

SAC Committee Meeting
Tuesday, March 17, 2026
Fargo Parks Sports Center
Island Park Conference Room

Present: Dominic Fischer, Rusty Papachek, Dave Bietz, Broc Lietz, John Gunkelman

Key Topics Discussed

1. Process & Timeline to Park Board

- Committee role: Finalize a benefit model the Park District can consistently apply to new developments (e.g., Madeline's Meadows, Selkirk, future parks).
- Park District process:
 - Once this committee is satisfied with the model, staff will:
 - Prepare it for the Planning meeting (third Wednesday of each month).
 - Then it moves to the Board (second Tuesday of each month), likely via consent agenda if there are no major concerns.
 - Target timeline:
 - Have a final document within 3 weeks to hit April Planning, which would then feed into the May Board meeting.
- Commissioners have already been briefed on the concept and are generally supportive, with interest mainly in how it compares to the City's model rather than in changing the core approach.

2. Intent of the Benefit Model

- The spreadsheet/matrix is not used to directly calculate the assessment dollar amount per lot.
- Instead, it:
 - Computes a total benefit value (tangible + intangible) for all improvements in a district.
 - Is used to show that:

Benefit (X) > Construction + financing cost (Y)

so the special assessment is justified.

- Actual assessments to property owners will be derived from total project cost (construction, financing, etc.), allocated per lot or per some standard (e.g., \$2,400–\$3,500 per lot over 20 years for an example subdivision).

3. Review of Key Improvement Types & Issues

A. General Park Improvements (Neighborhood & Community Parks)

- These are more property-value driven and statistical value of life (SVL) based.
- They don't perfectly match the City's categories, so:
 - Group is open to keeping or dropping the two general categories if they feel too abstract.
 - Recognize they add statistical value, but they're less concrete than other line items.

B. Trails & Shared-Use Paths

- Using City of Fargo's trail values as a baseline.
- Park District's maximum cost per square foot is somewhat higher (around \$10 more per sq ft), reflecting:
 - Mixed-use function,
 - Health and recreation benefits,
 - Property value uplift.
- Group acknowledges that higher cost can be justified given broader benefits.

C. Playground Equipment

- Dominic used a conservative average cost.

- Discussion notes:
 - Park District's actual systems range roughly \$250k–\$350k for more extensive structures.
 - There can be a big spread between a “basic” system and a high-end “rainbow” type system.
 - Consensus: An average value is acceptable, but Dominic will refine with more recent construction data (Tyler and team input).

D. Stormwater & Green Infrastructure

- Used frequently in landscape architecture, less so (so far) as a formal park benefit line item in Fargo Parks.
- Concept:
 - Green stormwater systems (like urban plains concept, or Southwest Regional Lake) combine:
 - Required stormwater detention/retention
 - Recreation + ecological + aesthetic benefit
 - Value assigned per acre.
- Park District increasingly tries to:
 - Integrate ponds and stormwater features into usable parks (trails, plantings, etc.),
 - Partner with developers and City on these multi-benefit projects.

E. Athletic Fields & Courts

- Current draft lumps soccer fields, basketball courts, open green, pickleball, etc. into one category.
- Concerns:
 - These are not equivalent in cost or intensity of use.
 - Current number is likely too low for some facilities.
- Direction:
 - Break into at least two categories:
 - Hard surface courts (e.g., basketball, pickleball, tennis) with per square foot cost.
 - Grass/turf fields (soccer/open play).
 - Consider future separate handling of artificial turf if/when it is used.
 - Use recent project data (e.g., pickleball projects, court costs, slab costs) to refine per-sq-ft numbers.

F. Pavilions, Shelters, & Multi-Use Structures

- Distinction between:
 - Open-air shelters (small neighborhood structures with tables, typically \$50k–\$70k).
 - Large open-air shelters (e.g., Urban Plains, Trollwood, seating 200+).
 - Enclosed multi-use buildings (with plumbing, enclosed walls, etc.; Dominic used ~\$200k per structure, generally agreed as reasonable).
- Proposed refinements:
 - Rename and clarify:
 - Open-air shelter with a per-sq-ft cost.
 - Large/multi-use shelter and/or enclosed multi-use structure with distinct unit values.
 - Use recent shelter construction bids to compute current per-sq-ft costs.

G. Landscaping (Beds, Plants, Grasses)

- Dominic drew on landscape research (e.g., property value and quality-of-life impacts from planted beds and ornamental landscaping).
- Issues raised:
 - Current draft uses per lot values; this may not be ideal.
 - Committee prefers a per-square-foot basis for:
 - Planting beds,
 - Ornamental grasses,

- Other landscaped areas.
- Plan:
 - Convert to per sq ft cost/value, using:
 - Landscape industry data,
 - Park District's actual planting plans (square footage).
 - Revisit intangible values (property value uplift, quality of life) to ensure they are comprehensible and defensible.

H. Trees

- One of the most complex sections.
- Current draft:
 - Breaks trees into several caliper size ranges, each with:
 - Tangible value (planting cost, replacement cost).
 - Intangible value (ecosystem services, aesthetics, quality of life).
- Discussion:
 - Park District typically plants 1"–4" caliper trees, but also manages mature trees (e.g., Lindenwood).
 - Need to be able to assign value both to new plantings and existing mature trees (e.g., if an assessment is ever used in an existing, tree-rich park).
 - Species differences matter scientifically, but would be too granular for this tool.
- Agreed direction:
 - Simplify to:
 - A per-caliper-inch value, so one formula works for any tree size.
 - Possibly two tree categories:
 - Standard trees (1–11/12 inches).
 - Mature/special trees (12"+) if needed.
 - Intangible values:
 - Recognized as conservative and research-supported, not arbitrary.
 - Supported by the Park District's Tree Plotter tool, which calculates:
 - CO₂ storage,
 - Other pollutants removed,
 - Stormwater benefit,
 - Monetary value of these ecosystem services.
 - Example from Tree Plotter shows a single large tree can have tens of thousands of dollars of lifetime environmental value.
- Consensus:
 - Use Tree Plotter and forestry data to justify but keep the spreadsheet numbers reasonable and defensible.

I. Parking Lots

- Draft uses a per-stall cost of roughly \$3,000–\$4,000 per stall.
- Feedback:
 - Real projects (recent parking lot) are closer to \$3,500 per stall, depending on asphalt vs concrete.
 - This number is considered slightly conservative but acceptable.
 - Recognize maintenance and life-cycle differences between asphalt and concrete.
- Intangible benefits reference City of Fargo's approach (safety, access, etc.).

J. Fencing (Potential Missing Line Item)

- Noted that fencing often accompanies courts (pickleball/tennis) or is occasionally used around playgrounds.
- Suggestion:
 - Add fencing as its own line item, with a per linear foot cost/value.

4. How the Model Will Be Used (Example: Madeline's Meadows)

- For a subdivision like Madeline's Meadows:
 1. Apply the benefit matrix to the planned park:

- Park area in acres/sq ft,
 - Trails,
 - Shelters,
 - Landscaping,
 - Trees,
 - Parking, etc.
2. Compute:
 - Total tangible + intangible benefit.
 3. Compare that total benefit to:
 - Total project cost (construction + financing).
 4. If benefit > cost:
 - The Park District has a defensible basis to move ahead with a special assessment (e.g., \$2,400 total per lot over 20 years, or similar).
- The spreadsheet is thus primarily a justification and documentation tool, not an assessment calculator.

5. Next Steps & Action Items (Implied and Stated)

Dominic / Technical Team:

- Refine the draft matrix:
 - Split or re-label categories:
 - Athletic fields/courts → hard surface vs grass.
 - Shelters → open-air, large open-air, enclosed multi-use.
 - Convert certain items to per-sq-ft units:
 - Landscaping beds,
 - Possibly shelter areas,
 - Hard-surface courts.
 - Tree valuation:
 - Move to per caliper inch.
 - Possibly maintain a separate category for mature trees.
 - Re-evaluate landscaping and tree intangible values so they're explainable and supported by cited research.
- Use Park District cost data update cost assumptions.

Park District Staff:

- Provide:
 - Recent cost data for:
 - Shelters (Urban Plains, Trollwood),
 - Courts (including pickleball),
 - Slabs,
 - Parking lots.
 - Any available per-sq-ft benchmarks for:
 - Landscaping installations,
 - Hard surface paving.
- Add Tree Plotter outputs and other relevant references to the shared site.
- Prepare to route the final model:
 - Through Planning in April (target),
 - Then to the Board (likely May, on consent agenda).

Committee & Board Interface:

- At least one committee member will attend the Planning meeting to help answer questions and explain the reasoning.
- Any requested tweaks from Planning/Board can be made without restarting the process, as long as core logic holds.

- General consensus:
 - The model is close to final.
 - Remaining work is mostly about:
 - Clarifying units (per lot vs per sq ft),
 - Splitting/renaming categories,
 - Fine-tuning numeric assumptions,
 - Making the intangible justifications easy to explain to commissioners and potential challengers.