

PARKS, RECREATION & CULTURAL SERVICES COMMISSION

Thursday, January 16th, 2025 – 7 P.M.

Novi Civic Center – Council Chambers

The meeting was called to order at 7:00p.m. with Chairman Joseph presiding.

ROLL CALL:

Commissioners: Joseph (present), Riggins (present), Dooley (present), Gopalakrishnan (present), Staab (present), Tolkacz (present), Torimoto (present)
Student Representatives: DiDomenico (present), Sid (present)

APPROVAL OF AGENDA:

Line items 7a was moved to 6a – introduction of Novi Parks Commission Executive Director, Marla Wise.

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

Voice Vote

Unanimous

CITIZEN COMMENTS:

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

It was moved that the minutes for the November 21st meeting be approved by Commissioner Staab and second by Commissioner Riggins.

Voice Vote

Unanimous

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

- A. Novi Parks Foundation – Commissioners Joseph, Riggins, Staab & Torimoto
Commissioner Staab introduced the new Executive Director, Marla Wise who joined the Foundation in December. Commissioner Staab said he was looking forward to working with her on the many items for 2025.
Marla Wise came to the podium to provide information about her background. She has lived in Novi for thirty years close to Rotary Park. She is married with two children. Marla graduated from Novi Ambassadors in 2024. In 2016, she started working for local elections as precinct staff and has worked every election since. During the Oakland County nine days of voting pilot program, she met Charley Staab. He let her know about the position with the Novi Parks Foundation.
Ms. Wise retired three years ago after forty years in advertising and sales management in the Detroit area. She worked in cable TV running the state of Michigan for Comcast then moved to Crain's Detroit Business as an associate publisher.
She is very excited to be working with the Foundation and collaborating with the Parks Board.

Commissioner Staab said there was a meeting December 17th. Mark Somerville was welcomed as a new member. The meeting wrapped up 2024 with discussion of balances. The new officers for 2025 were voted on Charley Staab - President, Brian Adams - Vice President, Sheel Dasai - Treasurer and Ryan Joseph - Secretary. The next meeting is January 22nd.

- B. Active Mobility Committee – Commissioners Tolkacz & Dooley
Commissioner Tolkacz explained that meetings are typically scheduled prior to the Parks Commission meeting every month. Recently the frequency has increased, however, the meetings were cancelled this month so there is no update.

MATTERS FOR COMMISSION DISCUSSION AND/OR ACTION:

- A. Novi Parks Foundation – Introduction of Executive Director, Marla Wise
Moved to 6a.

- B. 2024 Annual Report – Deputy Director Tracie Ringle
The highlights report was displayed on the screen as well as the commissioner's packets. Deputy Director Ringle said the department takes pride in being able to share the accomplishments of the stellar team. This information is put together to share with Parks Commission, City Council and the community on the website. A preview of the highlights was posted on social media over the holidays. The achievements were categorized based on the city's values of team, innovation, commitment and trust.
The first accomplishment discussed was the CanDo project with Village Oaks Elementary at Brookfarm Park. It was important to feature soccer because it is the largest program. It had 35% growth and Lightning - select players - doubled in the last four years. Nearly 1,000 players participated in 2024 which is expected to repeat in 2025.
In 2024 new pickleball courts were built at Wildlife Woods Park and Meadowbrook Activity Center. The unique Northwest Park with the nature-based playground and pathways opened.
Nature Nurture Novi is under our commitment value and those programs continue to be enhanced with everything from bird watching to a garlic mustard pull. We try to make sure people understand why things that are being done in the parks such as the no mow zone and how we take care of pollinator gardens.
Another important project the department worked on this year was the DIA inside Out. It was the fourth time pieces of art from the DIA have been displayed in the city. Part of the program includes the DIA taking people free of charge to the museum.
The strategic plan is part of the trust value. It is used to guide the department in the correct direction, by listening to the community, and understanding what is important for us to accomplish for the residents. The Strategic Plan is also used when applying for grants. The plan is done every five years.
The Foundation has been operating for twenty years and has had many successes providing the community with funding for programs and park amenities.

The digital reach communicates the good things that are happening and tells the stories in numerous ways. The social media outreach promotes in addition to showing the value the department brings to the community. 20,000 newsletter subscribers receive information from PRCS twice a month. 6900 Facebook and 2200 Instagram followers are very active.

STAFF REPORTS

A. Administration Division – Director Jeff Muck

1. Parks Winter FAQ's

Director Muck compiled a list of the calls with questions the department often receives in the winter so the commissioners can learn the answers, reasons why and help spread the word in the community.

Residents often ask why isn't the ITC trail cleared of snow and ice in the winter? Parks maintenance cannot keep up during sudden weather events. The trail is wide, consequently drifts and freezing can happen before the staff can get out to address the issue. We do not want to mislead people that it is safe if there is a chance it is icy. Some of the snow removal methods would impact wildlife and plants along the trail. The machinery could tear up the boardwalks. No matter what time of year the trails are to be used at your own risk.

Bosco Field's gates are closed with a notice that the park is closed for the season. Technically the park is not closed for walking. The gates are mainly for security purposes because the fields are vulnerable, especially in the winter and spring. The trails are not plowed at Bosco because they are gravel.

The only park restroom that is open in the winter is the Lakeshore Park Building because it is heated. The other park bathrooms are winterized to protect the assets.

The pickleball and tennis nets are removed in the winter to prevent damage from the freeze and thaw cycle. They are removed as late as possible in the fall, which has been the beginning of December. They are installed as soon as possible in the spring as the weather forecast is monitored.

Questions also occur about weather cancellations. If Novi Schools are closed due to inclement weather Novi Parks will cancel activities held at the schools prior to 4:30. After 4:30 the status will be determined by Community Education and custodians. There is a weather hotline, the Facebook Page is updated, text alerts are sent, and it is posted on the website. 4:30 is the trigger point when we make the decision about evening programs. Weekends and early morning weekday cancellations are determined as soon as possible. The hotline number is (248)347 0473.

2. 2025 PRCS Commission Agenda Items

Director Muck provided a preview for some of the items to discuss in 2025. In February the commission's park report schedule will be available for review. It will be tweaked a bit. The focus will be on the smaller parks such as the RC Raceway.

Next month Jenneva Kayser, the new Art and Events Recreation Supervisor, will be introduced.

January 21st is a City Council workshop to discuss large initiatives; police and fire buildings, recreation / senior center, Beck Road, and ITC Community Sports Park.

Prioritizing and funding of these projects will be the main topics. Director Muck will report back to the commission or you can tune in to watch the meeting. This spring, splash pad rules and procedures will be discussed at a meeting for the commissioner's input. In addition, a pre-approval list for food vendors and priority registration for shelter rentals will be items for the commission to consider. On the opening day for park shelter rentals most reservations were made by non-residents. This impacted residents whose tax dollars contribute to the parks. There is a potential property acquisition which is still in negotiation. Director Muck was proud to announce that the city will be holding its first Diwali Festival on October 16th. The parks staff has been working with council member Priya Gorumurthy, Commissioner Swamy Gopalakrishnan and residents to be the steering committee for the event. The steering committee will look for sponsors, entertainment, and food vendors. The evening will conclude with fireworks. Commissioner Gopalakrishnan said he has attended similar events in Canton and always thought Novi should have one of their own because of the large Indian community. The event will bring people together. Diwali is the Festival of Lights, the biggest celebration in India. Instead of the commission meeting on October 16th the commissioners should attend this event. Save the date.

B. Recreation Division – Deputy Director Tracie Ringle

1. Programs & Services

Deputy Director Ringle explained that Jenneva Kayser will be in attendance next month to provide full information about Sizzling Summer. The art series will be revamped with cultural components to be held on Friday nights, two – three weekday evening programs. It will be different from 10:30a.m. on Wednesday mornings. In another month there will be more details to present to the commission.

Recreation Supervisor Kayser is also working on a new application system for the 2026 Villa Barr resident program. She has great insight since she is a professional artist and has personally been involved in residency programs. The marketing and software system will be upgraded.

Recreation Supervisor Gillingham is busy working on the Daddy Daughter Dance, and Mother Son Game Night. Registration is now open. Daddy Daughter Dance will be February 7th and 8th with a Friday and Saturday night and Saturday afternoon option. He is also working on Kids Night Extravaganza which is basically a parent's night out on February 22nd. Summer camp planning is also underway. Registration opens April 8th for residents and non-residents can register a week later. This is the first-year priority registration will take place. Communication about the new process will start very soon.

Recreation Supervisors Root and Fellhauer are working on sports. Winter basketball and volleyball games begin this weekend. There are 500 players between the two sports, with a smaller waitlist due to priority registration. Northville added some programs to provide for some of the non-residents that played with us in the past. Spring soccer registration is ongoing for the 1000 players anticipated.

2. 2024 PRCS Sponsor Recognitions

Deputy Director Ringle said that the department seeks sponsorship throughout the community to support our programs. This enhances the amenities, experience and allows us to offer more. Last year there was \$30,000 in sponsorship for the department. In 2025 the department expects the amount to increase because we are fully staffed. Every team member works on generating funding for our programs.

Deputy Director Ringle shared some of the names of the large contributors. The names of the companies can be displayed on a team jersey or supporting our veteran events. It is a wide range of opportunities which the key demographics can be targeted plus aligning with something positive.

C. Older Adult Division – OAS Manager Kit Kieser

1. Programs and Services

OAS Manager Kit Keiser had a couple of updates. The group travel program had increased participation in the last few months and 2024. It was 50% over the previous year with 450 people signing up for various trips. These ranged from destinations close to home plus longer trips to national parks and Europe. Registration opened for the Mackinac trip last month and is already half full. It is a great experience for a reasonable price.

In 2024 over 1500 people participated in Nature Nurture Novi programs including bird watching, hiking, invasive species removal, perennial exchange and Arbor Day celebration. Outdoor activities continued into the winter months with an Owl Prowl. Upcoming events consist of Rick Meader speaking about creating a butterfly pollinator garden on February 20th. February 28th the Farmington Hills star gazers will host a night at ITC Community Sports Park. March 25th Fire Captain Theisen will talk about the life of honeybees and their crucial role in our gardens and crops.

A Michigan trivia event will be held at the Civic Center tomorrow. The lunch features Buddy's Pizza, Better Made Potato Chips, and Faygo. On January 23rd OAS is partnering with the library for an afternoon of free music. January 29th volunteers from the DIA will present Behind the Scenes, To Die Upon a Kiss, a talk that explores many expressions of love through renowned works of art.

OAS Manager Keiser reported that in December there was an increase in the numbers in the nutrition and food assistance programs. Sandy Fisher will attend updated training to better facilitate the programs. The largest program of the year is the AARP Tax Aid. Novi is the biggest provider in the area. 300 of the 411 time slots are filled.

3. PEX Agreement / 6 Month Recap

OAS Manager Keiser said it is not a tremendous change regarding the numbers for People's Express. It is the same 95% increase year over year. The average is still 2400 rides per month. On Monday, December 16th an updated agreement went to City Council to extend the use of office space and the parking lot at the Civic Center to support the satellite location. This also addressed the subsidies provided for in-boundary rides at no cost. January 6th both these were approved. People's Express will continue to use our parking and fuel facilities. The city will continue to pay subsidies for eligible riders. People's Express is currently

seeking space within Novi or a neighboring community to accommodate an office and secure parking for fifty vehicles. The company is growing, and they are looking for accommodation to exceed current needs.

COMMISSIONER COMMENTS:

Student Representative Sid

I want to start out by saying the 2025 plan is really great specifically about allowing residents to have priority registration. Summer camps and shelter locations are really a struggle when they are booked up. My younger brother and I attended the summer camps because they are great programs. My dad said it was always a headache trying to get enrolled.

Student Representative DiDomenico

Thanks for sharing the annual report and all the updates.

Commissioner Riggins

A lot was shared at tonight's meeting with many good updates.

Thank you, Marla, for coming in to tell us about yourself. It will be great working with you on Parks Foundation.

Wow, 50% increase in group travel. That is awesome that people are getting involved. I am going to sign up for the Mackinac Island trip this year.

Commissioner Gopalakrishnan

Happy New Year to everybody. It was an excellent meeting today.

I did have a wonderful trip to India in December. I got to see my mom who wasn't feeling well. There was wonderful weather, good food. I did not want to come back to this weather.

Warm welcome to Marla. Thank you for the introduction and updates and I am looking forward to hearing more from you.

Thank you, Tracie Ringle for the 2024 highlights. It was wonderful to see what is coming up.

Thank you, Director Jeff, for the clarification on winter park usage. I would like to venture out to visit the parks to see how they differ this season. Thanks for highlighting the agenda items for this year.

Good update from Tracie about the programs and services in 2025 and same with the OAS Manager Kit. Thank you for everything you do.

Commissioner Talkacz

I enjoyed the Older Adults discussion on trips. I have heard about many such as Tiger games and Mackinac Island but did not know they transcend to National Parks and Europe.

I was interested in the Wild Birds Unlimited program and hope it happens again.

Go Lions.

Commissioner Torimoto

I would like to repeat a lot of what was said already. The highlights look fantastic, and the report was packaged well. It is amazing to look back at how much Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Services have been able to achieve. Next year's plans look

fantastic, especially the Diwali Festival. The engagement and interest from the citizens are great for the city.
Welcome Marla.

Commissioner Staab

Go Lions! and Happy New Year everybody.
I am glad we are instituting the preference for Novi residents for sign-ups. This should be beneficial for residents.
I am looking forward to attending the Diwali Festival in October. I like expanding my cultural diversity.
July 18th is Pour on the Shore at Pavilion Shore Park. Make sure to put it on your calendar.

Commissioner Dooley

Hearing the 2024 highlights and reading over the notes from November I remember the comment about being last and not having the opportunity to say anything original because everything has been said by these great commissioners and student reps. It speaks volumes for the department. You should be very proud. Over the years things keep getting better.
Thank you, Marla, for volunteering for the ambassadors. It is something near and dear to our hearts. I was one of the original ambassadors and it is neat to see a recent graduate. You should be very proud and learned a lot about what makes the city great. Marla is going to do great things for the Novi Parks Foundation.
I will also say go Lions.

Chairman Joseph

It is hard to go last when everything has been said. The Diwali Festival deserves recognition and makes complete sense given the makeup of the city and residents. I am looking forward to that in October.
Welcome Marla. It is not too early to start talking about Pour on the Shore. Marla's background with sales and marketing will help continue the tradition and grow that event.
With 1000 kids playing soccer, we will need a bigger grill for Dooley Dog Day.

ADJOURNMENT

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

Voice Vote

Unanimous

The meeting was adjourned by Chairman Joseph at 7:58p.m.

DATE APPROVED: _____

Joseph, Chairperson

Dooley, Vice Chairperson