

PARKS, RECREATION & CULTURAL SERVICES COMMISSION

Thursday, May 15th, 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 (absent/excused), Torimoto (absent/excused)
Student Representatives: DiDomenico (present), Sid (present)

APPROVAL OF AGENDA:

Commissioner Staab 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 April 17th meeting be approved by Commissioner Dooley and second by Commissioner Riggins

Voice Vote

Unanimous

PRESENTATIONS

- A. OAS Recreation Programs – Recreation Supervisor Madison Lachance
Recreation Supervisor Lachance explained her role with the Older Adult Services department. She oversees social, nature and travel programs for adults and older adults. She said she was excited to be at the commission meeting tonight to share her report.

The Earth / Arbor Day Celebration recently wrapped up. When Recreation Supervisor Lachance started with the city, Arbor Day was just a sapling give away. The event has evolved through collaboration with Rick Meader and Keith Salowich. This year there was a full week of activities including a birdwatching hike, tree facts along the trail at Lakeshore, and a guided hike with Rick and Keith. The week concluded on Saturday April 26th with community groups: Sustainability Committee, Detroit Bird Alliance, Beautification Commission, and Oakland County Parks. The public could interact and learn more about nature from these groups plus participate in the annual Garlic Mustard Pull. The first week of May the Arbor Day festivities continue by tagging along with Novi Youth Council's eco-challenge. Plans are already being made for Earth / Arbor Day 2026.

There has been a noticeable increase in participation of nature programs. Novi Parks is one of the only agencies that provides nature-based programs in the

area. May 19th there will be an invasive species hike at Rotary Park guided by Rick Meader. June 3rd World Bike Day will be celebrated on the ITC Trail. June 14th there will be a nature photography hike at Lakeshore Park with Sara Srinivasan, who displayed her work in the Atrium in January.

Novi partners with five travel companies that offer day and extended trips domestic and international. In addition, OAS also has our own trips using the fourteen-passenger bus. This summer there are two scheduled trips to the Detroit Tigers' games. Plus, a trip to the DIA for general admission. Recently there has been a 55% increase in travel registrations compared to the last fiscal year. After the Travel Fair in April there were 115 registrations. Another Travel Fair will take place in the fall. The Mackinac Island Grand Experience in October sold out quickly.

Upcoming social programs include Sip Sip Hooray where people compete in trivia, bring their own drinks and enjoy charcuterie style food. June 12th is a line dance lesson and lunch at the Meadowbrook Activity Center. OAS is encouraging people to get outside in July for Parks and Recreation month. There will be a Summer Games Bash on the Meadowbrook lawn with a variety of games and popsicles. August 6th is the 50's Float Fest with live music, 50's theme and root beer floats.

Launching this fall combining travel and nature programming is the Nature Adventure Series. It will utilize the fourteen-passenger bus and head to nature focused outings. Trips are being planned to Kensington Metro Park and the Outdoor Adventure Center in Detroit. Recreation Supervisor Lachance is also working with senior directors and programmers from Northville and Wixom to hold a joint dance party in 2026.

The report was wrapped up by inviting the Commissioners to the Fuest Field of Honor event May 21st at 5:30. The event will feature live music, a nice dinner for veterans, and a ceremony. There will be remarks from the Mayor, pledge of allegiance from the scouts, the VFW will present the colors, lay a wreath, play taps and a rifle salute. The Novi Choralaires will also be performing.

Last month was volunteer appreciation week. Recreation Supervisor Lachance presented the Commissioners with cookies to thank them for their support of Novi Parks. She acknowledged Commissioner Dooley for being a bingo caller at Meadowbrook Commons.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

- A. Novi Parks Foundation – Commissioners Joseph, Riggins, Staab & Torimoto
Commissioner Staab said the next meeting is going to be the 22nd. Right now, the big push is for Pour on the Shore July 18th at Pavilion Shore Park. The band from last year is returning since they had rave reviews. The same food truck will be on hand. The dessert ideas are still being finalized. The selection of beer and drinks will be broader this year.
There are a few initiatives the Foundation is entertaining for funding. At the March meeting \$8750 was contributed to the Shawood Lake acquisition.
- B. Active Mobility Committee – Commissioners Tolkacz & Dooley
Commissioner Dooley said it was a great meeting tonight with a lot of committee

members in attendance. Many topics were discussed. There was a roads report refresh that the DPW put together. Improvements in the PACER rating evaluations were discussed. Safe Streets for All was a major topic. The acronym is SS4A. It is a safety action plan that gets renewed every few years. The ITC Trail connector to Bosco Fields is ongoing and was talked about. Commissioner Dooley thought the Active Mobility Plan was really good. The main concern was - are we doing all we can to make Novi safe whether it be roads or sidewalks. Many areas under construction were highlighted in the report.

Commissioner Riggins added information on transit, especially the broad plan with placing bus stops in strategic places.

Commissioner Dooley added that during Community Fest on June 4th a QR code will be offered to get public comment on Safe Streets for All and what areas are dangerous. A map is available showing areas in the city where accidents occur to give priority to try to minimize by looking at speed and left turns. Commissioner Dooley said it is very impressive that the city looks out for our safety, and they should be applauded for that. Commissioner Riggins finished with the slogan is – "safe community at all times for all people".

C. Commissioner Parks and Facilities updates

1. Villa Barr Art Park – Commissioner Joseph

Commissioner Joseph visited Villa Barr Art Park earlier this week which was an active day at the site. He showed some new pictures and a few from a previous visit to Villa Barr. The sculpture and botanical gardens have an audio tour that can be utilized as people walk around the facility. Commissioner Joseph rated the condition of the park a six or seven out of ten and said overall it was in pretty good shape. Dandelions are a resounding issue throughout the entire area. The grass looked like it had just been cut. He was concerned about a tree right in front of the pond with the overgrowth and bark coming off. The area was still very wet from the recent rain.

The kiosk at the front displayed upcoming events including Fuest Field of Honor next week. Park rules and maps also were available in the kiosk.

It was an interesting visit due to several dogs off leash being trained in the back. Commission Joseph did inform the dog owners about the leash rules that need to be followed when visiting the parks.

On his visit he noticed the screen of the workshop was hanging off. The planter beds close to the workshop were immaculate, the best in the park. Other beds had fresh mulch but needed attention because some weeds were popping through. Commissioner Joseph was surprised by the split of half mulch half rocks around the residence.

The pathway around the pond was highlighted because of the upcoming project. Commissioner Joseph talked with some individuals walking their dogs about the plan to pave. They were ecstatic but did have concern about their pets' paws. The condition of the pathway is in dire need to be refreshed / updated. It will be very nice to have the ability to walk all the way around the park. One or two willow trees will be lost during the project.

Deputy Director Ringle addressed several of the Commissioners' concerns about the upkeep of Villa Barr. She explained that May is shoulder season and typically the wettest month during the year. There has been conversation with the

landscape architect to mitigate to make some areas look better. Several areas have no mow zones currently. The property is wet but there should be more remediation of the water when the pathways are paved. The tree mentioned is healthy. The dandelions are being addressed by the maintenance team by treating the park and hopefully it will look better in the future. The gardens are continually being attended to by cutting down overgrowth, weeding and replanting with things that are not as maintenance heavy. A seasonal employee will be assigned to maintain the weeds soon. Deputy Director Ringle clarified a few other concerns. She finished the report by answering Commissioner Staab's question about the resident. Deborah Redwood is a sculptor from Australia and moved into Villa Barr on Monday.

MATTERS FOR COMMISSION DISCUSSION AND/OR ACTION:

A. PRCS 2025-29 Marketing Plan

The 2025-2029 marketing plan was available for the Commissioners at the meeting and emailed earlier in the week. Deputy Director Ringle said Parks Recreation and Cultural Services is a service of choice unlike other city departments. Therefore, marketing is essential with ever-changing opportunities. When she started in the city the department worked heavily with newspapers doing traditional press releases, things have changed. It takes time and effort to connect with the community and all the staff plays part in the marketing of programs and events. The marketing plan is a required document for CAPRA accreditation. But more importantly it is a guide for our team. The strategies, explanation of content marketing vs traditional marketing, the content calendar, after action reports and evaluations are used by the team on a regular basis. The demographic data, trends and survey results are helpful to communicate the need of marketing tools like Engage, E-Engage newsletter and social media to tell the story of why we need support and marketing. The PRCS department is assisted by the Community Relations team. They work with all departments in the city for public relations, educating residents about services, road closures, water mains and the basic city needs. Marketing is separate from public relations. PRCS needs "love" to hit our target markets, share our story, educate the community on what we offer and the benefit of parks. The previous marketing plan met the CAPRA required standards and was shared with other communities as a template. 2025-2029 has a lot of the same information although the evaluations, content calendar, and trends have been updated. There was a motion of support from the Commissioners led by Gopalakrishnan and Staab.

STAFF REPORTS

A. Administration Division – Director Jeff Muck

1. Park Project Updates

Director Muck updated the Commissioners on the good stuff as we fire up for summer. The Jessica Splash Pad was started on Tuesday in preparation for opening on Saturday, May 24th. All the mechanicals are in working order. There are still a few checklist items to complete including water testing and an inspection by Oakland County.

The Villa Barr pathway project engineering was approved by City Council on May 5th. The engineering firm will prep plans to get it out to bid. It will return to Council with a recommendation of a construction company. August or September is when the construction is planned to take place since it is the driest time of year.

The flaking of the pickleball courts at Wildlife Woods is being addressed. Work was supposed to occur today, but it did not happen. A meeting is scheduled for tomorrow with the surfacing contractor to resolve the problem. Signage will be posted at the courts and on social media when the fix is coming. The ITC tennis courts will be resurfaced by the contractor who did Rotary Park last year. It should be completed in June.

The Novi Ice Arena will be closed Saturday May 24th through Sunday June 15th. Significant upgrades aimed at improving the comfort, safety, and overall quality of the facility are scheduled. These include HVAC replacement, dehumidifier replacement, new duct furnaces, improved air circulation, especially for the locker rooms. In addition, releveling of the sand floor base which will improve the ice quality and consistency. The glass boards, glass around the rink and other touch ups will be done. The Suburban staff are planning a re-opening event with complimentary skating and other specials.

The Parks Commission meeting next month will be pushed back a week due to Juneteenth. It will be held on June 26th. The June meeting is the kickoff to National Parks and Recreation Month. More information on the plan for the meeting will be available soon.

Director Muck finished his update with the story about an Eagle Scout building a gaga pit at Ella Mae Power Park. Jack Hoppesch is a former camper at Lakeshore, then Counselor in Training and is now a Junior Counselor. We look forward to this project being completed because it will benefit Camp Power Play at the Civic Center and other park users.

B. Recreation Division – Deputy Director Tracie Ringle

1. Programs & Services

Deputy Director Ringle said Madison talked extensively about the nature programs that she does a fantastic job with. Recreation Supervisor John Gillingham has adopted the same concept and adjusted it offering programs for six- to twelve-year-olds called Nature Nurture Novi Junior. Last night Fire Captain Tyson presented the Buzz About Bees with a bubble wrap beehive and taught the importance of bees. The department will continue to offer junior programs because they are a great feeder for the adult programs.

The Sizzling Summer Art series is wrapped up, advertised, and ready to go. These are held at 10:00am. This year pre-registration is required since the program is more activity oriented instead of entertainment based. Registrations have exceeded our expectations, but we still have space available. Botanical sun prints, paper flowers, Japanese fans, artist trading cards and a live bird show are a few of the activities scheduled. There will also be a date making a mini art car which will be tied into the R/C Raceway.

T-Bolt registration is near one hundred kids for the fourth year of the program.

Adult tennis league starts this week. Soccer select level (Lightning) team tryouts are June 7th. It is a big day for our sports recreation supervisors.

Twenty Novi kids will compete in an archery tournament. The archery program is partnered with Farmington Hills because they have an extensive program with an archery range.

Deputy Director Ringle commented that it is not a big surprise that the numbers are low in baseball / t-ball due to decline in popularity. The sport across the nation is diminishing. Discussions have happened internally if we should continue to offer these programs, modify them, or work with our partner organization to add the younger teams.

The Memorial Day Run has 200 participants registered. Last year there were 400 runners, but many signed up late.

New speakers and amplifiers were installed in the four quarters replacing equipment that did not sound great. Phase two of the project will include replacing the wireless mikes and connection. These will assist our theatre productions, Civic Center events including the upcoming Diwali Fest.

Commissioner Dooley was concerned about the T-ball / baseball program and additional conversation occurred. Director Muck explained that kids are dropping nationally due to not enough touches compared to other sports such as soccer or lacrosse. Pitchers and catchers get the ball all the time but the kid in right field may never. The Novi population has gravitated towards soccer.

C. Older Adult Division – OAS Manager Kit Kieser

1. Programs and Services

OAS Manager Kit Kieser provided an update on the programs that Madison did not cover. Lifelong Learning has a new program called Mindful Meditation with MSU Extension. It is beginning May 22nd. It is a wellness offering that provides participants with practical tools to manage stress, improve focus through guided meditation. Twenty people have already signed up. There is also strong interest in the upcoming Understanding Artificial Intelligence class offered by Mike Allie. It is scheduled for June 10th. Cutting the Cord is taught by the same instructor and will take place on June 23rd. Since the spring of 2022 there have been ten sessions of Cutting the Cord with over 250 participants. However, it is waning so it will not be offered after June 23rd.

OAS has been heavily focused on the Memorial Day events. Fuerst Field of Honor is next week on the 21st. The traditional parade will take place on Memorial Day May 26th. The department has been working on the events for months. Currently there are thirty-one groups signed up which is typical. However, we are looking forward to a few new groups including baton twirlers and a World War II era jeep. The morning of the parade our veterans from VFW post 1519 will visit Oakland Hills Cemetery and Novi Cemetery to conduct remembrance service honoring our fallen servicemen and women. The VFW folks will head to Meadowbrook Activity Center for a continental breakfast for veterans, dignitaries that are in the parade and Meadowbrook Commons residents. The parade begins at 10:00am. It will start at Meadowbrook Commons then head east on Ten Mile concluding at the Civic Center. We encourage everyone in the community to come out and join the festivities honoring those who made the ultimate sacrifice.

COMMISSIONER COMMENTS:

Student Representative Sid

I want to start by thanking Ms. Lachance for coming to the meeting and giving all the details of the recreation programs. It was really helpful and detailed. Thanks especially for the cookies.

The marketing plan looks great, and it is very detailed. When I get home, I will check it out more thoroughly. There is a lot of growth, and I hope it will continue.

Thank you Commissioner Joseph for the Villa Barr presentation. It was very detailed and great. I was driving past Villa Barr on the way to ITC the other day and stopped briefly. It is a gem.

Student Representative DiDomenico

Thank you, Madison, for the overview of the Older Adult Services. It was a good presentation of the park. There is some really cool stuff there. The marketing plan seems very thorough, well-constructed, and planned out.

Commissioner Riggins

Madison's list of all the programs was very nice. There is so much going on in Novi. The nature programs are really exciting. The junior programs help reinforce what the kids are learning in school, which is great.

I am excited about attending the parade with my grandson.

The marketing plan is outstanding, and I can see why it is being used as a template.

Mindful Meditation is interesting too.

I hope everyone had a good Mother's Day.

Commissioner Gopalakrishnan

Very good updates today like the fellow commissioners and student reps said.

Madison's update was very thorough, lots of programs happening. Thank you, Commissioner Staab, for your updates on the Novi Parks Foundation. My favorite is Pour on the Shore. I volunteered last year and am looking forward to doing it again.

Thank you, Commissioner Dooley, for your update on the Active Mobility Committee.

Commissioner Joseph gave an excellent presentation on Villa Barr. Many residents do not know that we even have this park. It is a treasure, and we need to keep promoting it to bring it to people's attention.

The marketing plan has very good information. Thank you for putting it together.

Thank you, Director Muck, for your updates on the Jessica Splash Pad starting. It is a popular one and will have another busy season. The Novi Ice Arena updates were pretty good, and it is good to have that work done.

Thank you, Deputy Director Ringle, for your updates. My favorite was the audio system because we can use it for the Diwali Fest. Thank you, Kit Kieser, for the OAS updates. AI is interesting. I attended the Memorial Day Parade last year and am planning to be there again. There will be a banner to let people know about the Diwali Fest.

Overall, a great meeting with a lot of updates.

Commissioner Staab

Ditto to everything. Madison's presentation was very enlightening and comprehensive.

The Active Mobility Committee report from Jay was appreciated especially the item on

Safe Streets for All and the redo on Beck Road. I want to ask some follow up questions offline.

There is a lot of activity at Villa Barr Art Park for a very comprehensive report. Thank you, Brian. The report was timely with the issues, initiatives and enhancements to the park. Like everyone acknowledges, the park is a diamond in the rough. Most cities do not have something of this caliber. We are really blessed.

The marketing plan was very comprehensive. I appreciate it being shared and want to dig into it further.

I appreciate Jeff's report on the pathways, opening of the splash pad, and resurfacing of the pickleball courts.

Thanks to Deputy Director Ringle for the information on the many things going on. It was enlightening and disappointing to hear that baseball and softball tend to not be as popular as they once were. There are many other activities for youth these days including cricket and lacrosse.

I appreciate the information on what is going on in Older Adult Services. I am going to try to attend the last session of Cutting the Cord.

I urge the viewers to attend the Fuerst Field of Honor next Wednesday the 21st and the Memorial Day Parade on the 26th. Buy your tickets now for Pour on the Shore on July 18th. Have a blessed Memorial Day, enjoy your families, friends and appreciate the veterans.

Commissioner Dooley

I echo all the sentiments of the student reps, great comments tonight, spot on. I agree with the fellow commissioners too. It is always a pleasure to see OAS Recreation Supervisor Madison Lachance. She works so hard, is humble and does so much without wanting to receive any credit. I am glad she had an opportunity to come tonight to express some of the great things she does along with Kit and the folks in the department.

I am glad Tracie presented the marketing plan because she is passionate about it. She could recite every page from memory because she put so much work into it. It should become a template for other communities again because this is better than the last one.

Recreation Supervisor Root and I did another hot dog cookout at Bosco Fields. It was a cold day. The weather has been unpredictable for this event over the twenty years. The families that attended thanked the parks department repeatedly for all the work they do to keep the fields in great condition.

I also want to thank the department for being a part of Miss Amazing which took place the first weekend in May at City Hall. The city came alive again as it has for six generous years. The parks department was front and center answering questions as the participants came through. The city should be complimented by serving the pageant for the various age groups. Novi should be proud of this amazing successful year for year six.

Happy Memorial Day. I hope to see all of you during the parade and hope you have the opportunity to come out on the 21st of May.

Chairman Joseph

I want to add two things. I want to congratulate the team on another successful Jags

Tournament. Many cities and communities are involved but it showcased our wonderful facilities and fields.

It is good to see all the programs as usual but hearing that we are pivoting as the environment is changing is positive. For example, the AI programming and meditation program. I share the sentiment and concern about the decline in baseball but understand the shift in popularity elsewhere. You are always flexible, trying to be ahead of the curve. That is well received by the citizens, and it shows by the attendance in the programs.

ADJOURNMENT

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

Voice Vote

Unanimous

The meeting was adjourned by Chairman Joseph at 8:05p.m.

DATE APPROVED: _____

Joseph, Chairperson

Dooley, Vice Chairperson