



OFFICE OF THE CITY CLERK

BIANCA L. TIRADO, CITY CLERK

PERSONNEL & FINANCE

SEPTEMBER 10, 2025 6:30 P.M.

Committee Members Present:

Sheila Niezgodski, Karen L. White, Rachel Tomas Morgan

Committee Members Absent:

Dr. Oliver Davis

Councilmembers Present:

Canneth Lee*, Ophelia Gooden-Rodgers, Sharon McBride*

Others Present:

Bianca L. Tirado, Jasmine Jackson, Matthew Neal, Veronica Pitt-Payne, Lari'onna Green, Bob Palmer

Presenters:

Katrina Lee, Jordan Gathers

Agenda:

2026 Human Rights Commission (HRC)
Budget Overview | 2026 Venues Parks and Arts (VPA) Budget Overview

Members marked with an asterisk (*) are in virtual attendance.

Please note the attached link for the meeting recording:

<https://docs.southbendin.gov/WebLink/browse.aspx?dbid=0,0&mediaid=399502>

Please note the attached link for the meeting presentations:

<https://docs.southbendin.gov/WebLink/0/fol/395495/Row1.aspx?dbid=0&dbid=0&startid=395495&startid=395495&row=1&row=1>

Committee Chair Sheila Niezgodski called to order the Personnel & Finance Committee meeting at 6:30 P.M.

Committee Chair Niezgodski provided information regarding the 2026 Budget Overview process. City Residents can access the City Budget Survey to provide their input using the following link: <https://southbendin.gov/budget>. Additional questions pertaining to this meeting or the budget hearing can be emailed to the Personnel and Finance Committee Chair, Sheila Niezgodski, at sniezgod@southbendin.gov and they will be directed to the appropriate department. The Final Budget Hearing is scheduled for October 13, 2025.

INTEGRITY | SERVICE | ACCESSIBILITY

Jasmine Jackson
CHIEF DEPUTY CITY CLERK / CHIEF OF STAFF

Matthew Neal
DEPUTY CITY CLERK / DIRECTOR OF POLICY

Margaret Gotsch
DIRECTOR OF SPECIAL PROJECTS

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Katrina Lee, Executive Director of the Human Rights Commission (HRC), with offices at 202 South Michigan Street Suite 801, South Bend, IN 46601, presented a PowerPoint providing an overview of the proposed 2026 HRC budget. She highlighted achievements including grant funds secured, increased bilingual services, and an anticipated reduction in legal expenses due to her mediator certification. The budget was reduced year-over-year by nine-point-eight-eight percent (9.88%), and she stated that they plan to increase community engagement activities and renegotiate grants for additional funding in 2026.

Committee Chair Niezgodski opened for questions from the Committee.

Committee Vice Chair Karen L. White asked if the grant renegotiation with Saint Joseph County will occur during or after this budget period.

Katrina Lee confirmed that the grant would be renegotiated after this budget period. She noted that they currently have a surplus of cash due to the two-hundred-thirty-four-thousand dollars (\$234,000) recovered from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) in 2025.

Councilmember Ophelia Gooden-Rodgers asked if there was a period of time this year when the phone service was not working.

Katrina Lee confirmed that there was a period of time when the phone service was not working and stated that it has since been fixed. She advised Committee Members to contact her directly if they encounter this issue in the future.

Councilmember Gooden-Rodgers expressed appreciation for the availability of bilingual services.

Committee Member Rachel Tomas Morgan asked what programs and initiatives are at risk due to the federal funding pause.

Katrina Lee replied that federal funding is used for training and community partnerships. She stated that loss of this funding prevents HRC personnel from receiving the most robust training available and limits the amount of outreach and education that can be provided for City residents.

Committee Member Tomas Morgan asked if HUD and EEOC funds cover the majority of HRC operating expenses. She asked Katrina Lee to clarify whether the 2026 HRC budget was decreased due to an anticipated reduction in funding from HUD and EEOC.

Katrina Lee confirmed that is correct. She stated that the 2026 budget was prepared assuming that forty-five-thousand dollars (\$45,000) will not be recovered.

Councilmember Sharon McBride and Council President Canneth Lee thanked Katrina Lee for the presentation.

Committee Chair Niezgodski congratulated Katrina Lee on her certification. Committee Chair Niezgodski opened the public hearing.



Mark Piasecki, 101 North Conestoga Lane, South Bend, IN 46617, asked if the state-level HRC also handles EEOC and HUD claims and whether the state would take over these services if the local chapter did not exist.

Katrina Lee responded that there is a dual filing process and that local chapters are responsible for a specific area. She confirmed that if the local chapter did not exist, the state would absorb those responsibilities.

Committee Chair Sheila Niezgodski closed the public hearing.

Jordan Gathers, Executive Director Venues Parks and Arts (VPA), with offices at 301 South Saint Louis Boulevard, South Bend, IN 46617, presented a PowerPoint providing an overview of the proposed 2026 VPA budget. He highlighted completed projects and achievements from 2025. The budget was decreased by three-point-four percent (3.4%) year-over-year, primarily driven by personnel reduction and restructuring. He discussed the proposed organizational changes in detail.

Councilmember Gooden-Rodgers asked Jordan Gathers if he is satisfied with the budget he presented and whether the proposed budget will allow for adequate maintenance of VPA facilities.

Jordan Gathers replied that while the cuts are not ideal, he is satisfied with the proposal. He stated that services and programs will remain the same.

Committee Member Tomas Morgan asked what role will be absorbing the responsibilities of the eliminated Chief Development Officer position.

Jordan Gathers replied that the new Chief of Venues and Promotion title will absorb these responsibilities.

Committee Member Tomas Morgan asked for a status update on the group violence intervention (GVI) and park safety initiatives following staffing reductions and restructuring last year.

Jordan Gathers responded that a park security contract was added this year and there have been fewer incidents. He said that GVI established new partnerships this year and created a data system for tracking safety metrics in real time. He noted that there will be a GVI call-in on October 15, 2025.

Committee Vice Chair White asked Jordan Gathers to confirm that nine (9) positions are being eliminated and that title changes reflect the additional responsibilities added to existing roles. She pointed out that the proposed utilities budget did not reflect a cost increase in 2026 and asked for clarification on the "other services" budget reduction.

Jordan Gathers confirmed the proposed changes to the organizational structure and stated that "other services" will be provided internally instead of through external contractors.

Committee Vice Chair White stated that a community center is needed for youth on the southeast side of the City and thanked VPA staff for their engagement with community events.

Council President Canneth Lee asked which eliminated position was the hardest reduction to make.



Jordan Gathers said that while he is comfortable with the plan for 2026, the decisions were not easy and that every reduction was hard.

Council President Lee asked Jordan Gathers to confirm that an Office of Violence Prevention (OVP) role was among the eliminated positions.

Committee Chair Niezgodski added that there appear to be three (3) eliminated GVI positions and asked Jordan Gathers to confirm.

Jordan Gathers replied that the eliminated OVP Program Manager role was vacant and that an OVP Program Coordinator role is also being eliminated.

Council President Lee asked where the responsibilities of these eliminated positions will be shifted.

Jordan Gathers replied that they will be shifted into the Community Initiatives, Recreation, and Community Programming divisions.

Committee Chair Niezgodski asked for clarification around the restructuring of the Community Initiatives division and expressed concern that this will disrupt the continuity of GVI.

Jordan Gathers stated that the GVI Project Manager position will remain in Community Initiatives and that the restructuring will not affect program continuity.

Committee Chair Niezgodski expressed concern regarding deferred maintenance and the reduced capital budget for 2026. She asked if equipment and facilities can be sufficiently maintained with this budget. She asked how many of the eliminated positions were filled and how many were vacant.

Jordan Gathers replied that the majority of the eliminated positions were filled. He said there has been significant capital investment in recent years and the existing equipment will remain serviceable through 2026.

Committee Member Tomas Morgan asked what will be impacted by the seventy-seven percent (77%) reduction in professional services and sixty-five percent (65%) reduction in other services in the park maintenance budget.

Jordan Gathers stated these services are not being cut but rather taken over by VPA personnel.

Committee Chair Niezgodski asked if any grant opportunities were lost due changes in funding at the federal level.

Jordan Gathers said that no grant opportunities were lost.

Committee Chair Niezgodski opened the public hearing.

Mark Piasecki, 101 North Conestoga Lane, South Bend, IN 46617, asked how many VPA employees there are and what percentage of VPA revenue comes from property tax.



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Jordan Gathers stated that there are one-hundred-nineteen (119) VPA employees and that he is uncertain of the percentage of revenue from property tax.

Mark Piasecki asked what would be cut from the budget if property tax revenue decreased significantly.

Jordan Gathers stated that he cannot speak to specific cuts but that they would prioritize maintaining the current programs, events, and level of service.

Mark Piasecki asked if any of the venues generate profit.

Jordan Gathers replied that the Morris and the Century Center generate profit.

Mark Piasecki inquired about the status of the golf professional whose position was eliminated.

Jordan Gathers said that personnel conversations are pending and that they will ensure separated staff have a smooth transition.

Committee Chair Niezgodski closed the public hearing.

With no further business, Committee Chair Niezgodski adjourned the Personnel & Finance Committee meeting at 8:02 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sheila Niezgodski".

Sheila Niezgodski, Committee Chair

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