



CITY OF NOVATO
CALIFORNIA

Multicultural Advisory Commission
Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, June 26, 2024

Novato City Hall, 901 Sherman Avenue

A. CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

Meeting called to order by Chair Jacobs at 6:01 pm.

Commissioners Present: Keith Buchignani, Pamela Luk, Sophia Osotio, Allison Skinner, Carlos Solis (arrived at 6:20 pm), Chair Jacobs

Commissioners Absent: Vice Chair Alexandre, Vladimir Matviishin

Staff Present: Director of Parks, Recreation and Community Services Katie Gauntlett, Community Services Division Manager Drew Bendickson, City Manager Amy Cunningham, Assistant City Manager Jessica Deakyne

B. APPROVAL OF FINAL AGENDA

Commission Action: Upon motion by Commissioner Luk and seconded by Commissioner Osotio. The Commission voted **5-0-3** to approve the final agenda.

AYES: Buchignani, Luk, Osotio, Skinner, Jacobs

NOES: None.

ABSENT: Alexandre, Matviishin, Solis

C. PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

D. CONSENT ITEMS

D.1 Approve the meeting minutes from May 22, 2024

Commission Action: Upon motion by Commissioner Osotio and seconded by Commissioner Skinner. The Commission voted **5-0-3** to approve the meeting minutes of May 22, 2024.

AYES: Buchignani, Luk, Osotio, Skinner, Jacobs

NOES: None.

ABSENT: Alexandre, Matviishin, Solis

E. UNFINISHED AND OTHER BUSINESS

E.1 Receive an update from the Ad Hoc Committee for the United Against Hate Week Event

Commissioner Solis presented an update from the Ad Hoc Committee for the United Against Hate Week Event, scheduled for September 25th at the Multicultural Advisory Commission's regularly scheduled meeting.

The proposed format includes:

- A one-hour panel discussion with speakers
- Opening with a brief history of United Against Hate Week and introducing panel speakers
- Focus on multiculturalism, diversity, inclusion, unity, and affirming shared values
- Pre-formulated questions based on the event theme and speakers' expertise
- Opportunities for audience participation through Q&A
- Handouts defining hate, explaining reporting procedures, and listing resources

The commission discussed the number of speakers, advising that 4-5 speakers might be too many for the timeframe. They recommended the Ad Hoc Committee aim for 3 speakers instead. Staff also provided recommendations.

The commission also suggested inviting a member of the Novato Police Department to attend the event, not as a speaker but as a resource to offer advice on handling hate incidents in the community.

Commissioner Luk expressed interest in providing tools and handouts for attendees on how to contribute as allies.

The commission discussed various event names, including "Building Bridges" and "Educate to Stop Hate." After deliberation, they settled on "Community Empowered: A United Against Hate Week Event" as the event title.

The Ad Hoc Committee will continue to develop the event, incorporating the commission's feedback on the format, speakers, and theme.

Commission Action: Upon motion by Commissioner Luk and seconded by Commissioner Skinner, the commission voted **6-0-2** to have the Ad Hoc Committee continue to develop the event, incorporating the commission's feedback on the format with 3 community speakers, a Novato PD resource, and title the event as "Community Empowered: A United Against Hate Week Event".

AYES: Buchignani, Luk, Osotio, Skinner, Solis, Jacobs

NOES: None.

ABSENT: Alexandre, Matviishin

E.2 Receive an update from the Ad Hoc Committee for the Indigenous People's Day Event

Commissioner Luk presented an update from the Ad Hoc Committee for the Indigenous People's Day Event, scheduled for October 23, 2024. The committee has decided to proceed

with a movie night event, which fulfills both the Indigenous Peoples' Day event and multicultural movie night goals outlined in the work plan.

Staff has contacted Dean Hoaglin, board president of the Museum of the American Indian, who has expressed support for the event and reserved the date. A representative from the museum will introduce the selected movie, documentary, or short film. The committee aims for PG-rated content suitable for families, with a preferred duration of 30-40 minutes.

Following the screening, Commissioner Luk has volunteered to moderate a Q&A session with a museum representative. The session will include audience questions and prepared questions based on the film.

Commissioner Skinner noted that during her 4th-grade class visits to the museum, they have offered age-appropriate content for students to watch, suggesting that suitable material for the event should be available.

The next step for the Ad Hoc Committee is to connect with the museum about film or documentary recommendations. The committee will continue to develop the event, working closely with the Museum of the American Indian.

The commission expressed full support for this event proposal and is excited about its direction.

F. GENERAL BUSINESS

F.1. Fiscal Sustainability Update from City Manager, Amy Cunningham and Assistant City Manager, Jessica Deakyne

City Manager Amy Cunningham provided an update on Novato's fiscal sustainability challenges and potential solutions. She highlighted that Novato faces unique financial issues compared to other cities, as it does not provide fire, water, trash, sewer and wastewater services. These are handled by separate districts.

City Manager Cunningham noted that the City Council adopted a \$4 million operating deficit for FY 2023-24, the fourth consecutive year with a deficit budget. Emergency reserve funds are being used to offset operating costs, but these reserves are projected to be depleted within the next 1-2 years if spending continues at current levels. She emphasized this is a critical juncture for preserving community services.

The City Manager explained that Novato receives a smaller share of property tax revenue compared to other Marin cities, at just 7% of each property tax dollar. For sales tax, only 1.25% of the 8.5% collected in Novato returns to the City. Novato's sales tax rate of 8.5% is lower than many neighboring cities that are already at the state cap of 9.25%.

City Manager Cunningham outlined cost containment efforts, including reducing personnel from a peak of 234 employees to the current 198. However, she noted this impacts service delivery. She also shared results from the City's budget priorities survey, which identified top community priorities as street maintenance, emergency response, business retention, homelessness, and park maintenance.

The presentation concluded by discussing a potential ballot measure to increase the local sales tax by 0.75 cents, which could generate approximately \$10 million annually for priority services. City Manager Cunningham emphasized this would be locally-controlled revenue that could not be taken by the state or county. She noted the Council will decide on July 23rd whether to place this measure on the November ballot for voter consideration.

F.2. Receive a presentation on Latin American Culture from Star Diner Owner, Diana Gonzales

Diana Gonzales, owner of Star Diner, gave a presentation on Latin American Culture, focusing on her family's Guatemalan heritage and how it influences their restaurant.

Gonzales explained that her family comes from a rural area in Guatemala where they grew coffee, corn, beans, and bananas, as well as raised livestock such as cows, pigs, goats, sheep, and chickens. She emphasized how this agricultural background shapes their approach to cuisine, aiming to recreate the flavors of the Guatemalan countryside for diners.

The presentation highlighted several Guatemalan cultural celebrations, including Holy Week parades, Independence Day (September 15) torch ceremonies, Christmas fairs, and observances for the Day of the Dead and Saints' Day.

Gonzales shared personal touches in the restaurant's decor, including:

- A cowboy statue honoring her father, Rony Gonzalez, who immigrated to the United States to provide better opportunities for his family.
- Cowboy-leg bar stools that have become a popular photo attraction for customers.
- A horse statue that families, especially children, enjoy taking pictures with.
- She also noted the restaurant's commitment to their faith and to believe in themselves to achieve their dreams and goals.

Gonzales concluded by thanking the community for their support and inviting families to visit the restaurant to experience a taste of Guatemalan culture and cuisine.

F.3. Consider expanding the United Against Hate Week and Indigenous People's Day Event Ad Hoc Committees each by one member

Commission Action: Upon motion by Commissioner Luk and seconded by Commissioner Buchignani. The Commission voted **6-0-2** to add Commissioner Buchignani to the United Against Hate Week Event Ad Hoc Committee and to add Commissioner Skinner to the Indigenous People's Day Event Ad Hoc Committee.

AYES: Buchignani, Luk, Osotio, Skinner, Solis, Jacobs

NOES: None.

ABSENT: Alexandre, Matviishin

G. COMMITTEE PROPOSED AGENDA ITEM(S)

None.

H. COMMITTEE AND LIAISON REPORTS

H.1. Commissioner Reports

Commissioner Buchignani reported that the Pride flag raising ceremony was well-received, with community members noting a great turnout for this year's event.

Commissioner Osotio discussed the upcoming 4th of July parade scheduled for Thursday, July 4th. As a volunteer coordinator, she expressed appreciation for the City of Novato's support and highlighted that all parade organizers are volunteers. She noted that over 80 businesses and community groups are participating in the parade.

Commissioner Skinner, attending her first meeting, thanked the commission for their warm welcome.

Commissioner Jacobs reported on attending an LGBTQ+ event the previous night, June 25th, at College of Marin's Kentfield campus. The event, organized in partnership with Marin County's Behavioral and Recovery Health Services team, celebrated Pride, discussed current LGBTQ+ services in Marin County, and explored visions for future queer and trans services in the area. Commissioner Jacobs shared his positive experience and the insights gained from the event.

H.2. Staff Liaison Reports

Community Services Division Manager Drew Bendickson provided several updates to the commission:

Pride Month Celebrations: On June 1, the City held a Pride flag raising ceremony at Novato City Hall, with speeches by Hope Greenleaf and Matt Nightingale, and Grace Cosentino raising the flag. The Pride flag has been flown at both City Hall and the Police Department throughout June. On June 11, the City Council issued a proclamation recognizing June 2024 as LGBTQ+ Pride Month in Novato, presented to Grace Cosentino, a teacher at San Jose Middle School and GSA program sponsor.

Josef Hoog Community Park: The City is seeking community input for a playground renovation at Josef Hoog Community Park. An online survey is available until June 30 at Novato.org/OpenNovato, and a public meeting will be held at the park on June 27 at 6:00 PM.

Summer Concert Series: Community Services Division Manager Bendickson reminded the commission about upcoming free concerts:

- Concerts on the Green at Novato Civic Green on select Fridays from 6:00-8:00 PM, featuring various artists.
- Hot Amphitheater Nights at Hamilton Amphitheater on the last Saturday of June, July, and August from 5:00-7:00 PM.

Community Services Division Manager Bendickson encouraged commissioners to spread the word about these events and direct people to novato.org/events for more information.

I. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 7:51 p.m. by Chair Jacobs.

I HEREBY CERTIFY that the foregoing minutes were duly adopted at the Multicultural Advisory Commission meeting of August 28, 2024.

/ Drew Bendickson /
Drew Bendickson, Community Services Division Manager