



Parks & Arts Commission 2023 Annual Report

19 December 2023

INTRODUCTION

The Parks & Arts Commission of the City of Ypsilanti was established in the summer of 2023 by combining the Parks and Recreation Commission and the Arts Commission. This new commission covers both previous commissions' general responsibilities, namely making recommendations concerning the recreation and arts needs of the city and its residents; making recommendations on funds use in related matters; updating the Parks and Recreation Master Plan; reviewing and approving 'Adopt-A-Park' applications; reviewing and making recommendations on public art project submissions; and expanding artistic and recreational opportunities through commission-sponsored events if and when appropriate.

MEMBERSHIP

As of November 2023, the Parks & Arts Commission membership is:

Anne Baxter

Dillon Navarre

Ben Connor-Barrie

Aaron Seagraves

Lola Malmer

Cathy Thorburn, Secretary

Brian Merlos, Vice Chair

Kimmie Wolfe

Michael McAtee, Chair

City Council Liaison – Evan Sweet, Ward 3

Staff Liaisons:

- Bonnie Wessler, Director – Department of Public Services
- Elize Jekabson – Interim Director – Planning & Development Director & DDA Coordinator

There are currently 3 vacant seats, one of which is reserved for a youth member

OPERATIONS

Operations for both the Parks and Recreation and Arts Commissions were impacted by declining commission membership and was among the needs addressed by combining these Commissions. This was particularly acute for the Arts Commission as it was unable to officially meet in the months of March, April, and May due to membership having fallen below quorum requirements set out in that commission's bylaws. Since the decision to combine the commissions was made, most of all parties' time and effort has been focused on the transition.

When regular meetings were possible, both the Arts Commission and the Parks and Recreation Commission held monthly in-person meetings with Commissioners present and public participation welcomed. Since September, the combined Parks and Arts Commission has held regular monthly in-person meetings focused on logistics and continuity.

The commissions have received, as appropriate, regular updates from the Friends of the Rutherford Pool, Parkridge Community Center, the Friends of the Ypsilanti Senior Center, an ongoing Artist Survey project, and the Youth Poet Laureate program, along with periodic updates on the status of the Peninsular Dam removal project and local Little Leagues.

The commissions have reviewed both arts and recreation proposals, notably including Fall River Day and the second annual Embracing Our Differences exhibition.

2023 HIGHLIGHTS:

- Proposed update to smoking ordinance in city parks, to expand ordinance to prohibit smoking within 15 feet of a park playground. The ordinance has since been approved by the City Council.
- Held the annual Fall River Day Event on Sept. 24 to offer discounted paddle trips on the Huron River in Ypsilanti and connect residents to engaging outdoor experiences. This event had over 100 people enjoy a kayak trip down the Huron River from Frog Island Park to Ford Lake
- Successfully implemented merger of Arts Commission and Parks and Recreation Commission. Reviewed and approved new Commission By-Laws, which have been approved by the City Council.
- Nominated the Bill Anhut Memorial Field in Waterworks Park for the Michigan Recreation and Park Association (mParks) Park Project Award and was presented the statewide award at the annual mParks conference in March 2023 in Lansing.
- Continued to advance the Artist Survey and Ypsilanti Youth Poet Laurette Program

LOOKING FORWARD

The Parks & Arts Commission hopes to make progress on the following projects and goals:

- Consolidation of norms and practices from ancestor commissions
- Removal of the Peninsular Dam and plans for the expansion of Peninsular Park
- Engagement with an Ypsilanti Youth Poet Laureate
- Review of capital budget and exploration of funding opportunities for parks improvement
- Distribution of and response from the Artist Survey
- Exploring and leveraging the synergies of our combined commission