2026 Recreation Mid-Year Report

Program Management:

Winter Recreation:

Winter recreation experienced one of its most successful seasons in recent years. Favorable weather conditions allowed us to open well ahead of schedule and remain open for a record number of days. The Goaltender at Jones Park was staffed seven days a week, while The Cozy Clubhouse at Reid Golf Course operated Fridays through Sundays. Recognizing that hockey players regularly utilized The Goaltender even during times when staffing was unavailable, Recreation staff partnered with the Parks and Facilities Divisions to keep the building unlocked daily from 10:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. Throughout the season, there were no issues associated with not having staff on site. We will evaluate continuing this practice in future seasons.

The Jones Park ice skating rinks and The Goaltender were able to be opened for public use on December 15. With a slight extension, we were able to keep ice and the pavilion open until February 21. That is ten weeks of skating fun! Snow was a little less frequent this season, but we were able to open the Cozy Clubhouse at Reid on December 15 and keep it open on Friday-Sunday through February 7.

Preschool:

Appletots Learning Center continued to experience success throughout the winter, spring, and early summer seasons, providing engaging parent/child programming focused on creativity, movement, and hands-on learning. Appletots classes were held at the Scheig Center and included Family Groovy Tots, Science Tots, Nature Tots, Culinary Tots, Imaginative Tots, and interactive movement-based classes. Strong enrollment and positive participant feedback demonstrated continued community interest in high-quality early childhood programming.

Appletots continued to expand with the addition of three themed celebration events featuring sensory exploration, crafts, and creative play, as well as two new Creative Movement Tots classes offered at the dance studios in June.

Friday Fun, one of our preschool themed parent/child offerings, experienced significant growth this year, increasing from 89 participants in June 2025 to 118 participants in June 2026. New themes such as Colorful Creations and Mess Makers complemented returning favorites and helped drive increased participation. Each 45-minute class for children ages 2–6 incorporates themed crafts, creative movement, sensory play, and story time, providing families with meaningful opportunities to learn and connect through play.

Youth Sports Leagues and Camps:

Youth sports programming had a strong first half of the year, providing a variety of opportunities for participants ranging from preschool through middle school. The A-League basketball season concluded in February with 535 participants from kindergarten through 8th grade. While participation was slightly lower than last year, enrollment remained strong, and our leagues continued to provide a great recreational experience for participants.

Spring Youth Volleyball Camp returned for its fourth year with the most skill advanced group of participants we've seen. Based on the varying skill levels of participants, staff will continue to evaluate program structure and explore separate beginner and experienced groups in future sessions to better meet participant needs.

The first half of the A-League baseball, softball, and T-ball season has been successful, with 758 participants across all age groups. Older youth leagues, including the 3rd/4th grade and 5th/6th grade divisions, continued to see consistent participation. Weather has been the primary challenge this season, with multiple rainouts impacting evening games. Veterans Memorial Park has remained a busy hub for youth athletics, with overlapping games and park activities creating increased demand for parking during peak evening hours.

Summer sports camp programming continued to provide a wide range of opportunities for youth. Tennis programming included 98 participants in youth camps for ages 8–14 and 52 participants in Little Hitters for ages 4–8. Although weather again impacted outdoor lessons, staff adapted schedules and utilized alternative spaces when needed to continue providing quality instruction. The first session of summer sports camps served 272 participants across basketball, flag football, multisport, pickleball, soccer, and sports exploration. A new Multisport Camp at Green Meadows Park was introduced and received strong enrollment, demonstrating continued interest in expanding youth sports camp opportunities.

The APRD Running Club also returned for another successful season, engaging youth through active programming that combined running, skill development, and fun. The season concluded with participation in our Kids Fun Run at Veterans Memorial Park that provided participants with an opportunity to utilize what they learned in the session.

Youth Programs:

Youth enrichment and community programs continued to provide meaningful opportunities for youth and families throughout the first half of the year. The Open Gym program provided a safe, accessible indoor recreation option during the winter months,

serving 675 participants at Ferber Elementary. With especially cold and snowy weather, the program serves as a great opportunity for kids to get out and stay active.

KidStage® continued to be a great partnership program with us, providing youth with opportunities to build confidence, creativity, and performance skills through theater. The winter session concluded with a Little Mermaid showcase, and the spring session concluded with a Beauty and the Beast performance at Appleton West High School. Participants developed acting, singing, teamwork, and stage performance skills while celebrating their accomplishments with family and friends at their showcase performance.

Urban Riders, our biking program for school-age children, provided youth with opportunities to develop bike handling skills, safety awareness, and confidence navigating the community. Through three levels of instruction, participants learned everything from foundational bike skills and trail etiquette to safely interacting with traffic and understanding road rules.

The 2026 Playground Program launched successfully with 30 Playground Leaders serving 12 sites throughout the city, including new locations at City Park and Lundgaard Park. Staff orientation focused on team development, conflict resolution, first aid, and emergency preparedness through training provided by the Appleton Fire and Police Departments.

Participation has exceeded expectations, with 927 youth enrolled, representing a 22% increase from the previous year. Lundgaard Park has been a particularly successful addition, with more than 180 participants enrolled. The Junior Leader Program also expanded leadership opportunities for youth ages 14–17, with 15 Junior Leaders gaining hands-on experience while developing teamwork, communication, and leadership skills.

Program partnerships continue to enhance our recreation offerings for youth. In collaboration with Youth Enrichment League, staff offered summer enrichment opportunities focused on STEM and technology skills. While one session was canceled due to low registration, the Coding Animation and Video Games class launched successfully with 12 participants. Additionally, a babysitting course offered in partnership with Tanya Rosenthal filled quickly with 37 participants, providing youth ages 10–14 with valuable skills in first aid, CPR, child safety, and caregiving.

Adult:

Adult recreation programming provided diverse opportunities for community members to learn new skills, stay active, and connect with others. Spanish language classes remained a popular offering, with beginner, advanced, and conversational courses available throughout the year. The winter/spring session concluded with 47 participants

enrolled, and continued demand for beginner classes has led to the addition of a daytime beginner option for the fall session.

Adult fitness and movement classes continued to be well received. The adult dance program provided participants with engaging ways to stay active through Tap, Hip Hop, and Ballet Barre classes held at Unity Dance & Acrobatics studios. These classes continue to attract participants of varying skill levels while promoting fitness, creativity, confidence, and enjoyment through movement.

Adult tennis also experienced renewed growth in 2026 following a decline in participation the previous year. Current classes have 30 participants enrolled, with strong attendance and a mix of beginner and intermediate/advanced players developing their skills in a fun, recreational setting.

As pickleball continues to be a community favorite, staff have adjusted offerings to better align with community interests. Six pickleball clinics were offered throughout the summer, with an increased focus on skill development rather than introductory instruction. This shift reflects a growing trend among participants who are looking to improve their game and aligns with what other recreation providers throughout the Fox Valley are experiencing.

We continue to offer enrichment opportunities including our Fundamentals of Photography workshop led by Debbie Daanen Photography. This two-day introductory course provided participants with hands-on experience in composition, lighting, and photography techniques at the Scheig Center gardens. Due to limited interest, Pet First Aid & CPR was discontinued, allowing staff to explore new program opportunities that better meet current community needs. Staff will continue to evaluate adult programming based on community interest and participation trends.

Aquatics Programs:

The 2026 aquatics season began with another successful staggered pool opening, allowing staff to balance operations while preparing both facilities for the busy summer season. Mead Pool opened on May 30, followed by the full opening of both Mead and Erb Pools on June 5.

A significant investment was made in staff development prior to opening day. In addition to lifeguard certification courses, new instructor training, and position-specific orientations, staff participated in emergency response training in partnership with the Appleton Fire Department, Gold Cross Ambulance, Outagamie County Dispatch, and the

Appleton Police Department. These trainings helped staff practice emergency situations, improve communication, and build confidence before the pools opened.

Swim lessons continue to be one of the department's most valuable community services. With our winter lessons we had 170 participants total between East and West High School Pools. Prior to the summer season, all instructors participated in a two-day Swim Lesson Bootcamp and received supplemental Aqua Academy curriculum designed to standardize instruction and place greater emphasis on stroke technique, skill progression, and swimmer proficiency. Summer Session 1 served 465 participants through traditional swim lessons and specialty offerings including Diving Dynamics, Lifeguard Readiness, Champions in Training, and Adaptive Swim Lessons.

Aquatic attendance remained strong throughout the first half of the season despite several weather-related closures. Through the end of June, the pools welcomed more than 20,700 visits across open swim, lap swim, twilight swim, tot swim, aqua fitness, and other aquatic programs. A new Sensory Swim program at Mead Pool has been well received, providing a quieter and more accessible environment for individuals with sensory sensitivities and their families.

The new online option for purchasing and renewing pool passes has been a success, making the process easier for both customers and staff. Through June, more than 2,000 season passes and punch cards had been sold. Pool rentals also saw strong demand, with 51 private rentals and party packages booked during the first month of the season, nearly double the number from June 2024.

Erb Pool also continued to serve as the home for local swim team practices and successfully hosted the Summer Classic Swim Meet in partnership with the Fox Cities YMCA Swim Team, bringing swimmers and spectators from across the region to Appleton.

Unity Dance and Acrobatics:

Unity Dance & Acrobatics had a successful first half of 2026, highlighted by another outstanding recital season and a strong start to summer programming. Throughout the winter and spring, staff focused on preparing for the annual recital while continuing to provide high-quality instruction across our variety of dance genres.

The annual recital was held May 1–2 at Appleton West High School and featured 729 participants performing in ballet, jazz, pom & kick, acrobatics, hip hop, lyrical, tap, modern, and musical theater. Four performances were held over the weekend, with more than 90 volunteers who helped ensure a smooth and successful event. Over 3,200 tickets were sold, an increase of approximately 200 tickets over last year. Additional support was received through recital program advertisements and merchandise sales, helping offset program costs.

Following the recital, the summer dance session began in June at the Northland Mall studios. Summer programming includes youth and preschool classes across multiple dance styles and has enrolled 351 participants.

Special Events:

Special events continued to bring the community together during the first half of 2026. Through a variety of family-friendly events and community partnerships, the Recreation Division welcomed thousands of participants and created fun, memorable experiences for people of all ages.

The fourth annual Mom Prom fundraiser was once again a tremendous success, welcoming 318 participants for an evening of entertainment and community connection. The event generated more than $10,000 to support the Recreation Fee Waiver Scholarship Program, helping remove financial barriers for local families. The success of the event was made possible through the support of sponsors, donors, volunteers, and community partners.

Several annual family events returned with strong participation, including the Toy Ride Along, Bike Rodeo, Ties and Tiaras, Kids Fun Run, and Movie on the Hill. These events provided opportunities for families to stay active, build new skills, and spend quality time together. Although the June Bike Rodeo was canceled due to weather, the May event successfully promoted bicycle safety through interactive learning stations in partnership with Safe Routes to School and the East Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission.

One of our most exciting new initiatives, the Discover Appleton Challenge, officially launched on May 1. Developed in collaboration with 12 City departments, the interactive scavenger hunt encourages residents and visitors to explore Appleton while learning about City services and amenities. As of the end of June, the program had attracted 257 teams and generated more than 3,250 mission submissions, demonstrating strong community interest and engagement. With the challenge continuing through October, participation is expected to grow throughout the remainder of the year.

Scheig Center:

The Scheig Center continues to serve as a valuable community facility, hosting a variety of private rentals and recreation programs throughout the year. During the first half of 2026, the facility hosted 44 rentals, including weddings, bridal showers, baby showers, graduation parties, and birthday celebrations. In addition to rentals, the Scheig Center remained a busy hub for recreation programming, offering fitness, mindfulness, Appletots, Spanish, photography, and other community classes.

During the Parks and Recreation office remodel, the Recreation Division and Customer Service staff temporarily relocated to the Scheig Center. Despite the added activity, staff were able to continue daily operations while maintaining a welcoming environment for both program participants and rental groups. The Scheig Center also continues to serve the community as a designated City of Appleton polling location.

Marketing Highlights:

Marketing and communications continued to play a vital role in promoting Recreation Division programs, events, and services during the first half of 2026. Staff successfully produced and launched both the Spring/Summer and Fall/Winter Activity Guides, while updating the department website and recreation registration system to ensure a smooth registration experience. Our Spring/Summer Activity Guide was promoted through a coordinated marketing campaign that included email newsletters, social media, promotional flyers, press releases, and community outreach, helping increase awareness of recreation programs and events.

We continued to expand our marketing presence through local media appearances, podcasts, and television interviews promoting programs such as Mom Prom, the Discover Appleton Challenge, and seasonal recreation opportunities.
Promotional materials were also updated throughout the year for special events, playgrounds, aquatics, sports programs, and community outreach efforts.

Social media continued to be one of our strongest communication tools. During the first

half of the year, staff created more than 260 Facebook and Instagram posts, reels, and stories, generating well over 1.5 million views while adding more than 1,200 new followers across both platforms. Creative video content highlighting aquatics, playground staff, and community events significantly increased engagement and helped connect residents with Recreation Division programs and services.

Email continued to be an effective way to keep participants informed. During the first half of the year, the department sent 13 community newsletters to more than 19,000 subscribers, with an average open rate of over 40%. Staff also sent 57 targeted emails with an average open rate of more than 70%, helping participants stay informed about programs and important updates.

Community Partnerships:

The recreation division has continued to strengthen community partnerships and outreach in 2026 by collaborating with numerous local businesses and organizations. Through these relationships, we have enhanced our programs and events, bringing more value to our community. Additionally, our team has actively engaged with various community groups, advocating for our services and ensuring they meet the diverse needs of our residents. These efforts demonstrate our ongoing commitment to fostering a vibrant, connected, and healthy community.

Total number of partnerships as of mid-year: 38
Total number of outreach events/presentations as of mid-year: 15

Description	**Year to Date** ***(as of 6/30/26)***	**Full Year Amended Budget**	**% of Amended Budget**
PARK & RECREATION			
16541 Recreation Programs – Revenues	524,194	1,062,852	49%
16541 Recreation Programs – Expenses	746,797	2,352,404	32%
16541 Recreation Programs – Net Expenses	222,603	1,289,552	17%