



Winnemac Park Advisory Council Volunteer Night & February Meeting Minutes

Date: Wednesday, February 11, 2026

Time: 6:15 PM - 8:00 PM CST

Location: Amundsen Library

Attendance:

Rick Kallad, Claire Howard, Lisa Ragucci (park supervisor), Deb Miretzky, Sarah Harpring, Joan Elias, Mike Bernardi, Eduardo Guardia, Jon Woolwine, Danielle Neergheen, Chelsea Brown, Tony Correa, Brandon Jessee, Rick Marron, Monet Stalle Fennema, Robert Lau, Ron Rasmussen, Tessa Groll, Jeff Borden

Volunteer Night Notes & Summary:

Our February meeting took place in a different format than our usual gatherings. This evening focused the first 50 minutes (6:15-7:05PM) on volunteering efforts and interest. Here, we utilized the survey results from October and reached out to those who expressed interest in helping the Council in 2026, whether it be in the form of advocacy, fundraising, natural areas, etc. We utilized a GoogleForm to collect information from participants and attendees in order to have ideas on paper prior to our meeting.

During our time together, a group of ~18 discussed various ideas of how we can bring entertainment, activities for all ages, and more to Winnemac Park in the upcoming year and those subsequent.

Natural Areas Interest

Many people's hearts lie in helping within the natural areas. Luckily, this is one of the most accessible ways to participate within Winnemac. Therefore, Tessa Groll covered the topic of Walk & Talks and shared that there will be a number of walks that we plan to host this summer (~8). These tours will be focused on trees, wildflowers, park history, and beyond. We have also added a weekday volunteer offering on Tuesday nights to accommodate those who have interest but are unavailable on the weekend. While we always need assistance in our prairies and park, we did emphasize the importance of event volunteering, fundraising and advocacy for the park as many of our initiatives require some sort of funding.

Event Volunteering & Planning Interest

Chelsea Brown covered the work and priorities she undertook when planning our Winnemac Fourth For All, underscoring the strategic efforts that a small group took to execute a big event. While we had a big focus on family-friendly events, we want to expand these offerings

to accommodate neighbors of all ages, especially adults. WFFA involves working with local businesses and vendors to both raise funds and to organize the schedule and layout of the day, with a goal of providing an enjoyable experience for those who attend. We also attempt to keep expenditures as minimal as possible.

Ideas Proposed By Volunteers:

1. **Farmers' Market (Rick Marron):** Suggested that Winnemac Park feels like a more natural space to host an event such as this; could draw consistent activity and broaden offerings to the public with additional farmers and vendors.
 - a. Monet Stalle Fennema volunteers at Lincoln Square Farmers' Market and liked this idea, however, mentioned that there is significant work that goes into organizing and maintaining markets, both for the host and for the farmers who travel to the venue.
2. **Wintertime in Winnemac: Ice Sculptures (Jeff Borden):** Mentioned that Chicago is a fantastic winter destination but needs to be marketed as such. He proposed the idea of an Ice Sculpture exhibit sometime between Dec-Feb. This could be aligned with full moons, star-gazing walks, etc.
3. **Busker Night:** Jeff also proposed a Busker Night, where local musicians who generally set up in Giddings Plaza and other known spots in the Square could gather in Winnemac to play either as a line-up or throughout different areas of the park.
4. **Chicago Metropolitan Baseball Association Commissioner (Tony Correa)** discussed how he would like to form a stronger partnership with the WPAC going forward . CMBA has been playing in Winnemac for 30 years.
 - a. This potentially opens a lot of opportunities to work with the neighborhood in terms of All-star games, Amundsen baseball players vs CMBA, or a tournament and/or kids' batting lessons at WFFA
5. **Food Trucks:** Monet Stalle Fennema suggested having food trucks in the park more often. Currently WPAC arranges for ~7 trucks that join us for our Winnemac Fourth For All event. The idea of a weekly food truck during warmer months is something to potentially pursue.
6. **Self-Guided Tours In The Park (Rick Marron):** This would allow people to walk through the park and get insights about our trees, wildflowers, prairies, etc. on their own via signage. Rick also proposed partnering with local businesses to sponsor the signs and have their logo/business name present. Lisa Ragucci confirmed, however, that permanent signage would need to be approved and installed and would require various permits, and any revenue would go to the Park District rather than WPAC. This

idea spun off a few other ideas that may be more viable, less costly, and may allow some of the same benefits.

- a. Chelsea Brown proposed the idea that we could have a **Winnemac Bingo Card** that allows folks to walk through the park and “fill out” their card. This could be paired with a fundraising opportunity by requesting a donation of \$2 to WPAC to download the PDF card. Tessa Groll has created seasonal sheets that feature visuals and facts about our park wildlife, originally created for kids/teens for an after-school program with Chappell.
 - b. An **Artists’ Silent Auction** would involve inviting local artists and makers to create art and objects that could be silently auctioned, with proceeds going to the park. While it would be complicated to allow artists to directly sell their work, enough might be interested in having their names and work publicly displayed to make this a worthwhile effort.
7. **Partnering/Aligning Activities In The Park With Local Happenings (Eduardo Gaurdia):** Eduardo mentioned that there are numerous events that occur on Damen during the year through the Ravenswood Neighborhood Association (& other local groups) that draw folks of all ages, but lean toward 30+. We could plan events that align with these nights (Busker Night, All-star baseball game, etc) to draw folks to the park.
8. **Storytime for Kids:** this would likely be in partnership with a local bookshop or other appropriate vendor. Ideal location would take place in the Children’s Garden and could potentially be a good Saturday morning activity during warmer months. This idea could also

WPAC Meeting Minutes | Official Monthly Meeting

Approval of January Minutes? Yes

Approval of February Agenda? Yes

Members in Attendance

(19 total, 13 total voting members): Rick Kallad, Claire Howard, Deb Miretzky, Sarah Harpring, Joan Elias, Jon Woolwine, Danielle Neergheen, Chelsea Brown, Tony Correa, Brandon Jessee, Rick Marron, Robert Lau, Ron Rasmussen, Tessa Groll, Amy Reeder, Mary O’Connor, Lise Helene, Anne Sylvan, Mike Pavilon, Margaret O’Connor, Jeff Borden

Supervisor Reports

Park Supervisor Report, Lisa Ragucci

There will be a ribbon cutting to celebrate the new turf field taking place on **March 21st** from **11:00 - 12:00 PM**.

Treasurer's Report, Claire Howard

CURRENT FINANCIAL STANDING AS OF FEBRUARY 10, 2026

Unfortunately, there were no donations in January but there were payments made to general operating and administrative funds. As it stands, we have ~\$4000 in the account. This is a bit of a concern as we want to enhance the availability at our WFFA event, which would require at least \$15,000 to do successfully. This underscores the need for fundraising to begin in earnest as soon as possible. WPAC is currently involved in recruiting someone with experience to head up a fundraising committee, for both WFFA and other goals.

Old Business

Edgewater Castle Football Club: a very positive meeting was held at the Alder Andre Vasquez's office on February 10th to cover the topics and concerns at hand. Many of the key stakeholders were present to address these items directly. Those meeting minutes will be distributed publicly in the near future to the WPAC email list. The WPAC will vote on their recommendation to Alderman Vasquez regarding beer sales during ECFC within the next week.

New Business

VOTING ITEM | APPROVED: Tessa Groll created signs on behalf of the WPAC Natural Areas Committee that highlight the nesting areas of Red-winged Blackbirds (ground-nesting native birds who spend March-September in our park). This would provide an explanation for their behavior and encourage people to distance themselves from nesting sites. **Projected Cost:** these would be 3 signs for a total of \$72

VOTING ITEM | APPROVED: Tessa Groll to create signs on behalf of WPAC that highlight the dates of 2026 PAC meetings. There would be 6 laminated signs to be placed in various locations throughout the park. **Projected Cost:** 3 for \$18.

Community Contributions:

Lisa Helene submitted questions on our recent Edgewater Castle FC survey and is interested in staying in the loop; Margaret O'Connor also expressed these sentiments. It was confirmed at our meeting at the Alderman's Office (2/10/26) by Eddie Curry (CPS Stadiums Manager) that ECFC's use of the stadium would not compromise any activities for Chicago Public School students at any time. The soccer club is getting the only available dates the stadium has in 2026. This will also be the first time CPS has rented out the stadium for revenue purposes.

Mike Pavilon brought up continued concerns for the insurance of Edgewater Castle as he realizes this can be a potentially large liability and wants to ensure the utmost safety for our community.

Performing Arts Committee Update

David Cady Jr. has left the council, therefore we need an individual who can head our Performing Arts Committee. This committee seeks to find performers (music, theater, dance) to entertain the community during warmer months.

Yoga In The Park

Get ready to hit your best Tree pose this summer as Deb Miretzky confirmed that yoga will be back in Winnemac from April through November on the second Saturdays of each month (weather permitting) starting at 9:45 AM.

Saturday, April 11th

Saturday, May 9th

Saturday, June 13th
Saturday July 4th
Saturday, August 8th

Saturday, September 12th
Saturday, October 10th
Saturday, November 14th

Nature Committee Report, Tessa Groll

Our westernmost Weeping Willow was carefully attended to by Davey Tree on January 29th, which did a wonderful job in stabilizing this tree further while keeping its shape.



Unfortunately, my own observations led to further inspection of one of our pathway Common Hackberry trees, located off the main path on the eastern half of the park. This tree has endured a massive split down the center of its trunk, making it a safety issue to patrons and to itself. This tree is slated for removal in the very near future. At this time, we do not have specific dates, but do pay your respects while there is still time.



Our River Birch trees within our westernmost prairie patch have also been placed upon the removal list, however, Amy Williamson (Natural Areas Liaison, Lead Steward) and I are currently working diligently to work with the Park District to see if these trees can be trimmed or supported versus taken down. While they are past their prime, they are still a righteous habitat for woodpeckers and acts as a marvelous perch to just about every species I have seen fly through Winnemac. Moreover, they currently pose no threat to the public; should they fall, it would do so in a natural area, avoiding pathways. Therefore, we are seeing if we can remove some of the top parts of the northernmost birch to minimize any (potential, yet unlikely) impact to a public pathway shall this tree endure any further damage. We have provided photos to relay these requests and hope to see these trees stay.



Pictures and observations by Tessa Groll (@fromwinnemacpark | WPAC Co-Secretary)

The meeting was adjourned at: 8:00 PM CST

Minutes submitted by Tessa Groll, WPAC Secretary with edits and inclusions from Deb Miretzky (WPAC Vice President)