



MINUTES
Recreation and Community Services Commission
Adjourned Regular Meeting
January 13, 2021

MEETING WAS CALLED TO ORDER at 6 p.m. by Vice Chairperson Kirk Real.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE was led by Director of Recreation and Community Services Valarie Frost.

ROLL CALL: PRESENT: Vice Chairperson Kirk Real (via Zoom)
Commissioner Dave Allen (via Zoom)
Commissioner Ted Spaseff (via Zoom)

ABSENT: Chairperson Winnie Heiss
Commissioner Stacy Valdez

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: Meeting of December 9, 2020. A motion was made by Commissioner Dave Allen and seconded by Commissioner Ted Spaseff to approve the minutes from the meeting of December 9, 2020. The motion was carried by unanimous roll call vote.

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND PRESENTATIONS:

Director Valarie Frost began her remarks by announcing that in the interest of public health, and because of the continued increase in COVID-19 cases region wide, City Hall was closed to the public for in-person visits. Ms. Frost stated that city services were still available by contacting city staff via phone, email or internet forms. It was said that according to the COVID-19 case summary report on the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health's website, there have been 5,381 cases of the coronavirus in Lakewood and 33 deaths of residents in the Lakewood community. Ms. Frost mentioned that in regards to the vaccine and inoculation of residents, staff have been informed by county and state health officials that they are working out plans to get dentist offices, pharmacies, and the National Guard involved in delivering the vaccine shots. It was said that the governor had recently announced that adults 65 and older were eligible to be vaccinated. Information regarding how residents can register to get vaccinated, and where vaccines are being made available, will be communicated to the public once the city is notified.

Ms. Frost reported that at a recent city council meeting, the City Manager brought forth to the Council a report on the California Voting Rights Act. She noted that the city currently elects its council members through an at-large election system in which each council member can reside anywhere in the city and are selected by voters of the entire city to provide city-wide representation. She shared that on November 30, 2020 the city received a letter challenging the city's current election method, asserting that the city's at-large election system violates the California Voting Rights Act. In response to this potential litigation, the council approved staff's recommendation to adopt a proposed resolution declaring its intention to transition from at-large to by-district city council elections and to authorize the mayor to sign an agreement with National Demographics Corporation to draft maps of proposed boundaries for those districts. Voting by district would begin with the election in March of 2022.

Next, Ms. Frost informed the commission that RCS had several personnel changes. First, she shared that Lisa Dalmatoff began as the department's newest Administrative Clerk on January 11. Lisa fills the vacancy created by Elizabeth Loera's promotion to the Public Safety Department. Additionally, she shared that department staff had recently completed the recruitment process to fill the position of Community Transportation Supervisor. It was said that after the completion of reference checks and other pre-employment qualification requirements, the new supervisor would start by February 8. Ms. Frost mentioned that staff was finalizing the recruitment announcement for the position of Community Services Supervisor to oversee The Centre operations. This vacancy, she noted, was created by the passing of RCS' beloved friend and colleague Gay Givens.

Lastly, Ms. Frost provided the commission with an update regarding the last commission meeting, where several members of the public attended and voiced concerns regarding Home Run Dog Park. She shared that staff was finalizing a survey of neighboring cities who also have dog parks, regarding their facility rules, regulations and policies. She added that staff was also consulting with Southeast Area Animal Control Authority (SEACCA), the city's animal control authority, to reconfirm their recommendations as it relates to having both a small and large dog park, and the enforcement of such in that regard. She shared that it was staff's hope to be able to have a response to the public by early February, and mentioned the commission would be provided with an update at that time.

Commissioner Ted Spaseff shared that he had the opportunity to work a shift at the Project Shepherd warehouse. He mentioned it was a very smooth operation and commended Community Services Supervisor Kelly Garnetti for her organization and leadership. He added that on his walk by the Burns Community Center, he witnessed the smooth operation of the meal delivery service. He commended Community Services Supervisor Caitlin Carioso for a job well done.

REPORTS:

1. Spring Programs and Catalog Preview

Community Services Manager Nancy Hitt reported on aspects of the Spring 2021 Recreation Catalog. Ms. Hitt reported that the cover of the 2021 Spring Recreation Catalog features the final edition of the "Fun" design series, where the words "Jump into Fun" along with photos of current activities are depicted within the letters. It was said that the 2021 spring catalog will be exclusively available online beginning Friday, January 15. Postcards directing residents to the website to view the catalog will be mailed to Lakewood homes January 13. Ms. Hitt shared that most classes and activities begin the week of February 1 and run through June. It was said that throughout the spring catalog, was an assortment of virtual classes and in-person outdoor dance and fitness classes, which were allowed by the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health (Public Health).

Ms. Hitt stated that the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has caused cancellations and disruptions of many recreation events and programs since March 2020. She mentioned that the trend has continued into 2021 beginning with the cancellation of Volunteer Day, which is typically held in April. It was said that if trends surrounding the virus change, especially given

the dissemination of a vaccine, staff would determine if the valued community event could be reinstated at a later date.

Next, Ms. Hitt announced that Lakewood's oldest community event, the Pan Am Fiesta, scheduled for Mother's Day weekend, was also predicted to be canceled for 2021. She informed the commission that if the traditional event does not happen as scheduled, a virtual Pan Am experience on the city's website would be provided for the community to enjoy, as similarly offered in 2020. It was said that the experience would feature Pan Am history and photo gallery, carnival rides, midway games, entertainment, carnival favorite treats, children's cultural activities, recognition of the Pan American Ambassadors, poster contest winners and poetry contest winners.

Ms. Hitt informed the commission of other event cancellations including, Earth Walk, Lakewood Youth Sports Coaches Recognition Event, Daddy-Daughter and Mother-Son Date Nights and the Lakewood Teen Action Committee Awards Banquet. Additionally, it was said that Arbor Day presentations would not be offered on-site at Lakewood schools, but the cast of Community Services Supervisors will instead provide a video version for classes to access with help from CityTV.

Ms. Hitt reported that FUN-Tastic Family Nights continue to be a popular family activity, offering engaging entertainment for everyone to enjoy. She shared that four virtual events were scheduled for the spring.

Concerning park programs, Ms. Hitt shared that if Public Health regulations allow, staff were prepared to offer spring vacation activities at city parks during spring recess from school, taking place April 5-9.

Concerning travel programs, Ms. Hitt reported that until venues are allowed to reopen and day trips can return, the department is providing participants with links to Southern California venues providing free or low cost virtual experiences with online tours, educational programming, online performances, interviews and many other unique opportunities.

With regards to older adult and Active+ programming, Ms. Hitt shared that in order to maintain the safety and health of Lakewood's senior population, senior recreational activities during the spring would continue to be limited. She noted that the in-person fitness classes, including step aerobics, stretching, walking club, and chair volleyball, were not available. As a result, she shared that the two fitness instructors had recorded aerobics classes and posted them on the Virtual Recreation page on the city's website. It was said that the competitive pickleball group, which normally attracts over 100 members, was allowed to reopen on Wednesday, June 10 following state and county guidelines, and attracted a small but regular group of participants. Ms. Hitt mentioned that this activity was required to close due to the updated Public Health Order on November 30, however, she shared that it is assumed that it will be one of the first activities to reopen once it is considered safe to do so. It was said that educational and social events, were still not allowed.

Next, Ms. Hitt reported that daily activities at the Weingart Senior Center normally include a variety of classes that keep older adults interested and engaged, however, the Weingart Senior Center is closed until Public Health guidelines allow for reopening. It was said that most activities were canceled, including the fitness room, staff-led fitness and dance classes, arts and crafts classes, and all seminars. Ms. Hitt informed the commission that plans were tentatively in place for drive-thru celebrations for Valentine’s Day, St. Patrick’s Day, Mother’s Day, and Cinco de Mayo.

Ms. Hitt confirmed for Commissioner Spaseff that information regarding sign-ups for free family programs could be found on the city’s website.

Commissioner Dave Allen commended staff for all of their hard work and dedication during the pandemic.

Vice Chairperson Kirk Real shared his relief that the Arbor Day presentation, although virtual, will continue despite the pandemic.

Ms. Frost informed the commission that city staff would provide an Arbor Day message to record and send to schools to forward to the children. She pointed out that physical distancing requirements would make it difficult for staff to produce a play.

The Commission received and filed the report.

2. Teen Programs Annual Report

Community Services Supervisor Kelly Garnetti provided information on activities and programs offered at the Teen Resource Center and the Lakewood Youth Center, as noted in the written report. Ms. Garnetti reported that the Teen Resource Center (TRC) at Bloomfield Park and the Lakewood Youth Center continue to offer a fun and safe environment for teens to hang out and socialize with their friends. She shared that the TRC continued to offer 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. Ms. Garnetti reported that the Youth Center provided teens with daily drop-in use of the game room, summer adventure series, and weekly Fusion Friday activities and special events, averaging 25 teens visiting the center a day.

Ms. Garnetti informed the commission that the Lakewood Teen Action Committee (LTAC) started its 2019-2020 year strong with 22 members participating in meetings, volunteer opportunities, and community service.

It was said that as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, and for the safety of the participants, the 2020 program calendars for teen programming were put on hold, and the TRC and the Youth Center closed their doors mid-March. Ms. Garnetti reported that although program staff at both facilities were unable to meet with teens in person, they periodically checked in with participants through wellness check phone calls. She shared that teen program participants

were also included in a postcard mailing sent out to residents as an effort to ensure that city staff are available to support them during these unprecedented times.

Ms. Garnetti reported that although LTAC could no longer meet in person, and celebrate the end of the year with a banquet, participants were still recognized for their service with certificates that were made available to pick up by appointment. She shared that the volunteer of the year, Kathalinne Gonzalez, was also celebrated and acknowledged for her devoted service.

Finally, Ms. Garnetti informed the commission that to continue supporting Lakewood's teens in their pursuit of higher education, the 20th annual College Fair went virtual for the year. Available on the city's website from October 13 to 27, 2020, students had the opportunity to connect with representatives from over 200 colleges and universities, take virtual college tours, view scholarship information and more. Live Zoom college information webinars designed for parents and students were said to have been featured. Ms. Garnetti shared that 269 students registered for the webinars, which took place on three different dates for convenience. Additionally, it was said that over 400 people viewed the Virtual College Fair information on the city's website

Vice Chairperson Real shared his appreciation for staff making the best of every situation during the pandemic.

The Commission received and filed the report.

3. Project Shepherd Program Recap

Community Services Supervisor Caitlin Cariaso displayed slides and provided an update on the Project Shepherd Program as noted in the written report. Ms. Cariaso reported that Project Shepherd completed its 48th year of assisting Lakewood residents who are unemployed, low income, or on public assistance. She provided the commission with a recap of the 2020 program year, reporting that registration for the 2020 holiday assistance program began on November 4 and continued through November 18 at the Burns Community Center and Palms Park. It was said that a total of 436 Lakewood families registered and received assistance. Palms Park registered 133 families, while the Burns Community Center registered 303 families.

Ms. Cariaso shared that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many standard operations of Project Shepherd were altered. Food drives did not take place, rather staff purchased food items to ensure lesser handling through donors, scouts, schools, staff and volunteers. Project Shepherd's annual giving campaign encouraged cash donations and utilized \$35,000 in CARES Act funding denoted for the holiday program. Augmenting the Christmas holiday program, those who registered also received gift cards for the intended purchase of Thanksgiving meal items. Additionally, it was said that this year Project Shepherd purchased and packed household care items including toilet paper, paper towels, laundry detergent, dish soap, sponges, and a bar of bath soap.

Ms. Carioso shared that Golden State Water had typically donated turkeys to Project Shepherd in years past. In 2020, they instead provided a donation of \$480 for the purchase of turkeys. It was said that Los Angeles County Supervisor Janice Hahn's office also donated \$1,500 to be used for Thanksgiving items. Additionally, Supervisor Hahn's office also donated \$2,500 for purchasing four-foot artificial Christmas Trees and \$25 Michael's gift cards for 25 seniors and 25 families.

Next, Ms. Carioso reported that the Rotary Club of Lakewood had assisted in promoting the purchase of toys from the Project Shepherd Amazon Wish List. There were many different options for online donations, including a virtual food drive, virtual toy drive, and virtual monetary donation drive. Ms. Carioso informed the commission that the Project Shepherd Amazon Wish List site was very successful with 302 toys purchased. Paper Teddy Bears with gifts were also returned to City Hall and Burns Community Center by members of the Lakewood community and by a number of city staff. It was said that online donations on the city website for the virtual food, toy and monetary drives totaled \$25,861. Ms. Carioso shared that the Teddy Bear Tree program allows residents to pick a specific child recipient and purchase the gift that child desires to receive. Out of the 744 gift requests, 725 or 97% of the specific requests were filled through donations. In addition to the Teddy Bear gifts, 50 scooters, 3 tricycles, 1 bicycle and 54 helmets were given to children.

Ms. Carioso announced that 2020 was the seventh year that Project Shepherd offered a sponsorship opportunity to raise funds for the program. There were four major sponsorships obtained through the program, including: Macy's, Farmers & Merchants Bank, Lakewood Jaycees and Janice Hahn, Los Angeles County Supervisor, 4th District. The total of all sponsor donations received was \$18,942.

The commission was informed that a limited number of Rotary Club of Lakewood volunteers and select community volunteers were scheduled to assist with packing boxes of food from December 9 to 16, and with distribution to participants on December 18 and 19. Ms. Carioso mentioned that with the food purchased directly from local grocers, the items arrived in cases, so volunteers were only needed to pack boxes, eliminating the need for sorting donations, resulting in fewer volunteers needed and for fewer hours. Approximately 47 volunteers contributed 191 hours assisting in the warehouse. It was said that Rotary members, using their own vehicles, made deliveries to seniors residing at the Candlewood Park Apartments and Whispering Fountains Apartments on Saturday, December 19. Clients not requiring a home delivery picked up their items by appointment in a curbside pickup format.

Ms. Carioso shared that through the Project Shepherd Extension Assistance Program, Lakewood residents in need are given assistance throughout the year with emergency food, grocery store gift cards and utility assistance. In 2020, the extension program spent \$10,934.64 on utility bill assistance, which was a 90% increase over 2019. It was said that CARES Act funding allowed the utility bill funding to be increased by \$5,000.

Ms. Carioso informed the commission that for the past several years, staff has seen an overall decrease in extension services, however, because of the pandemic, there was an increased need for assistance in 2020. In 2018, 110 families were given assistance and 102 families in 2019, however 335 families requested assistance in 2020.

It was said that the backpack program is an integral part of Project Shepherd. Ms. Carioso shared that in 2020, staff packed and distributed 229 backpacks and school supplies for school-age children and teens.

Lastly, Ms. Carioso reported that the RCS Department had instituted Park Alternative Learning Sites (PALS), which allows elementary school age children a COVID-friendly place to go during the school day to participate in distance learning while parents are at work. This program costs parents approximately \$130 per week. It was said that CARES Act funding allowed \$10,000 to be allocated to children in the PALS program if they applied through the Project Shepherd Program. In 2020, \$4,726.60 in funding was used towards PALS tuition.

Vice Chairperson Real commented that he could not believe it had been 48 years since the Project Shepherd program began. He stated that staff has risen to meet the needs of the community exquisitely.

Commissioner Allen shared that he had been involved with Project Shepherd for quite a while. He mentioned that Lakewood is a caring community and thanked staff for their hard work and dedication to the program.

Commissioner Spaseff shared that he was impressed with the highly organized pick up and delivery process. He too thanked staff for their hard work and effort.

The Commission received and filed the report.

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 December 2020 and a listing of upcoming activities for February 2021.

The Commission received and filed the report.

WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS

None.

ORAL COMMUNICATIONS:

None.

ADJOURNMENT:

There being no further business to be brought before the Recreation and Community Services Commission, Vice Chairperson Kirk Real adjourned the meeting at 6:41 p.m. to February 10, 2021 at 6 p.m. in the City Council Chambers.

Michelle Williams, Administrative Secretary
Recreation and Community Services Commission