City Of Hammond Parks & Recreation 2025 Year in Review

Administrator, Jim Taillon

2025 Board Summary

The Board of Park Commissioners for the City of Hammond met for regularly scheduled meetings on the first and third Wednesday of each month. All meetings in 2025 were available via Zoom in accordance with Indiana law for electronic meetings and consistent with Park Board Resolution 21-03.

There was no change to the board members in 2025, John Vezmar remains the president. Catherine Blanc serves as the Administrative Assistant for the Board.

Mayor Thomas M. McDermott Jr. thanks the board members for their commitment to the Park Department.

Marcus Taylor continued to be a member and Park Board appointee to the Hammond Plan Commission Andrea Edwards continued to serve as Vice President. Smith Sersic also remained as the legal representatives for the Hammond Park Board.

A statement of receipts and disbursements will be provided by the City Controller's office. This report is in accordance with IC 26-10-4-7 (e)

2025 Board of Park Commissioners

John Vezmar, President

Andrea Edwards, Vice-President

Marcus Taylor, Member

Mike Opinker, Member

Legal Services provided by Smith Sersic Attorneys at Law.

2026 Goals

Following are some of the 2026 goals for the Hammond Parks and Recreation department.

- Create a three year plan for upgrades in multiple parks including additional seating, playground maintenance and mulch.
- Pave parking lot behind the Sportsplex and in front of the Jean Shepherd Center.
- Civic Center ADA Ramp improvements.
- Oversee the Harrison Park Pond Project, phase one, pond rescue for wildlife this spring.
- Continue improvements at Dowling Athletic Complex, including tennis courts and turf on the baseball and softball fields.
- Request for proposals to become the tree service company for the Park Department.
- Complete Columbia Park bathroom upgrade and plan potential project for the park.

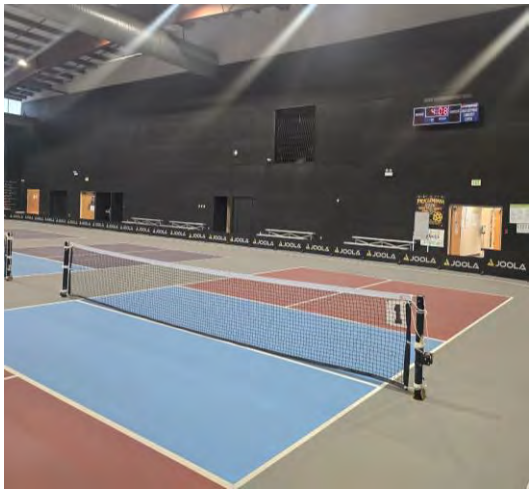
Parks and Recreation Administrative Staff

Jim Taillon, Park Administrator
Aileen Martinez, Special Events Coordinator
Devin Wick, Parks Superintendent, Forestry
Matthew Marcum, AFO, Rec Facilities Ops Mngr.
Jason Bean, Assistant Rec. Facilities Manager
Craig Faught, Field Maintenance Manager
Jill Gajewski, Marketing & Media Manager
Kymberli Roberts, Sportsplex GM
Sebastian Contreras, Sportsplex Ath. Supervisor
Brian Erminger, Sportsplex Athletics Supervisor
Devin Ellis, Sportsplex Athletics Supervisor
Josette Perkins, Sportsplex Office Manager
Maria Martinez, Sportsplex Hospitality Manager
Juan Bautista, Plex Asst. Hospitality Manager
Julia Villalpando, Sportsplex Financial Clerk
Chrissy Nelson, Dowling Complex Manager
Tabitha Dempsey, Dowling Complex Hospitality
Juan Soto – Hammond Civic Center Manager
Rosa Maldonado, Parks Bookkeeper
Anna Mamala – Senior Programs Coordinator

City Of Hammond Parks & Recreation 2025 Year in Review

Park Projects Completed in 2025





Pictured left: Jean Shepherd upgraded the lighting, repaired slick spots on the gym floor, and painted the sound wall black in the Pickleball Gym to improve the vision for the players during play. This facility is now one of the best in the Midwest for Pickleball.

***Pictured right*:** The Hammond Sportsplex expansion was completed in the fall of 2025, adding a new soccer building with a youth and two 3 v 3 fields. A new volleyball building is in the place of the old soccer fields.





Park Projects Planned For 2026

Harrison Park – Plans to move forward with Phase 1 of the Park project. We will dig out the bottom of the pond to allow wildlife to return while also helping flooding during heavy rain storms. Grant money will be used for this project. Plans include the Man of Steel clean and resurface on the 50th anniversary of the art piece in the park.



Columbia Park – Plans to upgrade bathroom building. Additional upgrades to the park with a potential new project in 2026 / 2027 to add an additional athletic feature.

Pulaski Park – A new project planned for 2026 will potentially include mini pitch soccer fields and a new street style skate park where the old pool currently sits. Removing the fencing around the pool will improve the visual look of the park.



Dowling Park – Upgrades are planned to repair cracks in Tennis Courts and infields on the baseball and softball fields. Replacing turf on both fields from dugout to dugout.

City Of Hammond Parks & Recreation 2025 Year in Review

2025 Urban Forestry Report – By: Devin Wick

The 2025 forestry report for Hammond shows more good news with continuing improvement of our Urban Forest and the expansion of our programs and efforts to maintain healthy green spaces within our city. We saw the resolution of over one hundred problem trees being removed and with the assistance of our forestry partners, we were able to plant five hundred and thirty six new trees in our community.

Our risk assessments of problem trees were slightly down from the previous year. We were able to assess three hundred and seventeen trees for an average of 26.5 per month. A three tree per month decrease from last year. We will be working to alleviate our back log of problem trees this year.

In 2024, we were able to secure a grant from the Indiana Department of Natural Resources for improving our forestry efforts. In 2025, with that funding, we were able to complete a detailed tree inventory for two of our cities districts and also create a concise and informative Urban Forestry Management Plan. We were also able to update our Urban Forest Canopy Cover Summery. This report is a tree planting plan based on where our planting efforts are needed the most, focusing on urban heat islands, storm water mitigation, and sociodemographic equity.



Hammond has maintained it's status as an Arbor Day Association "Tree City" for the sixteenth year in a row.

2025 Hammond Sports Hall of Fame Inductees

The 2025 Hammond Sports Hall of Fame took place at the Hammond Civic Center once again in March and saw six new members inducted.

The 2025 class included: **Michael Carpen Jr.,** Clark High School multi sport alumnus and Chicago State basketball player. **Johnnie Craig**, Gavit High School Johns Hopkins baseball player. **Richard Jay,** Gavit High School multi sport coach. **Michael Kozy**, Morton High School graduate and professional bowler. **Frank Kuzara**, Hammond Tech High School and University of San Francisco basketball player. **Ed Schuster,** Hammond High School distance runner and later triathlete and bicyclist. **The Hammond Sports Hall of Fame** is happy to announce plans to recreate all of the annual inductees boards and feature them around the walking track at the Hammond Sportsplex in 2026.

The 2026 Hammond Sports Hall of Fame Induction dinner will take place on Tuesday March 10th at the Hammond Civic Center.
For information go to: www.hammondsportshalloffame.com

City Of Hammond Parks & Recreation 2025 Year in Review

Crowds Pack The Pavilion For 2025 Festival of The Lakes



The growth of the Festival of the Lakes crowds continues to impress city officials. This past year we saw over 60,000 visitors over the five day event. The Festival continues to put safety on the forefront as we added a clear bag policy, upgraded security measure at the front gate, extra patrol on the streets and new parking lots with shuttle buses to ensure less traffic on Calumet Avenue. The Hammond Police Department implemented new exit traffic patterns for the second year in a row allowing crowds leaving the shows to clear the streets much earlier than usual.

Last years acts continued the tradition of appealing to all NWI residents as we started the week with John Fogerty on Wednesday night, Brantley Gilbert rocked the house on Thursday night with pyro techniques blended into the show, AKON took us back in time on Friday Night and Third Eye Blind made their return to the stage, after recording a new album, in Hammond on Saturday. The always exciting finish to the festival saw the much anticipated Arrolladora Banda El Limon excite the record crowds on Sunday night to finish off the very successful week along Wolf Lake.

The Festival of the Lakes is a week long celebration of the city. But it is more than just concerts though, as the city puts on multiple events around the concert series. Some other events surrounding the week long celebration included The Mayor's Golf Tournament, Senior Day Event, Polka Party, Hot Rod Car Show, Fishing Derby, Gospel Brunch, 5K run and, of course, the Carnival and food court were rewarded with huge crowds too. The 2026 Festival will be the 22nd annual and is sure to be the biggest party yet. Stay tuned..

www.festivalofthelakes.com









City Of Hammond Parks & Recreation 2025 Year in Review

Sportsplex Revenues Near 1.5 Million in 2025 – By Kym Roberts



The Hammond Sportsplex grew its revenue to nearly one and a half million dollars in 2025 and continues to expand its reach to Chicagoland and Northwest Indiana, while continuing to offer local leagues for Hammond residents. The Sportsplex completed a ten million dollar expansion in 2025. The expansion included a new soccer building on the eastern section of the campus allowing all sports, Basketball, Soccer and Volleyball to have its own buildings. It also added two state-of-the-art Trackman golf simulators in the newly renovated Swingers Golf Simulator and Lounge. The building continues to be a training facility for PNW athletes and serves as an off season training facility for local professionals competing internationally.

The Sportsplex serves as a central venue for travel clubs, providing a convenient and affordable option for youth programs. The ability to host our own tournaments and leagues substantially reduces the cost of travel programs for NWI families. We are able to bring other travel clubs to us, saving time and money for our athlete's families. For information on our programs, go to www.hammondsportplex.com





Hammond Sportsplex Programs Continue Growth In 2025

The Hammond Sportsplex is home to multiple clubs offering residents an affordable option for youth sports. Since our teams have their own facility, it cuts down on the costs associated with travel leagues. We bring the tournaments to us.

The Northwest Indiana Tradition Basketball program is under the direction of former Indiana Northwest Associate Head Coach Devin Ellis. Coach Ellis brings a wealth of knowledge from his college coaching and player development to the Tradition Program.

Velocity 219 volleyball program completed it's 8th season in 2025 under the leadership of Brian Erminger. The program continues to show growth with over 350+ players in the program. We now have National Level teams, a competitive boys program, a sand program and an in house program for those that want to learn and play the game.

Hammond F.C. Rec and Rec Plus are a part of the programs offered at the Plex under the leadership of Sebastian Contreras. We have indoor winter leagues at the Sportsplex but also offer an outdoor season at the Hessville Soccer Complex. FC Kicker's is a beginners program for kids wanting to play soccer with fun drills and games.

City Of Hammond Parks & Recreation 2025 Year in Review

Jean Shepherd Pickleball Facility Tops in NWI – By: Chrissy Nelson

The Jean Shepherd Community Center reinvented itself in 2025, transforming into a state of the art 12 court pickleball facility. The face lift was a welcome change for the facility that has been a hidden gem in the Dowling Park Athletic Complex for years. Pickleball is the fastest growing sport in the country, and the new facility has already proven to be a success with players driving in from all across Chicagoland to play in our leagues, tournaments and open play formats. The building hosted the first annual Picklemania Tournament in February offering an amazing $20,000 in prize money. Players from 10 states traveled to NWI to compete in the event and we had two players from Paris, France. Over 350 players competed in the multiple level tournament. The 2026 Tournament takes place in February again and is expected to draw a talented group of players. Spectators are welcome to come watch.







The City of Hammond has partnered with 219 pickleball to run leagues, open play and tournaments at the Jean Shepherd. The 219 Pickleball group operates daily from 9am – 12pm and 5pm – 9pm. The Jean Shepherd rents court space weekdays from 12pm – 5pm and on the weekends when space is available. For membership or rental pricing information go to: www.jeanshepherdcenter.com.

For information about 219 Pickleball Go to: www.219pickleball.com

Flick's Picklebar and Kitchen can also host your corporate event or family party. Just call 219-554-0155 for more information.



FLICK'S KITCHEN

JEAN SHEPHERD COMMUNITY CENTER

City Of Hammond Parks & Recreation 2025 Year in Review

Hammond Civic Center Goes Back To It's Roots – By: Juan Soto

The Hammond Civic Center reclaimed itself as the event center for the City of Hammond in 2025. An arena with a capacity of hosting crowds of 3,500 fans or more, got back to it's roots by hosting MMA, Kick Boxing, Brazilian Jiu Jitsu, Boxing, Gymnastics, Tae Kwon Do and finally, Professional Wrestling was back! The Civic Center also introduced Armored MMA to the raucous Hammond crowd.







The long-standing tradition of the Shrine / Carden International Circus once again drew packed houses, including four sold out performances of the six total shows over the Thanksgiving weekend.



Community centered events are a big part of the Civic Center and they included: 219 Day, The Annual Flower Giveaway, Indoor Garage Sale, Full Circle Electronics e –waste recycling event, which collected 5,000 pounds of electronics for safe disposal and Halloween's Annual Trunk or Treat event.



As highlighted by the NWI Times, The Food Truck Friday Series launched in 2025, offering local vendors a platform to showcase their food while inviting the community to explore diverse cuisines and small businesses from the surrounding area.

Beyond events, the Hammond Civic Center continues to offer residents the most affordable health and wellness facility. Featuring a swimming pool, jacuzzi, steam room, walking track and free weights in the lower level of the building. 2026 will see the return of live music, comedy shows, basketball tournaments and more community driven events. www.hammondciviccenter.com



City Of Hammond Parks & Recreation 2025 Year in Review

Hammond Special Events 2025 Review – By: Aileen Ibarra



219 Day - The 2025 version of 219 Day took place on 2/22/2025, The theme was Viva Las Region. The Sinatra and Beyond show was the headlining act. Other entertainment included DJ Dale' and Steve Swing. The 2026 version will be the 10th year of 219 Day and the theme will appropriately be the 10 Year Region Reunion.

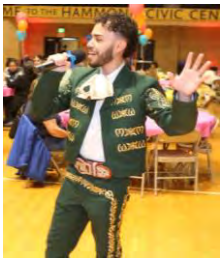












Cinco De Mayo, May. The 20th Annual Cinco De Mayo event was held at the Hammond Civic Center in 2025. The culturally inclusive event celebrates all backgrounds and had over 500 guests. Food was offered by El Gran Taco of East Chicago and Mariachi Santa Maria, DJ Dale' & Ballet Folcorico Yolotzin provided the entertainment at this family fun event.









Employee Olympic Pickleball Tournament, March Team Building. City Employees from all departments gathered at the Jean Shepherd Center for an all out battle to see who would become the ultimate champions. Teams were randomly selected based on skill set and were allowed to play in a competitive tournament or just for fun. A great time was had by all.









City Of Hammond Parks & Recreation 2025 Year in Review

Hammond Special Events 2025 Review Cont. – By: Aileen Ibarra

Trunk or Treat - The event took place at the Hammond Civic Center. There were over 600 attendees, and there were 52 community vendors handing out a lot of candy.







Veterans Parade. The 12th Annual Veteran Appreciation Day Parade took place on Saturday November 1st. Veterans of the Hammond Fire Department were the Grand Marshall's and Kevin Margraf gave the keynote speech. The Lima Lima flyover once again kicked off the parade.



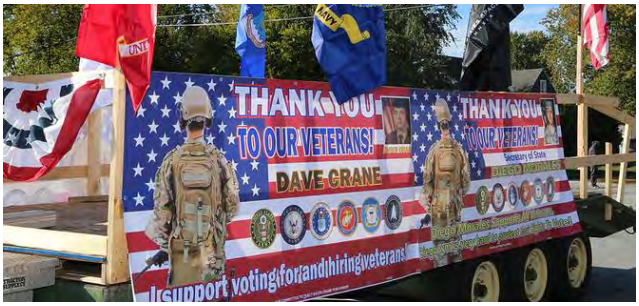


Annual Tree Lighting Ceremony, Friday, November 28th. The annual tree lighting event was once again well attended even though the temperatures were very low. The Irving Elementary Mariachi Pantera group sang Christmas Carols, The Hammond Academy of Performing Arts and Dance team performed and we once again had live reindeer in attendance.











Holiday Parade. The Annual Holiday Day Parade took place on Saturday December 6th. 72 participants ranging from marching bands, dance teams, and community groups all participated. The parade was once again kicked off by the Santa Sprint down Indianapolis Boulevard.



