

PARKS, RECREATION & CULTURAL SERVICES COMMISSION

Thursday, June 17, 2021 – 7 P.M.

ELECTRONIC MEETING

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m. with Commissioner Dooley presiding.

ROLL CALL:

Commissioner Dooley read a State Mandate of the Open Meetings Act, that all members will identify their location by stating the county, city, and state from which he or she is attending the meeting remotely.

Dooley (Present) from Novi, Oakland County, Michigan, Staab (Present) from Novi, Oakland County, Michigan, Joseph (Present), Joshi (Present), from Novi, Oakland County, Michigan, Riggins (Present) from Novi, Oakland County, Michigan, Smith (Present) from Novi, Oakland County, Michigan, Torimoto (Present) from Novi, Oakland County, Michigan.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA:

Commissioner Dooley asked if there were any changes to tonight agenda or can we get approval to accept as it is presented.

It was moved that the agenda, as presented, be approved by Commissioner Staab, and seconded by Commissioner Joseph.

Voice Vote

Unanimous

CITIZEN COMMENTS:

None

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Approval of April 2021 minutes.

It was moved that the minutes for April be approved by Commissioner Joshi and seconded by Commissioner Smith.

Voice Vote

Unanimous

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

A. Walkable Novi – Commissioner Riggins & Smith

Commissioner Smith gave the updates from the meeting the previous Thursday (6/10/21). A park serve tool was discussed which outlines how far people are from parks in Novi. This could be added to the agenda for the next Parks Commission meeting. The corner clearance rule for trails and pathways was discussed.

Currently there is no routine reinforcement but if a citizen makes a complaint the city will address. It is basically keeping the corners clear for visibility for people in cars.

The neighborhood sidewalk repair fund was approved for 400K for 2021 and 2022 and years out. It is going to start with Meadowbrook Glens Homeowners Association. It is a pilot program for repairing three quarter inch and higher

deflections with the residents. Meadowbrook Glens HOA decided to make it optional for homeowners.

The non-motorized plan update was approved by City Council. Director Muck discussed park signage on main roads at the meeting.

Engineering updates included several things under construction, Haggerty Rd near Orchard Place, Meadowbrook east side between 11 Mile and Gateway, and 10 Mile north side at Dinser. We are waiting on utilities to get easements sorted to finish that (Dinser) off.

Safe routes to schools are starting in July by Orchard Hills. The ITC connector to Wildlife Woods is pending the MDOT right of way. The 10 Mile sidewalk north side by Wixom project received no bids so that will be reviewed this summer. The big project 10 Mile south side between Haggerty and Meadowbrook is in preliminary design which replaces some culverts from the thirties. The exciting one is between South Lake Dr. and South Lake Court along Walled Lake where plans are for a six-foot-wide gravel path. Bristol Corners Homeowners are involved in this project. We are waiting on some wetland permits and an easement from Bristol Corners. This will be a nice addition.

The next Walkable Novi meeting will be September 9th at six o'clock and it will be in person.

Commissioner Dooley asked when the 10 Mile project on north side will be completed. Commissioner Smith answered that they are waiting for DTE clearance. Director Muck confirmed DTE needs to move some wires and it should not take too long since those are small pieces.

B. Novi Park Foundation – Commissioners Joseph, Staab & Torimoto

Commissioner Torimoto stated that we had a chance to have our meeting at Lakeshore Park which was an unbelievable experience. There will be an opportunity for the entire public to see Lakeshore Park at the community open house in early July.

At the meeting there was discussion about policy and what type of donations would be accepted. Any kind of religious or political affiliation would not be accepted by the Foundation.

A committee structure will be taking over for the Friends of Villa Barr selection for the artist in residents' program. Also, opportunities in the community with the library and schools to show their art.

Pour on the Shore was discussed as far as opportunities to receive more donations and to make it clear what we are funding.

Director Muck thanked the Novi Parks Foundation for the \$80,000 contribution which assisted the construction of the pickleball courts at Wildlife Woods. The courts opened in May and have been used for recreational purposes. A majority of the programs being planned to take place on these courts from learn to play to tournaments are at or near capacity. The pent-up demand for pickleball is being met.

C. Grants Committee – Commissioners Dooley & Joshi

Commissioner Joshi stated that there was not a meeting this month. Updates will be provided after next months in person meeting. Land acquisition will be the main topic.

Director Muck mentioned the email that was sent from MParks with an announcement about the Governor's \$250 million initiative. The governor is making a request to fund state park renovations. This could have a significant impact on Novi with the state potentially using that money from the recovery act. The federal funds should hopefully open a lot more of the trust fund dollars to locals, such as Novi for future grant projects.

D. Parks and Facilities Updates

1. Ella Mae Power Park – Commissioner Joseph

Commissioner Joseph displayed a PowerPoint about Ella Mae Power Park. He remembers this park from growing up in Novi with the big play structure in the back by the pond. He remembers it was unsafe when he climbed as a kid. He rode his bike to the park and entered from 10 Mile between the high school lot and the Civic Center. There is a nice sign welcoming everyone to the park along the long driveway to the actual parking lot. The parking lot was full when he visited with a lot of softball practices and people enjoying the park. The installation of the new accessible equipment that was approved a couple meetings ago was underway. The footings have been poured and machinery for moving land was there, progress is being made. The play structure was also blocked off however, the swings were still accessible. All the equipment including trash cans looked in great shape and well taken care of.

A picture of the path looking back through the woods was shown. It could be confused as a service road. The website shows the availability of hiking trails and nature activities readily visible from the main area of activity. Commissioner Joseph said he walks his dogs in this area, the shade is nice which helps. At the center of the wooded area there is a nice grassy opening with some water on both sides. It is a peaceful area where people sit on blankets and have lunch. It is close to a neighborhood but still has the feeling of having your own private spot. The path has been widened and it is maintained by the cross-country team. The presentation continued along a paved path over a bridge there is areas to potentially expand for more nature walks. A paved piece comes in off Taft Road that goes along the practice soccer field and baseball diamond. It is not extremely clear where to walk to get back to the high school however, crossing a field to get the path / boardwalk which ends at the track and football field is the way. The boardwalk is in really good shape. There is some fenced area to get to the stadium. There is availability to go down this steep hill and take the pathway and walk along the fence line back to the pond. Snapping turtles, bat houses and a lot of other wildlife activity can be seen. The tour continued to a service road which leads back to the entrance. There is about 30 feet of buffer space and growth that keeps you out of the water as well as signage that says the pond is unsafe and to keep out.

The park looked great, maintained and was being used. Commissioner Joseph said it was good to see people out and enjoying the facilities even while it was under construction.

Commissioner Joshi mentioned she had no idea there was so much back there such as the boardwalk and grassy areas. I assumed it was high school property.

Commissioner Joseph added he assumed it was considered high school property. He went back and looked on the map and recognized that it truly was that large of a space.

Director Muck explained there is an agreement between the city and the schools for those fields. They maintain the fields and the boardwalk. It is our property, but it is not unusual for people not to know that agreement with the schools.

2. Lakeshore Park– Commissioner Smith

Commissioner Smith apologized for not being able to take a lot of pictures or drone footage because there were so many people even midday during the week. A picture from the city's Facebook page was shown which included all the new stuff, bright green bike path, the building and shelter. There are bike stands, racks, and signs to remind to check for bikes when backing out. That is a good reminder for people to pay attention. The main building has a porch that faces west. It would be perfect for Adirondack chairs. The lending library is up and running. Commissioner Smith gave a demonstration of how it works.

Landscaping work was still going on too. The playground equipment looks really good. The wheelchair accessible piece is a bit hard to spin and probably needs an adjustment. Commissioner Smith finished with the park is an amazing place adding he spoke with people from various communities and universally everybody's opinion was it is just an awesome space.

Commissioner Joseph asked who maintains and runs the actual library. Director Muck answered the library staff. They can remotely see what materials have been checked out and replenish as needed. Materials can be returned through the kiosk or at the main library. Further details were discussed- a couple hundred books available, an email will be sent after checking out.

Clarification was made regarding the new path discussed in the Walkable Novi report. Would help with connecting Lakeshore Park via the green pathway further west along South Lake Drive past the edge of the lake and turning north. It will connect people further north along South Lake Court by the emergency vehicle entrance to the subdivision.

MATTERS FOR COMMISSION DISCUSSION AND/OR ACTION:

A. Light Up the Night

Deputy Director Ringle took on this topic. She stated we are always planning six months out which takes us up to the holiday season. With COVID restrictions lifted and where we were with shutdown it is a good opportunity to look at programs and take the time to make changes that make sense for the community. One of the programs that we have talked extensively in our office about is Light Up The Night. Historically this has been our largest community event with 4,000 – 5,000 people attending annually. The event is at least ten years old on the Civic Center Campus. As a staff we relooked at the event as well as heard from residents and council members about improvements we could make to our holiday events.

While brainstorming citywide community events, there are several factors to consider as a team. The ability to maintain appropriate gathering numbers, traffic flow, making sure people can get there and actually move around is

always a challenge. A location with ample parking, high visibility, easily maintained site which is accessible for vendors, staff and the public is important for being able to accommodate 4,000-5,000 people. We are capitalizing on growing trend of year-round family friendly outdoor gatherings. We saw during COVID that parks are important to people year round and realized they are willing to put on winter coats and boots and go outside more than ever. In 2020, we learned of several outdoor winter holiday celebrations around the country that were successful in the outdoors especially in cold climates and locally. In lieu of Light Up The Night we are talking about something outdoors. Fuerst Park is a viable option with two Santa visits at Township Hall, lighting the park with holiday lights and scenes that will be available the whole month of December. Rather than just one Friday night indoors, the outdoor combined event specific space with activities at your own leisure throughout the month of December will take place. In the idea, framework is that Festive Nights is a possible name which would entail lighting a large portion of the park and constructing different holiday scenes. The weekend of December 3rd – 5th that is our traditional Light Up the Night weekend would be the kickoff. We would have crafts along the trail, carolers, performances at the amphitheater, hot chocolate, marshmallow toasting and Santa visits in Township Hall. A lot of these are the same activities held previously at Light Up The Night with a different feel. The Santa visits would be a reservation-based system to control how many people are gathering. The first two evenings would be restricting how many people could attend which creates a better experience for everyone. The lights and décor would be up the whole month of December which a great opportunity for sponsorship. Sponsors would get a month of value instead of one night, especially in this economic climate.

The holiday tree will stay at the Civic Center Campus, and Civic Center will be lit how it typically is for the holidays. The tree lighting is up for discussion, either being before a Monday night Council meeting or combined with the Friday night of opening of the event.

Typically, we have raised \$14,000 to run Light Up The Night which we think we need at least that amount to be able to do something substantial at Fuerst Park to be engaging for the community. Deputy Director Ringle opened the conversation to the commission for questions and comments.

Commissioner Riggins thought it was a great idea. She went to Fuerst Park for the Wonderful Wednesday to see the Polynesian dancers. It is a nice park to set up Santa and different things throughout the month. "I am for the controls of how many people are there."

Commissioner Smith agreed with Commissioner Riggins and added it will be good to spread the event out over a longer period of time, getting more people through without the big crowd that Light Up The Night always had.

Commissioner Joshi added that she thinks it is a great idea. The Fuerst Park is spread out more. The lighted walking trails will be amazing. She questioned the schedule if the events were for the whole month, every day, or just Fridays.

Deputy Director Ringle clarified that the activities, Santa, hot chocolate, crafts will be the first weekend. Then it is at your own pace to experience the lights and take in the beauty of the park. Commissioner Joshi commented the traffic and parking will be better.

Commissioner Joseph added the walkway lends itself to this type of activity which could end centrally with a display near the amphitheater. This alleviates the crowds and parking situation from Light Up The Night.

Commissioner Torimoto asked if the event was mainly outdoors. Deputy Director Ringle answered yes except for the Santa visits. It was asked if fireworks will be considered for the event. Deputy Director Ringle explained the cost of the fireworks is being transitioned into lighting the park for a whole month.

Commissioner Staab said it is very interesting having the event throughout the month with the big kick off the first weekend. He had the idea that each Saturday could have different activities perhaps being taken on by assorted volunteer organizations.

Commissioner Dooley liked the fact that the Civic Center Campus will still have the tree lit showcasing itself but likes the idea of going to Fuerst Park which will be absolutely beautiful. He wanted to add that he is a traditionalist and hopes the name of the event has a traditional name.

Commissioner Staab added it is refreshing to be talking about this after what we have been through the last fourteen months.

B. Village Wood Lake Park Amenities

Director Muck stated he wanted to build off Chair Dooley's report on Village Wood Lake from last month. He was very complimentary about the current status of the park. But one of the things we have considered and actually brought forward in previous years by council as a goal is to enhance the amenities of neighborhood parks. One of those is Village Wood Lakes so we are considering adding three park benches into the park. Director Muck showed potential locations for the benches which took advantage of the view of the lake. The benches would go onto a cement pad so they would be handicapped accessible. He opened it to a brief discussion on the topic with comments and suggestions. This included: the type of benches which will be the same ones that are at Pavilion Shore, status of fish in the lake, plan to start with three benches and more can be added later. The placement of the benches was demonstrated in a drawing with the focus for placement on nice views of the lake. Commissioner Joshi suggested the benches be closer to the lake however, Director Muck cautioned that there would not be an accessible path to them.

Commissioner Dooley added it is not easy to get down to that pond from that side due to high grass and high pitch. There are picnic tables also in that area. Director Muck stated he will be getting these benches ordered tomorrow. Commissioner Riggins added she thought where the benches are placed is a good idea but also agrees with Commissioner Joshi that they should be closer to the water and to maybe come back and add that later.

Voice Vote

Unanimous

STAFF REPORTS

A. Administrative– Director Jeff Muck

1. Park Project Updates

Director Muck stated there is so many positive things that are happening with the park projects it is important to run those down. ITC Trail the segment along Nine Mile is now complete. The sidewalk connectors on Ten Mile are in the final stages. Commissioner Smith mentioned earlier there is now a fully completed trail throughout Novi along the corridor which is a great asset to the community. Lakeshore benches, additional landscaping have been installed and the lending library has opened, along with camp that began Monday. We will reevaluate park use and potentially add more tables and benches.

The water tower is still in the process of painting and sandblasting. We had a few mechanical issues, but activity should start again. The pickleball courts are open at Wildlife Woods. Outdoor fitness stations are going to be installed late summer on the south side of the pickleball courts. The ITC Connector will be constructed in the fall. Deputy Director Ringle has done work on a project that would replace the siding on the red studio at Villa Barr. She has taken a personal interest in the gardens at Villa Barr and has done quite a bit of work out there along with other parks and city staff.

The inclusive playground at Power Park is being installed and is on track to open in July. The transportation vehicles have received new graphics that will assist with promotion and visibility. We continue to work with the contractor at Bosco field as they add additional seeding, fixing low lying areas and continue to run the irrigation. We are still not at the point where we are ready to accept so the fields have not been turned over yet. But more to come as we continue to monitor with the park's maintenance team.

2. CAPRA Re-accreditation

Director Muck thanked the commission for the kind words and emails that came out after last month's meeting. He went on to recap the CAPRA accreditation. It is the only accreditation for parks and rec agencies. It is a measure of an agency's quality operations management and customer service. It is a multi-year process both to get accredited and maintain it. We work year-round on planning, administration, human resources, financial management, facility and land use, public safety, risk management, research, and evaluation. All city departments along with city leadership and City Council support this initiative as well as the Commission. It takes a village to get and maintain CAPRA accreditation. We received our initial accreditation in 2016 and it is required to

be renewed every five years. In May, three evaluators from across the country joined us on a virtual visitation and they have recommended the department for reaccreditation. We achieved 152 out of 154 standards which is 98.7%. We are one of only three agencies in Michigan who is accredited and 180 out of approximately 10,000 across the country.

A few bullet points from the report which was very complementary of the operations and professionalism of the department. "Novi PRCS has a dedicated team who not only provide a valuable essential service to the community but also work together to adhere to the CAPRA standards." The self-assessment was easy for their visitation team to access the living document which is readily available to the staff for continually updating. The comments continued "Novi has a wonderful community programming presence including strong outreach to underserved populations and commitment to older populations. The department has representation on many local and state organizations including Southeast Michigan Council of Governments. Novi has many tremendous procedures and plans such as after-action reports, marketing plan, risk management questionnaire which would benefit any community."

There will be an official announcement from CAPRA board in September at the national recreation and parks conference in Nashville, Tennessee. The news will be shared with the Novi community via press release, social media, Studio VI and e-newsletters.

B. Recreation Division – Deputy Director Tracie Ringle

1. Program & Services

Deputy Director Tracie Ringle stated we are off and running with the summer programming. The Civic Center parking lot is full tonight due to adult softball. The Sizzling Summer Art Series kicked off this week with three performances.

Wednesday the amphitheater was full for the Polynesian dancers. Tonight, we partnered with the library to offer a Sizzling Summer presentation. Friday night there is a movie scheduled at Fuerst Park.

Select soccer tryouts were held last weekend which is the traditional time they are held. There will be even more teams in our select Lightning Club than we even had pre-COVID. People are looking for a way to play soccer which is affordable and not the full commitment of surrounding big clubs. It is a niche opportunity for people to have a good level of competition with a different level of commitment. We are happy to see those numbers back.

Camp is back in session both at the Civic Center and the new building at Lakeshore Park. They are both sold out. The camp counselors are excited about the Lakeshore building. The building will help us retain staff. There have been great comments from parents about the facility at Lakeshore Park. Contracted camps such as farm, horse, and science numbers are higher than they were pre-COVID too.

Parks shelter rentals are through the roof. The half day rentals are solid every weekend at Lakeshore Park both morning and afternoon. Deputy Director Ringle feels it was a good move to get more people into the park and use the shelters. Many more rentals are using caterers than in the past probably due to COVID and wanting somebody licensed to do food rather than potlucks. Caterer use has tripled.

Pickleball lessons and leagues are full. Recreation Supervisor, Greg Morris is working to offer more pickleball for the community. Pickleball has been the number one topic from phone calls, emails, and social media posts. People were really looking forward to those courts being opened.

The Villa Barr gardens are 90% replanted, mostly with perennials and about 5% annuals. We did that so a decision could be made later about the final flowers to plant. It was a group effort to get the flowers planted with just a few more flats left. The new siding is on order for the studio.

July is parks and recreation month, and we will be doing a series of videos featuring great stories from the community about how parks and recreation has influenced their lives. The National Parks and Recreation Association's theme is "our parks and rec story". We captured some videos of long-time users, a camper turned camp counselor and the father daughter that have both played softball in our leagues. The videos will be on social media in the month of July. July 7th is the Lakeshore Park open house. Marketing for the event will start next week. There will be tours of the building, light refreshments, ice cream and staff will be able to answer questions. We will have trail mix and bug spray for those people who want to head back to the trails. We are looking forward to being able to showcase the park to the community.

A number of our programs such as adult / youth sports, fitness, cultural arts camps / programming, park shelter rentals, dog park memberships have reached 90% or greater of the budgeted revenue for this year. Granted the number was lower but we were not sure we would hit due to COVID impacting the numbers. We will be raising our expectations and numbers. Deputy Director Ringle added that is a good thing.

Commissioner Jospeh asked if there have been any issues with the half day rentals with overlap or folks wanting to stay longer than their allotted time? Deputy Director Ringle said she was not aware of any issues. She explained there is a park attendant onsite to do a quick change of the shelter to make sure it is clean, and the garbage is removed. There has been some additional garbage and the beach has been left in a fashion that we are not accustomed to. We are educating people using the park that we are all stewards of the park.

C. Older Adults Division – Director Jeff Muck

1. Special Outreach Services Update

Director Muck stated that in the month of May our transportation provided 900 trips to our passengers, as of today, we have provided 500 for June. Those numbers are continuing to increase. In January, our daily average was thirty trips a day and now it is up to fifty. The huge number swing in transportation is correlated to the loosening of restrictions and vaccination level.

The fitness participants are excited they are going back to Meadowbrook for classes in July. Zumba Gold is going to start in September at Lakeshore. We are going to start programming the building after camp is over with more senior programs.

We have made almost 1,200 reassurance calls to residents sixty and over. It resulted in 83 social service referrals, 163 transportation referrals and 200 files of life were distributed by the Novi Fire Department. There has been an impact with those direct outreach calls getting more people aware of our services.

We held a tech support group May 20th that had thirty people attend. We are moving forward with meetings every other month. Mike Allie has committed to volunteer to help the OAS team close the digital divide we see with seniors.

Bingo is taking place on Fridays at the Civic Center or Meadowbrook. About fifteen to thirty people are attending each meeting. We are currently looking for more bingo callers. Programming is returning to Meadowbrook Activity Center. Many of the volunteers are eager to return. A special event was held with the cooperation of KMG at Meadowbrook Commons. The event was the first since March 2020 and sold out in a half an hour. The ladies enjoyed lunch and bingo. The next event is in June and will be a baseball theme.

The medical loan closet continues to be one of our most popular service we offer with almost 90 interactions a month for walkers, wheelchairs, shower seats and toilets.

OAS is picking up especially with the restrictions lifted, we are doing our best to try to get programming up and running in that division.

COMMISSIONER COMMENTS:

Commissioner Smith

Congratulations to Director Muck, Deputy Director Ringle, and the whole staff for surviving CAPRA, getting the accreditation and recognition for the great work here in Novi. I did not know all the stuff was in the back of Power Park. Anybody who has not been to Lakeshore it is beautiful out there.

Commissioner Joshi

Thank you for the park presentations I learned a lot from both. I want to congratulate again to the parks department for reaccreditation. I look forward to seeing everyone in person next month.

Commissioner Joseph

Congratulations again to Director Muck and Assistant Director Ringle. That is awesome news, obviously your staff is equally excited.

After being at Lakeshore Monday night I think it is a shame that we are not able to host some events in that beautiful new building but understand where the restrictions come from. Hoping that we loosen that as we see the activity and more residents see what the park has to offer and recognize that it is a beautiful space with a lot of uses. All the parks we have are beautiful, but Lakeshore stands out as the center piece or distinctive park of the city.

Commissioner Riggins

I read an article the other day that said spending twenty minutes in a park makes you happier. I just want to encourage everyone to go out and visit our lovely parks here in Novi. All the different programs Deputy Director Ringle told us about are awesome so please go out and enjoy. The presentations today were awesome so thank you. I want to give congratulations to the reaccreditations.

Commissioner Torimoto

I am echoing the comments so far. Congratulations on the reaccreditations for CAPRA. The positive energy and opening up the community is unbelievable. Just hearing about the Older Adult Services and what it was like a six month - year ago and then now,

everybody engaging and waiting for the opportunity to really enjoy it. The positive energy is exciting to hear.

Commissioner Staab

I want to reinforce again the great job on reaccreditation of CAPRA. I appreciate the comprehensive good report from Commissioner Smith and Joseph and the reports from Director Muck and Deputy Director Ringle. I would like to reinforce Commissioner Joseph when he said go up to Lakeshore Park and look at that facility. It is the crown jewel in our cadre of wonderful parks and facilities. It is very picturesque and does embrace the up north feeling that the residents desired with the renovation. I agree with Commissioner Joseph and understand the concern over other facility uses but it is such a showcase. It is something to consider as we move down the road.

As far as Light Up The Night, the presentation was excellent, and I appreciate Deputy Director Ringle. I liked the different twists, it is a good time to change things up, and reinvigorate new ideas.

If you need bingo callers, I could help out. Have a great Father's Day. I am looking forward to getting together in July.

Commissioner Dooley

All the comments go without saying this is a fantastic group. We all lend support to each other, Director Muck, Deputy Director Ringle and their wonderful staff. The fact that the reaccreditation is going to take place is truly a tribute to Jeff, Tracie and those who work with you in the wonderful Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Services Department.

Commissioner Joshi and I were privileged enough to go in front of City Council for reappointment. There were some tremendous candidates for various boards within the city. Continue to show support for the city there is a lot you can offer. Not many people volunteer to sit on a various board. Those of us on this Commission are passionate about it. If there is something else that you have an interest or passion continue to volunteer because volunteerism is what makes us great. In the latest Engage Magazine there is a wonderful opportunity in September. For those of us on the commission that have not had the opportunity to go through the Novi Ambassadorship, I was blessed and privileged to do that early in the process. It is a great program, where you really learn a lot about the city, within the various departments, businesses. The classes begin in September, and I highly recommend.

I look forward to seeing everyone in July.

ADJOURNMENT

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

Voice Vote

Unanimous

The meeting was adjourned by Commissioner Dooley at 8:32p.m.

DATE APPROVED: _____

Jay Dooley, Chairperson

Charles Staab, Vice Chairperson

