



MINUTES  
Recreation and Community Services Commission  
Adjourned Regular Meeting  
January 10, 2024

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

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE was led by Commissioner Anitza Valles.

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

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: Meeting of November 8, 2023. A motion was made by Commissioner Ted Spaseff and seconded by Vice Chairperson Veronica Lucio to approve the minutes from the meeting of November 8, 2023. The motion was carried with a unanimous roll call vote.

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND PRESENTATIONS:

Assistant Director Kevin Bright provided information on programming and upcoming events. He informed the commission that the Lakewood Youth Hall of Fame Board of Electors Meeting would take place at 5:30 p.m. on Thursday, January 11 in the Executive Board Room. It was said that the meeting would open with a McDonald's feast, sponsored by Piazza Family McDonald's Restaurants, and would see the electors deliberate and select the 42nd class of athletes to the Lakewood Youth Hall of Fame. Mr. Bright noted that an Athlete of the Year, and upwards of two dozen performers of the year and special achievement awards, would be named at the meeting.

Mr. Bright reported that the Lakewood Youth Hall of Fame Banquet and Awards Ceremony would take place on Monday, February 27 in The Centre Ballroom. It was said that the commission would receive a full report from staff at the next commission meeting.

Mr. Bright informed the commission that Community Services Supervisor Veronica Ramirez had accepted a promotion with another city, and noted that a recruitment had opened to fill the position.

Mr. Bright shared that the Parks, Recreation and Community Services Long Range Plan continued to progress. It was said that the city's contracted consultant, MIG, had been hosting community pop-up booths to garner input from residents at recreation events. In November and December they were at the Play-at-Palms Harvest Fest and the Tree Lighting Ceremony, respectively. Mr. Bright informed the commission that later in the month, they will set up community input booths at Mayfair Park on an evening in which the park is activated with classes and sports programming, and at Bolivar Park to specifically target LYS families.

Finally, Mr. Bright announced that the community survey had officially launched. He shared that it was featured on the Recreation Catalog post card, which was mailed to Lakewood residents. It was said that the survey campaign would be heavily promoted and would be included in the Lakewood eMag, Lakewood Living Magazine, on social media posts, and more. Mr. Bright mentioned that MIG and staff were excited to receive responses that will help to steer the long-range plan.

Parks Superintendent Abel Andrade informed the commission of two Environmental Resources Division projects that will begin in January. He shared that staff secured a grant for \$110,000 through the Central Basin Municipal Water District for a water efficiency project. Mr. Andrade informed the commission that this project would allow staff to upgrade Boyar, Del Valle, and San Martin Parks with flow sensors, master valves and smart sense irrigation controllers. He noted that the project would be complete in mid-March. Additionally, Mr. Andrade reported that staff would begin a new landscape installation at the George Nye Library. Together with the Public Works department, staff have made exterior repairs to the building, and it was said that the landscape is overdue for a redesign. The commission was informed that staff would begin the landscape work at the library in the coming week.

Commissioner Dave Allen commented that he liked the RCS hiring postcards that were mailed to residents. He mentioned that staff did a great job designing them.

Commissioner Ted Spaseff mentioned that he attended the Tree Lighting Event and said it was a great event, with tons of people in attendance. He commented that MIG's booth at the event was very active, and the team ushered many residents into their booth to gather community input. He shared that he also attended the Senior Holiday Luncheon and mentioned that it was a wonderful event and that Commissioner Allen did a great job as the emcee. He commended Community Services Supervisors Caitlin Carioso and Kelly Garnetti for the efforts with the Project Shepherd program and added that he enjoyed helping pack boxes of food for the program recipients. Lastly, he shared that he attended the Senior Ugly Christmas Sweater Party at the Weingart Senior Center and commented that it was a lot of fun and had a great turnout.

Vice Chairperson Veronica Lucio thanked Ms. Carioso for her hard work and efforts with the Project Shepherd program.

## REPORTS:

### **1. Spring Programs and Events**

Community Services Manager Nancy Hitt reported that the 2024 Spring Recreation Catalog highlights spring activities and events, such as Lakewood Youth Sports basketball and the Pan Am Fiesta, and gives a nod to participants at the Weingart Senior Center. It was said that the new catalog featured an exciting variety of classes, programs and community events guaranteed to engage the entire family. Ms. Hitt informed the commission that the catalog would be posted online on Friday, January 12, at which time registration for recreation classes will open for residents. Non-resident registration opens

on Monday, January 22. Most classes and activities begin the week of Monday, February 5.

Ms. Hitt provided the commission with details regarding programs and events such as the Pan Am Fiesta, upcoming FUN-Tastic Family Nights, Play at Palms events, Mother-Son-Date Night, Daddy-Daughter Date Night and Earth Walk, as noted in the written report.

Ms. Hitt reported that spring vacation activities would be offered at city parks during spring recess from school, taking place April 1-5. She shared that programmed activities would include a variety of arts and crafts, outdoor sports, indoor games and specialized activities, and an excursion to Knott's Berry Farm.

Information regarding upcoming travel trips, and older adult and Active+ programming was shared with the commission as noted in the written report.

Finally, Ms. Hitt provided the commission with details regarding the 2024 Lakewood Volunteer Day taking place on Saturday, April 13. She noted that the event would once again demonstrate how Lakewood supports aging and disabled residents through neighbors helping neighbors.

Mr. Bright confirmed for Commissioner Spaseff that contract classes were at full registration and showed no significant drop from pre-pandemic registrations.

Commissioner Allen said that he loves the longevity in RCS programs. He shared that years ago, he and his daughter enjoyed many Daddy-Daughter date nights.

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

## **2. Teen Programs Annual Report**

Community Services Supervisor Kelly Garnetti displayed slides and provided details regarding teen programs in 2023. Ms. Garnetti reported that the Teen Resource Center (TRC) at Bloomfield Park, and the Lakewood Youth Center (LYC) at Del Valle Park, each offer a diverse palette of programs, while integrating new opportunities for the community's teen population. Details regarding programming and events offered at both the TRC and the LYC, as well as hours and days of operation, were provided to the commission as noted in the written report.

Ms. Garnetti informed the commission that in 2023, a rejuvenated Junior Rec Leader Program offered teens ages 13 to 15 the opportunity to gain work experience volunteering at parks and with special events during the summer season. It was said that the five-week program provided training in customer service, park maintenance, program marketing and special events. Eleven teens were said to have completed the program and were recognized with an end of program celebration, receiving a certificate of completion and acknowledgements from members of the City Council.

Ms. Garnetti shared that to kick off the 2023-2024 school year, and to bring awareness to the programs offered at the LYC, staff organized an open house event on September 15, 2023. Participants interacted with staff and learned about the programs offered, sampled day-to-day activities, and had the opportunity to register for additional programming throughout the year.

Following the success of the Junior Rec Leader Program during the summer, it was said that Youth Center staff added similar opportunities to teens participating in the 2023-2024 Lakewood Teen Action Committee (LTAC) program year. Teen volunteers were provided opportunities to assist at parks on the weekends to gain work experience in addition to volunteering at special events throughout the year. Ms. Garnetti noted that the Teen Life Skills series was also offered in conjunction with the LTAC program to help teens develop a sense of adulthood and responsibility.

Finally, Ms. Garnetti provided the commission with a recap of the 2023 College Fair, which took place at The Centre on October 10, as noted in the written report.

Vice Chairperson Lucio commented that she was thankful to hear that teen programs included the teaching of essential skills through mock interviews and practice with resume writing.

Commissioner Spaseff thanked Ms. Garnetti for her report. He shared that his grandson was a member of the Jr. Recreation Leader Program.

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

### **3. Project Shepherd Program Recap**

Community Services Supervisor Caitlin Cariaso reported that Project Shepherd had completed its 51<sup>st</sup> year of assisting Lakewood residents. Ms. Cariaso shared that registration for the Holiday Assistance Program began on November 1 and continued through November 15 at the Burns Community Center and Palms Park. Palms Park registered 126 families, while the Burns Community Center registered 341 families for a total of 467 families registered in 2023.

Ms. Cariaso informed the commission that the Boy Scouts of America food collection generated hundreds of boxes of food items, and 13 Lakewood schools participated in food drives for the program, donating 412 boxes of food and 316 grocery gift cards. It was said that food collected from both the boy scouts and the schools would be utilized for the year-round pantries at Burns Community Center and Palms Park.

Ms. Cariaso reported that Project Shepherd had purchased \$33,713.04 in food and household care items, and \$27,146 worth of grocery gift cards from local stores to be utilized for the holiday program. She provided details regarding the different options for

online donations, including a virtual food drive, virtual toy drive, and virtual monetary donation drive. It was said that online donations on the city's website for the virtual food, toy and monetary drives totaled \$9,600. In addition, Golden State Water provided a donation of \$480 for the purchase of gift cards for fresh food items, such as turkeys. Ms. Cariaso shared that approximately 91 volunteers contributed 359 hours assisting in the warehouse, packing boxes and distributing and delivering them to residents in need.

Information regarding the Teddy Bear Tree Program, scooter and helmet purchases, the Backpack Program, and recreation scholarships was provided as noted in the written report.

Lastly, Ms. Cariaso provided information regarding the Project Shepherd Extension Program. She shared that the program provides help with emergency food and utility bill assistance. It was said that in 2023, the extension program assisted 275 families and provided \$5,876.23 in utility bill assistance, which was said to be a 22% decrease from 2022.

Ms. Cariaso confirmed for Commissioner Anitza Valles that the recreation scholarships were for program registration fees only and did not cover costs for materials or equipment.

Commissioner Allen said that this program takes a lot of coordination and true grit. He commended Ms. Cariaso and her staff for all of their hard work.

Chairperson Spaseff said that as a volunteer he knows how much a well-organized program will keep volunteers coming back to volunteer again. He thanked Ms. Cariaso and staff for their hard work and effort in maintaining such a successful and highly organized program over the years.

Chairperson Stacy Valdez shared that she had volunteered to help with packing boxes of food and making home deliveries during the holiday program. She mentioned how heartwarming it was to see how appreciative program recipients were for the extra help during the holidays.

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 2023 and a listing of upcoming activities for February 2024.

The Commission received and filed the report.

#### **WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS:**

1. Letter to Jacob Cervantes, Employee of the Month for November 2023.

ORAL COMMUNICATIONS

ADJOURNMENT:

There being no further business brought before the Recreation and Community Services Commission, Chairperson Valdez adjourned the meeting at 6:40 p.m. to Wednesday, February 14 at 6 p.m. in the Council Chambers.

Michelle Williams, Administrative Secretary  
Recreation and Community Services Commission