



MINUTES
Recreation and Community Services Commission
Adjourned Regular Meeting
October 11, 2023

MEETING WAS CALLED TO ORDER at 6 p.m. by Chairperson Stacy Valdez.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE was led by Vice Chairperson Veronica Lucio.

ROLL CALL: PRESENT: Chairperson Stacy Valdez
Vice Chairperson Veronica Lucio
Commissioner Dave Allen
Commissioner Ted Spaseff

ABSENT: Commissioner Anitza Valles

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: Meeting of September 13, 2023. A motion was made by Commissioner Dave Allen and seconded by Vice Chairperson Veronica Lucio to approve the minutes from the meeting of September 13, 2023. The motion was carried with a unanimous roll call vote with Commissioner Ted Spaseff abstaining.

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND PRESENTATIONS:

Director Valarie Frost began her announcements by informing the commission that the city's contracted consultant, MIG, was well underway with the development of the city's Parks, Recreation and Community Services Long Range Plan. She mentioned that stakeholder interviews were conducted with City Council members, and the city manager, as well as with community stakeholders who had long tenure as residents, or who operate a business in the community. To create an avenue for the community to share their opinion regarding Lakewood's recreation facilities, parks, recreation programs and classes, and community events, a series of focus group meetings were held. It was said that these scheduled focus group meetings were designed to target specific groups within the population, and provide a forum for discussion amongst individuals who share a common interest. Ms. Frost reported that on Wednesday, October 4, two focus group meetings were held via Zoom, one for businesses in the Lakewood community, and one for community youth and adult sports organizations. On Friday, October 6, a focus group meeting took place, also via Zoom, for community-based organizations, including city commissioners. Ms. Frost shared that later that evening on October 6, a community-wide focus group meeting was held at Palms Park. It was said that about 45 people were in attendance. Ms. Frost shared that all Lakewood service clubs were extended an invitation to attend a focus group lunch meeting with MIG, hosted by the Rotary Club of Lakewood on behalf of the city, on Thursday, October 12. Ms. Frost shared that in addition to the focus group meetings, a community-wide survey was being developed. MIG will also host booths at upcoming city events to provide residents with an opportunity to share their thoughts and opinions on Lakewood's recreation facilities, parks, recreation programs and classes, and community events, and how they are maintained. Ms. Frost noted that MIG would also assist the city with promoting the long-range plan through a website. The website will provide residents with an additional platform to post their thoughts and opinions.

Next, Ms. Frost informed the commission that she, along with Parks Superintendent Abel Andrade, met with Sonya Jahn, the current interim caretaker at the Lakewood Equestrian Center (LEC) on Wednesday, October 11. It was said that Ms. Jahn's caretaker agreement ends with the city on Tuesday, October 31, and that she had been notified that the city had made the decision not to renew the contract. Ms. Frost mentioned that a letter, informing facility trainers, vendors, and select boarders of the change, was emailed on Wednesday, October 11. She shared that the city was slated to potentially take over equestrian center operations beginning Wednesday, November 1. It was said that the city would bring in an equestrian specialist by the name of D. Joy Gould who will serve as the equestrian center manager. Ms. Frost mentioned that Ms. Gould would provide consultation to the city, and employ and manage those who care for the horses, and city staff would oversee administration—including the development of a boarder agreement, vendor agreement, and trainer agreement—and grounds maintenance at the facility. The commission was informed that at the October 24 City Council meeting, the LEC transition plan would be presented to City Council members so that staff could appropriate the necessary funds for both expenses and revenues.

Parks Superintendent Abel Andrade announced that Park Maintenance Worker Nancy Lopez had retired after many years of service with the city.

Assistant Director Kevin Bright provided information on programming and upcoming events. Mr. Bright reported that the third annual Fest-Of-All multicultural event was slated to take place on Saturday, October 1 at Lakewood Center. He mentioned that the event was in its final preparation stages and would be presented with a full slate of cultural performances and bands, a multicultural food court, children's cultural booth, a family fun zone, and community booths and vendors. It was said the event kicks off at 2 p.m. in the west parking lot, just south of El Torito, and will continue until 8 p.m.

Secondly, Mr. Bright announced the roll-out of a new web-based program called My Senior Center at the Weingart Senior Center and the Burns Community Center. This program will allow seniors and older adults to sign-in by swiping in to each center for both drop-in and pre-registration programs. Mr. Bright shared that phase one of the roll out of the My Senior Center program would provide outreach and communication to senior event-goers and will allow for better tracking and input with regard to the program offerings as well as reporting attendance numbers for reports to council and commission. Mr. Bright noted that phase two of the program would occur at the end of the year when the transit module will be employed. The transit module will allow DASH Transit staff to register clients, assign routes, set appointments, and better manage the dispatch process, as well as driver and route management. It was said that this program would help to modernize all of the department's senior offerings. Over the coming weeks, staff will orient all users and input them into the system to prepare for the limited rollout on November 6. Mr. Bright noted that the full rollout would take place on November 27, with the Dash Transit rollout remaining tentative.

Commissioner Dave Allen thanked Community Services Manager, and Emergency Manager, Chuck Martucci for his role in the annual Emergency Preparedness Expo.

Commissioner Ted Spaseff shared that he attended both the Senior Craft Fair and the College Fair and shared that both events were excellent and had a great turn out. He mentioned that his grandson was playing in the Lakewood Youth Sports program and noted that it was very convenient to have all games take place at the same park. Lastly, he shared that he attended the October 6 Community Focus Group Meeting and mentioned that there were many positive comments, and that staff did a great job facilitating the meeting.

REPORTS:

1. Park Maintenance Annual Report

Environmental Resources Division Supervisor Mike Cracium displayed slides and provided the commission with an update on park maintenance activities in 2023. Mr. Cracium informed the commission that the park maintenance branch was one of the largest in the city. He proceeded to list the many responsibilities of park maintenance staff as noted in the written report.

Mr. Cracium provided information regarding Park Maintenance projects completed in 2023, including renovating the planters at Bolivar and Palms Parks, and throughout the Civic Center Complex; and purchasing and installing high-quality concrete benches and installing over 17,000 square feet of sod at the small dog park at Home Run Dog Park.

Next, Mr. Cracium reported that in October 2022, Odyssey STEM Academy High School in Lakewood approached the city to volunteer their time. A volunteer group by the name of the “Tree Huggers” has since volunteered on one Saturday of every month on Phase III of the city’s nature trail. They removed tree suckers, performed weed abatement, and cleaned debris. It was said that they have also participated in Earth Walk and Volunteer Day. The group of students was recognized at Lakewood Celebrates with a volunteer award for their dedication.

Lastly, Mr. Cracium then introduced the commission to the many ERD staff members in the audience.

Mr. Cracium informed Commissioner Allen that the St. Augustine grass at Home Run Dog Park was top notch and should last for many years to come.

Ms. Frost informed Commissioner Allen that JPIA would go out to city parks in the coming months to conduct facility audits and review Playground Safety Inspections.

Vice Chairperson Lucio commented that the parks look amazing and are very well maintained. She thanked the Park Maintenance staff for their hard work and dedication.

Commissioner Ted Spaseff thanked Park Maintenance staff for doing a superb job in maintaining all city parks and facilities. He mentioned that it was greatly appreciated by all.

Chairperson Stacy Valdez echoed Commissioner Spaseff’s sentiments. She thanked staff

for their efforts.

The Commission received and filed the annual report on Park Maintenance.

2. Adaptive Recreation and Special Olympics Annual Report

Community Services Supervisor Noel Munoz displayed slides and provided information on the Adaptive Recreation Program (ARP) and Special Olympics programs during 2023. Mr. Munoz provided details on both programs as noted in the written report.

Mr. Munoz informed the commission that 2023 has been a remarkable one for the ARP and Special Olympics programs. He shared that both have witnessed significant growth in terms of participant engagement, as well as a resurgence in Special Olympics, due to the post-pandemic competitions and training opportunities offered to the athletes and coaches alike. It was said that in recognition of their hard work throughout the season, Team Lakewood was graciously invited by Special Olympics Southern California (SOSC) to take the Mud Dogs Bocce team and 49ers Basketball team to the Summer State Games held at Cal State Long Beach. Details regarding the two events were provided by Mr. Munoz as noted in the written report.

Mr. Munoz reported on ARP special events held in 2023. He shared that ARP had displayed consistent engagement throughout all four seasons, with an average of 22 registered participants spanning across the spring, winter, summer, and fall sessions. Notably, he mentioned that ARP dances attracted an average of 50 enthusiastic participants, while destination events, such as Long Beach State baseball night, cosmic bowling, and ARP dinner and a movie, maintained a steady participation rate of 25 individuals. Moreover, it was said that Special Olympics athletes had displayed commendable commitment and involvement. Weekly practices saw an impressive average of 45 participants, emphasizing the dedication of athletes and volunteers alike. The tournaments organized by SOSC, consistently drew 25 Lakewood athletes per event. Special mention was made of the Special Olympics Summer Games, which saw 16 hardworking Lakewood athletes competing on a grand stage against other teams from Southern California.

Mr. Munoz concluded his report by informing the commission that it was important to recognize the support extended by the Lakewood Women's Club to the Adaptive Recreation Program in 2023. It was said that their commitment and involvement were instrumental in the success of several events such as the ARP Prom, Luau, BBQ and Pool Party, providing food and resources that enhanced the overall experience for the participants.

Vice Chairperson Lucio shared that at the school where she teaches, there is a large Multiple Myeloma and Multiple Sclerosis population. She mentioned that it was great to know that they will have such amazing programs to be a part of as they age out of their current programs.

Commissioner Allen commended Community Services Manager Chuck Martucci for

starting the Adaptive Recreation Program back in 1981. Mr. Munoz confirmed for Commissioner Allen that the program and program staff are top notch and as such, the program has continued to see an increase in attendance and participation numbers.

Commissioner Spaseff mentioned that the program is fantastic for all participants, and even better for their parents, who get a much needed break while their children enjoy safe and supervised fun. He shared that he thoroughly enjoyed reading the Special Olympic athlete biographies that were included in the promotion of the fundraiser event. He commented out of all the many city programs, that he was most proud of the ARP and Special Olympics programs, noting that Mr. Martucci and his successors continue to make it better each year.

The Commission received and filed the annual report on Adaptive Recreation and Special Olympics.

3. Activities and Maintenance Report No. 4

A written report and discussion of the Recreation and Community Services Department Programs, Services and Maintenance Activities for the month of September 2023 and a listing of upcoming activities for November 2023.

The Commission received and filed the report.

WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS:

1. Letters to Madison Yarak and Brian Garvey, Co-Employees of the Month for August 2023.

ORAL COMMUNICATIONS: Lakewood resident Ben Chavez

ADJOURNMENT:

There being no further business brought before the Recreation and Community Services Commission, Chairperson Valdez adjourned the meeting at 6:55 p.m. to Wednesday, November 8 at 6 p.m. in the Council Chambers.

Michelle Williams, Administrative Secretary
Recreation and Community Services Commission