

PARKS, RECREATION & CULTURAL SERVICES COMMISSION

Thursday, March 21st, 2024 – 7 P.M.

Novi Civic Center – Council Chambers

The meeting was called to order at 7:00p.m. with Vice Chair Riggins presiding.

ROLL CALL:

Commissioners: Joseph (absent/excused), Riggins (present), Dooley (present), Joshi (absent/excused), Staab (present), Tolkacz (present), Torimoto (present)
Student Representatives: DiDomenico (present), Sid (present)

APPROVAL OF AGENDA:

Commissioner Dooley motioned for approval of agenda and second by Commissioner Staab.

Voice Vote

Unanimous

CITIZEN COMMENTS:

None

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Commissioner Staab corrected the date of Pour on the Shore. The date is July 26th. It was moved that the minutes for the February 15th meeting be approved as amended by Commissioner Tolkacz and second by Commissioner Dooley.

Voice Vote

Unanimous

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

- A. Walkable Novi – Commissioners Dooley & Tolkacz
Commissioner Tolkacz said the Active Mobility Plan was adopted by City Council on Monday night. The meetings were scheduled for the rest of the year, July 18th and October 17th. There was an engineering update to talk about the plans for the sidewalks on Nine Mile which is fairly controversial. The two non-motorized crossings on Nine Mile were discussed too. The sidewalk repair plan with the pilot being Meadowbrook Glens was outlined. It will be a five-year plan dividing up the city to fix a few neighborhoods a year.

- B. Novi Parks Foundation – Commissioners Joseph, Joshi, Staab & Torimoto
Commissioner Torimoto mentioned two major topics that were discussed. The first contributing funds to have an artist carve one of the tree stumps at Northwest Park perhaps with the logo of the Foundation.
It is the 20th anniversary of the Parks Foundation. The website is being refreshed. At the meeting there was discussion about the content and best ways to communicate.
Commissioner Staab reinforced Pour on the Shore on July 26th.

- C. Grants Committee – Commissioners Joseph & Riggins
Commissioner Riggins said the next meeting is April 18th. Director Muck added City Council approved an agreement with the Michigan Economic Development Corporation for the \$200,000 splash pad grant. Representative Breen helped assist receiving the funds for Novi.
- D. Parks and Facilities Updates
1. Rotary Park – Commissioner Dooley
Commissioner Dooley visited Rotary Park with the Student Representatives on a warm February day. He showed many slides with pictures of the area. Commissioner Dooley said that Rotary Park is an absolutely gorgeous gem in the City of Novi. It is off Nine Mile. Driving up Roethel Drive you come upon a cute little park with quite a bit of amenities. Cityofnovi.org contains history of Rotary Park. It was developed through donations to the Rotary Club and a Michigan Department of Resources grant. The park is made up of wetlands and woodlands. A sign in the front of the park shows the schematics of the size and the natural beauty the park entails.
The photos showed the playground, which is fairly new, well maintained, and clean. The next slide was of the shelter which is not rented this time of year but information on how to rent is displayed. The ladies 'and men's rooms were not open due to being winterized but looked very clean. People were actually using the tennis courts. The two tennis courts are painted blue, but the paint could use a little update. Chase Farms Trails is a great area to explore in the spring, summer, and fall. The many acres of woodlands and wetlands are very easy to walk. Student Rep DiDomenico said he used to go to Rotary Park a lot to use the playground and play tennis. It is a great park! The bat houses were pointed out, they help the community with natural insect control.
Commissioner Dooley highly encourages folks to come visit Rotary Park. It is well worth the time to go out and visit.

MATTERS FOR COMMISSION DISCUSSION AND/OR ACTION:

- A. OAS Transportation Update
Director Muck said this is a big update that impacts the city. Novi has run a Senior transportation program for decades. It falls under the Parks Recreation and Older Adult Services umbrella. In November of 2022 Oakland County voters approved an Oakland County public transportation milage. It is a ten-year milage, .95 mill tax dedicated to expanding and maintaining transit services throughout Oakland County. Novi is annually sending approximately \$4.4million to the county for public transportation services. Right now, we are receiving two Smart bus routes operating on Twelve Mile and Grand River. In January of 2023, City Council appointed an Older Adults Needs Committee to be formed to identify the best practices for service delivery and formulate recommended plans to meet the needs of older adults and adults with disabilities. Senior transportation was one of the first topics of conversation. The committee researched and discussed some of the statistics, challenges, and how the citizens are paying for both the milage and Novi's service.

The committee recommended to the City Council that they should consider contracting a third-party provider that would be funded under the Oakland County transportation millage. Our staff did due diligence researching several providers. Oakland County is utilizing providers including People's Express and WOTA (Western Oakland Transportation Authority) to provide curb to curb service. After the RFP People's Express rose far and away to the top. The company has been in business for thirty years operating in Ann Arbor, Wixom, Milford, and Detroit. They have a fleet of 67 vehicles. OAS Manager Keiser, Director Muck and City Manager Cardenas visited the headquarters and were impressed with their training protocols, pay schedule and full-time opportunities. Another advantage is the potential with teen riders. The Novi Youth Council expressed interest in the service believing it is safer and more affordable than Uber or Lyft. The county millage requires the fares to be capped at \$2 each way for senior citizens and those with disabilities. All other riders are \$4 each way. Riders under People's Express can start at fourteen years of age. Novi Transportation is age fifty-five plus or citizens with disabilities. By going to People's Express the number of days, hours, and service area increase. This change was recommended by the Older Adults Needs Committee, Youth Council and Monday, City Council approved a resolution asking the county to bring the service to Novi.

OAS Manager Kit Keiser anticipates the target date of a complete transition to be June 28th when the fiscal year ends. Between now and then work will be done to get riders implemented into the new system which should be seamless due to the software compatibility. The riders will have a new phone number to call when making an appointment for a ride. An additional benefit is lead time needed to guarantee a ride will go from our current seven - ten days to three days. Marketing will be done to make sure communication gets out to the riders.

On Tuesday night there was a staff meeting with the drivers. People's Express has offered to take on Novi employees. The drivers were appreciative of the communication even through it was a difficult conversation.

Another positive is that a few vehicles will be kept for OAS trips, activities, and functions. This was not possible before due to essential needs.

The message to the community is that transportation is not going away but being transitioned to People's Express along with expanded ages, times, days, and service area. There will be some overlap before the service starts approximately July 1st.

Questions and more discussion from the Commissioners included boundary area for the service, Apps / technology, increased safety with the dashcams, how this change will benefit the taxpayers, and prices of the rides.

STAFF REPORTS

A. Administration Division – Director Jeff Muck

1. Spring Park Projects Update

Director Muck started with an update on Lakeshore Park's parking lot. The main lot from the playground to the trailhead is scheduled for reconstruction and expansion. A map of the construction zone was shown. The contractor is estimating a May 1st start with anticipating a two-week project. It should be complete before Memorial Day weekend. Social media will notify the public and

the Motor City Mountain Bike Association will be sharing the information too. The parking lot at 12 and a Half Mile can be used to access the trail. The Meadowbrook Commons parking lot expansion and addition of four pickleball courts are scheduled to start next week. The contractor is anticipating finishing in late May. The courts then require thirty days to cure. The courts could open in mid to late June. The Meadowbrook Commons residents have been notified of the construction. This will not impact the Memorial Day Parade. The expansion of the parking lot will significantly help the activities at Meadowbrook. Once Meadowbrook is complete the contractor is planning to come back in late July to start work at Wildlife Woods. The whole park will need to be shut down to construct four new pickleball courts and expand the parking lot. The park will be closed from July to September. These courts will need to cure for thirty days and then the acrylic coating will be applied. This has to be done before the cold weather begins. By October there will be twelve dedicated pickleball courts in Novi plus the portable ones at ITC Sports Park.

2. Jessica's Splashpad

Director Muck showed an overview of the splashpad that was taken by Studio VI with a drone. He outlined several items that need to be accomplished before the Memorial Day weekend opening. DTE needs to run an electrical line and install a transformer to the panel that feeds the building so that the splashpad can be activated. This is the major hurdle to fire up the system and get the water to move. Once the system is powered then testing and inspections can begin. The County Health Department and Eagle need to come out to make sure that we are good to go. Benches need to be put into permanent locations, adding tables, chairs, and signage with rules. A wall will recognize donors and display the history of Jessica and how the splashpad came to life. Landscape restoration needs to be completed as well as fencing around the perimeter before the opening.

Starting Memorial Day weekend, the splashpad will operate seven days a week 10:00am – 8:00pm through Labor Day, weather permitting.

There should not be issues with parking conflicts with soccer due to little crossover. Bosco has a large lot that accommodates thirteen fields. The splashpad will operate similar to how the Civic Center and Lakeshore is staffed. There will be a park attendant that will monitor the weather, clear the area if there is a maintenance issue, open and close. The full-time parks maintenance staff will be responsible for mechanicals, water testing and reports.

B. Recreation Division – Deputy Director Tracie Ringle

1. Programs & Services

Deputy Director Ringle began with the sports realm. Spring soccer is going to have nearly 1000 participants which is a 7.8% increase over last year and 22.7% over 2022. This is a major revenue generator for the department. Novi soccer is on par with some of the private soccer club numbers and is certainly one of the largest municipal programs in the state. Chase Root and his Site Supervisors do a fantastic job which is why this program is so successful.

600 players registered for flag football this spring. The previous number was 455 so this is a 24% increase. There is one more week of adult softball registration with

only a few spots open. These are better numbers than last year. Teams can sign up for spring, summer and fall currently. Steve Fellhauer, the new Recreation Supervisor had the meeting with umpires yesterday and plans to meet with managers on April 4th.

The Detroit Pistons will be offering two basketball camps this summer. The first is in July and is two thirds sold out. The second camp is in August.

Chair volleyball happens twice a week at the Civic Center with an enthusiastic crowd. Steve Fellhauer and Madison LaChance, OAS Recreation Supervisor have been working with area senior centers to expand games by playing against other teams in the region.

Camp registration opens to the public Monday April 1st. It will be a crazy day for the staff. John Gillingham is doing a great job putting together camp packets, staff manuals, and wrapping up counselor hiring. There are a lot of great returning counselors and applicants.

Stella Johnstone is working hard in the arts and events area. A Japanese hip hop class will be offered by Ayumi. There are twelve children registered for the free trial. The Descendants theatre program production is approaching the weekend of April 11th-14th. Novi has been chosen as one of the sites for DIA Inside Out program again this year. The art will be installed before June and displayed through October. Folks on the team are programming to highlight that exhibition including events at Pavilion Shore, Dog Park, and Villa Barr.

The 2024 artists in residence have been chosen. A photographer named Michael Shi begins May 14th. Painter, Kung Ho starts in July.

An Instagram account has been created for R/C Raceway per the suggestion from this meeting last month. It is auto populating from Facebook.

Northwest Park is in the process of restoration by our park's maintenance team and Landscape Architect Rick Meader. This spring a black walnut tree had to be cut down due to dropping debris on the playground. A fifteen-foot stump was left intentionally. Art carvings are being investigated for the piece. Artists have been engaged for quotes, woodland creatures native to Michigan designs are being considered as well as the Foundation logo. The stump is located by the playground seating area. This is great opportunity to use something that is natural to enhance the area.

C. Older Adult Division – OAS Manager Kit Kieser

1. Programs and Services

OAS Manager Kit Kieser told the Commissioners that there is a lot going on in Older Adult Services in addition to the transportation changes. She provided an update on programs that have been completed or coming up. Two St. Patrick's Day events were held last week. Eighty people participated in the Nature Nurture Novi Shamrock Shuffle at Lakeshore Park last Wednesday. It was a two-mile St. Patrick's Day theme hike on the trails. Seventeen shamrocks were hidden along the path. People of all ages came out for the event. OAS hosted seventy participants at the St. Patrick's Day Luncheon at the Meadowbrook Activity Center. Everyone enjoyed the food, entertainment, games, and the opportunity to get together for fun.

Estate Planning Basics was held in Council Chambers and fifty of the seventy people signed up attended.

A full motor coach took nearly fifty people to the Detroit Institute of Arts today. This program was so popular another date was added for May. A new bingo board that projects to a big screen to make the program more visual has been added. Other communities with the same technology increased their numbers.

March 27th Rick Meader will be teaching Managing and Creating Natural Habitat in your Yard. This Nature Nurture Novi program has fifty-two people registered. April 6th Disney Descendants dress rehearsal is an opportunity for older adults to come to the show for free. April 16th OAS is providing a course on Financial Crimes, Scams, and Identity Theft. The Novi Birders group is back and will be starting on April 15th. It will happen at various parks around town. April 25th the Hearing Loss Support group is having an ADA Title IV speaker named Mary Novitsky. She will provide information about how to receive a free caption phone for people who struggle to use a phone due to hearing loss. Another Nature Nurture Novi program coming up is the city's Arbor Day event. It will be held April 27th from 10:00am – 2:00pm at Lakeshore Park. Boy scouts and Alpha Kappa Alpha will assist handing out seedlings to Novi residents. The city's forester Keith Salowich will do a presentation on proper seed planting and care at noon. April 22nd is Earth Day, signs with tree facts will line the trails at Lakeshore Park.

The Memorial Day Parade is coming up. Registration will be online this year. Twelve of the twenty-six participants from last year have already signed up. Kit Keiser, OAS Manager provided more information on the registration process in response to a commissioner's question. "Engage will tell you exactly how to register." She also mentioned AARP taxes are full and closed for registration.

COMMISSIONER COMMENTS:

Commissioner Tolkacz

There is a lot going on. I enjoyed the People's Express update. It seems like a win-win with savings for the city and expanded services.

Good progress on the splashpad.

I cannot believe there is 1000 participants in soccer. It seems like just a couple of years ago the numbers were in the 500–600 range. Double the participation in a program is great.

I enjoyed hearing about bringing advanced technology to bingo.

Commissioner Torimoto

I think the opportunities with transportation are great. Whether a ride is needed or walk (walkable Novi) we have those options of being able to get outside and get somewhere is fantastic. The pickleball courts and splashpad are top notch facilities. My only worry is getting instructors, referees and coaches which is really a struggle. There is a severe shortage right now and we need some creative solutions.

Commissioner Staab

People's Express is really great. It is going to give a lot more people mobility to get out and enjoy the city.

I look forward to the opening of the splashpad and new pickleball courts.

I want to reinforce the Spring Choralaires Concert on May 11th at the Middle School. Commissioner Staab asked about the exercise equipment at Meadowbrook Commons. Director Muck explained the wood fiber surface is being replaced with a Poured-in-Place surface. This is a rubberized surface similar to what is at Power Park and some of our other playgrounds. It will help people with mobility challenges navigate better. The area has been excavated and we are waiting for the weather to turn before installation.

Student Representative Sid

I thought it was interesting all the ride opportunities. It is cool that students and younger people can use the service and much cheaper. I might try it.

Student Representative DiDomenico

I will piggyback off the other comments. (People's Express) is a great opportunity for people my age because some would not feel comfortable with an Uber but since People's Express is connected to the city it seems better.

It is really cool to see that the splashpad is almost done since we have been talking about it since I got here.

Commissioner Dooley

As you are watching this evening just marvel at all the staff reports. As Commissioners it is absolutely a pleasure when Kit, Tracie, and Director Muck do their presentations. The City of Novi is so active, cares about people and wildlife. For those who do not think that is the case just listen to one of these meetings to hear about all the great things going on in this city from a Parks Recreation and Cultural Services standpoint. It is absolutely amazing everything that happens .

Commissioner Dooley saw a correspondence about a butterfly waystation and believes Northwest Park could provide a location for one in Novi and it would be a focal point of the park.

Thank you to Kit for your updates and telling us how someone can take part in these activities.

The Novi Ambassadors are having a reunion in April. Many of us have gone through the program and it is an opportunity to learn about the nuances of the city. Many who have participated get very involved as far as volunteering. I commend the city for holding a reunion.

Vice Chair Riggins

I echo all the comments so far. I want to say thanks for the great presentation and the student reps for helping Commissioner Dooley with Rotary Park. I will actually take my grandson to see the bat houses and find some turtles.

People's Express is a great opportunity for our citizens and young adults alike to ride and maybe get back and forth from work at an affordable price.

ADJOURNMENT

A motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Staab and seconded by Commissioner Torimoto.

Voice Vote

Unanimous

The meeting was adjourned by Commissioner Riggins at 8:14p.m.

DATE APPROVED: _____

Joseph, Chairperson

Riggins, Vice Chairperson