



MINUTES
Recreation and Community Services Commission
Adjourned Regular Meeting
January 12, 2022

MEETING WAS CALLED TO ORDER at 6 p.m. by Vice Chairperson Dave Allen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE was led by Commissioner Veronica Lucio.

ADMINISTRATION OF OATH OF OFFICE: Council Member Vicky Stucky administered the Oath of Office to newly appointed Commissioner Robert Nelson.

ROLL CALL: PRESENT: Vice Chairperson Dave Allen
Commissioner Veronica Lucio
Commissioner Robert Nelson
Commissioner Stacy Valdez

ABSENT: Commissioner Ted Spaseff

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: Meeting of November 10, 2021. A motion was made by Commissioner Veronica Lucio and seconded by Commissioner Stacy Valdez to approve the minutes from the meeting of November 10, 2021. The motion was carried with a unanimous roll call vote with Commissioner Robert Nelson abstaining.

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND PRESENTATIONS:

Director Valarie Frost began her announcements by welcoming Mr. Robert Nelson to the Recreation and Community Services Commission.

Next, Ms. Frost shared that the position of Parks Superintendent was still vacant. A recruitment was completed in early December, but the selected candidate declined the city's conditional offer to employ. A second recruitment process to fill the position is underway with the intention of having the position filled in early April. Ms. Frost advised the commission that until the position is filled, Kevin Bright has assumed leadership of the Environmental Resources Division.

It was said that the RCS department had welcomed two new full-time employees. Romaldo Perez Jr. was promoted from a Maintenance Trainee to a Park Maintenance Worker assigned at Rynerson Park, and Susan Peebles—who was a Community Services Specialist at Bloomfield Park—began her full time tenure with the city as the Community Services Supervisor for Mayfair and San Martin Parks.

To reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19 throughout the Lakewood Youth Sports program, Ms. Frost announced that the start of the 2022 basketball season was delayed. Practices were previously scheduled to start with the New Year, but are now scheduled to begin on Saturday, January 22. Basketball games will begin on Saturday, February 12, and the season will run through Saturday, April 2.

Ms. Frost shared that adult sports registration for softball and volleyball was underway, but games were not scheduled until February.

It was said that staff was looking to schedule LYS and adult sports programs at a time when COVID-19 case rates have declined, and testing sites are more readily available for participants, volunteer coaches and staff.

The commission was informed that in light of the increased number of COVID-19 cases, the Lakewood Youth Hall of Fame Board of Electors meeting was moved from Thursday, January 13 to Thursday, February 3. In addition, the Lakewood Youth Hall of Fame banquet, previously scheduled for Monday, February 28 was postponed to Friday, April 1, at Mayfair Park on the Lisa Fernandez Field.

Ms. Frost shared that Mayfair Park had fully reopened to the public after the completed installation of the environmentally-friendly stormwater capture project and underground reservoir. In addition to the stormwater capture facility, the tennis courts were renovated, and all baseball/softball fields were renovated—with new irrigation lines and turf appropriate for athletic use. It was said that the tennis courts were renamed by the Lakewood City Council in honor of the late Howard L. Chambers, who was Lakewood’s city manager for 41 years. The Howard L. Chambers Municipal Tennis Courts and ballfields are open to the public for use on a drop-in basis with preference of use provided to scheduled contract classes and permitted use for organized youth and adult sports programs.

“Lakewood Online,” the city’s website at lakewoodcity.org, was redesigned. Ms. Frost reported that new features include:

- Large menus to see all options for a section at a glance
- Buttons for the most common tasks are now on the home page
- News stories, events, and important city topics are also displayed on the home page
- Built-in accessibility for visually impaired users, and one-click language translation
- Form creation to transform more tasks currently done with paper to digital forms

The commission was asked to take a tour of the new website and provide feedback to staff.

Next, Ms. Frost informed the commission that design concepts for 11 street medians and one street panel were underway and will include irrigation and landscape improvements along major thoroughfares throughout the city. Much of the improvements are slated for the medians along Del Amo Blvd. from east to west. It was said that preliminary schematic concepts were due to the city in the coming weeks and staff will then have an opportunity to provide comments and recommendations. The commission was informed that improvements to these streetscapes were expected to be completed by the end of the calendar year. Ms. Frost noted that funds from the city’s American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) allocation would support this capital improvement project.

In closing, Ms. Frost provided the commission with an update about the city’s effort to support the community with COVID-19 concerns. In terms of vaccines, she mentioned that the L.A. County

Department of Public Health’s Mobile Vaccine Unit would offer a vaccine clinic at the Weingart Senior Center on Thursday, Jan. 20 from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. A second vaccine clinic was said to be scheduled for Friday, February 25 at the Burns Community Center. Ms. Frost shared that a COVID-19 testing site, coordinated by the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department, was slated to open at Bloomfield Park. She mentioned that details—including days and times of operation—were not yet confirmed. Testing will be free for community members. It was said that residents can get up to date information on COVID-19 related issues, including testing locations and appointments for the vaccine on the city’s website.

Ms. Frost confirmed for Commissioner Nelson that the Bloomfield Park testing site is a walk-up site that does not take appointments. She informed him that the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department was coordinating the testing sites.

Vice Chairperson Dave Allen shared that he attended the Ugly Sweater Party at the Weingart Senior Center in December. He said it was marvelous and executed efficiently. He thanked Community Services Supervisor Sabrina Junkin and staff for all of their hard work.

Commissioner Lucio shared that she attended the Tree Lighting Ceremony with her family. She mentioned that the event was fun and very well organized. She commended the staff who were working the game booths for their patience and kindness.

Commissioner Valdez shared that she was thankful there was a new COVID-19 testing site available in Lakewood to help alleviate the crowds at other nearby sites. Additionally, she shared that she had recently volunteered to assist with the Project Shepherd program. She mentioned it was well organized and that it was heartwarming to witness the gratitude of the program recipients.

REPORTS:

1. Spring Programs and Events

Community Services Manager Nancy Hitt announced that the spring catalog featured a photo of the Monte Verde Park lodge, with a collage of words depicting family, togetherness and nature. She shared that the spring catalog would be posted online January 14, with reminder postcards mailed to residents. She urged the commission to check out the interactive catalog that will be posted for the first time. Although catalogs will not be mailed to residents, it was said that a limited amount of printed catalogs would be available for pick up at City Hall, parks and community centers. Classes were said to begin February 7 and run through June.

Ms. Hitt informed the commission that the Pan Am Fiesta, held Mother’s Day weekend, was scheduled to return to its traditional location on the grass at Mayfair Park Thursday, May 5 through Sunday, May 8, and include the traditional activities of carnival rides, entertainment, craft vendors and food.

FUN-Tastic Family Nights were said to be returning in spring at The Centre with one event each month, featuring entertainment and dinner. On Friday, February 18, Paramount Pets will allow participants to interact with reptiles. On Friday, March 18, Arty Loon

returns with his amazing interactive and close up magic. Friday, May 20, Talewise’s Pirates show will bring high-energy storytelling and interactive science demonstrations, and on Friday, June 17 Wonder Woman and Spiderman will offer a superhero training course to participants of all ages.

Ms. Hitt announced that the Play at Palms series will offer Movie Night Under the Stars with Scoob on February 11 and Godzilla vs. Kong on March 11. Additionally, she shared that the popular spring Community Car Show returns with events on April 8, May 13 and June 10.

Mother Son Date Night was said to be returning to the Lakewood Youth Center on March 26, and Daddy Daughter Date Night returns to the Centre on April 1, both with the theme of “Travel through the Decades.” Mother Son Date Night will feature contests and inflatables, while Daddy Daughter Date Night will feature a semi-formal dance.

Ms. Hitt reported that four Travel Trips were planned for the spring, including a trip to the GRAMMY Museum on February 26, the Palm Spring Aerial Tramway on March 19, the J. Paul Getty Museum on April 9, and a trip to see “Tootsie” on May 15.

It was said that spring break activities were scheduled to occur at Lakewood Parks April 5-9 if Public Health regulations allow.

The commission was informed that Active+ classes at Burns Community Center were fully open, with Pickleball, Stretch Classes and Aerobics Classes, and Chair Volleyball. She shared that staff had planned a Bunco Party, Canvas and Cupcake Party and two AARP Smart Driver courses during spring.

Ms. Hitt concluded her report by sharing that the Weingart Senior Center was fully open with fitness classes, billiards, dance classes, crafts, and the fitness room. She shared that Bingo and Karaoke had reopened and are offered twice per month. It was said that staff will celebrate Easter by inviting grandchildren and great-grandchildren to dye eggs at the annual Easter Eggstravaganza on Wednesday, April 13. Ms. Hitt noted that although staff was hoping to offer congregate dining beginning in December, due to the COVID surge, walk up frozen meal service would continue to be provided until the Human Resources Association receives permission to hold in-person dining again.

Ms. Hitt assured Commissioner Lucio that staff is working diligently to ensure that the older population can still access the recreation catalog despite it being online. She informed her that postcards are mailed to residents detailing how to access the online catalog and informed her that staff has printed catalogs available at City Hall and parks and community centers which can be mailed to residents upon request.

The commission received and filed the report on spring programs and events.

2. Teen Programs Annual Report

Community Services Supervisor Kelly Garnetti informed the commission that as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, and for the safety of the participants, the 2021 program calendar for teen programming was put on hold throughout the winter and spring months. Programming returned at the beginning of the 2021-2022 school year. To begin the school year, both the Teen Resource Center and the Lakewood Youth Center continued to provide a safe, fun environment for teens to hang out and socialize with friends. Ms. Garnetti reported that the Teen Resource Center at Bloomfield Park had resumed daily drop in activities and monthly special events, as well as homework assistance and use of the center's computers, gaming consoles and access to the snack bar. It was said that the Youth Center offered daily drop in use of the game room and its amenities, weekly Fusion Friday activities and special events. To kick off the 2021- 2022 school year, and to bring awareness to the programs offered at the Youth Center, staff organized and hosted an open house event. Over 40 students and their parents attended the event. Participants were able to interact with staff, learn about the programs and sample day-to-day activities.

Ms. Garnetti noted that many of the students who continue to frequent the Youth Center for daily drop in programs are a result of the Open House event. She shared that the Youth Center averaged 15 teens a day and saw a significant increase in middle school students participating in daily programming.

It was said that in September, the Lakewood Teen Action Committee (LTAC) resumed in-person meetings. Staff continued to work diligently to rebuild the program and recruit new members as most previous participants have since graduated high school. Staff have experienced some limitations with recruiting teens on campus due to restrictions put in place by the schools. There are currently four active members of the program. It was said that LTAC members were working toward selecting volunteer opportunities for the remainder of the calendar year.

Ms. Garnetti informed the commission that the College Fair had made its return to The Centre for an in-person event. Nearly 400 students and their parents had the opportunity to speak to representatives from over 60 colleges and universities. An additional 100 colleges provided information for the College Resource Guide, which was made available on the city's website. Two college information sessions were offered – one in-person session at the Lakewood Youth Center and a second virtual session offered via Zoom. A total of three \$250 scholarships were awarded. Scholarships were sponsored by the Lakewood Teen Action Committee and Assembly Member Anthony Rendon.

It was said that the Youth in Government program was a new program set to launch during the 2021-2022 school year. The program would encourage the youth in Lakewood to immerse themselves in civic engagement and develop an understanding of civic values. Ms. Garnetti shared that the program had received minimal interest, and mentioned that staff plan to relaunch the program with new marketing strategies and community partnerships at the start of the 2022-2023 school year

Ms. Garnetti informed Commissioner Lucio that the majority of students who attend the Youth Center are from Bancroft Middle School and Lakewood High School.

Commissioner Nelson commended staff for creating and maintaining programs for teens that allowed for social interaction during the pandemic. He emphasized the importance of such programs and mentioned that it was comforting to see that these programs exist in Lakewood. He encouraged staff to continue with the same efforts moving forward.

Ms. Garnetti provided information regarding the Youth in Government program to Commissioner Valdez. She noted that the program accepted applications from August to October, and mentioned that the class would begin in January and continue through the remainder of the school year.

Vice Chairperson Allen thanked Ms. Garnetti and staff for all of their hard work and creative efforts throughout the pandemic.

Ms. Frost pointed out to the commission that Community Services Supervisor Joseph Vasquez, who oversees Bloomfield Park—which houses the Teen Resource Center—was in the audience. She mentioned that he shared the responsibility of teen programming for the community on the eastside of Lakewood.

The commission received and filed the annual report on teen programs.

3. Project Shepherd Program Recap

Community Services Supervisor Caitlin Cariaso reported that registration for the Holiday Assistance Program began on November 3 and continued through November 17 at the Burns Community Center and Palms Park. Palms Park registered 134 families, while the Burns Community Center registered 283 families for a total of 417 families registered in 2021. In 2020, it was said that Project Shepherd had 436 families register for holiday assistance, representing a 4% decrease in registration from the year prior. Ms. Cariaso displayed slides with a graph reflecting the registration numbers over the past 10 years, pointing out the peak in 2011 where 536 families were assisted. She noted that the program saw a dramatic increase in registration in 2020—due to families facing hardship during the pandemic—and higher than average numbers in 2021.

It was said that in 2021 Project Shepherd budgeted to purchase grocery gift cards for Thanksgiving for the second year. Ms. Cariaso explained that this was an extra service implemented by staff in 2020 because of the pandemic. She explained that families were given grocery store gift cards upon registering for the program, and shared that they were very appreciative of the extra benefit. A slide depicting a chart detailing the dollar amount given to each family based on the number of people in their household was displayed for the commission.

Golden State Water, LA County Supervisor Janice Hahn and Grocery Outlet were said to be great supporters of the holiday program. Golden State water donated money for turkeys

and food, Janice Hahn donated money for grocery gift cards and holiday food items, and Grocery Outlet donated grocery bags to help distribute personal care items.

Ms. Cariaso provided the commission with information regarding the Teddy Bear Tree Program. She shared that this program allows residents to pick the specific child recipient of their choice, and purchase the gift that child desires to receive. In 2021, physical paper bears were available at Lakewood City Hall, Burns Community Center and a variety of businesses in Lakewood. In addition, there were two virtual options for residents to purchase gifts, an Amazon Wish List and a virtual toy donation on the city website. Both of these options were very successful in generating gifts for the program. The Amazon list contributed 340 gifts and online donations totaled over \$6,900.

In addition to the teddy bear tree gifts, Ms. Cariaso shared that there were 40 scooters, 3 tricycles, 2 bicycles and 45 helmets that were given to specific children registered for the program.

The commission was informed that Project Shepherd receives numerous monetary donations as the holiday program approaches. It was said that a large amount is received from residents through the request that is mailed with the city's utility bill, Lakewood Briefs and from online donations. Ms. Cariaso stated that 2021 was the eighth year that Project Shepherd had offered a sponsorship opportunity to raise funds for the program. Through sponsorships, Project Shepherd was able to raise \$35,149. She shared a slide displaying the sponsors for 2021 and provided information on the various levels of sponsorship.

It was said that volunteers play a major role in the success of the program. In 2021, a group of 65 volunteers contributed 207.5 hours of service to help pack and distribute the items given to participants. All volunteers were still required to wear masks, and stay socially distanced while inside the warehouse. Distribution was said to have taken place at the Lakewood Youth Center on Friday, December 17 and Saturday, December 18. Participants were checked in and given their items on the service road in front of the building. Curbside pickup allowed for social distancing and a quick load of the items.

Ms. Cariaso shared that Project Shepherd continues to do home deliveries for seniors, the disabled, and families that have no transportation. In 2021, volunteers delivered 90 meals to families all over Lakewood.

Concerning the year round extension program, Ms. Cariaso reported that for the past couple of years, staff has seen an overall decrease in extension services, but last year that dramatically changed. In 2019, 102 families were served; in 2020, 335 families were served; and in 2021, 209 families were served. Help primarily consisted of emergency food and utility bill assistance. A family is typically given 2-3 boxes of food and a grocery store gift card. In 2021, the program spent \$7,043.22 on utility assistance. Other types of assistance given included diapers, toilet paper, cleaning supplies, personal care products, and bus tokens.

It was said that 2021 marked the eleventh year Project Shepherd has conducted a backpack program. In August, staff distributed 329 backpacks filled with schools supplies for school aged children and teens. This was said to be a 44% increase over 2020, when children were doing distanced learning at home.

Commissioner Lucio thanked staff for their work with the Project Shepherd program. She mentioned that she was amazed at the number of people who volunteered their time to assist. She shared her love for the excitement the children portray when collecting food for the program at school.

Commissioner Valdez thanked staff for allowing her to assist with program efforts in 2021. Ms. Cariaso thanked Ms. Valdez for volunteering her time.

Vice Chairperson Allen described Project Shepherd as one of Lakewood's crown jewels. He thanked Ms. Cariaso and staff for their hard work and dedication to the residents of the city. Ms. Cariaso informed Mr. Allen that the program received donations from both Mayfair and Lakewood High Schools.

The commission received and filed the report on Project Shepherd.

4. Activities and Maintenance Report No. 7

A written report and discussion of the Recreation and Community Services Department Programs, Services and Maintenance Activities for the month of December 2021 and a listing of upcoming activities for February 2022.

The Commission received and filed the report.

WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS:

1. Letter to Noel Muñoz, Employee of the Month for November 2021.

ORAL COMMUNICATIONS

ADJOURNMENT:

There being no further business brought before the Recreation and Community Services Commission, Vice Chairperson Allen adjourned the meeting at 6:45 p.m. to Wednesday, February 9, at 6 p.m. in the Maple Room.

Michelle Williams, Administrative Secretary
Recreation and Community Services Commission