PARKS, RECREATION & CULTURAL SERVICES COMMISSION

Thursday, August 21st, 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), Bagley (present), Dooley (present), Gopalakrishnan (absent/excused), Riggins (absent /excused), Staab (present), Torimoto (absent/excused)
Student Representatives: DiDomenico (present), Sid (absent)

APPROVAL OF AGENDA:
Commission Dooley requested to remove line item 7C item 1. due to Student Representative Sid's absence.
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 June 26th meeting be approved by Commissioner Staab and second by Commissioner Dooley.

Voice Vote **Unanimous**

PRESENTATIONS

A. Introduction of new PRCS Commissioner Ebony Bagley
Director Muck shared the exciting news and introduction of new Commissioner Ebony Bagley. He had the opportunity to meet her and provide an orientation to the department, meeting process, and dynamics of the group. She was invited to introduce herself.
Commissioner Bagley said she was happy to be on the Commission because parks and recreation has been a large part of her life. She was a counselor, then camp director with Southfield Parks and Rec. She said, "it was the best job ever!" She became a teacher and now works in communications, but she wanted to stay involved in parks. She was appointed to Oakland County Parks Board in 2019 as commissioner. Ms. Bagley is now the Chair of Oakland County Parks Board. As a resident of Novi with children in the community it was important to her to be a part of the Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services Commission as well. Commissioner Bagley is married with two kids and loves the community.

B. Recognition of Jack Hoppesch for Eagle Scout Gaga Ball Pit Project

Director Muck began by saying there is a long-standing history of Eagle Scout projects within the City of Novi. This is our second gaga ball pit that has been constructed. Recreation Supervisor John Gillingmham came to the podium to explain that gaga ball is a fast-paced playground game played in an octagon. The goal is to hit other players below the kneecap with a ball. Once hit, the player is out and the game continues until one person remains. It is a simple, active and favorite game amongst kids. Last year a pit was built in Lakeshore Park near the soccer fields. After seeing what a hit it was with the campers, discussions occurred with Director Muck about obtaining another at Power Park for the campers at the Civic Center.

This is where Jack comes in because of his impressive history with our programs. He started as a camper at Lakeshore, transitioned to a counselor in training, now works as a site supervisor and junior counselor. Hopefully next summer he will be a full-time camp counselor. He is the first person to take all the steps from camper to staff member.

Last December Jack reached out with an idea for his Eagle Scout project. The original proposal was not a good fit, so a gaga pit was suggested for Power Park. Adjusting his project speaks volumes to Jack's character. After a meeting to discuss the location, Jack took full responsibility. He did fundraising, coordinated logistics, and led construction with the support of Scout Troop 777 in Northville. On May 31st the project was completed. It was an instant success and a great addition to Ella Mae Power Park.

Jack had an incredible experience this summer back packing through Iceland and traveling across Europe. Recreation Supervisor Gillingham asked the commissioners to recognize Jack for an outstanding Eagle Scout project. Jack Hoppesch came to the podium to say he was glad he had this opportunity. Novi Parks was the beneficiary that came to mind first. He wanted to give back to all the programs he benefited from.

Commissioner Joseph spoke for the Commission saying that Jack has an impressive background going full circle with the programs in the city and dedication to parks and recreation in Novi. Pictures were taken of Jack and the Commission to celebrate his success.

C. Novi Parks Soccer program – Recreation Supervisor Chase Root & Recreation Administrative Assistant Sean Pendorf

Director Muck gave a quick overview of the outstanding growth in the soccer program over the last ten to twelve years. It is a testimony to Chase Root and Sean Penndorf who was brought on a few years ago.

Recreation Supervisor Chase Root thanked the Commissioners for having him come to speak about the ever-growing soccer program. The program has three different levels. Tiny Tikes is for three-year-olds which is controlled chaos. It is entry level with no practices during the week and four 45-minute sessions on Saturdays combining practice and a game.

The recreation league is known as Thunder for players ages five – nineteen. Youth five – eight is all in house with practices in Novi and games played against other Novi teams at Bosco Fields. U9 and older teams play against other recreational teams in the area through the Western Suburban Soccer League (Whistle). Lightning is our select program. This level requires a try out, coaches offer players spots, and

teams are formed after the try out. These teams play in the Whistle Select / Premier league.
Recreation Supervisor Root continued with a snapshot of the soccer program, program size, growth, planning process, and staffing. The website and efficiencies were presented by Sean.
Currently the program has 971 soccer players, 80 teams and 130 volunteer coaches. A graph was shown to demonstrate the explosion of the program. Almost 100 players were added each year since 2022. The recreation level has stayed the same while the growth has occurred in more competitive level. The is due to these players being able to play at a high level at a reduced price compared to clubs that pay their coaches. Novi has coaches that care deeply about the development of the players and instruct because they love it. Revenue for the soccer program has increased over 50% during this time.
Putting together the practice schedules for eighty teams is a puzzle. The number of fields and practice times remains the same despite the growing number of teams. 80-90% of the coaches are parents of players. The rest are high school students or community volunteers. The roster creation for 1000 players involves 2000 requests for practice times, coaches, or friends to be on the same team. Chase and Sean do the best they can, accommodating as much as possible.
There is a lot of paperwork for coaches including a background check, code of conduct, concussion training, risk management through Go Sport and safe sport training. The lightning teams have additional paperwork for players after registration. Forms are submitted through software called Sports Form and their birth certificates need to be uploaded to verify age, a head shot for their pass card which will be shown to the referees before games. In addition, there is ITC (International Transfer Clearance) for players born outside the United States.
Game scheduling happens through Got Sport and schedules are created in a SharePoint document. It is a lot of administrative time making sure the 160 games per season are scheduled correctly. During the games, site supervisors are onsite to check in referees and be the eyes and ears for Chase and Sean. The shortage of referees is always an issue. On Mondays Chase and Sean meet with the maintenance team regarding field preparations.
Recreation Administrative Assistant Sean Pendorf continued the presentation to explain the app, website and technology. He has been a major help to Chase since he started in 2022-2023. He started as a coach in 2018 but with his IT background with IBM he has been able to work on automation of the soccer process as a part time employee. He first started to work with the tryouts since that is the greatest amount of paperwork through sign-ups, tryout day and registration. The customers (parents paying for soccer) were standing in line for 45 minutes to an hour on tryout day. Sean built an app which site supervisors can run on their phone at the check in table. This reduced check-in time substantially. Pre-registered players can be looked up in Civic Rec, a picture taken on the phone, a pass card is created, then players are given a bib number. The coaches can use their phone to select the player from their phone to offer them a position on their team. The select level has gold, blue, and white teams. If the gold coach offers a player a spot, they are not available to the other coaches. This information is updated automatically on the app. The child / parent can choose whether they accept or decline the offer. 800-900 kids come to the try-outs, not all of them make a team or decide to go to other clubs.

Civic Rec is the resource for player and coach information such as address, phone numbers and emails. SharePoint has more detailed team and coach information. Coaches are volunteers and need to have certain paperwork to coach in Novi. This is managed through the systems Sean created. He can filter Individuals to make their work faster. Emails can be automated to coaches. FIFA is a worldwide soccer association take requires every player ten and older to fill out paperwork especially for children born outside the United States. These players need to submit six years of school records, utility bills and other proof of residency. ITC consumes 40% of Sean's workload. He has also built links in the website for schedules, coach contact lists and paperwork. Sean said "every day I'm working on these flows to try to make everything improve and better.

Recreation Supervisor Chase Root mentioned a few special events that are run in addition to the leagues. This summer there was a free pre-season camp for Thunder and Lightning players. Dooley Dog Days happens every season where 1000 hot dogs are given away. The first week of November, under the lights games are played at the Novi High School stadium.

Director Muck concluded by thanking Chase and Sean for providing a snapshot to highlight the level of detail the processes needed for running a program with a thousand kids. This is a year-round job. They are a passionate and dedicated team.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

A. Novi Parks Foundation– Commissioners Joseph, Riggins, Staab & Torimoto
Commissioner Staab said the Pour on the Shore took place on July 18th. It was a beautiful night, one of the best in Michigan. A good time was had by all. 346 tickets sold, which was two more than the previous year. $13,170 was the profit for the event. Special thanks to Executive Director Marla Wise.
The next Foundation meeting will be September 16th. The primary topic will be fundraising for 2026. A few things will be changed after looking at good analytics and surveys from the participants at Pour on the Shore.
Commissioner Joseph added that they are continuing to look for board members. The city is always wanting people to get involved.

B. Active Mobility Committee– Commissioners Tolkacz & Dooley
Commissioner Dooley stated there was good discussion at the meeting tonight. He started with the safe streets for the City of Novi as a draft is being created for a safety action plan. Secondly, the interesting sidewalk survey data was explained. The city addressed the sidewalks and determined overall the sidewalks are in good condition. The city is prepared to repair any two-inch gap in-between slabs. The next topic was the Nine Line update; there is a feasibility study being done to look at bike trails. Currently there is one from Hazel Park to Farmington, a twelve-mile stretch to Novi has been studied. This is something the Mobility Committee will make recommendations about to City Council.
The next meeting is scheduled for October 9th.

C. Commissioner Parks and Facilities updates

1.Jessica's Splashpad– Student Representative Sid - removed

2. Lakeshore Park – Student Representative DiDomenico
Student Representative DiDomenico showed a presentation about his visit to Lakeshore Park. The weather was not the best on the day he visited, and the beach was closed. He explored the whole park and said everything looked in good shape. His sister was with him and tested some of the playground equipment. It was noted one was hard to spin and made a weird noise. He also mentioned a bench by the trail was pretty into the ground. Overall, Student Representative DiDomenico felt Lakeshore Park was in great shape. Commissioner Bagley asked if there was a checklist for outings for park reports.

MATTERS FOR COMMISSION DISCUSSION AND/OR ACTION:

A. Commission Chair, Vice Chair Nominations & Committee Appointments
Director Muck said annually we elect a new Commission Chair, Vice Chair and appoint Commissioners to committees such as the Novi Parks Foundation and Mobility Committee. Typically, a notice is sent a month prior asking to indicate desire to serve in a leadership capacity and which committees commissioners would like to join. A ballot will be brought to the September meeting; discussions will occur then a vote. The officers and committee members will go into effect for the November meeting since there will not be an October meeting due to the Diwali Fest.

B. Appoint Replacement to Mobility Committee
Director Muck continued that due to not having a full contingent here tonight replacing Commissioner Tolkacz on the Mobility Committee will happen next month. His position is open due to his resignation. Commissioner Riggins is the alternate and will attend the October meeting.
Commissioner Dooley asked about reappointments for the commissioners. It is three-year terms. Director Muck will send out more information with everyone's expiration date. He clarified that a goal of Council was to standardize the structure of boards and commissions and the onboarding process. There are also opportunities for commissioners to be on the Older Adult Advisory Board which is under PRCS.

STAFF REPORTS

A. Administration Division – Director Jeff Muck

1. Park Project Updates

Director Muck had several updates. Information about the controlled burn at Northwest Park was posted on social media. It took place in late July. This was part of the efforts to convert the two-acre open field at the south end of the park to a prairie with Michigan native plants. The burn was very successful with many positive comments received on the efforts. Rick Meader, the city's Landscape Architect continues to work on plans for buckthorn removal at the park as well as the next stages of prairie restoration.
A crew has been at the water tower removing the standpipe. It has shifted out of place and is a potential long-term maintenance and safety issue. T-Mobile has cell phone lease agreements on that tower that this could have damaged too.
The bid of demolition of the building on the newly purchased Shawood Lake island property is scheduled for September 2nd. A pre-bid meeting will be held September

10th. Bids are due September 25th. Then it will go to Council for approval. The demolition will most likely happen late fall.
Director Muck shared the good news that windscreens have been ordered and will be installed at Wildlife Woods pickleball courts. These will be placed on the exterior fences on the west side. They will feature the city and Novi Parks Foundation logo. The Foundation contributed to the construction of the initial four courts. Meadowbrook Commons does not have plans for windscreens at their courts.

2. Student representative DiDomenico & Sid End of Term

Director Muck shared that tonight was technically the last meeting for Student Representatives Sid and DiDomenico. Their terms are expiring in addition to a new initiative through City Council.
The Novi Youth Council was established in 2005. It was intended to provide teens an opportunity to engage with local government, build leadership skills and represent youth voices in the community. While the mission remains commendable, the structure and operation have remained unchanged for nearly two decades. City staff are recommending establishing a Mayor's Youth Forum. It would create a more effective, inclusive and sustainable model of youth engagement. The current youth council would be dissolved as well as designated student rep positions on the library board and parks commission.
The youth forum would be open to all Novi students from any school in 9th – 12th grade. Key features include open participation, no application, or appointment process, any high school aged resident could attend. The events would be held quarterly or biannually, which would be more flexible, allowing students to attend as their schedules permit. Each session will center around a specific issue identified by City Council, city departments or community partners. The boarder reach will reflect on the diversity of Novi and ensure equitable representation. It is very limited right now on who can be appointed and how many positions are available. A resolution to formally dissolve the youth council and student board reps' roles is going forward at the City Council meeting on Monday. Creating the new Mayor's Youth Forum framework will also happen at the meeting.
Director Muck and several of the Commissioners thanked the Student Reps and praised their engagement.

B. Recreation Division – Recreation Supervisor John Gillingham

1. Programs & Services

Recreation Supervisor John Gillignham presented Deputy Director Ringle's report which featured his main program, summer camps. This summer marked the first year of implementing a one-week priority registration for Novi residents for Camp Lakeshore, PowerPlay and Bon Voyage. The camps were still filled within fifteen minutes on the first day of enrollment and generated long waiting lists. The one-week priority will be offered again next year and will be promoted on social media, E newsletters, and emails to verify residency status prior to ensure a smooth registration process. A high number of cancellations still occurred because people secured spots just in case. There was a significant decrease in transfers since implementing a transfer fee. 1300 total campers

attended the ten weeks of camp. The breakdown is 248 unique individual children across 226 families and sixteen teens participating in the Counselor in Training program. This summer the campers enjoyed local and further away field trips including the Novi Ice Arena, Launch Trampoline Park, Henry Ford Museum, canoeing at Proud Lake, Detroit Zoo and Rolling Hills Water Park. The Bon Voyage camp featured some great experiences such as a Starlab inflatable indoor planetarium, magic show, Michigan Science Center and the Diamond Jack River Tour.
Last year the camp start time was adjusted from 7:00 to 7:30 due to low attendance at that time. Novi is one of the only camps open until 6:00 so we are evaluating closing earlier next summer to help with budget and staffing.
Recreation Supervisor Gillingham took a moment to praise his camp staff because they work directly with the campers every day. The staff consistently stayed upbeat, positive and care about the kids.
Cultural arts under Recreation Supervisor Jenneva Kayser were highlighted next. Details about the Sizzling Summer Art Series were provided. There were three dance showcases and six art projects held in collaboration with the Detroit Institute of Arts. Over a thousand participants enjoyed these free events thanks to the sponsors, DTE Energy, The Goddard School, Christian Financial Credit Union.
Theater auditions for Beetlejuice Junior will be on Sunday August 24th for third – eighth graders. The show will be in January at Novi Middle School. More than thirty applications were received for the 2026 residencies at Villa Barr. The jury will choose three local and three visiting artists. Registration is open for dance classes beginning in September.
The summer adult softball league is wrapping up and the fall league begins after Labor Day. Registration is open for fall youth basketball, volleyball, tennis, parent / child cornhole, pickleball ladder league and more.
The latest Engage magazine is online and will be hitting homes late this week.

C. Older Adult Division – OAS Manager Kit Kieser
1. Programs and Services
OAS Manager Kit Kieser mentioned that it has passed the one-year mark of People's Express operating in Novi. The final count for the fiscal year 24-25 was 33,151 rides. Novi Senior Transportation provided about 14,000 a year. Therefore, the number of rides has more than doubled, a 129% increase. This demonstrates the unmet needs of weekend and evening rides. People are taking advantage of the additional transportation opportunities. People's Express is still looking for property in Southwest Oakland County to accommodate a larger hub.
Planning is underway for the annual Veteran's Day Celebration to be held on November 6th. Commissioner Dooley will be returning as the master of ceremonies. Jeff Phillips and Friends Band will provide entertainment. The student essay was a success last year so it will be brought back this year. Registration is now open. Veterans are free and guests are $12.
The Perennial Exchange will be held September 20th from 9:00-11:00 at Fuerst Park. The event will feature Michigan native plants. Captain Theisen will give a presentation about the importance of pollinators, and the Beautification Committee will be onsite.
The City of Novi has added two beehives to the Bosco Back 30. Captain Theisen, an experienced beekeeper, has been closely monitoring the hives. He will showcase them at the Buzz About Bees program on September 24th at 5:00.

Senior Day at the Detroit Zoo will be held on September 10th. The fourteen-passenger van plus a People's Express vehicle will take thirty-one people to the zoo. 23 of the 31 spots have been filled.
September 19th there will be an ice cream social following Bingo at Meadowbrook. There will be sundaes, board games and a good time at this popular event.
OAS Manager Kieser continued with the upcoming programs under social services. Powerful Tools for Caregivers will be back on September 22nd. The month of September is fall prevention month. OAS will be working with Henry Ford Health to present A Matter of Balance beginning September 24th. Bingocize is a new program from New Age Ways that starts on September 24th. It meets twice a week through December. It is a combination of bingo, healthy living information and exercise videos. Another new class from Henry Ford Health called Understanding Nutrition focusing on fads versus sustainable eating plans will be offered September 25th.

COMMISSIONER COMMENTS:

Student Representative DiDomenico
I started as a student representative my sophomore year and I am going to be a senior. It has been a pleasure to serve here and an opportunity to remember the rest of my life. It definitely had an influence on my college career. I want to major in international affairs, but I am not giving up on music. Hit me up if I am selling out stadiums in the future.

Commissioner Bagley
This has been a great first meeting. I love hearing about all the amazing things that are happening in Novi. I especially loved the report on older adult services since I am in the caregiving industry. I like the fact that we are doing so much in the community. I also loved the camp report. This meeting was a little different than what I am used to learning about all the plans. I usually deal with budgets. I am looking forward to being here.

Commissioner Dooley
I would like to echo all the comments. It nice to get a good appreciation of what the soccer program entails. It is very successful. There has been a lot of changes from the time I coached. It has really taken off.
What is done in older adults is truly remarkable. There is always something new and productive that is reported monthly. I can't thank Kit enough for her leadership.
Jeff, it goes without saying that you are the premier director of parks and recreation in Michigan. It all starts with you. We need to thank you for all you provide to us.
Best of luck to the student reps. They were truly a welcome addition.

Commissioner Staab
I wish the student reps well on their future endeavors.
I would like to thank Jeff and his staff for all the help and assistance with Pour on the Shore. It would not be possible without the PRCS staff.
I appreciated Chase and Sean's presentation. Soccer programs around the country could benefit from the tracking and information methods.
People's Express has been very positive on our community. I see them running up and

down our streets every day transporting people. It shows with double the participation. The camp information was enlightening and appreciated. Thanks to John for coming out of the bullpen to deliver the recreation division report.

Chairperson Joseph
Welcome to Ebony. It is great to have you with us, and we are looking forward to you being on commission. Best of luck to our student representatives.

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

Voice Vote **Unanimous**
The meeting was adjourned by Chairman Joseph at 8:24p.m.

DATE APPROVED: _____

_____ _____
Joseph, Chairperson Dooley, Vice Chairperson