

**Riverbanks Park Commission  
Meeting Minutes  
19 February 2026**

*In accordance with the Freedom of Information Act, a copy of the agenda is available to radio and TV stations, newspapers, and persons requesting notification; was posted in the lobby of Riverbanks' administration building and was uploaded to Riverbanks' webpage.*

**Attendance Report**

**Commissioners Present:** Cliff Bourke, Bob Davidson, Jeff Reeves, Deneen Shockley, Mike Velasco, Alana Williams.

**Staff Present:** Tommy Stringfellow, Christie Vondrak, Lochlan Wooten, Ashley Harris, Jessica Austin.

**Call to Order**

Chairwoman Williams called the meeting to order at 12:30pm.

**Reading of the Minutes**

The January 15, 2026, Commission Meeting minutes were approved as distributed.

Bourke motioned to approve the minutes, Velasco seconded, m/c unanimous.

**Chairwoman's Remarks:**

- Wished Commissioner Davidson a very happy birthday
- Welcomed staff back from AZA Directors Policy Conference
- Expressed appreciation to Reeves and Shockley for their work reviewing the FY25 audit with Scott + Co. member and staff.

**Finance Report:**

VP of Finance Ashley Harris provided the following report:

- January Dashboard Report:
  - Total attendance through January was approximately 1% below budget. January attendance exceeded projections, helping close the gap between budgeted and actual attendance. Free Friday events continue to perform strongly - attendance was approximately 3,900 higher than January of the prior year. One recent Free Friday in February brought 9,700 visitors to the zoo.
  - Total earned revenues are up significantly over budget and prior year. Through January we are reporting over \$1.2M more in earned revenues than last year.
  - Concession and retail commissions are reporting \$127,000 over budget and \$119,000 over prior year.
  - Wild Lights event generated approximately \$125,000 above budgeted revenues.
  - Miscellaneous revenues are running well above budget. Includes \$250,000 in insurance proceeds related to the burned tram incident and interest income.
  - Expenditures remain generally consistent with prior months. Utilities remain under budget due to prior water bill credit, though that credit has now been exhausted.
- December Balance Sheet:
  - LGIP's average interest rate for January was 3.96%

Velasco motioned to approve the financials, Davidson seconded, m/c unanimous.

- FY2025 Audit Presentation:
  - Terri Wilson of Scott & Company presented the audited financial statements for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2025.

- Issuing an unmodified opinion. No material weaknesses or significant deficiencies were identified.

Reeves motioned to approve the FY25 Audit, Shockley seconded, m/c unanimous.

- Capital Reserve Allocation:
  - With completion of the FY25 audit draft, the unassigned fund balance can now be reallocated. Recommend committing \$3.8M to Capital Reserve, leaving approximately \$500,000 in unassigned funds.

Velasco motioned to approve the transfer of \$3.8M to Capital Reserve, Shockley seconded, m/c unanimous.

**Executive Session:**

- Dan Fritze of Nelson Mullins was introduced as the commission's general counsel.

Shockley motioned to enter executive session, Reeves seconded, m/c unanimous.

- Commissioners entered executive session to discuss an issue pursuant to SC Code § 30-4-70 (a) (3).

No vote was taken after Executive Session.

**President & CEO Report:**

President & CEO Tommy Stringfellow provided the following report:

- Meetings continue with Richland County, Lexington County, and the City of Columbia to provide project updates and maintain support.
- A request has been submitted to Lexington County for a 25% funding increase, citing a 24% rise in expenses over the past five years.
- Zoo submitted a request for \$5 million in state funding for infrastructure repairs. Legislative leadership indicated that funding opportunities may be available this year

**Chief Administrative Officer Report:**

Chief Administrative Officer Christie Vondrak provided the following report:

- Snow Days Photos
- Dates and Reminders
  - **February 25** – All-Staff Town Hall
  - **February 26** - Board & Commission Social at the Aquarium & Reptile Conservation Center
  - **March 19** – Next Commission Meeting, featuring presentations on the next bond issuance.
- Spring seasonal hiring needs are lower than previous years, reflecting strong employee retention.

**Chief Operating Officer Report:**

Chief Operating Officer Lochlan Wooten provided the following report:

- Gorillas ZaKota and Mo are Dallas bound as part of Species Survival Plan with AZA
- Companion cotton-top tamarin has arrived for Nell – facility renovations or underway to support new pair
- Updates on Master Plan and design renderings will be presented at March meeting.

The meeting was adjourned.

Approved and adopted on the 19 day of March 2026.

  
\_\_\_\_\_, Secretary