

**PARKS, RECREATION & CULTURAL SERVICES COMMISSION**

**Thursday, August 15th, 2024 – 7 P.M.**

Novi Civic Center – Council Chambers

The meeting was called to order at 7:00p.m. with Chairman Joseph presiding.

**ROLL CALL:**

Commissioners: Joseph (absent / excused), Riggins (present), Dooley (present), Gopalakrishnan (present), Staab (present), Tolkacz (present), Torimoto (present)  
Student Representatives: DiDomenico (present), Sid (present)

**APPROVAL OF AGENDA:**

Commissioner Staab motioned for approval of agenda and second by Commissioner Torimoto.

**Voice Vote**

**Unanimous**

**CITIZEN COMMENTS:**

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES:**

Line item B1 was tabled until the September meeting.

Commissioner Dooley asked that additional names be added to the Novi Parks Foundation instrumental members he mentioned at the last meeting during commissioner comments. Linda Apsey a past president of the foundation, Angel Heard and Mayor Justin Fischer. The spelling of Bob Churella's name was also corrected. It was moved that the minutes for the June 20<sup>th</sup> meeting be approved by Commissioner Dooley and second by Commissioner Staab.

**Voice Vote**

**Unanimous**

**COMMITTEE REPORTS:**

- A. Novi Parks Foundation – Commissioners Joseph, Staab & Torimoto  
Commissioner Staab said the big event, Pour on the Shore was July 26<sup>th</sup>. It was a beautiful night with good attendance and food. All the reports received so far have been positive. The numbers will be finalized at the September meeting. The partnership with People's Express was successful and saved money.
  
- B. Parks and Facilities Updates
  - 1. Villa Barr Art Park – Commissioner Joseph - tabled until September.
  
  - 2. Lakeshore Park – Student Representative DiDomenico  
Student Representative DiDomenico visited Lakeshore Park on one of the best days this summer. He showed many pictures of the different areas in the park and said everything was really great including the beach, lending library, toilets, sand volleyball courts / nets, bike pump and playgrounds. The day he was there those

amenities were in use. He added that he actually got a book from the library. He previously had a birthday party at the playground by one of the pavilions. The gaga ball pit and soccer field / goals were also in great shape. He noticed the horseshoe game for the first time. The mountain bike trails look good however, he pointed out some loose screws and boards in that area. Director Muck was appreciative of the report. He will notify the Mountain Bike Association about those two issues in the sapling loop and training course for new riders.

### 3. Pavilion Shore Park – Student Representative Sid

Student Representative Sid went to Pavilion Shore Park earlier this week. It is located on the lakefront with a really great view. The park was opened about ten years ago at the former home of an amusement park and casino.

When he arrived the parking lot was completely full which is a sign that the park is being used. The seating area looked great, and the bathrooms were clean. A lot of kids were using the playground area, and the equipment seemed to be functioning fine.

The lakefront can be used as a fishing area although nobody was fishing when he was there. The railing was reported to have some stains, bird poop and needed a cleaning. He pointed out a lot of great signage in the park telling the history plus safety tips. The read box to borrow books was also highlighted in the report.

Pictures of the green space were shown and a strange plant most likely a native species was growing close to the shore.

Commissioner Riggins mentioned a clicking noise coming from the reddish merry go round at the playscape she noticed while visiting the park with her grandson yesterday.

## **MATTERS FOR COMMISSION DISCUSSION AND/OR ACTION:**

### A. We CAN Improve our Parks/ Environment Proposal – Nick Weigel-Hubler, Village Oaks Elementary

Director Muck began this report by pointing out the fantastic relationship with the school district in Novi. An outstanding staff member from Village Oaks Elementary School reached out with a proposal that would benefit the parks, educate students, assist with CAPRA as a citizen science program. Director Muck discussed the program with staff and the parks maintenance department, and everyone was on board with the project.

Nick Weigel-Hubler introduced himself as a fourth-grade teacher at Village Oaks Elementary. He said he was here tonight with a proposal for a partnership to give the kiddos a chance to make real some of the life science they are learning in the classroom and bring into the local community. It is called We CAN. As a teacher for sixteen years, he is the science captain, and co-sponsor of the Novironment, an after-school club. This club takes life science from the classroom into engaging creative activities. The club went to the Detroit Zoo for the Oakland County Green School Celebration Day. As a Michigan Green School, they are always looking for ways to make a positive impact on the Novi Community. He added that he has worked and been involved with various park's departments for many years.

While walking in Heritage Park in Farmington Hills he saw a decorated garbage can that was adopted by a local elementary and thought he could bring this idea to

Novi with a partnership between the schools and the parks department. The goal of this project is to provide students a chance to apply what they learn about healthy environments in the local community. It becomes very powerful learning when students are empowered to become experts, use their knowledge and apply it to something they are passionate about. Taking what is learned in textbooks then creating websites, Google slide presentations, or an art installation to share with community members through adoption and displays on a garbage can. Hence, We CAN improve our parks. Students would decorate, impose QR codes which citizens can use to see what the students are learning and promote the overall health of the park. Brookfarm would be the ideal park to start with since he works at Village Oaks. There are five elementary schools in the district, and we would love to possibly to take it to more parks. The timeline would be: August 26<sup>th</sup> school starts, the first week of September begin the science units, by October 1<sup>st</sup> students can create the digital resources and November 1<sup>st</sup> the school would be ready to officially adopt a can. The stakeholders include the teachers, who teach lessons in the classroom and provide guidance for the digital materials. The students who become the experts and create the displays. The community members who will utilize the content and maintain the park. The role for the commissioners and parks staff is to be determined.

There was a lot of questions and discussion among the commissioners, Director Muck and Deputy Director Ringle. Director Muck clarified the motion "to direct park staff to work with Nick and his team at Village Oaks to establish the We CAN program this fall as a pilot program at Brookfarm Park with up to three garbage cans".

Commissioners Dooley motioned for approval and Commissioner Tolkacz second.

B. Introduction of PRCS Recreation Supervisor – Milah Loose

Deputy Director Ringle introduced the new Recreation Supervisor in charge of facilities, Milah Loose. Milah explained that she will be overseeing facility rentals at the Civic Center and the parks, managing the site supervisor staff, operation of the splash pad, dog park and Lakeshore Park. She continued saying that she is brand new to the Novi area moving here from Adrian two days before she started the job on July 27<sup>th</sup>. She previously lived in Adrian for six years while she attended Siena Heights University. She was an active member of the softball team. After graduating with a degree in business administration she worked full time as a Sports and Family Program Director at the Frank and Shirley Dick YMCA. Milah is originally from Elk Rapids, Michigan.

Recreation Supervisor Loose said she was very excited to be part of the team. Currently she is working on the Doggie Dive-In, an event at Lakeshore Park for dog park members after the beach closes for the season. She is also working on hiring new staff since many will be going away to college, looking at operation manuals, and putting together a survey for rentals.

### **STAFF REPORTS**

A. Administration Division – Director Jeff Muck

1. Summer Park Projects

Director Muck had a short report due to finishing summer projects. At Meadowbrook Commons additional walks and pad for the portable restroom are expected to be installed the week of the 26<sup>th</sup>. There are a lot of people

utilizing the courts. Director Muck gave kudos to Commissioner Staab for suggesting that Meadowbrook Commons would be a good spot for pickleball courts. This serves the east side of Novi well.

The four additional courts and parking lot expansion project at Wildlife Woods is going well. The contractor is placing the base materials for both the court and lot along with the forms for reinforcements. The concrete will be poured tomorrow or Saturday depending on the weather. There should be no issue meeting the October 6<sup>th</sup> substantial completion date. Director Muck thanked the community for respecting the active construction zone and not entering the park. The community will be notified when the courts open for play.

## 2. Strategic Community Recreation & Master Park Plan Update

Director Muck said the consultant, Spicer group met with the parks team to discuss the results of the community input sessions and online surveys. The most common response from residence were requests for a pool, community center, more seating and shade at the parks. Spicer also had our team take a survey to assist with formulating our strategic planning goals. The biggest topics of discussion were the lack of facility space to run programs, efforts towards reaccreditation, increasing use of technology with AI and SharePoint, and the need to increase marketing storytelling and community engagement. The next step is for Spicer to compile the data along with maps, park inventory, administrative structure, mission and values into a draft plan. That will be shown to the commission in October. It would then be available for public comment for thirty days before it goes to City Council for final approval.

## B. Recreation Division – Deputy Director Tracie Ringle

### 1. Programs & Services

Deputy Director Tracie Ringle provided one of the last updates on summer programs because it is the third week of August. Camp Lakeshore and PowerPlay end tomorrow. Bon Voyage is the final week with a smaller group August 19<sup>th</sup> - 23<sup>rd</sup>. It has been a very successful summer and John Gillingham will be here next month to present a camp wrap up report. Theatre and dance camps are finished for the season too.

Sizzling Summer Art Series ended today with the ninth performance of the season. Summer softball is in the playoff phase. There are sixty teams signed up for the fall league. T-Bolts youth tennis had their last tournament last week. Hunter Root did very well. The site supervisors were great this summer at the splash pad and Lakeshore Park. Many of them are headed off to college or involved in high school sports and clubs so the beach hours will be reduced next week operating 10:00-5:00 until Labor Day weekend. Labor Day weekend the hours will return to normal.

Villa Barr had two summer residents, Michael Shi a talented photographer and Kung Ho a painter. Both have pieces in the atrium and more information can be found on the website. [CityofNovi.org/VillaBarr](http://CityofNovi.org/VillaBarr) . The Dia Inside Out Program continues at ten locations around Novi through October. At Pavilion Shore Park there is a painting by a Mexican artist called Mexican Pueblo. The Mexico Lindo group is going to do a performance and host a game of Mexican bingo called Loteria at Pavilion Shore on Thursday August 22<sup>nd</sup> at 6:30.

Recreation Supervisor Chase Root is deep into the soccer season with scheduling and working out referees. The practices are starting and fall soccer is headed our way.

Choralaires are holding open rehearsals on the 10<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> of September at Novi Middle school. Their new season will be underway soon.

At the next PRCS Commission meeting final summer wrap up with shelter rental numbers, camp statistics and splash pad visit information will be presented.

C. Older Adult Division – Director Jeff Muck

1. Programs and Services

Director Muck filled in since OAS Manager Kit Kieser is on vacation. Get Outside Novi Challenge wrapped up with 187 participants who aimed to spend 100 hours outdoors in July. Those who completed the challenge were entered into a drawing and five lucky winners received outdoor prizes such as a hammock, fishing poles and water toys. The Novi High School Robotics Team, Frog Force held an outreach program at Meadowbrook Activity Center where the students served as bingo callers and showcased their robotics projects. Another will be held August 20<sup>th</sup> at 2:00 at the Civic Center. On Monday, August 12<sup>th</sup> the Farmington Hills Stargazers hosted a meteor shower party at ITC Community Sports Park. Approximately 150 participants had the opportunity to observe the Perseids Meteor Shower through telescopes. Many calls and photos have been shared by people expressing how grateful they are for Pavilion Shore Park and being able to use that space to witness the meteor shower and Northern Lights. OAS revisited two financial programs that continue to draw community interest, Estate Planning and Retirement Investment Basics. Estate Planning will be back in September.

Senior Day at the State Fair is August 29<sup>th</sup>. That day 900 seniors from around Southeast Michigan get to enjoy a free breakfast and lunch, visit vendors, entertainment and admission to the fair. The tickets are sold out which they do every year.

September will be a busy month. Novi Parks will join NRPA's BioBlitz to identify various species especially pollinators and designated areas. Along with the Beautification Commission we will host the perennial exchange at Fuerst Park on September 21<sup>st</sup> at 9:00a.m. It will feature a talk by Fire Captain and beekeeper Mark Thiesen about supporting pollinators in home gardens.

A Matter of Balance program is returning and will run September 9<sup>th</sup> – October 28<sup>th</sup>. It will be presented by staff from Ascension Acute Rehab Services. Powerful Tools for Caregivers is also coming back from September 24<sup>th</sup>- October 29<sup>th</sup>. It is staffed by Ageways. The Oakland County Health Department is going to present on prescription drug disposal and technical assistance on September 17<sup>th</sup>.

In June, we discussed the Older Adults Needs Committee was going to city Council with some recommendations. The committee concluded its work in July and Mayor Pro Tem Casey presented the final report on July 22<sup>nd</sup>. There were several recommendations with three at the top of the list.

Number one, a creation of a community center in Novi with dedicated space for older adults. Recognizing that this would be several years out the committee recommended an interim space be identified, rented or leased to serve as a third space for older adults.

Number two, the creation of a council appointed commission for older adults which would sunset the Older Adult Advisory Board. Number three, recommends City Council continues dialog focusing on senior friendly housing, including homes, condos and apartments that are accessible for all abilities. Review existing ordinances impacting accessory dwelling units and how they impact multi-generational housing for extended families.

## 2. PEX Transportation Transition

Director Muck reminded the commissioners that transportation services transitioned to People's Express July 1<sup>st</sup>. PEX established a satellite office at the Civic Center. They have successfully maintained uninterrupted service during the first month. Notably ridership has increased 76% which aligned with the expanded service days and hours. Novi Transportation had limited hours on Saturdays, no Sundays plus ended earlier in the evening. The expanded hours are paying off. The parks department is planning on keeping two of the vehicles for recreation programs. The remaining will be reallocated to other city departments or auctioned. Since PEX has entered Novi as a service provider they have participated in the Memorial Day Parade, Superhero Showcase and partnered with the Parks Foundation to provide the shuttle service for Pour on the Shore. In October PEX will offer a free program for residence to educate them on how to use the service.

### **COMMISSIONER COMMENTS:**

#### Commissioner Swaminathan (Swamy) Gopalakrishnan

The newest commissioner started the comments by introducing himself.

He moved to the United States in 1997 to start a master's program in Kalamazoo. He started his career at Johnson Controls Automotive in Holland, Michigan. He lived in West Michigan for nearly twenty years. Five years ago, he moved to Novi with his wife and two sons. His children are in high school and middle school. When looking for a new home they only looked in Novi.

While living in West Michigan he spent a lot of time at Lake Michigan and the parks around the area. He said, "I love parks! And wanted to be part of this commission for years." He spent a few years on the Board of Review and learned a lot about the city process. He came to the Parks Commission when he got the opportunity because he heard so many wonderful things about it.

He was part of the Pour on the Shore event with Commissioner Staab. Pavilion Shore Park is his favorite park in Novi. It was a wonderful night, and the event went well.

#### Commissioner Tolkacz

Commissioner Tolkacz apologized for being late due to the 696 construction. He welcomed Swami and thanked him for joining the Parks Commission team. He thanked the student representatives for the great presentations that were very professional. He thanked Commissioner Staab for the great leadership role during Pour on the Shore. The event gets better and better each year.

Commissioner Tolkacz said every month I am amazed by the new ideas and programs that pop up. Just when I think everything is covered, we get a presentation like Nick did

today, a great idea / addition to the parks which is minimal cost and the whole community will benefit. Yeah Novi!

#### Commissioner Torimoto

Welcome Swamy. Nice job of the presentations from the student representatives. The presentation by the teacher was really fantastic. It will be really great for the kids. I am looking forward to seeing how it goes. Planting the seeds for the next generation to appreciate the environment, engage with people, contributing and working with the community. It sounds like a great project.

#### Commissioner Staab

I want to thank the Parks Recreation and Cultural Services staff, Jeff and Tracie for the assistance with manpower for Pour on the Shore. Without your department we could not pull it off. It was a total team effort. Commissioner Torimoto and I were there at noon setting stuff up. Executive Director Melissa Agosta worked 24/7 the last two days before the event. She did an excellent job. We are fortunate to have the support of the community behind this. Thank you to Kit for getting the information to People's Express to connect our partnership.

At the last meeting Commissioner Dooley thanked past Foundation members. I want to add two more who were originators of the golf outings, Kathy Cosentino and Brian Burke.

I want to thank all the presentations. I look forward to the trash cans with decorations at Village Oaks Elementary. That is the school the current mayor came out of. I am sure he will enthusiastically support this initiative.

#### Student Representative Sid

I think there were some great presentations, particularly the trash cans. It will definitely add color to the parks and will be interesting to see. I have a brother in second grade. He is very creative so I will be interested to see what these students will be making and come up with.

#### Student Representative Sid

Great presentations again. I have known Mr. WH since the year he started. It is crazy it has been eight years. He is totally capable of pulling this off. It is a really cool concept.

#### Commissioner Dooley

Thank you for the outstanding presentations this evening. The pictures were incredible. The Student Representatives did a really good job portraying those two parks as far as the beauty.

It is a rousing endorsement of the teacher Nick. I do want to be involved in the We CAN program to watch and see the student's creativity. It is going to be a really neat thing, and the fourth graders will take ownership. I am grateful that we had the vision and approved the proposal.

Welcome to the team Swamy. We are looking forward to working with you. Thank you for your passion and expertise with parks. You will be a welcome addition.

Commissioner Dooley volunteered to do the Northwest Park presentation when it is time.

Thanks for a great meeting tonight.

Vice Chair Riggins

As the meeting comes to a close, I want to welcome Swamy again. The presentations were phenomenal, great job for your first time.

It is great to hear that everyone is using People's Express. A lot of people getting around the city, visiting parks, mall, getting something to eat, and doing whatever they want to do.

Have a great Labor Day.

**ADJOURNMENT**

A motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Dooley and seconded by Commissioner Talkacz.

**Voice Vote**

**Unanimous**

The meeting was adjourned by Vice Chair Riggins at 8:17p.m.

DATE APPROVED: \_\_\_\_\_

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Joseph, Chairperson

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Riggins, Vice Chairperson