

Irmo Chapin Recreation Commission

BUDGET WORK SESSION MINUTES

April 22, 2026
Saluda Shoals Park
River Center
6:00PM

Members Attending: Bill Harmon, Michael Cromer, Dr. Gerrick Hampton, Laura Huggins, Dr. Akil Ross

Non-Members Attending: Mark Smyers, Eve Mittendorf, Jay Downs, Jason White, Alfred Comfort, Ashley Smith, Lindsay Hudson, Andrea Harris, Jennifer Riddle, Lori Shaffer, Mike Hudson, Patrick Shealy, Sidney Wilson, Christina Bickley

Mark Smyers stated staff would like to revise the Holiday Lights schedule by moving the Sunday evening Chairman's Lighting event to the preceding Friday, which would allow for an additional run or walk event on Sunday evening. Mr. Smyers also shared a drone video and Riverwalk update and noted that the ribbon-cutting is scheduled for August 2026; completion of this phase will close the gap and create a continuous six-mile trail across the dam and through Saluda Shoals Park. Mark Smyers added that the completion of this phase, along with the Riverwalk building, additional staffing, operating supplies, and other resources, is included in the proposed FY 2026/27 budget. Mr. Smyers shared that the new budget includes a full-time park technician to help give visitors the best possible experience; this person will focus heavily on hospitality and handle general maintenance and building security; they will also manage daily operations like assisting staff with selling passes and sharing helpful tips about the park and trails. Mr. Smyers reminded the board that the compensation and classification study results were presented at the last meeting, and the recommendation is included in the new budget. Discussion occurred regarding the current short-term bond timeline and future bonding strategies.

Mark Smyers noted that feedback from the 2025 strategic planning refresh highlights a clear need to renovate and expand Crooked Creek Park to keep pace with community growth; achieving this will require a general obligation bond. Additionally, Mr. Smyers pointed out that playgrounds across the agency are aging out, requiring either major revitalization or complete replacement. Mr. Smyers communicated that staff recognized an opportunity at Seven Oaks Park to expand the kitchen for programmatic opportunities in the culinary arts area; the vision is to develop a teaching kitchen to host classes for both adults and children. Mark Smyers communicated that the bathrooms at Seven Oaks Park are not adequate and have plumbing issues that need renovation. Mr. Smyers shared that staff heard through the strategic plan process that the public love Mungo Park, but it doesn't have anything new or significant; as a result, staff would like to explore all the opportunities through a master plan process. Mark Smyers shared that staff are building a contingency line in the budget. Discussion occurred regarding grant opportunities. Mr. Smyers noted that the budget includes a grant opportunity for an RV/Campground Park; if awarded, the grant and matching funds will cover infrastructure costs and initially 30 revenue-generating spots; furthermore, early indicators from the feasibility study project show strong success and long-term revenue growth. Mark Smyers shared that staff have office issues, which resulted in splitting admin staff into two locations; additionally, office space is desperately needed for the Saluda Shoals Park staff. Mark Smyers communicated that one solution is to move administrative staff to a new location and give the current building to the Saluda Shoals Park team.

Mr. Smyers shared the budget timeline; staff will bring the FY26/27 Budget to the Commission in May for approval; over the summer staff will continue to build the master plan documents, conceptual drawings and cost estimates for Commission approval in October. Mark Smyers shared that the goal is to prepare a bond request to County Council between January and March 2027.

Mark Smyers shared the FY 26/27 budget information reflecting Funds 10 – operating and 20-special revenue. Mr. Smyers stated that the capital projects/short term bond fund is not bound by a fiscal year. Mark Smyers communicated that the grant-related revenues include accommodations tax, Community Development Block Grants (CDBG), Older Americans Act funding, long term care grant, and contributions from the Saluda Shoals Foundation. Mr. Smyers communicated that the total revenue sources from taxes are 36% and 64% of revenues are from user fees, grants, donations and sponsorships. Mark Smyers shared that there are capital projects included in the operating budget in the planning and development department; these are the conceptual design costs as part of the master planning process, which include playground, CCP recreation center, Mungo/SSP/SOP, EEC trailside retreat, admin building, and RV park; in addition, the SSP art project, new trash cans and picnic tables at Saluda Shoals Park are included in the operating budget. Mr. Smyers communicated the FY26/27 short-term bond capital projects totaling \$1,606,000. Mr. Smyers highlighted additional budget elements, including a 3% merit pool, two new positions, a \$100,000 contingency fund, \$515,000 in planning allocations, and an expansion of the therapeutic recreation program. He noted that \$0 will be carried forward from the previous year's fund balance. Mark Smyers stated that a public hearing on the budget will be held in May and staff will see Commission approval of the budget on May 27, 2026.

There being no further discussion, the Commission moved into General Session.

Respectfully submitted,
Eve Mittendorf
Recording Secretary
IRMO CHAPIN RECREATION COMMISSION

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GENERAL SESSION

April 22, 2026
Saluda Shoals Park, River Center
7:00PM

Members Attending: Bill Harmon, Michael Cromer, Dr. Gerrick Hampton, Laura Huggins, Dr. Akil Ross

Non-Members Attending: Mark Smyers, Eve Mittendorf, Jay Downs, Adrian Wright, Jason White, Alfred Comfort

Bill Harmon called the meeting to order at 7:45pm. Chairman Harmon delivered the invocation. Guests were welcomed.

I. REQUIREMENTS OF THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT

The news media was notified of the meeting; it was posted on the website and a notice and agenda was posted at the park sites one week prior to the meeting.

II. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

A MOTION WAS MADE BY DR. AKIL ROSS TO ACCEPT THE MARCH 25, 2026 MINUTES AS PRESENTED. SECONDED BY LAURA HUGGINS. VOTE TAKEN. MOTION PASSED.

III. STAFF REPORTS – were accepted as presented.

V. NEW BUSINESS

A. Riverwalk Phase I Change Order – Gas Line Installation

MOTION WAS MADE BY DR. AKIL ROSS TO ACCEPT STAFF'S RECOMMENDATION ON OF THE RIVERWALK PHASE I CHANGE ORDER FOR THE GAS LINE INSTALLATION AS PRESENTED. SECONDED BY MICHAEL CROMER. VOTE TAKEN. MOTION PASSED.

B. Contract Award – Leo's Landing Fall Surface

Mr. Smyers communicated that the pour-and-play rubber surfacing at Leo's Landing will be replaced with matching turf. Pending approval, the project will be awarded to a state contractor who completed the original installation. Vice Chairman Cromer inquired if the project was a budgeted item. Mr. Smyers stated that it would be funded through contingency.

MOTION WAS MADE BY MICHAEL CROMER TO APPROVE STAFF'S RECOMMENDATION ON THE CONTRACT AWARD FOR REPLACEMENT OF LEO'S LANDING FALL SURFACE AS PRESENTED. SECONDED BY DR. GERRICK HAMPTON. VOTE TAKEN. MOTION PASSED.

VI. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Mr. Smyers expressed sincere gratitude to the staff for their hard work over recent months. He noted that building a zero-based budget from scratch remains a highly challenging task. Mr. Smyers emphasized that the shared vision would yield long-term benefits and he is highly optimistic about the organization's future direction.

VII. COMMISSION RESPONSE

Commissioner Huggins expressed appreciation to Mr. Smyers for the comprehensive budget presentation, praising the proactive strategies implemented to ensure the success of the therapeutic recreation program and for addressing ongoing community needs. Additionally,

Commissioner Huggins commended the hospitality-driven focus of the new park technician position and expressed enthusiasm for the upcoming Riverwalk ribbon-cutting ceremony. Vice Chairman Cromer echoed Commissioner Huggins comments; and shared excitement toward the future of the agency. Commissioner Ross echoed these sentiments, praising the budget's dual focus on current community priorities and future growth. He expressed high praise for the commission's ability to operate with only 39% tax support, noting that its heavy reliance on enterprise revenue is proof of wise investments. Looking ahead, Commissioner Ross advised staff to evaluate a 5% to 10% contingency cushion to better safeguard projects against shifting timelines and rising market costs. Chairman Harmon commended Mr. Smyers for effectively clarifying the agency's current position, strategic vision, and resource allocation. He also expressed appreciation to the entire staff for their hard work in compiling the comprehensive budget information.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned AT 7:51P.M.

Respectfully submitted,
Eve Mittendorf, Recording Secretary

IRMO CHAPIN RECREATION COMMISSION