

Meeting Minutes
Parks and Recreation Board
December 9, 2025, at 9:00 AM
Tulsa Zoo | 6421 E 36th Street N | Tulsa, Oklahoma 74115

Attendees:

MEMBERS		
NAME	PRESENT	ABSENT
SAVAGE	X	
MEINDERS BURKETT	X	
MILLER		X
REESE-TIPTON	X	
FERNANDEZ		X
TOTALS	3	2

- I. Chairperson Savage called the meeting to order at 9:09AM.

- II. Savage asked for review and approval of November 4, 2025, PRB minutes. No corrections or revisions were requested.

NAME	IN FAVOR	OPPOSED	ABSTAINING	NOT PRESENT
SAVAGE	X			
MEINDERS-BURKETT	X			
MILLER				X
REESE-TIPTON	X			
FERNANDEZ				X
TOTALS	3			2

Motion carried.

III. REPORTS

- a. Parks, Culture and Recreation Department Report – Anna America

America thanked the Zoo for hosting the meeting. America noted that winterization has been completed at the Parks (closing most bathrooms, etc. to prepare for cold weather).

America noted that the maintenance team has but in a lot of preventative work to prepare for the freezing weather.

America noted winter-themed events coming up including the Eggnog Pajama Jog at the Tulsa Christmas Parade.

America noted that, even with the weather, capital projects are still ongoing. America noted the design has been completed for Johnson, Berry, and Chamberlain Parks and bids will be starting soon.

America noted that Hicks Inclusive Playground has been completed but is currently awaiting fencing. America noted that in areas with small children, loose dogs, and parks close to the street; parents have asked for fencing around playgrounds to improve safety.

America noted that Bales Inclusive Playground will be completed soon. The Department is working on an event in partnership with Bike Club to open the new playground.

America noted that contracts for Ben Hill and Dream Keepers Park are being worked on. The next stage will be community engagement. America noted that Dream Keepers will be a different process including a Cultural Committee comprised of members of the major Tribes in Tulsa that will assist in evaluating aspects of the project. America noted that Deputy Director Stacie Martin has been meeting with members of the Tribes outside of this project in order to improve collaboration.

America noted the partnership with Up With Trees has planted over 300 trees in City of Tulsa Parks.

America noted that the Department is in the midst of budget season. America discussed two areas of underfunding: mowing and tree maintenance. America noted that the mowing season in FY26 extended past the original end date due to the high temperatures reaching into November. America noted the work that the Department's Forestry team has put into preventative maintenance in the parks.

Savage asked what kind of work is going into looking at adjustments in the budget to account for inflation (specifically water quality). America noted that adjustments like this will take place on a Citywide level rather than individual department adjustments.

America noted that the Department is getting more pressure from the partner groups to assist where federal grants cannot. Caroline Guerra-Wolf noted that if discussion on the budget is to be held, it must be its own agenda item. Savage agreed and the conversation regarding the budget was closed.

Questions were welcomed.

b. Tulsa Zoo Update – Lindsay Hutchinson and Joe Barkowski

Lindsay Hutchinson and Joe Barkowski presented the Tulsa Zoo Update. Hutchinson presented a quick video that showcased the new Elephant Exhibit.

Joe Barkowski moved on to present the “2025 Highlights – Animal News”. This update showcased births and hatchings of an African Penguin, Flamingoes, Aldabra Tortoises, and a Giraffe. The Zoo also welcomed Asian Elephants (Billy and Tina).

Savage asked about predators of the animals. Barkowski noted that a fence has been put up to contain the ten acres of land for the new elephants. Savage asked how the fence was tested. Barkowski noted that they have oilfield fencing due to its structural stability.

Hutchinson noted that they have broken ground on the African Wilds and Giant Anteater Exhibits.

Barkowski noted that the African Wilds exhibit will be seven acres. Barkowski noted the new Meerkat Facility that includes a new Giraffe feeding area. This exhibit also includes a new bathroom. Barkowski noted that new Underground MEPs and Footings for Lion Hippos.

Barkowski noted the new Dog Aviary Building, Vulture Retaining Wall, and the Zebra/Vulture Building.

Hutchinson noted that the Zoo has been breaking multiple of its own records, including:

- 121,045 attendees in March 2025
- 38,482 attendees in November 2025
- On pace for 250,000 education encounters
- 600 memberships sold the day after Thanksgiving

Hutchinson noted the current challenges the Zoo is facing, including:

- The Zoo costs \$54,000 day to operate
- \$35M in backlog of deferred maintenance
- Second year with the main entry bridge closed pending replacement
- \$14M funding gap for the African Wild exhibits

Hutchinson noted the progress on the Trek Roof replacement and Rainforest electrical system and HVAC replacements.

Savage asked how many acres the Zoo is. Hutchinson noted the Zoo is 124 acres.

Savage asked if the Zoo is looking at national foundations to improve fundraising. Hutchinson said they have been exploring this avenue.

Questions were welcomed.

IV. ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION AND/OR ACTION

a. *Recommendation to Rename Midland Valley Trail to Tuckabache Trail – Jim Tilly

Jim Tilly noted he has lived in Tulsa since 1976, originally from Pryor, OK. Tilly noted that he researched the Locvpoka and discovered the name of Tuckabache. As a result of his research, Tilly developed the opinion that we should find a way to honor Tuckabache. Tilly asked if the Board had known about the name Tuckabache prior to the issue of the Midland Valley Trail. Savage noted she had known about Tuckabache. Tilly noted that Tuckabache is believed to have been present when the Council Oak embers were relit. Tilly noted that Tuckabache eventually settles at the area known as “Maple Ridge”. Tilly noted that Tuckabache was also a well-known medicine man. Tilly noted that there was very little information about Tuckabache available however, after his passing, the Tulsa World noted, “Like the death of Geronimo, the demise of Tuckabache was the passing of one of the famous Indian characters of the Southwest”.

Tilly noted that Tuckabache’s great great granddaughter and her mother were present at today’s Park Board meeting. Tilly noted that, after discussions with Meinders Burkett, they came to the conclusion that renaming the Midland Valley Trail would be a suitable way to honor Tuckabache since the current trail runs through Tuckabache’s original land allotment. Tilly noted that Tuckabache’s grave currently sits within a few feet of the trail.

Meinders Burkett noted that the Tulsa Indian Affairs commission supports this change.

Savage noted that she loves the connection with the Muscogee Nation and Tuckabache and his family and loves the significance of the request. Savage noted her appreciation of Meinders Burkett for working on this project.

Meinders Burkett noted that Guerra Wolf put in an extensive amount of work on this project as well.

America noted that the Department will be able to put up new signs and replace current signage with the name change. America noted that the Mayor is aware and is supportive of the change.

America noted that a huge part of Tulsa’s history has been ignored, which is just one reason the Department is extremely supportive of projects like this and Dream Keepers Park.

Meinders Burkett noted that Tuckabache is the first name on the abstract of her home.

Tuckabache’s family noted the honor it is to represent and ensure his legacy is remembered. The family also noted that this will be a great opportunity for the community to learn the history of this trail. The family noted their appreciation to Jim Tilly for bringing this to light.

Recommendation to rename the Midland Valley Trail to Tuckabache Trail and submit the recommendation of the Board to the Tulsa City Council.

NAME	IN FAVOR	OPPOSED	ABSTAINING	NOT PRESENT
SAVAGE	X			
MEINDERS-BURKETT	X			
MILLER				X
REESE-TIPTON	X			
FERNANDEZ				X
TOTALS	3			2

Motion carried.

V. NEW BUSINESS

[NOTE: "New business" is restricted to any matter not known about or which could not have been reasonably foreseen prior to the time of posting. *Oklahoma Open Meeting Act*, 25 O.S.2001, §311(9)]

No new business.

VI. PUBLIC COMMENTS

VII. Next Meeting –January 6, 2026, at the Hemerich Center for American Research – 1400 N Gilcrease Museum Road, Tulsa, Oklahoma 74127.

VIII. Adjournment at 10:06AM