to exceed $1,250,000.00; authorize the Interim Superintendent to execute appropriate documents pending final legal review.

Motion to approve by Mr. Evans
Second by Mr. Stages

The Chairman again recognized Ms. Landry for public comment. She questioned the company's name in reference to the bid's scope. To address Ms. Landry's concern, Commissioner Evans stated that part of the "new" BREC is to do better going forward on how projects are scoped and that some companies start in one area and expand into others. This company started out as a horticultural services company and expanded into a pool company, and changing the name is irrelevant as long as the work is done and the company is licensed and insured. He stated that she was not wrong in her questioning, as he and Chairman Polito shared similar concerns, but the project was one that needed to be done.

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 stated that item 2 did not come before the Finance Committee, so the item is coming before the Commission without a recommendation from any standing committee.

Ms. Williams read Item 2 under Contracts and Bids:

Resolved, that the Commission approve an increase in funding of $20,000.00 to State Contract #4400022627 with Westaff Temporary Staffing Services to hire temporary staff as needed to fill vacant positions for the BREC Park Operations Department at the contracted hourly rates, for a total amount not to exceed $1,545,000.00; contract terminates July 31, 2026. Authorize the Interim Superintendent to execute the appropriate documents upon legal review.

Motion to approve by Mr. Evans
Second by Mr. Vicknair

The Chairman recognized Ms. Landry who questioned the additional services provided by the contract increase and asked about the current number of employees in both the Human Resources Department and the Park Operations Department and the amount of total compensation.

Chairman Polito recognized Park Operations Director RaHarold Lawson. Dr. Lawson explained that the current contract is an agency-wide contract housed under Park Operations. The contract is traditionally utilized by the Park Operations and Golf Departments; however, with the addition of the call center as well as the work done to improve Farr Park, the contract has been used organization-wide. Though the Westaff contract has not been renewed by the state as of yet, and the amendment is to ensure that funding is available until the end of the contract.

Ms. Williams stated that she would address Ms. Landry's additional concerns at a later time.

Commissioner Evans clarified that the contract was a system-wide contract and did not pertain to Human Resources per se, and assured Ms. Landry that the amendment was a 1.2%

variation in the original contract change order and was not significant but necessary.

Chairman Polito inquired as to the reason why the item was not presented in committee; Ms. Williams stated that it was a timing issue.

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. Williams commended her team on their work in completing the 2025 audit and stated that her mission was to have an audit with zero findings. She thanked Ms. Simmons for her support.

Commissioner Stages asked Ms. Williams to give an update on the upcoming budget. She stated that there will be an agency-wide training with all departments on budgeting and procurement, and this year's budget process will begin in July which will give the Finance department a full six months to finalize the budget. She stated that travel as well as professional fees and services will be zero-based.

Commissioner Evans encouraged department directors to utilize the free videos on the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) website for more insight into budgets.

Reports of Special Committees

Chairman Polito recognized Commissioner Stages, who stated that the Internal Process Review Committee met on June 9, 2026 to review BREC employee practices, procedures, and investigations to ensure compliance with applicable state law, BREC policy, and established best practices; each case was discussed and appropriate resolutions were identified. He explained that state law prohibits the discussion of personnel matters in public without the consent of the affected employee. The committee will reconvene in August 2026 for its next schedule meeting.

Special Orders

Chairman Polito took up the appointments to standing advisory committees as follows:

Lon Vicknair	
Christopher Toombs	Zoo
Dustin Yates, Mayor of St. George	
Jeff Carbo	Planning & Park Resources

Motion to approve by Mr. Evans
Second by Dr. Harrison
There being no discussion, Chairman Polito called for the vote with the following results:
Yeas: 8
Nays: 0
The appointments were approved unanimously.

Unfinished Business and General Orders

None

New Business

Chairman Polito read Item A under New Business:

Introduction of the proposed resolution levying the ad valorem tax millages for the 2026 parish-wide assessment roll and setting a public hearing for July 23, 2026, during the regular meeting of the Commission at BREC administration offices in Womack Park.

Motion to approve the introduction by Mr. Evans

Second by Mr. Yates

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

Yeas: 8

Neas: 0

The motion to introduce was approved unanimously.

Chairman Polito read Item B under New Business:

Resolved, that the Commission, recognizing the important role that parks and recreation plays in strengthening communities, promoting health and wellness, preserving natural resources, and enhancing the quality of life in East Baton Rouge Parish, declares the month of July 2026 as Parks and Recreation Month.

Motion to approve by Mr. Yates

Second by Mr. Vicknair

Commissioner Evans requested that a copy of the Parks and Recreation Month resolution be sent to all of the municipalities so that the declaration can be made in concert throughout the parish.

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

Yeas: 8

Nays: 0

The motion was approved unanimously.

Adjournment

Chairman Polito called for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Evans made a motion, Commissioner Yates seconded.

Ms. Landry spoke from her seat in the audience and noted that she had submitted a card to speak. Chairman Polito clarified that a vote had not been taken on the motion to adjourn. The Chairman then recognized her and asked her to come to the podium. Ms. Landry clarified her reason for asking the question earlier regarding the Human Resources employees and the increase in the amount of the Westaff contract. She also asked for clarification of the date and time of the community meeting for City-Brooks Park. She mentioned the town hall meetings listed on the BREC website, stated how difficult it was to navigate the website, and suggested that a committee of citizens be formed to meet with the BREC Information Systems team to share from the citizens' perspective on how they would like the BREC website to work. Ms. Simmons clarified that those meetings mentioned by Ms. Landry were not community meetings, but town hall meetings held when she first came on board as Interim Superintendent.

Chairman Polito called for a vote on the motion to adjourn and the meeting was adjourned at 6:05 p.m. without objection.

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

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