



CITY OF NOVI
Beautification Commission
Wednesday, August 13, 2025 6:00 pm
Mayor's Conference Room
Novi Civic Center | 45175 Ten Mile Road

Call to Order: 6:02 p.m.

Roll Call – Gareth Crawford, Yogesh Kumar, Nicole Rumao, Dinesh Seksaria, Mary Angela Winter, Torry Yu

Present: Yogesh Kumar, Dinesh Seksaria, Mary Angela Winter, Torry Yu
** Nicole Rumao arrived at 6:23p.m.

Absent Excused: Gareth Crawford

Also Present: Katherine Oppermann, Staff Liaison
Sabrina Lilla, Deputy Finance Director
Susan Erspamer, Hospitality House Executive Director
Tiffany Atkinson, Hospitality House Development & Marketing Manager

Approval of Agenda

Motion: Yu; Seconded: Winter; Approved: 4:0

Approval of Minutes – July 23, 2025

Motion: Yu; Seconded: Winter; Approved: 4:0

Chair – Gareth Crawford

Secretary – Torry Yu

City Liaison – Kate Oppermann

Purpose of the Meeting

1. Community Development Block Grant
 - a. Hospitality House

Deputy Finance Director provided a summary of the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) to the Commissions. She shared that the former committee that handled the program was dissolved, and the associated task of administration was reassigned to the Beautification Commission. The City

receives around \$130,000 annually from Oakland County and, historically, the City is permitted to choose four different programs and how much is distributed to those programs within parameters the County sets (most recently stipulating 15% of funds being assigned to Public Service activities and 85% assigned to Minor Home Repair).

In the past the Commission has expressed interest in learning more about the individual projects the funds are dispersed to and so it has been arranged for them to appear before the Commission. Novi Youth Assistance will be at the September meeting, HAVEN has not yet responded, and Hospitality House is present today. Ms. Lilla then welcomed the representatives from Hospitality House and let them proceed.

Susan Erspamer, the Hospitality House Executive Director, and Tiffany Atkinson, the Hospitality House Development & Marketing Manager introduced themselves. Ms. Erspamer shared that Hospitality House is celebrating its 25th Anniversary and gave an overview of Hospitality House, especially their two main programs:

Client-Choice Food Pantry

This vital resource allows people to shop the mini store for food they truly need and want. The system allows for dignity and respect of the clients and reduces food waste. The store includes shelf stable foods, canned, fresh and frozen fruit and vegetables, frozen proteins, and dairy products. Food is sourced from Gleaners, Forgotten Harvest, donations, and “Rescued” from area restaurants and grocers.

Weekend Food Program

Program designed to feed school age children when school is out, filling the gap left by the state provision that provides free breakfast and lunch on school days. It started in the Walled Lake Consolidated School District and is newly in the Novi Community School District. They work in partnership with the schools to identify eligible students and to assist with discrete distribution.

Both programs heavily rely on volunteers, in addition to full-time Hospitality House staff. Hospitality House’s 2024 data shows them providing services to 5,000 individuals/2,000 families, 1.2 million pounds of food given out. Specifically Novi visits have increased 38% from 2024 to 2025, 2,800 visits from Novi residents alone, 176,207 pounds (roughly \$350,000 worth) to Novi residents. Novi is the number one City that they provide support to. She noted that the needs has grown, there are pockets in every community, and that food insecurity has no zip code or face. They anticipate that need will continue to rise. She also briefly reviewed some of their smaller and seasonal programs (Holiday House, Thanksgiving, school backpacks, etc.).

Commissioner Winter asked how people qualify for food assistance to which Ms. Erspamer explained that they follow state guidelines and that prospective clients fill out an application either online or in-person. It is very rare that they receive anyone that isn't qualified for the weekly program. That said, they look at anyone who comes to them as humans who need food and support. Commissioner also asked if people could go to more than one pantry to which Ms. Erspamer said that they can, but it is not typical. Commissioner Seksaria asked how they determine if someone is taking advantage of the system, Ms. Erspamer said that it is on the honor system, generally they sit down with people and believe them to be telling the truth. It is the goal to make a resource like this as accessible as possible, despite a small percentage of people that may take advantage. Commissioner Seksaria then asked what the average number of people who come to Hospitality House. Ms. Atkinson said it varies based on the hours they are open but that they see between 90 – 160 households each day, 900 families twice month (IE up to 1800 monthly visits). Commissioner Kumar asked what the amount of food per shopper is, Ms. Atkinson said that the quantities are set based on supply and that shoppers go around with a volunteer to help explain and monitor, as needed. Commissioner Seksaria also asked about the amount provided to Novi residents vs. the amount of funding provided via the CDBG program. Ms. Erspamer noted that the food provided to Novi residents is 176,207 pounds, or roughly \$350,000 worth based on \$1.97 per pound figure from Feeding America, not counting what is provided through the school program. Ms. Lilla said that CDBG gave them just shy of \$6,000 in the last year or about 17% of what is given.

Commissioner Winter then asked how food was distributed to schoolchildren for the Weekend Food Program so that it is not noticed or questions by other students? Ms. Erspamer stated that it varies by school but that it is provided in a non-descript bag. All students, regardless of age, receive the same meals for a given distribution period, they are all peanut-free and can accommodate other client allergies as needed. Commissioner Yu shared that, as a teacher in Walled Lake, he has personally witnessed the positive impact of the program. He also noted that a good chunk of Novi residents attend Walled Lake schools and therefore benefit from the program. Ms. Erspamer shared that the two schools that they provide the most assistance to are both located in Novi.

There was also discussion of need for additional volunteers for Hospitality House. Staff Liaison Oppermann said that she would note that and, as she often works with individuals looking for volunteer role, would be happy to share Hospitality House as a local avenue they could look into.

Ms. Erspamer thanked the Commission for their time and great questions, expressing that they would be welcome to come tour the pantry whenever they

like. The Commission thanked Ms. Erspamer and Ms. Atkinson for coming and speaking to them.

Ms. Lilla then briefly talked about how the County is changing how it is allocating funds, which was shared with her just yesterday (8/12/25). In the past they would tell Novi how much they were being given and give the parameters under which Novi could then choose how to split it amongst our chosen organizations. The City is now expected to request up front how much we want and for which programs. Following this request the County will decide if they will grant that amount. Currently the exact execution is still unclear, she will be closely following any new information so it can be shared with the Commission. The timeline is now changed so that the city's request/recommendation for funds is due no later than September 18th (this is a significant move up from the expected date). While we do not have to stick to our past numbers Ms. Lilla stressed that we have to be reasonable and realistic about what we can spend. Based on past years she estimates \$100,000 – 130,000. It is expected that the prior rule stipulating 15% of funds being assigned to Public Service activities and 85% assigned to Minor Home Repair is still in effect. Commissioner Seksaria asked that the Commission be provided with the last three years budgeted so that they can make an educated decision on what to request. Ms. Lilla affirmed that she would put the numbers together and provide them.

Roundtable Discussion

Commissioner Winter spoke about having recently seen Beautification Award signs in Northville and that she thinks a similar program might be good for Novi. It was determined by the Commission that this could be a future program and requested that staff liaison Oppermann look into how much such signs would cost to design and print as well as gather information about other local area programs that might serve as an inspiration for Novi's efforts.

Commissioner Yu noted the upcoming "Buzz About Bees" event being run by the Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Services department wherein residents are invited to meet the new honeybees and hear from Beekeeper and Fire Captain Theisen. The event is on Wednesday, September 24th at 5:00 p.m. The commissioners may join in if it agrees with their schedule.

Public Comment: None

Adjournment: 7:13 p.m.

Motion: Yu; Seconded: Winter; Approved: 5:0

Upcoming Meetings – 9/10, 10/8, 11/12, 12/10

Upcoming Events – Perennial Exchange (Saturday, September 20th 9:00 – 11:00 a.m.)