



**CITY OF NOVATO**  
PARKS & RECREATION

**Recreation, Cultural and Community Services Advisory Commission**

**SPECIAL MEETING**

**Minutes**

**Thursday, November 8, 2023 - 6:00 PM**

**A. CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL**

The meeting was called to order by Chair Lacey at 6:00 PM.

**Commissioners Present:** Chair Erin Lacey, Dennis Bentley, Suzanne Crow, Betsy Ricketts, Zachary Schmechel, Beverley Winsor

**Commissioners Absent:** Emily Larsen, Mavi Pilloton

**Staff Present:** Director of Parks, Recreation, and Community Services Katie Gauntlett; Community Services Division Manager Drew Bendickson; Recreation Division Manager Alexandra Kambur

**B. APPROVAL OF FINAL AGENDA**

**Commission Action:** Upon motion by Commissioner Bentley and seconded by Commissioner Crow, the Commission voted 7-0-0-2 to approve the final agenda.

**Ayes:** Bentley, Crow, Lacey, Ricketts, Schmechel, Weber, Winsor

**Noes:** None

**Abstain:** None

**Absent:** Larsen, Pilloton

**Motion Carried**

**C. PUBLIC COMMENT**

- Stephanie Simos

## D. CONSENT ITEMS

### D.1. APPROVAL OF THE MEETING MINUTES

**Commission Action:** Upon motion by Commissioner Crow and seconded by Commissioner Bentley, the Commission voted 6-0-1-2 to approve the meeting minutes from the Recreation, Cultural, and Community Services Advisory Commission Special Meeting from August 31, 2023.

**Ayes:** Bentley, Crow, Lacey, Ricketts, Schmechel, Winsor

**Noes:** None

**Abstain:** Weber

**Absent:** Larsen, Pilloton

**Motion Carried**

## E. UNFINISHED AND OTHER BUSINESS

None

## F. GENERAL BUSINESS

### F.1. Receive a Presentation a Presentation on the 2023 Hamilton Community Pool seasons from Community Services Division Manager, Drew Bendickson

Community Services Division Manager Drew Bendickson reported on the inaugural season for the City of Novato taking over operations of the Hamilton Pool. He shared that over the summer and fall seasons, the pool saw nearly 21,000 visitors across 138 open days, averaging 152 people per day.

Popular offerings included several types of season passes such as daily passes, 15-visit punch passes, and full summer season passes. In total, 128 summer passes and 160 punch passes were sold. There were also over 18,000 daily admissions.

In terms of programming, Division Manager Bendickson emphasized there was a heavy focus on swimming lessons for both kids and adults. Group swim lessons were the most popular, with over 680 participants. There were also specialized offerings like 36 private lessons and 24 teen and adult lessons. A lifeguard training program certified over 20 new lifeguards to ensure safety at the pools.

Community Services Division Manager Drew Bendickson indicated that social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram were utilized to promote offerings to Novato residents and increase attendance. Specific strategies implemented included creating engaging posts reminding residents to visit and beat the heat during heatwaves.

Community Services Division Manager Drew Bendickson shared that to wrap up the inaugural season, the Aquatics division held its first annual Floating Pumpkin Patch event, which sold out in October. This special event will become an annual tradition each fall at the pool.

Community Services Division Manager Drew Bendickson felt it was an extremely successful first season managing operations of the Hamilton Pool. The staff looks forward to enhancing offerings and preparing part-time staff in the offseason for an even better 2024 summer season.

**Public Comment:**

None

**F.2. Discuss Potential Sponsorships and Funding Options for a Miwok Park Bocce Courts Rehabilitation Project from Parks, Recreation, & Community Services Director, Katie Gauntlett**

Director Gauntlett presented an update on the two bocce courts at Miwok Park. The courts are estimated to be 10 years old, with some siding repairs done over the years. On July 13th, the Commission voted to approve discussing refreshing the courts.

Director Gauntlett confirmed with Public Works that the backboards were replaced within the last 5 years. Their professional opinion is that the courts are in decent condition, but the siding is starting to rot due to age. However, there is currently no budget allocated for repairs.

Director Gauntlett reached out to two potential community partners. The Druids group is unable to take on this type of project. The Eagle Scout group requires brand-new construction, not replacements, to qualify for their program. Director Gauntlett also submitted the project to Leadership Novato, but it was not selected.

Director Gauntlett stated that there is currently no identified funding to support renovations at this site, and improving the bocce courts has not been identified as a priority by the Commission or City Council. However, the Parks Master Plan is an identified priority for the City Council and Commission.

Director Gauntlett recommends tabling further planning and research on this project until the Parks Master Plan findings on community priorities are available, given limited resources and staff.

Chair Lacey believes the most appropriate course of action is to wait for the results of the Parks Master Plan and align with what the community prioritizes moving forward. She suggested waiting to see what the Parks Master Plan findings indicate before taking further action on the bocce courts at this time.

Commissioner Winsor clarified that the Druids' past involvement may have encompassed more than just maintenance of the courts. She had not reached out to Rotary regarding the bocce courts but is willing to contact additional groups about renovations. While she would like to see the existing courts maintained, Commissioner Winsor agrees that with no funding currently available and the Parks Master Plan process underway, now is not the right time for this project. She concurs with waiting for the community feedback from the Parks Master Plan to guide priorities for the department.

**Public Comment:**

None

**G. COMMITTEE AND LIAISON REPORTS**

**G.1. Staff Updates**

Parks, Recreation, and Community Services Director Gauntlett gave a recap of the department's fall events. These included two outdoor movie nights, a floating pumpkin patch event at the Hamilton Pool, and a Not-So-Scary Magic Show. The magic show was scheduled in partnership with the Downtown Novato Business Association's Downtown Trick-or-Treating event.

Fall programming is now underway. The current activity guide runs through the end of December. Gymnastics classes have reached 807 participants, the highest enrollment for a fall session since 2014. Babysitting and first aid classes are at capacity.

Looking ahead to winter, the Holiday Crafts Faire at the Senior Center is scheduled for December 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>. The Letters to Santa program, introduced at the start of the pandemic, will continue due to popularity. Drop-off locations are at the Gymnastics Center and Senior Center. Photos with Santa will take place at the

Crafts Faire on December 2nd. The final winter event is a Gingerbread House Building event on December 16th.

On November 15th, the consultants will share findings from the Parks Master Plan community engagement efforts.

Director Gauntlett shared that the department has also partnered with People with Disabilities Succeeding (PDS) for park maintenance. Their adult clients now help clean up parks across Novato.

The winter/spring Activity Guide will launch November 30th, with registration opening December 5th.

Renovations were completed on the Hill Community Room, including new flooring and siding. It is available for weekend and evening rentals.

The citywide playground improvement project continues, with surfacing upgrades done at Bahia, South Hamilton, and Miwok Parks. Olive Tot Lot construction remains underway. At Pioneer Park, fencing and surfacing installation will happen soon, with an anticipated grand opening before year-end. Director Gauntlett said she will update the Commission on the Pioneer Park opening date.

**Public comment:**

None

**G.2. Commissioner Reports**

Commissioner Schmechel informed the commission that his educational background includes studying recreation administration at Chico State. Given this background and finding the work of the commission compelling, when a seat opened up on the RCCS representing his hometown, he felt compelled to apply and is excited to now be serving on the commission.

Chair Lacey, discussed the public comment received earlier in the meeting about issues occurring in Hoog Park and requested that staff provide a report on the status of Novato parks and any ongoing problems or concerns at a future meeting.

**Commission Action:** Upon motion by Commissioner Ricketts and seconded by Chair Lacey, the Commission voted 7-0-0-2 to place on a future agenda, a discussion and review of the department's Parks and Permitting Policies.

**Ayes:** Bentley, Crow, Lacey, Ricketts, Schmechel, Weber, Winsor

**Noes:** None

**Abstain:** None

**Absent:** Larsen, Pilloton

**Motion Carried**

**H. ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned at 7:35 PM.

The next RCCS meeting is on January 11, 2024.

**I HEREBY CERTIFY that the foregoing minutes were duly adopted at the RCCS Commission meeting of \_\_\_\_\_.**

**/ Drew Bendickson /  
Drew Bendickson, Community Services Division Manager**