

Testimony – HB 1029  
House Government and Veterans Affairs  
01/17/2025  
By Cody Schulz  
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Chairman Schauer and members of the House Government and Veterans Affairs Committee, my name is Cody Schulz. I am the Director of the North Dakota Parks and Recreation Department, and I offer this testimony in opposition to HB 1029.

The proposed Facility Construction Committee would be tasked with advising on the location, design, and cost estimates of facility projects. While this bill is well-intentioned, the current language causes our agency the following significant concerns.

1. **Definitions/Thresholds:** There are no definitions for, or cost thresholds associated with, the terms “new expanded or renovated facility.” North Dakota Parks and Recreation oversees 331 buildings, including 59 overnight rental accommodations, 125 restrooms and numerous visitor centers, shops, storage buildings, and historic buildings across 14 state parks. Depending on the definition of “renovate,” the committee and our agency may be tasked with reviewing hundreds of submissions every biennium. Even if a definition of “renovate” is added that aligns with the public improvement thresholds contained in NDCC 48-01.2, our agency would have nearly two dozen projects for review during the current biennium.
2. **Duplications of Processes:** ND Parks and Recreation already conducts extensive oversight and planning through our master planning processes as well as the legally required work with engineers and architects on larger projects identified in NDCC 48-01.2-02.1. Our master plans incorporate input from local communities, historical experts, environmental agencies, and other stakeholders to ensure our facilities are thoughtfully designed and align with park aesthetics and needs. It’s important to note that our facilities are not “one size fits all.” From cabins to visitor centers to comfort stations, each park’s infrastructure must be tailored to its specific environment and visitor needs. Requiring committee approval for every location, design, and cost estimate risks slowing innovation and could result in fewer projects being completed on time and within budget. Adding another layer of review risks redundancy and further delays for projects that have already undergone rigorous evaluation.
3. **Logistical Challenges and Uncertainty:** It is unclear when a state agency would be required to engage the committee regarding the project. Specifically, challenges may arise due to lack of details if the state agency works with the committee before final architect and engineering work is completed and incorporating committee input after final architect and engineering work may cause significant delay and cost increases.
4. **Project Delay:** The quarterly meeting schedule creates a significant challenge. If a project requires adjustments or responses to the committee’s recommendations, it would have to wait for the next meeting. This could delay projects by six months or more. For our

department, which operates within narrow construction windows, these delays could be devastating. For example, if a restroom building fails during the busy summer season, we need the ability to act swiftly. Delays in repairs could lead to closures, diminished visitor satisfaction, and economic losses for the local communities that depend on park tourism.

5. **Cost Increases:** If delays are encountered, it may lead to cost increases. Many construction companies plan their schedules up to a year in advance, often finalizing work for the upcoming year in late summer or early fall. If we're unable to finalize project approvals in time to meet these scheduling windows, we risk losing contractors or paying premiums to secure their services. These delays and cost increases will not only affect project budgets but also create ripple effects on the visitor experience.

Along with an incredible Team and beautiful landscapes, our building infrastructure is vitally important to our mission and operations. These facilities serve as the backbone of our enterprise, supporting over 1.2 million visitors annually and contributing \$154 million to the state's economy.

We believe there may be a way to achieve the goals of this legislation without imposing such significant challenges. Creating standardized reporting/data requirements could provide the transparency and accountability this bill seeks.

In conclusion, while we appreciate the intent of House Bill No. 1029, its current form may introduce delays, inefficiencies, and costs that could hinder our ability to meet the needs of North Dakota's parks and the visitors we serve.

On behalf of North Dakota Parks and Recreation, I respectfully request HB 1029 receive a Do Pass.

Thank you for your time; I will do my best to answer any questions you may have.