



**CITY OF NOVATO**  
PARKS & RECREATION

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

**REGULAR MEETING**

**Minutes**

**Thursday, March 14, 2024 – 6:00 PM**

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

The meeting was called to order by Vice Chair Larsen at 6:02 PM.

**Commissioners Present:** Dennis Bentley, Suzanne Crow, Erin Lacey, Emily Larsen, Mavi Pilloton, Beverley Winsor

**Commissioners Absent:** Betsy Ricketts, Zachary Schmechel, Nancy Weber

**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 Commissioner Lacey, the Commission voted 6-0-0-3 to approve the final agenda.

**Ayes:** Bentley, Crow, Lacey, Larsen, Pilloton, Winsor

**Noes:** None

**Abstain:** None

**Absent:** Ricketts, Schmechel, Weber

**Motion Carried**

**C. PUBLIC COMMENT**

- Trish McCurdy
- Susan Magnone

## D. CONSENT ITEMS

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

**Commission Action:** Upon motion by Chair Crow and seconded by Commissioner Winsor, the Commission voted 5-0-1-3 to approve the Meeting Minutes from January 11, 2024.

**Ayes:** Crow, Lacey, Larsen, Pilloton, Winsor

**Noes:** None

**Abstain:** Bentley

**Absent:** Ricketts, Schmechel, Weber

#### **Motion Carried**

**Commission Action:** Upon motion by Commissioner Bentley and seconded by Commissioner Crow, the Commission voted 6-0-0-3 to approve the Special Meeting Minutes from February 29, 2024.

**Ayes:** Bentley, Crow, Lacey, Larsen, Pilloton, Winsor

**Noes:** None

**Abstain:** None

**Absent:** Ricketts, Schmechel, Weber

#### **Motion Carried**

## E. UNFINISHED AND OTHER BUSINESS

None

## F. GENERAL BUSINESS

- F.1. Receive a presentation from Parks, Recreation and Community Services Director, Katie Gauntlett, and the Novato Police Department on Recreation Policy 6 “Park Permit Policy” related to Park Permits for Picnic Areas, Field and Gymnasium Use; and a review of 2023 calls for service in the City’s parks and recreation facilities.**

Director Gauntlett of the City of Novato Parks, Recreation and Community Services Department (PRCS) provided an overview of Park Policies related to Park and Picnic Area reservations and included some information related to Field and

Gymnasium Use Policy. Rental use for City of Novato parks and portions thereof (i.e. picnic/barbeque areas, jump house sites, sports courts) are governed by Novato Municipal Code Chapter 10 as well as Parks and Recreation policies. Novato PRCS manages and supervises use of parks, meanwhile the City of Novato Public Works Department manages maintenance of parks.

Director Gauntlett reviewed the list of Novato Park and Picnic Areas available for reservation. This includes Picnic Areas of varying sizes at Hamilton Amphitheater Park, Hamilton Pool (Memorial Day through Labor Day, only), Josef Hoog Park, Miwok Park, Pioneer Park, and South Hamilton Park. Director Gauntlett explained that some parks support Jump House Sites, which require a coinciding reservation of a Picnic Area. Director Gauntlett provided examples of activities or events that require a park permit and proof of insurance. Some activities or events that require a park permit include exclusive use, amplified sound or speech, large community events, the sale or barter of goods, and the possession or consumption of alcohol. Activities or events that require proof of insurance are detailed in Appendix A of the Park Permit Application. Director Gauntlett clarified that park permits are issued by Novato PRCS, and resident and non-resident fees are set by Novato City Council and are included in the City of Novato's Master Fee Schedule.

Director Gauntlett explained the difference between exclusive use, permitted and reserved use of a park or portion of, and first come, first served use. Novato's parks and portions thereof are first come, first served, unless otherwise reserved. Director Gauntlett encourages the community to check park kiosks for reservation details and important scheduling notes. Renters are encouraged to have a copy of their permit in-hand to provide proof of reservation.

Director Gauntlett concluded by describing prohibited park activities which includes park use in the overnight hours between 10:00 PM and 6:00 AM. Some prohibited park activities like possessing or consuming alcohol, selling or bartering goods, and amplified sound are allowable when permitted through Novato PRCS reservation process. Other prohibited park activities include operating, driving, riding, or parking automobiles, motorcycles or similar in a park, lighting a fire except as part of a designated BBQ area, camping, and removing or defacing the soil, flora, or structures within a park.

Captain Correa of the Novato Police Department provided an overview of calls for service in Novato's parks, explained the regular and ongoing coordination and communication efforts between the Novato Police Department and Parks and Recreation staff, and provided recommendations for the community related to park safety and compliance with park rules. Captain Correa emphasized the Police Department's goal to mitigate issues through education and awareness before utilizing enforcement as a tool to gain compliance.

Captain Correa highlighted Pioneer Park, Miwok Park, Hill Recreation Area, Josef Hoog Park, Marion Recreation Area, and Scottsdale Pond as the City's parks with

the highest number of calls for service in 2023. Captain Correa explained that calls for service are categorized by type, some of which are broad in nature including suspicious persons and suspicious circumstance. Suspicious persons and suspicious circumstance are commonly tagged as the type of call for service in Novato's parks. Other common calls for service include noise complaints, vehicular/parking complaints, and juvenile disturbance. Captain Correa also provided information related to officer-initiated calls, in which there is an officer-initiated encounter rather than a 9-1-1 call. Captain Correa emphasized that violent crimes are not common in Novato's parks.

In 2023, there were 46 calls for service at Pioneer Park, 27 calls for service at Miwok Park, 20 calls for service at Hill Recreation Area, 16 calls for service at Josef Hoog Park, 15 calls for service at Marion Recreation Area, and 15 calls for service at Scottsdale Pond. In 2023, officer-initiated calls included 85 at Pioneer Park, 23 at Miwok Park, 17 at Hill Recreation Area, 11 at Josef Hoog Park, 6 at Marion Recreation Area, and 24 at Scottsdale Pond.

Captain Correa shared that the Novato Police Department meets with Novato PRCS monthly to discuss key issues and to coordinate efforts. Additionally, PRCS staff are in communication with Lieutenants and Sergeants to address day-to-day concerns and to provide information related to permitted exclusive use on a weekly basis. Captain Correa acknowledged that as we approach the warmer spring and summer season, we move into the busy park season. Captain Correa expressed the Novato Police Department's commitment to continuing to work closely with Novato PRCS, and to engage in community education and other campaigns to improve the community's understanding of and compliance with park rules. Captain Correa emphasized the importance of contacting the Novato Police Department to report suspicious activity, citing the tag line "if you see something, say something." Finally, Captain Correa thanked the community for their partnership and understanding as the Novato Police Department works diligently to prioritize 9-1-1 calls. Captain Correa encouraged the community to review the Novato Police Department's Annual Report, which was presented to the City Council by Chief Naugle and is now available on the City of Novato website.

Vice Chair Larsen asked how a 9-1-1 call to report a dog off leash might be categorized. Captain Correa suggested that it might be tagged as a suspicious person or a municipal code violation.

Commissioner Bentley asked about the requirements to reserve a Jump House Site. Director Gauntlett clarified that in order to reserve a Jump House Site, a user must also reserve a Picnic Area.

Commissioner Crow remarked that the data suggests that Novato's parks are safe and suggested additional efforts to communicate that to the community. Commissioner Crow asked about the status of large unauthorized gatherings at Josef Hoog Park that had previously been reported to the commission by a

community member. Captain Correa shared that Novato Police Department is engaged in a multifaceted approach to better understand the scope of the problem. This includes use of the traffic trailer to mitigate speeding, increased educational efforts, improved signage, and use of enforcement when necessary. Director Gauntlett added that there will be an emphasis on community education around park rules and appropriate park use this spring. Director Gauntlett reiterated how important it is for the community to contact the Novato Police Department right away, in the moment, to report suspicious activity.

Commissioner Lacey thanked the Novato Police Department for placing the traffic trailer out in front of Pioneer Park. Commissioner Lacey stated that there was a noticeable slowdown on Simmons with the traffic trailer in place. Commissioner Lacey asked what the typical response time to a call for service at a park might be. Captain Correa explained that it varies based on time of day and severity of other 9-1-1 calls in the queue. Captain Correa explained that Officers are busiest between 10:00 AM and 10:00 PM, the peak time for 9-1-1 calls.

Commissioner Pilloton asked about dispatcher training to support fair and impartial policing. Captain Correa explained the importance of trainings related to procedural justice and unbiased policing.

#### **Public Comment:**

- Stephanie Simos

#### **F.2.**

#### **Receive a presentation from Novato Parks, Recreation and Community Services Division Managers, Drew Bendickson and Alexandra Kambur, on reservable facilities, updated parks and facilities reservation webpage, and new online facility reservation request process.**

Novato Parks, Recreation and Community Services Division Managers, Drew Bendickson and Alexandra Kambur, presented information on the City of Novato's updated parks and facilities reservation webpage, [www.novato.org/rentnovatofun](http://www.novato.org/rentnovatofun), and detailed the new online facility reservation inquiry process.

Division Manager Kambur explained that the website project was initiated by Novato PRCS with input and assistance from the City of Novato's Communication Team, and that the project coincided with the Parks Master Plan. The webpage was launched on February 1, 2024 as a starting point for community members interested in learning more about Novato's reservable facilities including Park and Picnic Areas, Indoor Facilities, and Athletic Facilities. The launch on February 1, 2024 was a soft launch intended to provide PRCS staff with time to get accustomed to the new process and to work through any issues that might arise. Promotion of the new website and online inquiry process will begin later this Spring. Goals of the project include streamlining the rental process, improving

communication and website information, enhancing the overall user experience, and increasing revenue generating opportunities for the City of Novato. Division Manager Bendickson added that the new website includes reminders for the community to utilize the City's [www.novato.org/servicerequest](http://www.novato.org/servicerequest) webpage to report non-emergency repairs to the Public Works Department and to contact the Novato Police Department to report suspicious activity. Additionally, the website includes Recreation Policies and links to the PRCS section of the City of Novato Master Fee Schedule.

Division Manager Kambur showed a video demonstrating the function of the new webpage and the online inquiry process. Division Manager Kambur emphasized that the online process is intended for interested parties to submit an inquiry and is not a finalized reservation permit. To date, over 100 online inquiries have been submitted.

Division Manger Bendickson provided a detailed review of reservable Park and Picnic Areas and Jump House Sites and data related to reservations in 2023. In 2023, Miwok Park was the most popular park for reservations with 139 permits issued. That was followed by the Picnic Areas at the Hamilton Community Pool with 53 permits issued. Division Manger Bendickson reviewed indoor City facilities that are available for the community to reserve, which includes the Downtown Recreation Center, the Hamilton Community Center, the Hill Community Room, the Margaret Todd Senior Center, and Novato City Hall. In 2023, the Margaret Todd Senior Center was the top site for indoor facility reservations with 92 permits issued.

Division Manger Kambur provided a detailed review of athletic facilities, which includes fields and courts. Reservable athletic fields include multi-purpose fields as well as softball and baseball diamonds at Dunphy Field, Ernie Gray Fields at IVC, Hamilton Amphitheater Park, Hill Recreation Area, Marion Recreation Area, Pocket Park, and South Hamilton Park. Reservable athletic courts include the Hamilton Community Gymnasium, Hill Gymnasium, Hill Recreation Area Bocce Ball Courts, Hill Recreation Area Pickleball Courts, and the Pioneer Park Tennis Courts. Division Manager Kambur explained that Novato PRCS regularly reserves athletic facilities to athletic organizations, like Novato Youth Soccer or Novato Girls Softball, that might have one permit for several reservations that are ongoing in nature. Top permitted athletic facility sites include the Hill Gymnasium with 52 permits, the Hill Recreation Area Pickleball Courts with 34 permits, and the Hill Recreation Area Synthetic Turf with 24 permits.

Division Manger Kambur outlined reservable facility revenue budgeted for FY23/2024. In FY23/2024, the City of Novato is budgeted to generate \$52,000 in Park and Picnic Area rentals, \$74,000 in indoor facility rentals and \$212,000 in athletic facility rentals. This represents approximately 15% of the PRCS Department's overall revenue, as most of the PRCS Department revenue is generated through programming.

Division Manager Bendickson concluded the presentation by emphasizing promotion as the next step in the overall project. This includes updating the facilities directory webpage with new photos, including facility rental information in the Summer 2024 Activity Guide, and future marketing efforts utilizing the City's social media channels.

Commissioner Bentley asked if the Hamilton Community Gymnasium at the Hamilton Elementary School was property of the City of Novato. Division Manager Kambur explained that the property is owned by the Novato Unified School District. She provided further information, adding that the gymnasium was funded 50/50 by the District and the City of Novato in 2010 and is operated under a Joint Use Agreement. This means that the City of Novato operates the gym during non-school hours and that costs for custodial service and maintenance are shared between the District and the City.

Commissioner Lacey asked about the availability to rent Pioneer Park Tennis Courts. Division Manager Kambur explained that there are ongoing reservations at the Pioneer Park Tennis Courts, the schedules for which are posted in the kiosk available onsite. Division Manager Kambur encouraged anyone interested in reserving the courts to complete the new online inquiry form. Novato PRCS staff can then identify windows of opportunity to rent the courts and issue permits.

Commissioner Crow expressed interest in an online calendar that showed facility availability.

Commissioner Pilloton asked about tennis and other outdoor courts in Hamilton. Director Gauntlett clarified that the outdoor courts in Hamilton were previously operated through an agreement with the U.S. Coast Guard. That agreement has since been terminated.

Commissioner Winsor expressed interest in reserving the Pickleball Courts and expressed challenges in finding the price to rent the courts in the City of Novato Fee Schedule. Division Manager Bendickson explained that the City's Finance Department has instructed staff to direct community members to the Master Fee Schedule rather than adding fee information to various webpages and documents.

**Public Comment:**

**None**

**G. COMMITTEE AND LIAISON REPORTS**



## G.1. Staff Updates

Parks, Recreation, and Community Services Division Manager Kambur provided a recap of City Council proclamations issued on February 27, 2024 to Novato Gymnastics Boosters and Jim Spillman for their outstanding volunteer efforts to enhance recreation programs and facilities.

Special events in February and early-March included Andre Thierry's "Are You Ready to Learn" youth music program celebrating Black History Month on February 3, a Lunar New Year Lunch at the Margaret Todd Senior Center on February 21, the 10:00 AM and 11:30 AM Spring Magic Shows on February 24, and the 2024 Novato Classic gymnastics meet the weekend of March 2 and 3.

Highlights of winter and spring programming include the addition of two new game groups, duplicate bridge and watercolor enthusiasts, at the Margaret Todd Senior Center, strong participation across adult basketball and volleyball leagues with approximately 350 adults participating in athletics each week, 33 participants in ongoing Taekwondo classes, over 120 participants in Katia & Co. musical theater programming, and over 140 participants enrolled in Soccer Stars.

March marks the conclusion of Session 3 Winter gymnastics classes with over 840 participants enrolled in weekly classes and an additional 25 participants on the competitive team. Ms. Kambur shared that registration is now open and available for the Spring session of gymnastics classes, a 10-week session beginning March 25 and ending June 8.

Ms. Kambur explained that Novato PRCS is highly involved in early job training for Novato's youth and shared that the Youth Enrichment Division launched a brand-new Spring Counselor in Training Program for tweens and teens, ages 11–15. The new program, with 18 registered participants, is a hands-on course intended to empower and mentor youth, shaping future leaders. Upon completion, participants will be prepared to engage in practical, on-the-job learning supporting camps this summer. Additionally, 11 participants are enrolled in the American Red Cross Lifeguard Certification Courts held across three days on March 23, 24 and 30.

Over the mid-winter school break, PRCS offered All Sports Camp with 26 participants and Gymnastics Camp with 29 participants. Over Spring Break, the Department will be offering a Lifeguard Certification Course, All Sports Camp, Gymnastics Camp, and a Katia & Co. Camp.

Ms. Kambur provided an update on the Department's busy part-time hiring season and encouraged the community to visit [www.novato.org/jobs](http://www.novato.org/jobs) to apply for part-time and seasonal roles working as building attendants, camp counselors, gymnastics and swim instructors, lifeguards, and cashiers.



Ms. Kambur highlighted the work of Director Gauntlett and BerryDunn consultants Jeffrey Milkes and Art Thatcher for their work presenting the Draft Parks Master Plan to the Recreation, Cultural and Community Services Advisory Commission (RCCS) on February 29, the Financial Advisory Commission (FAC) on March 7, and to the Novato City Council on March 12. The final, stylized version with RCCS, FAC and City Council recommendations and revisions is slated to return to Council on Tuesday, April 9. Ms. Kambur thanked the RCCS Commission for their review of the draft and engagement in the 12-month Parks Master Plan project.

Ms. Kambur shared that the Department has been working collaboratively with the Novato Unified School District to update the Reciprocal Use of School District Facilities and City Facilities for Community Recreation Programs and the Joint Use Agreement Between the City of Novato and Novato Unified School District for the Gymnasium at Hamilton Elementary School. Updated agreements are expected to be reviewed by Novato City Council in May of 2024.

The Summer 2024 Activity Guide launched on Thursday, March 14. Ms. Kambur reminded the commission that registration for summer programs, camps and activities will begin at 6:00 AM on Tuesday, March 19.

Ms. Kambur concluded by providing the Commission with a list of important upcoming dates. This included the State of the City on March 19, the Spring Trash to Treasures Flea Market on March 23, the City Council Meeting on April 9 in which the Parks Master Plan is slated for adoption, Pioneer Park Ribbon Cutting Ceremony and Celebration on April 13, the Spectrum Safety Event on April 20, Fishing in the City on May 4, and opening day of the Hamilton Community Pool on May 25.

## **G.2. Commissioner Reports**

Commissioner Lacey shared that she attended the City Council meeting where they reviewed the Draft Parks Master Plan.

Commissioner Crow expressed gratitude for the City of Novato employee recognition event and shared that the synthetic turf at Hill Recreation Area was being well maintained by Novato Public Works.

Vice Chair Larsen believed that City Council members questions on the Draft Parks Master Plan were very thoughtful and considerate, demonstrating a strong level of engagement in the project.

## **H.**

### **ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned at 7:02 PM.

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

**/ Alexandra Kambur /**

**Alexandra Kambur, Recreation Division Manager**