

PARKS, RECREATION & CULTURAL SERVICES COMMISSION

Thursday, April 17th, 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 (absent/excused), Tolkacz (present), Torimoto (absent/excused)
Student Representatives: DiDomenico (present), Sid (absent)

APPROVAL OF AGENDA:

Commissioner Joseph moved the parks reports 7C to the May meeting.
Commissioner Joseph motioned for approval of the agenda and second by Commissioner Dooley.

Voice Vote

Unanimous

CITIZEN COMMENTS:

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

It was moved that the minutes for the March 20th meeting be approved by Commissioner Riggins and second by Commissioner Tolkacz.

Voice Vote

Unanimous

PRESENTATIONS

- A. Parks & Municipal Grounds – Superintendent Steve St. James
Director Muck invited Steve St. James to the podium. He added that the commissioners expressed interest in hearing from guest speakers. Director Muck said he was excited to have Steve here tonight since he has been working with him since he started in Novi. He watched him work in the parks and move into a supervisory role. Today he will provide an overview of the parks and municipal grounds crew over the course of a year. Steve St. James added a little more about his background. It is his third season as superintendent and 12th year in Novi. He went to Michigan State University and studied turf management. This is his second career. He spent twenty-five years building golf courses around the world. He was an assistant to international consulting agronomist Robert Trent. Steve keeps up to date on the best practices with Michigan State and applies them to growing things in the park system.
Steve explained winter is when his staff does educational courses to maintain licenses and certifications, personal growth, finding new equipment, tools and products to help do the job better. The department is learning more about sustainable techniques including battery operated equipment to reduce noise, amount of smoke and decrease the carbon footprint.

During the winter, staff attends classes and trade shows leaning towards sustainable environmentally friendly maintenance methods. A lot of equipment maintenance and restoration occurs during that time too. This year the dog kennel was rebuilt, fences were repaired, picnic tables restored, new benches built, drainage projects happened, and mechanical repairs were performed. Occasionally Steve's team is plowing and salting behind the DPW to maintain safe access to the parks. Inventory and assessing replacements for future budgets plus getting quotes happens in the winter too.

Steve continued by saying the first step in spring is to organize a number of different entities to get the buildings back open and water running at park facilities. His staff works with the Novi Water Department, plumbing contractors and inspectors from Oakland County to get the well at ITC checked, chlorinated and tested. Rotary, Wildlife Woods and Power Park work off city water. The vacuum breakers, checking plumbing fixtures and refreshing are part of opening for the season.

Typically, in spring, work on the soccer and baseball fields begins soon as the weather permits. The erosion that happened during the winter is repaired, fertilizer spread, bases installed, lines painted, and parking lots refreshed. A description of line painting process as well as the new equipment to expedite that process was part of Steve St. James report. Cleaning up debris, branches, litter and general clean-up of the parks is part of the spring task list. Then turf related items including fertilization begin. An innovative temperature sensitive product and new spreader were highlights of Steve's narrative.

Jeremia Pilarski oversees Lakeshore and Pavilion Shore Park but also is very dedicated to the RC Raceway. He comes up with a new design over the winter and installs it in the spring by getting the community involved. This year's design is fabulous.

The splash pad start up is a complex, technical process which is intimidating. The Parks Maintenance team handles testing and operations but wants a professional firm to start the pad up this year until they are more comfortable with the procedure. The splash pad and Lakeshore Beach open Memorial Day weekend. The beach adds 90-120 pounds of sand yearly because much is lost to wind / wave erosion and general use. Installing the buoys is another large task in the spring.

The turf at Lakeshore is in a multi-year restoration plan since the renovation of the park. A few other areas are selected to treat weeds that are necessary such as sports areas plus high visibility zones around the Civic Center and Police Department. Irrigation systems throughout the parks are checked then monitored throughout the year which can be controlled through a cellphone. Steve continued explaining the summer tasks at Power Park, ITC and Bosco with a shout out to Tim Zylka.

Before the presentation was wrapped up Commissioner Dooley asked about the fall procedures. Steve explained that fall was the reverse of what is done in the spring. Running mowers to mulch leaves, moving nets, transporting equipment and extra trash cans to the shop, winterizing irrigation systems and park facilities are the main tasks for the autumn. Director Muck and Commissioner Joseph gave kudos to the Parks and Municipal Grounds Crew. "Sometimes we take for granted how beautiful the parks are, and the amount of work needed. Steve,

this insight was incredible, letting us know what it takes to keep those parks up and running at the level we expect".

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

- A. Novi Parks Foundation – Commissioners Joseph, Riggins, Staab & Torimoto
Commissioner Joseph said there is a meeting next week, therefore there is no update tonight.
- B. Active Mobility Committee – Commissioners Tolkacz & Dooley
Commissioner Tolkacz mentioned that the next meeting is May 15th. He will be out of town so Commissioner Riggins will serve as the alternate. Talks about linking and trail development with Northville for activities such as biking to Guernsey's and breweries will be on the agenda.
- C. Parks and Facilities updates
 - 1. Villa Barr Art Park – Commissioner Joseph – tabled until May
 - 2. Wildlife Woods Park – Commissioner Torimoto - Tabled until May

MATTERS FOR COMMISSION DISCUSSION AND/OR ACTION:

- A. ITC Community Sports Park Tennis/Pickleball Courts
Director Muck told the Commissioners that the courts at ITC need resurfacing and the portable pickleball nets should be replaced. The pickleball courts at ITC were put in place to be a temporary solution while developing dedicated courts. Now there are twelve full-time dedicated courts in Novi. Eight are at Wildlife Woods. In contrast there are now only four tennis courts devoted to tennis since the land swap has been completed. The department is considering eliminating the temporary pickleball courts and nets at ITC. This prevents any potential conflicts between tennis and pickleball players and saves funds on additional nets and court lining. Director Muck asked the commissioners to give feedback on this matter. After discussion and several comments, it was agreed this was a good plan. It could always be reevaluated. The court resurfacing will not be scheduled until the weather improves.

STAFF REPORTS

- A. Administration Division – Director Jeff Muck
 - 1. Park Project Updates
Director Muck updated the Commissioners with a few quick projects. The Villa Barr pathway engineering is going to Council on May 5th. This endeavor would pave existing pathways and add an extension creating a loop around the pond. Mayor Fischer came to the Novi Parks Foundation to describe this project. It would significantly increase the handicap accessibility of the park. The only concern is the loss of two willow trees on the north end of the pond. Alternative options have been explored with the forester and engineering but unfortunately it does not seem the trees can be saved. If Council approves the plan and engineering the next step is to put it out to bid. Then we would come back to Council with a recommendation on the construction firm. Late fall would be the earliest time of construction due to the timeline and conditions of the site.

Secondly, Director Muck discussed the pedestrian bridge in Rotary Park which connects the trails to the Chase Farms subdivision. Early this month Steve St. James and Director Muck met with representatives from the HOA and adjoining property owners regarding using the easement as part of the construction plan. The proposal was well received by those residents. We are waiting on the response from EGLE to complete the next steps for design development and costs.

Last fall, flaking was noticed on the newly installed pickleball courts at Wildlife Woods. It was addressed with the contractor. The repairs will be made when conditions are suitable, probably late May or June. Adding windscreens to the courts is being considered and staff is developing costs and scope. This has been a suggestion from users of the facility.

The closing for the Shawood Lake property is expected to occur on Monday. Director Muck is in the process of working on plans to demolish the building because that was the directive once the city took possession.

B. Recreation Division – Deputy Director Tracie Ringle

1. Programs & Services

Deputy Director Ringle explained the document on the Commissioner's seats called Parks Posts. It is the first edition of a quarterly newsletter highlighting the accomplishments of the department from January – March. This will be shared with Council and PRCS Commission as a quick review. Engage copies are at the post office and should be in mailboxes soon. The online version has been on the website for over a week. Many residents find the online version and register for programs before they are advertised.

Tickets are on sale for Once Upon a Mattress which will take place at the Civic Center April 24th- 27th. There are seventy participants split into two casts.

Audiences are expected to be large filled with friends and family. The semiannual dance recital will be held May 3rd at the Berman Center and tickets can be purchased through their website.

The Atrium artist this month is Andrea Novak. She broke the attendance record with sixty-five people at her art opening. Next month is the High School Art Show which is held every May. The call for entry for Villa Barr residency is posted for 2026. Most people need to plan to move to another place for a period of time. In addition, a donor supplied funding for a new stick welder that was purchased this month, at the same time another donation of a second welder was received. These are great for folks that want to use these tools to create art. The next artist is moving in May 12th, Deborah Redwood from Australia.

The Choralaires and Concert Band will perform May 10th. Choralaires at 7:00 at the Middle School and Concert Band at 2:00 at the Civic Center.

As expected, Camp Lakeshore and Power Play sold out completely within minutes. Each have waiting lists which will be utilized because there are cancellations due to summer plans changing. Applications for Counselors in Training are being accepted through May 2nd. This position is for thirteen - sixteen-year-olds looking to become a full camp counselor in the future. We have partnered with Carousel Acres for a few summers. This year their registrations tripled last year's numbers. Because of the popularity of camps, we offer a wide variety of other programs to help supplement folks such as theatre, dance, and arts camps.

The Civic Center is booked on weekends for June and July with graduation parties and family gatherings. College student employees will be back soon to support these rentals plus the splash pad, bathroom closing, Lakeshore Park monitors, and more. Additional staff will be trained for the summer happenings. The beach will be open late on June 21st for the Walled Lake fireworks. We are hoping to secure a food truck too. This will be advertised to the community. The Doggie Dive In is Thursday May 22nd before the beach opens. Dog Park members are invited to register for the event. Spring soccer is underway. Dooley Dog Day will be April 26th. Adult softball play begins April 25th. The Senior Golf League begins this week. The pickleball ladder league is starting soon and is full through June. Later sessions will be available in the summer. Discussions have occurred to increase the openings but balancing between league play and public use must be considered.

C. Older Adult Division – OAS Manager Kit Kieser

1. Programs and Services

OAS Manager Kit Kieser provided an update on many of the programs she has mentioned at prior meetings. The 2025 AARP Tax Aid Program wrapped up on April 9th. Residents and community members continue to express how grateful they are for this program. Novi is the biggest site in the region.

The OAS office refresh is complete, so the durable medical loan closet is moving from the outside storage pod near the loading dock into the office.

Two meditation programs are coming soon. In May, Mindful Meditation will be presented by MSU Extension and Sound Bath which will be a series of four sessions. Both will take place at the Civic Center.

Nature Nurture Novi's seasonal outdoor groups have started back. Happy Trails meets on Thursday's at 5:30 to walk at various parks. Novi Birders meets every other Monday morning at 9:00. It is led by a reliable volunteer from Wild Birds Unlimited. Next week is Earth / Arbor Day celebrations with a variety of activities. It is topped off with the annual Garlic Mustard Pull and sapling give away.

Recreation Supervisor Madison Lachance will be at the Park Commission Meeting next month to provide a wrap up of those events. May 2nd Rick Meader will lead an invasive species hike at Rotary Park on May 20th. He will showcase the progress of the recent removal efforts and help identify local flora.

The Memorial Day activities were explained next by OAS Manager Kit Kieser. Fuerst Field of Honor will be at 5:30. It is open to the community and includes a special dinner for veterans and guests. Veterans need to register ahead of time, community members can just show up. Nineteen groups have registered for the Memorial Day Parade. The Commissioners were encouraged to spread the word to local organizations about participating in the parade.

There was discussion about activities happening during working hours. It was explained that the times are dictated by the volunteer's availability.

COMMISSIONER COMMENTS:

Student Representative DiDomenico

It was a really cool informative narrative that was well thought out and impressive. It was great it was written on paper too. Great updates.

Commissioner Riggins

Thank you for the updates. Everything we do is just amazing. I am liking this Quarterly Post. It is very nice for us each quarter. Steve set us up with everything he's doing. You can't get rid of him with all the stuff he does. I did not know all that went into the grounds work. He did a great job letting us know everything he does. He is very valuable with what he explained to us.
Happy Easter to everyone.

Commissioner Talkacz

Good suggestion Commissioner Joseph on the weekend events. I have the same sentiment about attending some of the birding programs. The Parks Post is really good with the correlation with what we talk about.

I continue to think of this role as a learning experience. I agree with Salene that I had no idea that Parks Municipal Grounds was such a high-tech operation from robot painters to temperature sensitive trigger release of fertilizers. Please relay our positive feedback to Steve.

Great update on Shawood Lake. I am glad to hear it is moving along. I am interested in the June 21st fireworks. Plus, I am glad to hear about the participation in the Memorial Day Parade. We do a nice job with that event, and I am glad to see it continuing.

Commissioner Gopalakrishnan

I go to a lot of these parks and always wondered how the fields, parks, lawn and everything are so nice. I have mentioned to my wife numerous times, how is this all happening? It was a very detailed report, and I can hear the passion in his voice in the way he described everything. It is just amazing, and I would like to talk to Steve further. The robot paint system was pretty cool I would like to see it work.

Thank you, Jeff, for the explanation of dedicated pickleball / tennis courts. It is a good idea to balance it out.

The Villa Barr project planning is happening now I am sure it will get approved on May 5th. It will be good to finish it up this year.

Tracie, thank you for all your updates. The city is so busy with a lot happening, I do not have to step out of Novi the entire year. The Parks Post is wonderful. It is a great summary. Thank you for another great meeting today.

Commissioner Dooley

How can I follow, everyone has been so comprehensive. I agree with all the comments that were made this evening.

This is a way of life for Steve. He would probably do his work for free, that is how incredible he is. He just scratched the surface with this document that he presented tonight. He could have made it a full day lecture telling us what his team does.

Sometimes we take it for granted when we visit various parks in the city as we marvel at all the resources and amenities that each of the parks offers. It is because of Steve and his team. Thank you for offering his ability to speak to us tonight. It was wonderful.

Thank you Jeff, Tracie, and Kit for what you do for the city and leading by example for the kids and older adults.

I am looking forward to everything to do with veterans. I will volunteer again for the Memorial Day Parade. There is so much going on in our city.

The Novi Ambassadors is going on right now with the coursework. The reunion is May 28th. It is great to meet the others who went through that program to learn the nuances of the city.

May 3rd is Michigan Miss Amazing which will take place in the auditorium. The city is gracious to host the event for the 6th year. I want to thank Jeff and his department because they are front and center with the setup and cleanup.

Chairman Joseph

The only thing I would say about Steve, besides the passion and enthusiasm, is that you can see the golf course development mentality he puts into the parks. Maybe with the newly acquired land we could add some golf course amenities such as a driving range. What could be said was said by the fellow commissioners this evening. Happy Easter.

ADJOURNMENT

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

Voice Vote

Unanimous

The meeting was adjourned by Chairman Joseph at 8:25p.m.

DATE APPROVED: _____

Joseph, Chairperson

Dooley, Vice Chairperson