PARKS, RECREATION & CULTURAL SERVICES COMMISSION

Thursday, December 18th, 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 (absent/ excused), Gopalakrishnan (present), Staab (present), Bagley (present), Torimoto (present)

APPROVAL OF AGENDA:
Commissioner Gopalakrishnan motioned for approval of agenda and second by Commissioner Riggins.

Voice Vote **Unanimous**

CITIZEN COMMENTS:

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:
It was moved that the minutes for the November 20th meeting be approved by Commissioner Riggins and second by Commissioner Torimoto.

Voice Vote **Unanimous**

PRESENTATIONS

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

A. Novi Parks Foundation – Commissioners Riggins, Staab & Torimoto
Commissioner Staab said at the December 9th meeting a new slate of officers were decided. Sheel Desai will be President. Brian Adams will return as Vice President, with Harry Torimoto Treasurer, and Mike Sommerville will serve as Secretary. Commissioner Staab thanked Salene and Harry for participating in the first round of interviews for the new Executive Director. Two people will be in the final interviews on the 29th and 30th. The next meeting is January 21st.
Director Muck and Commissioner Joseph recognized Commissioner Staab for his role as President and the stand-up job with Pour on the Shore. Commissioner Staab thanked everyone who supported the Foundation over the years.

B. Active Mobility Committee – Commissioners Gopalakrishnan & Dooley
At the November meeting Commissioner Dooley provided the latest update from the Mobility Committee. Commissioner Gopalakrishnan will attend his first Active Mobility Committee meeting in January and report after attending.

MATTERS FOR COMMISSION DISCUSSION AND/OR ACTION:

A. Shawood Lake Island
Director Muck is looking forward to a robust discussion about the Shawood Lake Island property. On August 25th City Council directed the Parks Commission to provide a plan and options for the Shawood Lake Island for City Council to

discuss during the initial budget sessions in February. The property has a large, long history. The property was originally considered by Council in 2021 but at that time they were not ready to purchase. Council members reconsidered the idea of acquisition in 2024. It was bought in 2025 for $210,000. The presentation Director Muck displayed was also in the Commissioner's packets. The island is 5.43 acres. There is no water or sewer on the site. Since it is in a floodplain an application to EGLE and FEMA must be submitted for any future structures such as a pavilion, picnic shelter or canoe / kayak launch. It will take a lot of engineering, applications and work. This would apply to any pathway or trail out to the island as well.

There have been multiple discussions with EGLE (Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy) about the vegetation patterns in Shawood Lake. These have been consistent since the 1930's confirmed by the city's mapping portal through the years. It is interesting that there was little fluctuation of how the lily pads, weeds, and reeds grow in the lake. There have been conversations by residents and council members about getting rid of the lily pads and cleaning up the lake. After a meeting with city staff, a few council members, engineers and several EGLE representatives, it was advised not to do any alteration to the lake by bioaugmentation - dredging, cutting of weeds or chemicals. EGLE staff was adamant that it would do greater harm to the lake and environment than public benefit. EGLE encouraged the city to provide educational outreach to residents about the wetland complex, the lake and encourage passive recreation opportunities such as bird watching and kayaking.

Director Muck showed details of the property including the canal which is not necessarily navigable to Walled Lake. Its purpose was to be an equalization culvert to regulate the flow between the two bodies of water. It would take significant engineering and changes to make the canal passable.

More points of interest were shown highlighting the view to the west, the beautiful Lakeshore Building, parking lot and access drive. Director Muck pointed out Elm Court which is the access road to the island off of South Lake Drive. Elm Court was described as a "two-way one-way road". At the end there is a strip of land before a small bridge to cross to the island. The vegetation of the lake comes down to the south and has a mix of invasive and natural species. The lake is shallow. Overviews were shown of the vegetation in summer versus winter with the summer months having limited open water.

The challenges to consider are parking, needing a complete structural analysis of the bridge, the island being in a floodplain would be a concern when adding a parking lot. Elm Court, being a narrow road, adds to the complexity and the shallow lake depth is something to consider too. Studies show that it is six feet deep at the maximum. The lake is important for migratory birds landing and nesting spots for a lot of animals. Director Muck asked what could bringing a lot of people to the island / water do to the ecosystem?

In addition, there may be concerns with public safety by giving more access to the isolated property. Finally, funding and budget needs to be considered. Projects would involve multiple consultants and contractors which comes with an expense. Plus, priority of Shawood Lake versus other park projects needs to be deliberated by the Commission. For example, is development more important for the island or ITC Community Sports Park?

Director Muck offered some suggestions for the Shawood Lake Island property for discussion. A passive park with a pathway, benches and interpretive signage. The signs would explain the wetlands and migratory birds. It could include a scenic overlook.

A canoe / kayak launch at Lakeshore Park is another idea. There may be a

desire for a boardwalk from Lakeshore Park to the island similar to one in downtown Brighton or in state/county parks. The island could also be a designated nature preserve and not doing anything at this time.
The building will be taken down in 2026. Director Muck provided insight to the costs of a consultant which could be over $75,000 covering design, invasive species, shorelines and cost estimates.
A question regarding whether the residents in the area have been consulted was answered by Director Muck that they are split on the ideas of welcoming more public access. It was clarified that folks could walk from Pavilion Shore but there is not enough room for a pedestrian lane. Deputy Director Ringle added that parking at Lakeshore Park is extremely busy in the summer with the shelter rentals, programming, and beach so it would be a challenge to have a canoe / kayak launch there too. A lot of discussion occurred about kayaking, vegetation, Elm Court traffic and migratory bird nesting times. The estimated cost for a boardwalk could be 2 - 2.5 million dollars. Prioritization of needs for community space to benefit more people at locations such as ITC Sports Park, recreation center, and paving the parking lot at Bosco fields. In addition, the soccer fields on Grand River are going to be lost with the development of City West. A new location will be needed for the Tiny Tikes program. There are plans to renovate the fields at Wildlife Woods due to drainage issues in the wet season.
The big-ticket projects need to be evaluated and prioritized. Commissioner Staab said to look at the whole scheme factoring in the CIP initiatives. It is nice we have beautiful property. There are higher priorities for more participants and activity. Commissioner Joseph said the boardwalk was an interesting option until you start thinking about the price tag. It sounds like we are talking ourselves into a passive nature preserve solution. Commissioner Bagley added based on the priorities shared she likes the idea of a passive nature preserve and the wait and see solution is fine. However, she does like the idea of a scenic overlook. Commissioner Gopalakrishnan mentioned going to Kensington Park in the summer with the osprey viewing area being busy. He thinks that it is a good idea in consultation with a naturalist. Commissioner Torimoto compared the area to Village Wood Lake Park, being a neighborhood park with limited parking which is passive with a few benches. Director Muck clarified a consultant would need to be engaged whenever we start making improvements, especially since the land has never been developed and will need to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Pathways, benches, seating areas and everything else would need to be in compliance.
Director Muck summarized the commissioner's recommendations. The Commission recommends a nature preserve in the short term as the best option. They are not opposed to exploring a boardwalk between Lakeshore and the island, scenic overlook or osprey nest. These options could be explored in the future. However, the Commission recommends the other currently scheduled CIP projects take higher priority. Finally, the canoe / kayak launch is not something of interest to this board. It was clarified that $75,000 would not be recommended to Council for a consultant at this point for any planning.
This motion was made by Commissioner Bagley and seconded by Commissioner Gopalakrishnan. It is an exciting, beautiful piece of property and it will be utilized. There is a lot of potential but much to work out. Director Muck added that the building is in the demolition process. There was a delay between the utility company and the contractor which will be resolved soon. In addition, an issue has come up with the abatement process. More to come in the new year.

B. 2026 Commissioner Monthly Reports

Director Muck shared Account Clerk, Derek Brooks idea of changing up the park reports that have been done for ten years. She suggested doing presentations on services and programs. An excellent example was Commissioner Riggins' report on Mackinac Island last month. The Commissioners would be assigned a month during spring, summer and fall and it is their discretion on how many activities to attend and present on. OAS Manager Kit Keiser and Deputy Director Tracy Ringle highlight upcoming events in their reports; this can give the Commissioners inspiration.
Commissioner Riggins said she thought it was a great idea. She enjoyed reporting on Mackinac, so she is in favor of the change. Commissioner Joseph agreed he is very much in favor. He was also going to suggest the Commissioner comments should be about programs and points not addressed in the meeting but expanding on programs that you have participated in or facilities visited. There is also potential to partner with a Recreation Supervisor for the month and coordinate attending their events or learning about the services offered. It could lead to a joint presentation; however, the Commissioner would still be responsible for developing the presentation. Director Muck will provide the tentative schedule for the year in January.

STAFF REPORTS

A. Administration Division – Director Jeff Muck
1. Park Project Updates
Director Muck stated he had nothing further after the Shawood Lake discussion. There will be more updates after the start of the new year.

B. Recreation Division – Deputy Director Tracie Ringle
1. Programs & Services
Deputy Director Ringle said the holiday events are complete: concert band, Choralaires, traditional dance recital, Polynesian dance recital, Lunch with Santa, Merry and Bright trivia, glass fusion ornament making and candlelight clay class. All were successful. The staff and the participants were happy.
Winter break camp is being offered Monday, Tuesday and Friday between December 22nd and January 2nd while the kids are home from school. It is the second year for the camp with a higher number of campers from 2024. Several counselors from the summer program are being utilized for staff.
January 22nd – 24th the youth theatre will present Beetlejuice Junior. It will be held in the middle school auditorium which is a new location. The Daddy Daughter dance will be held in February and Mother Son Game Night in March.
January 12th there will be an adult softball managers meeting. Erin Junge, the new Recreation Supervisor in sports will be introduced. The group will discuss rule changes, questions about divisions, and more. These managers are very passionate and have strong feelings about the league. Currently, the sports team is working on rosters, coach assignments and schedules for winter basketball and volleyball. It continues to be a challenge juggling gym space at the schools and player requests.
Registration is ongoing for programs January through April. The Engage magazine should be in mailboxes this week.
Deputy Director Ringle continued with information about the 2026 Sponsorship Guide. It has been modified, updated and streamlined this year. The guide was shown on the screen. It explained how to be a partner with the department with access to their target market in a number of programs. PRCS appreciates sponsorship and it is part of revenue planning for the department. We have great opportunities and our staff does an impressive job making sure that all the benefits promised are hit. A couple additional opportunities are included this year, advertising space in the park kiosks, Memorial Day

Parade and the Diwali Fest. Introductions, highlights about the department, demographics and benefits are listed in the guide. It continues with what we offer for the different levels of support, partnership of events and an overview of the different programs. Older Adult Services has slightly unique opportunities for benefits in connection with programs. Youth sports field banners, advertising in Engage magazine coordinated through Community Relations, working with the Novi Parks Foundation are other options. How to become a sponsor and a commitment form connected to the Novi Parks email can be found in the guide. The team will then get in touch with folks interested in sponsoring. Customization is available too. If somebody is interested in something new or a different price point modifications can be made to fit their needs and budget.
The annual Highlights Report will be presented at the January meeting.
Commissioner Torimoto asked some follow up questions about sponsorship. Deputy Director Ringle claimed on a good year the department can gain $100,000 in sponsorships. It has been in a bit of a decline due the economy recently. She is hopeful with the updated guide the team will feel more comfortable soliciting donors. It was clarified that the additional revenue helps enhance the programs. Costs are covered with fees, but we provide more due to sponsorship. OAS Manager Kit Keiser said the OAS programs have lower cost, and we give more for what is charged. The sponsorships cover the gap between the cost of the program and what is provided.

C. Older Adult Division – OAS Manager Kit Kieser
1. Programs and Services
OAS Manager Kit Kieser echoed what Deputy Director Ringle said that all of the holiday programs are done as of today. This afternoon there was a holiday celebration at Meadowbrook Commons with hot chocolate, festive treats and music. Earlier this month there was an Owl Prowl with fifty attendees. No owls were seen but a screech, great horned, and barred owl were heard
Registration is open for Mackinac Island 2026. Thirteen of the fifty-six spots are already filled. Last year the trip was full by February. The dates are October 13th-16th. OAS Manager Keiser recommends signing up quickly. Travel participation has been increasing steadily. In 2024 travel had 383 registrations. 2025 had 619 which is 61% growth. There was a significant dip in numbers after Covid, but people are coming back, which is exciting.
January 14th there is a free concert at the Meadowbrook Activity Center with James Duprey. January 16th is Michigan Day at the Civic Center. Michigan trivia, Buddy's Pizza and Michigan made snacks will be featured. One on One Technology Assistance will also take place on January 16th. This is a good chance to learn how to use your digital device. January 28th a family friendly beach themed recycled art class will be at Lakeshore Park.
Novi's food assistance /nutrition programs which focus on food security were explained by Kit Keiser. Meals on Wheels is partnered with Western Oakland Meals on Wheels to provide a lot of meals throughout the year. Novi serves as a frontline distribution site for emergency food assistance. We partner with Focus Hope and Oakland Livingston Human Services Agency / TFAP for food boxes. This December the number and quality of items was drastically less. This was caused by the recent federal shutdown, staff layoffs, transportation disruptions and delivery delays which slowed the operations. The federally allocated program budget has been decreasing as food prices are rising plus the increasing community need were contributing factors. OAS Manager Keiser wanted to talk about this since it impacts many people living in Novi. Many citizens rely on food assistance for food security.
Tax season is coming up, therefore AARP is currently training counselors. The Civic Center is the largest provider of tax prep in the Michigan area. Appointments can be

made starting January 6th. Last year approximately 440 tax appointments were scheduled. 500 are expected for 2026.
December 15th City Council approved two extension agreements with People's Express. The agreement to lease the office and parking space at the Civic center was renewed. The second was subsidizing ride for Novi residents 55 and older or anyone with a disability. City Council approved a five-year agreement. These rides will continue to be free within the boundary. Commissioners Staab and Torimoto asked questions about People's Express. The details were explained further.

COMMISSIONER COMMENTS:

Commissioner Joseph
After discussions with Director Muck, staff and unsolicited feedback it seems as a Commission we have moved away from the spirit of the Commission comments. The comment section has turned into a recap of the meeting and kudos around the table. It should be topics to add to a future agenda, make a comment or add items that we have missed during the conversation. I think tonight was a great example of robust conversation within each line item that last piece should be to put a cherry on top of anything we failed to mention. I think we all feel an obligation to make a comment, but we all know we appreciate Kit, Tracie and Jeff. The time standpoint also should be considered. Keep in the back of your mind that Commissioner comments don't need to recap the entire meeting.

Commissioner Riggins
I am excited to see what Shawood Lake Island looks like down the road. It is great we were able to purchase it. Right now, we can just leave it, and we will figure it out.
I hope everybody has a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

Commissioner Staab
I would like to reinforce the Novi Parks Foundation stepping up to help with the purchase of Shawood Lake, their funds put them over the top.
He asked when registration is for golf. Deputy Director Ringle answered January. The creation of the additional men's league should help with demand.

Commissioner Bagley
I really enjoyed today's meeting and loved the conversation. I am excited about Shawood Island and love educational aspect and taking kids out there. It is a great direction to go in.
I wish everyone a happy holiday season. I am excited about the new year and all the upcoming programming. Thank you, Tracie, and Kit for sharing the great things happening in Novi.

Commissioner Gopalakrishnan
Excellent meeting I loved the conversation. I learned a lot about Shawood Lake which presents a lot of challenges.
Happy holidays to everyone and Happy New Year.
A group photo was suggested for January when all the commissioners will be in attendance.

Commissioner Torimoto
I was outside a strip mall across from Busch's and met an older adult waiting for a ride from People's Express. The next ten minutes she kept telling him how amazing it has been since the transportation service was consolidated. She lives at Meadowbrook

Commons and uses the service for haircuts, pharmacy visits, and doctor appointments. Scheduling needs to be done a few days in advance, but you just need to be patient. The service has gotten more efficient plus it still has many of the same drivers. Thanks again for all the service PRCS provides.

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 8:10p.m.

DATE APPROVED: 1/15/24

Joseph, Chairperson

Dooley, Vice Chairperson