



CITY OF NOVATO
PARKS & RECREATION

Recreation, Cultural and Community Services Advisory Commission

SPECIAL MEETING

Minutes

Thursday, February 29, 2024 – 6:00 PM

A. CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

The meeting was called to order by Chair Weber at 6:01 PM.

Commissioners Present: Chair Nancy Weber, Vice Chair Emily Larsen, Dennis Bentley, Suzanne Crow, Erin Lacey, Mavi Pilloton, Zachary Schmechel, Beverly Winsor

Commissioners Absent: Commissioner Betsy Ricketts

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 Crow and seconded by Vice Chair Larsen, the Commission voted 8-0-0-1 to approve the final agenda.

Ayes: Bentley, Crow, Lacey, Larsen, Pilloton, Schmechel, Weber, Winsor

Noes: None

Abstain: None

Absent: Ricketts

Motion Carried

C. PUBLIC COMMENT

- No general public comments.

D. CONSENT ITEMS

E. UNFINISHED AND OTHER BUSINESS

F. GENERAL BUSINESS

F.1. RECEIVE A PRESENTATION ON THE DRAFT PARKS MASTER PLAN BY BERRYDUNN CONSULTANTS JEFF MILKES AND ART THATCHER, PROVIDE FEEDBACK AND CONSIDER PROVIDING A RECOMENDATION TO CITY COUNCIL TO APPROVE THE DRAFT PARKS MASTER PLAN

BerryDunn consultants Jeff Milkes and Art Thatcher presented a high-level overview of the Draft Parks Master Plan.

Jeff Milkes explained that BerryDunn, a nationally recognized parks and recreation management consulting firm, was hired in February of 2023 to develop the City of Novato's first Parks Master Plan. Mr. Milkes acknowledged that the Draft Parks Master Plan document includes many parts including a detailed Appendix section.

Mr. Milkes shared that the Parks Master Plan process started with branding and the creation of recognizable graphics to aid Novato residents in their ability to identify and participate in the project. Mr. Milkes highlighted the project's vision statements used to guide project efforts and inspire community participation. The vision for Novato's Parks Master Plan project included the following:

- Improve access and opportunities for recreation for all demographics, abilities, and socioeconomic status, and seek opportunities for collaboration with other public and private entities.
- Update the Parks Master Plan to coincide with the evolution, future development, and strategic goals of the City.
- Identify efficiencies in park maintenance and operations that may lead to decreased costs.
- Provide a strategy for development and maintenance of parks, and examine methods to improve parks to maximize use.
- Analyze financial implementation strategies to improve undeveloped parkland, maintain or enhance existing park facilities and amenities, and acquire land for new neighborhood parks.

Mr. Milkes went on to emphasize the project team's desire for robust community engagement and participation. Public engagement included an internal Staff SWOT (strength, weakness, opportunities, and threats), the launch of a digital engagement website called Social Pinpoint, which included 3,004 unique users, various intercept events where community members added stickers to a dotmocracy board to capture park priorities, a statistically valid survey with 1,342 total respondents, and 188 participants providing qualitative feedback in stakeholder, focus group and public forum style meetings.

The community identified top priorities for parks including the need for quality parks maintenance, safety in parks, long-term sustainable funding, an accessible park system for all, and parks close to resident's homes. In terms of future park related needs, the community identified improving amenities at existing parks, rehabilitating and maintaining trails, improving park maintenance, and adding natural areas and outdoor gathering spaces as top priorities.

Mr. Milkes explained that the Parks Master Plan included a thorough assessment of Novato's park system. This evaluation included an ADA access assessment, a Levels of Service analysis, and a Walkable Service consideration. The ADA access assessment identified 682 barriers. Mr. Milkes provided examples of ADA assessment barriers like non-accessible hardware on doors, walkway damage and missing signage. The Level of Service analysis included a comprehensive inventory of park components to identify gaps in service. Given the national movement to provide parks within a 10-minute walk of resident's homes, walkable access in Novato was evaluated. In Novato, 49% of households have access to a park that features four or more recreation components within a half mile or ten-minute walk.

In the development of goals, the project team considered key themes and considerations. This included the City of Novato's challenges related to funding, current staffing levels, the ongoing need to develop departmental guiding principles, and the desire to be forward looking. Each goal articulated in the Draft Parks Master Plan includes associated strategies and action items. Mr. Milkes spoke to each goal, providing examples, feedback and additional considerations. The Drafts Parks Master Plan goals include the following:

- Goal 1: Maintain, Preserve, and Improve Parks, Trails and Open Spaces
- Goal 2: Provide Access to Parks and Recreation for the Changing Community
- Goal 3: Provide Safe and Secure Parks and Trails
- Goal 4: Deliver Parks and Recreation in a Financially Resilient and Sustainable Manner

Commissioner Lacey thanked Mr. Milkes and Mr. Thatcher for their work on this important project. Lacey spoke to her experience at community meetings as well as her review of the data compiled in the Draft and identified two top community priorities: the first being the community's interest in improving and maintaining our current parks and the second being the community's desire for additional sports courts, specifically Tennis, Pickleball and Basketball courts. Commissioner Lacey appreciated the specific strategies and action items outlined in the Draft tied to investing, improving, and maintaining our current parks, however, Commissioner Lacey indicated that she did not see specific strategies or action items to address the community's interest in additional sports courts. Mr. Milkes referenced a Table

in Section 5 of the Draft that compared Novato's athletic courts to other agencies of comparable population, which included a recommendation to consider increasing courts to meet national averages.

Commissioner Lacey asked questions related to project timelines in the included Project List. Mr. Milkes explained that this would be covered in item F.2. Katie Gauntlett added additional context related to projects, articulating the difference between repairing, replacing, and maintaining existing park components versus spending capital dollars on new components.

Vice Chair Larsen asked for clarification with regards to the ownership of Slade Park. Mr. Milkes and Director Gauntlett confirmed that Marin County Flood Control District owns the land, and that City of Novato maintains the park. Director Gauntlett provided historical context, sharing that the City of Novato went into an agreement with the Floor Control District in the 1970's to develop the neighborhood park. Director Gauntlett added that the fields at Marin IVC are similarly maintained by the City of Novato on property that is owned by the College of Marin.

Commissioner Winsor inquired about ADA funding. Gauntlett explained that there are dedicated ADA funds that are set aside annually to review and maintain ADA functions and that additional research is needed to identify other funding opportunities, such as grants, to address these needs.

Chair Weber inquired about walkability to parks and asked if there are areas in Novato with an overproportionate amount of limited access. Mr. Milkes referenced maps in Section 5 where pedestrian barriers and gaps in service are identified. Mr. Milkes explained that when assessing these pedestrian barriers, the project team considers the safety and feasibility of an 8-year-old and an 80-year-old walking by themselves to the park when determining barriers in walkability. Mr. Thatcher clarified that roadway barriers are detailed in Figure 29 of the Draft.

Commissioner Bentley shared that the Pacheco Valley neighborhood has limited walkable park access, and that the neighborhood is growing with an increased number of families with children.

Public Comment:

- Justin Derby

Commission Action: Upon motion by Commissioner Crow and seconded by Commissioner Pilloton, the Commission voted 8-0-0-1 to approve the Draft Parks Master Plan excluding Appendix 9.

Ayes: Bentley, Crow, Lacey, Larsen, Pilloton, Schmechel, Weber, Winsor

Noes: None

Abstain: None

Absent: Ricketts

Motion Caried

F.2. RECEIVE A PRESENTATION ON THE DRAFT PARKS MASTER PLAN'S PROPOSED PROJECT LIST AND PRIORITY TIMELINES BY PARKS, RECREATION & COMMUNITY SERVICES DIRECTOR KATIE GAUNTLETT, PROVIDE FEEDBACK AND CONSIDER PROVIDING A RECOMMENDATION TO CITY COUNCIL TO APPROVE THE PROPOSED PROJECT LIST AS OUTLINE IN THE DRAFT PARKS MASTER PLAN.

Parks, Recreation and Community Services Director Katie Gauntlett provided a presentation on the Draft Parks Master Plan's proposed project list and recommended priority time frames as sited in Appendix 9 of the Draft. Director Gauntlett reminded the Commission that the scope of the Parks Master Plan was limited to parks and outdoor recreational facilities. Programs and indoor recreation facilities were not assessed.

Director Gauntlett explained that the development of the Draft Parks Master Plan has taken 12-months and included extensive assessment, review, and analysis of Novato's park system. While developing the proposed project list, special attention was placed on the findings from community engagement, the Americans with Disabilities access study, the community needs assessment survey, the parks and open space inventory, and the level of service analysis.

Director Gauntlett specified that Novato has 23 Neighborhood Parks, 7 Community Parks and 6 Special Use Parks covering 395 acres. Additionally, the City of Novato operates and maintains 301 acres across 4 open space areas. Through the needs assessment survey, we learned that Miwok, Pioneer, Stafford Grove, IVC Fields, O'Hair Park, Hill Recreation Area, Dogbone Meadow, South Hamilton, Arroyo Avichi and Hamilton Amphitheater are the top 10 most utilized parks in Novato.

The ADA assessment identified 682 barriers within Novato's parks, ranging from 2 barriers per park site to 90. Director Gauntlett explained that the proposed Project List focuses on addressing the 22 highest priority ADA barriers identified.

The proposed project list includes 39 identified projects at specific park locations, and 8 community driven additions or expansions for future consideration. The community driven additions or expansions for future consideration do not include a specific park locations. The projects range in scope, cost, and location. Priority time frames include short-term (0-5 years), mid-term (6-10 years) and long-term (11+ years).

Director Gauntlett read the six specific questions that staff used as criteria to justify priority time frame assignments. Director Gauntlett noted that given the City's

financial position, cost was also considered when assigning these time frames. Throughout the presentation, Director Gauntlett revisited the list of criteria below.

1. Is this a City owned facility?
2. Will improvements to the park/component increase safety?
3. Will improvements to the facility/component address identified ADA barriers and increase access for all?
4. Will improvements to the facility support additional revenue generation?
5. Is this park/component classified as part of a Community Park?
6. Is this park/component a part of one of the City's top 10 parks with the highest usage as identified in the needs assessment survey?

Director Gauntlett provided an overview of the proposed projects identified in Appendix 9 of the Draft Parks Master Plan. Explaining the project and priority time frame assignment for each proposed project. In the presentation, projects were grouped by priority timeline assignments.

The proposed projects in Appendix 9 include 9 short-term projects. Director Gauntlett was happy to report that 1 of the short-term projects at Olive Tot Lot had already been addressed as part of the Citywide Play Structures CIP project completed in the Fall of 2023 and that addressing restroom access at Hill Recreation Area is underway. Additionally, Director Gauntlett explained that many of Novato's playgrounds are reaching the end of their useful life and are set on sand which is not an accessible play surface. Those playgrounds are identified as short-term projects in Appendix 9 due to accessibility, safety, and liability.

The proposed projects in Appendix 9 of the Draft Parks Master Plan includes 8 short/mid-term projects, with the majority being related to ADA barriers. Director Gauntlett reviewed the short/mid-term projects, noting that Marion Recreation Area has four ADA barriers.

Additionally, the proposed projects in Appendix 9 of the Draft Parks Master Plan includes 6 mid-term projects and 15 long-term projects. Director Gauntlett explained that although Hill Recreation Area scored highly based on staff's developed criteria, the estimated project cost in excess of \$9 million pushed this project to long-term given the City's current financial challenges.

Director Gauntlett explained that through the community engagement process we learned of 8 ideas, additions and expansions that the community would like the City to consider when renovating or developing existing park sites. These 8 identified projects have been added to the proposed Project List in Appendix 9 for future consideration.

Commissioner Winsor expressed concern regarding the ADA barrier identified at Miwok Park. Winsor suggested that the Commission consider changing the priority

timeframe from mid-term to short-term given the safety concerns surrounding this project.

Given the long list of projects and priorities, Commissioner Bentley questioned the need to include EV chargers in the project list at all.

Commissioner Lacey expressed interest in adding sports courts to the list of community driven additions/expansions for consideration for future development.

Vice Chair Larsen emphasized the importance of addressing the ADA barriers. Larsen touched on federal dollars available to support EV chargers and suggested that City dollars be spent on other identified projects.

Commissioner Crow appreciated Director Gauntlett's comments with regards to continued maintenance in Parks. Commissioner Crow suggested the need to be creative to find partner organizations and additional funding to offset costs to the City for maintenance of facilities. Commissioner Crow indicated that many of the ADA barriers identified in the Draft could be addressed with little cost to the City.

Commissioner Schmechel asked questions related to priority time frames for consideration to add benches and shade structures. Director Gauntlett explained that auxiliary features like benches and shade structures would be considered when working on larger projects like playground renovations to coincide with overall improvement to the identified site.

Chair Weber inquired about synthetic fields and their general useful life. Mr. Thatcher, BerryDunn consultant, shared that with proper maintenance a synthetic field could last 15-20 years. The Commission discussed that San Marin High School's synthetic turf field lasted approximately 10 years before needing replacement, suggesting life span varies on amount of use. Commissioner Weber shared concerns that we do not have enough fields in town to support youth athletics.

Commissioner Pilloton asked why some ADA barriers were listed as long-term projects. Commissioner Pilloton expressed interest in having ADA barriers addressed in an expedited fashion due to safety and compliance. Director Gauntlett again reviewed the assignment criteria - the six specific questions developed and utilized to identify priority time frames as short-term, mid-term and long-term. Director Gauntlett emphasized staff's effort to be consistent when reviewing projects.

Commissioner Larsen expressed interest in approaching the Flood Control District with regards to financial support for repairs and improvements at Slade Park. Commissioner Crow and Chair Weber expressed interest in exploring fundraising opportunities to support park projects.

Chair Weber inquired about the commemorative bench sponsorship program and suggested that the Parks and Recreation Department increase marketing and promotion of the program to address interest in additional benches.

Public Comment:

- Fred Reece
- Todd Judd
- Russell Krug
- Trish McCurdy
- Sophia Osotio

Commission Action: Upon motion by Commissioner Crow and seconded by Commissioner Schmechel, the Commission voted 8-0-0-1 to approve the Draft Parks Master Plan Project List and Priority Timelines with the following amendments:

- Add to the future considerations list, consider adding a feasibility study under short-term priority to include review of determining where additional sports courts and athletic fields could be added to existing parks.
- Change the priority time frame for the Miwok Park ADA barrier related to a walkway hazard from mid-term to short-term.

Ayes: Bentley, Crow, Lacey, Larsen, Pilloton, Schmechel, Weber, Winsor

Noes: None

Abstain: None

Absent: Ricketts

Motion Carried

G. COMMITTEE AND LIAISON REPORTS

G.1. Staff Updates

None

Commissioner Reports

Commissioner Crow expressed gratitude to the consultants and staff for their work on the Parks Master Plan over the past 12-months. Additionally, she spoke to the Recreation Commissions long term desire to have a guiding document and prioritized list for park projects.

Commissioner Lacey echoed Commissioner Crows sentiments.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 8:12 PM.

The next RCCS meeting is on March 14, 2024.

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

/ Alexandra Kambur /
Alexandra Kambur, Recreation Division Manager