

# ALDERPERSON AGENDA ITEM MEMO

To: **Government Affairs Committee**

From: Robin Brannin, Alderperson District 9 and Joe Phillips, Alderperson District 7

Date: April 8, 2026

Subject: Proposal to Dissolve the City of Wauwatosa Board of Parks and Forestry Commission

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## **Background/Rationale**

The City of Wauwatosa currently maintains the Board of Parks and Forestry Commission, established under Wauwatosa Municipal Code Chapter 2.38 – Board of Parks and Forestry Commission. The Commission has historically served as an advisory body providing input on park operations, forestry management, and related policies.

References to the Commission also appear within Wauwatosa Municipal Code Chapter 7.64 – Parks: Rules and Regulations, which outlines rules governing the use and management of City parks.

Approximately nine years ago, the Parks & Forestry Division operated under a structure in which the Operations Superintendent oversaw the division, supported by a Parks Field Supervisor responsible for day-to-day park operations and a separate supervisory role responsible for Forestry operations. While this structure supported completion of daily operational tasks, it did not adequately support short- or long-term planning for the City's parks system.

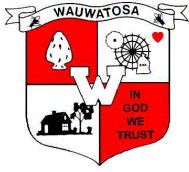
In recent years, the City transitioned to a new structure that places oversight of City parks under a **Parks & Forestry Superintendent**, now supported by a **Parks & Greenspace Manager**, a **Parks Field Supervisor**, and a **Forestry Field Supervisor**. This structure has created a stronger leadership team with significantly more trained and experienced staff dedicated to the planning, management, and implementation of park and urban forestry initiatives and design.

As a result, Wauwatosa is now well positioned to lead park system planning and implementation internally. This enhanced structure has allowed staff to effectively advance key Common Council initiatives and major park projects. A recent example is the successful development and execution of Firefly Grove Park, which required significant coordination, planning, and operational oversight that would have been difficult to achieve under the City's previous organizational structure.

Given these changes, it is appropriate to review whether maintaining the Parks & Forestry Commission remains necessary or whether its responsibilities can be more effectively managed within the existing council committee structure.

- **Department leadership and planning capacity have evolved.**

The addition of a dedicated Parks Manager has strengthened the City's internal capacity to lead park system planning and implementation. With the completion of the Parks & Open Space Plan, the focus now shifts to execution, which is primarily a staff and council function rather than one requiring a standing advisory commission.



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- **Significant staff time is required to support the Commission.**  
Parks staff spend approximately 15–20 hours per meeting preparing materials for Commission meetings, including compiling departmental updates, preparing agendas and reports, and responding to follow-up questions. These administrative tasks divert staff time away from park operations and implementation priorities.
- **Committee attendance limits the Commission’s effectiveness and prevents staff from moving forward with operational needs of the parks.**  
Attendance challenges have made it difficult for the Commission to consistently conduct business. There have only been three meetings (*out of 15 total*) since January 2024 that have had full committee attendance.
- **The Commission has advisory input but limited formal authority.**  
Most items reviewed by the Commission ultimately require approval by the Common Council or a council committee. As a result, agenda items are frequently reviewed by both the Commission and a council body, creating duplicative review and additional staff workload without providing clear governance authority.
- **Precedent exists for sunseting advisory bodies when administrative capacity evolves.**  
In 2019, the City sunset the Marketing & Communications Advisory Committee after hiring full-time communications staff in 2017 and completing a comprehensive Communications Plan. This transition reflected the City’s shift toward staff-led implementation supported by council oversight.

Taken together, these factors suggest that the Parks & Forestry Commission no longer serves a clear operational purpose and that its responsibilities can be more efficiently handled through the existing council committee structure.

## Proposed Shifts in Authority

Following discussions with City staff, the following structure is recommended for handling items currently reviewed by the Parks & Forestry Commission.

### Board of Public Works

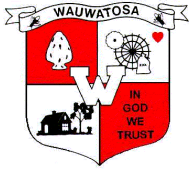
- Approve various policies related to the use of City parks
- Hear appeals of staff decisions regarding Parks behavioral policies and forestry policies
- Approve the Parks and Forestry Operations Manual
- Approve plans and specifications for publicly bid Capital Improvement Program (CIP) projects

### Community Affairs Committee

- Approve Parks & Open Space land use policies, including Park & Open Space Plans
- Approve park usage agreements between the City and nonprofit or for-profit entities

### Financial Affairs Committee

- Approve annual operating and Capital Improvement Program (CIP) budgets
- Approve grants and expenditures in accordance with City purchasing policy



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*NOTE: Exterior structural modifications or new structures within parks already require review by the Design Review Board or Historic Preservation Commission, where applicable.*

## **Requested Action**

Because the Parks & Forestry Commission is referenced in multiple sections of the municipal code, dissolving the Commission would require updates to more than one chapter.

Specifically, staff would be directed to:

- Repeal Chapter 2.38, which establishes the Board of Parks and Forestry Commission
- Amend references to the Commission within Chapter 7.64 (Parks – Rules and Regulations)
- Reassign authority within those sections to the appropriate council committee or City staff as necessary

These updates would ensure that park policies and operational authority remain clearly defined within the municipal code.