

PARKS, RECREATION & CULTURAL SERVICES COMMISSION

Thursday, November 21st, 2024 – 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 (arrived 7:45), Torimoto (present)
Student Representatives: DiDomenico (present), Sid (absent / excused)

APPROVAL OF AGENDA:

Line item 8A1, WeCan Update was moved up in the agenda before Citizen Comments. Commissioner Joseph motioned for approval of agenda and second by Commissioner Staab.

Voice Vote

Unanimous

WeCan Update

Director Muck mentioned that there is record setting attendance at the meeting tonight as we are joined by students and their wonderful teacher Nick Weigel-Hubler from Village Oaks. Nick presented an idea to the Parks Commission on how to improve the parks last summer. The Commissioners gave him unanimous approval to move forward. Today's presentation was moved inside to the PRCS Commission meeting due to the weather and daylight.

Nick Weigel-Hubler said he appreciates the ability to adjust. He was excited to talk about what has been done so far this school year. In August, he pitched the idea of the students adopting Brookfarm Park. It would be beneficial for the kiddos and the Parks Recreation and Cultural Services Department. Several students attended the meeting to explain what they have learned this year. The cans were designed, painted and have a QR code to show what is being learned in life science. Currently, the students are studying food chains and how every system has a food web. The students did a variety of experiments to determine what environmental conditions suit the needs to grow and thrive. What was learned in the classroom was then taken outside. Students went to the park to pick up trash and monitored where it was found.

Village Wood students Lily, Katelyn, Ben and Jayden provided additional information regarding what they are learning and the WeCan program. It was then turned over to the Commissioners for comments and questions.

Director Muck summarized on behalf of the staff. This warms our hearts to see how many kids are involved in helping our parks. The next generation is going to take care of our parks. He then introduced a special guest, Mayor Justin Fischer, who thanked everyone from Village Wood Elementary for their partnership and community involvement.

CITIZEN COMMENTS:

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

It was moved that the minutes for the October 17th meeting be approved by Commissioner Staab and second by Commissioner Dooley.

Voice Vote

Unanimous

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

- A. Novi Parks Foundation – Commissioners Joseph, Staab & Torimoto
Commissioner Staab said there was not a meeting last month. The meeting on December 17th will be at Joe Kools. This will be an opportunity to bring on new board members. The new Executive Director should be on board at that time.

- B. Active Mobility Committee – Commissioners Tolkacz & Dooley
Commissioner Dooley said he attended forty-five minutes of the Active Mobility Committee meeting prior to tonight's Park Commission. There were presentations from Northville about the coordination of the capital improvement plan which was a major part of the agenda. Discussion occurred about the Eight Mile project. It should be completed in the summer or fall of next year. This will make the area of Novi Road, Allen Drive and Galway Drive more synergistic. Novi and Northville in conjunction can have some effective pathways. More to come during the next meeting in December.

- C. Parks and Facilities Update
 - 1. ITC Trail – Commissioner Torimoto
Commissioner Torimoto started off by going to the City of Novi website. He looked at the maps from both routes, distances were displayed from both directions which is unique. The trail itself is from Providence to ITC Community Sports Park. He highlighted the connectors from the neighborhoods. These entrances to the subdivisions are the responsibility of the subdivision and volunteers. They looked fantastic. A sign stated no motorized vehicles, walking and bikes only. The crosswalk with functional warning lights was being used by a family. The boardwalk / overlook is above the wetlands was shown. The boards needed to be replaced in the past, however, after intently looking at the whole area Commissioner Torimoto did not see a plank that was in poor condition. At the Nine Mile trailhead there is a bike repair stand, bike rack, bench, trash can, parking spots and a dedication to former council member Wrobel. This was opened in 2023. The area was in excellent condition. To lead into the strategic plan presentation Commissioner Torimoto showed signs that explain the future of ITC and the expansion purchase.

MATTERS FOR COMMISSION DISCUSSION AND/OR ACTION:

- A. Strategic Community Recreation & Master Park Plan Draft – Approval

Director Muck stated that the process for the strategic plan was started over a year ago. The consultants were selected and gathered information. The commissioners

have received the plan, so Director Muck gave a higher-level overview. The five-year Community Recreation Plan is an opportunity to evaluate the needs of the community, review assets, aligns us with state compliance and allows the department to be eligible for grants. It also inventories existing facilities and resources. The department puts in the strategic component with goals and objectives related to programming and facility management.

Public input took place in person and online, the draft created, reviewed and pending commission approval, it will go to Council for final approval. Next it goes to the state for approval after which we are eligible to apply for grants.

Community input involved a public open house during the Superhero Showcase. Additional open houses targeting Seniors and diverse populations were held. Online community surveys and a staff survey on our internal needs. This was combined for a discussion to formulate our goals and objectives. 400 responses to surveys were recorded. The demographics showed it was an older population percentage of responders.

The city has three themes in terms of goals and objectives. To operate a world class, sustainable local government, build a desirable and vibrant community for residents and businesses and invest properly and be a safe community for all. We tie our goals and objectives underneath those. This includes communications, marketing, technology advancement and accessibility through facilities, walkable parks, trail connections. Statements about monitoring and pursuing properties to acquire for park conservation purposes are always in the plan. Over the last ten years several properties have been acquired including the ITC Trailhead, ITC Trailhead Park expansion which were done through trust fund grants. Northwest Park was also built through a grant that would never have happened without a strategic plan on file. We are also concerned about emergency access, trail signage, staff certifications and improving our parks and facilities amenities. All three bullet points may be funded through the city general fund, state and federal grants, donations and foundations. Specific grants are not put into the plan because during the five years things can change such as Council Members, Park Commissioners, staffing and trends. In this plan we have stayed away from individual parks and projects other than what is already in the CIP.

Questions and discussion occurred amongst the commissioners about demographics, renters, and measuring goals. OAS Manager Kit Kiesr explained the major input from the older adult community.

Commissioner Staab motioned for approval of the plan. It was seconded by Commissioner Dooley. Followed by unanimous approval by the rest of the Commissioners.

STAFF REPORTS

A. Administration Division – Director Jeff Muck

1. WeCan Update – moved to beginning of the meeting.

B. Recreation Division – Deputy Director Tracie Ringle

1. Programs & Services

Deputy Director Tracie Ringle highlighted the programs for the rest of the year. Lunch with Santa event is almost sold out, there are several spots open during the second seating. It will take place on December 14th at Lakeshore Park.

A winter break camp will be offered for six to thirteen-year-olds on the 23rd, 26th, 27th, 30th, January 2nd and 3rd. Parents can choose all the dates or mix and match. Several camp counselors that are home for the holidays will be working at the camp.

The Novi Choralaires have performances on the 8th and 15th at local churches. Tickets are available at the door. More details are available through their Facebook page. The Concert Band will have a holiday show at the Civic Center December 14th at 2:00. The prior weekend two dance recitals will be held. The traditional on December 7th and the Polynesian on the 8th. These groups will take advantage of the new light board in the theatre.

Winter basketball is one of the largest programs for the department. Due to constraints with gym space resident priority registration was used successfully. Recreation Supervisor Steve Fellhauer is in communication with Community Education about reserving space in the gymnasiums. It is a balance of demand versus the space available.

The Older Adult Golf League registration begins on December 9th. It is expected to be a busy day.

On November 12th Jenneva Kayser joined the team as the Recreation Supervisor for Arts and Events. She is a working artist with programming experience. It is targeted that she will attend the January meeting to be introduced to the Commission.

Additional discussion occurred regarding Engage, the Choralaires 60th anniversary and basketball constraints.

2. E-Communication, Social Media & Marketing

Deputy Director Ringle segued into the communication, social media and marketing update. She shared different avenues for the community to find the information. These are good ways to keep up with changes, introduce new programs and spontaneous opportunities. This would be outside of Engage which goes to every home. A bi-monthly E newsletter called E-Engage lists several of our programs with a link to the website to register. 10,000 people are subscribed.

The department has multiple Facebook pages. The largest has 7,000 followers. This is updated and populated with program information and success stories. The City of Novi Boomers and Beyond page is targeted to adults fifty plus. There is also a Facebook page for all the parks that direct people back to the main Novi Park page except for the RC Raceway at Water Tower Park. This is manned by Jeremia Pilarski, the parks maintenance employee who was behind the building of the raceway. There are 2000 followers on this page.

Lastly the park's Instagram account has 2200 followers. Photos are shared along with information to direct people to the website.

Deputy Director Ringle encouraged the Commissioners and members of the community to take advantage of these avenues to stay up to date on what is happening in Novi Parks. She elaborated about the content calendar focusing on the programs that need the most marketing. All the staff are administrators on the social media accounts and add information.

C. Older Adult Division – OAS Manager Kit Kieser

1. Programs and Services

OAS Manager Kit Kieser started with some past programs. The Veteran's Day Celebration earlier this month brought together over 200 attendees. Including 110 veterans, guests, sponsors, local officials and Mayor Fischer to honor those that served. Commissioner Dooley was a wonderful emcee. The first essay contest was won by Madeline Leneschmidt. She read the essay called What Freedom Means to Me which was received with a stand ovation. The program was revamped to bring it into the present for the Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan veterans. We are looking to attract the younger crowd.

Yesterday the popular Cutting the Cord program teaching people about streaming options was held. We hope to host it again in the spring.

Today the annual Thanksgiving Luncheon took place at Meadowbrook Commons. Eighty-seven participants attended, which increased by fifteen from last year. The meal was catered by Moe's on Ten and music from Jeff the Entertainer was featured. The feedback was extremely positive.

New counselor training started this month for the AARP Tax Aid season. Beginning January 7th, we will start taking appointments for in-person tax prep assistance. Those appointments will take place in February, March and a couple of days in April. Last year there were ten weeks of tax prep serving over 450 people. Our site is one of the most popular and successful services.

A new event in collaboration with Henry Ford Health called Healthy Holiday Eating is coming up on December 4th. Detective Stempien from the Novi Police Department will present the Financial Crimes, Scams and Identity Theft class on December 5th. This program is yearly due to updates on the latest tech, email and online scams.

Novi Birders had a fantastic 2024 season with over 200 participants joining from April – November. Wild Birds Unlimited volunteers will lead an Owl Prowl at Lakeshore Park on December 4th. A Night Hike with S'mores will be held on December 11th at 5:30. Both events are wonderful opportunities to connect with nature and are open to people of all ages.

Sporcle Trivia was very popular earlier this year. December 5th it will be held again for Merry and Bright Trivia at the Lakeshore Park Building. Participants are encouraged to wear festive holiday attire and bring their holiday themed thinking caps.

December 12th will be the holiday luncheon, Winter Wonderland, at Meadowbrook Commons. There will be a meal, entertainment and a hot chocolate bar.

2. People's Express Q1 Report

OAS Manager Kit Keiser said in this report she is going to cover some important data. There has been a big increase in volume. Operations started on July 1st. The first quarter has been completed and the ride volume has seen a gigantic increase (85%-95%). An interesting component was when the service is being used.

Weekdays grew from an average of fifty-three rides in 2023 to ninety completed rides in 2024. Saturday has more than doubled too. An important part of staying healthy as you age is getting out of the house and connecting with social groups. Adding Sundays there has been an increase of twenty-one rides from zero. Another notable variable was the increased hours.

82% of the riders are the same population that was being served with Novi Transportation (Fifty-five and older or a disability that prevents them from driving). 18% is the public getting a service they did not have before. People are using People's Express to go to school, work, medical appointments and grocery stores. 30% indicated it is being used for personal use such as the mall and library. Medical appointments are the top use with 4% being for dialysis.

It has been an overwhelmingly positive response, however, there were some issues in the month of October. People were having difficulties securing a ride during the three-day lead time, getting rides out of the boundaries without a connection. The issues have subsided.

People's Express is working on increasing capacity and efficiency around their operations. They are acquiring new vehicles, hiring staff and moving towards prioritizing medical and in boundary rides. They are in the process of onboarding new software to allocate the rides and how the fleet is being used. The software should be live by December 1st. OAS Manager Kit Keiser will continue to have consistent communication and meetings with both People's Express and Oakland County Transit. She will stay open to feedback from residents. The community has been directed to reach out to her office with any specific complaints. She will be advocating for Novi residents.

COMMISSIONER COMMENTS:

Commissioner Gopalakrishnan

The WeCan project done by the Village Oaks kids was awesome. I was looking forward to going to the park, but they came in here today to present. It is excellent to see such young children in elementary school doing projects and presentations. I did not do anything like this until high school. It is awesome how much technology is growing and children being part of it. I would like to see this initiative in other Novi elementary schools and parks.

Thank you, Commissioner Dooley, for the Active Mobility update.

Commissioner Torimoto gave an excellent presentation today. ITC Trail is very near and dear to me since I moved here five years ago. The trail is very close to my house, it is awesome and well maintained. I use it often during the summer. The crossing areas by the main roads have wonderful signage and flashing lights. People always respect and stop when others are crossing.

The Master Strategic Plan was very good homework. I read it over a couple of times. It was excellent information being new to the city. I learned about demographics. It is awesome to see the strategic plan, goals from the City Council and how it ties to PRCS and how we are capturing the needs of the population. I was amazed with the detail and how much information was included.

Thanks to Deputy Director Ringle for the updates about winter break and social media. Today I learned how much is going on in the city with social media. Many of the city events are very well communicated through the Engage magazine. The city does an excellent job with communication.

Thank you to OAS Manager Kieser for your updates. People's Express is fantastic. Ever since it was implemented, I see the white vans going somewhere all the time.

Thank you again for a wonderful night and the ton of updates. It was wonderful to see so many people in the audience.

Commissioner Tolkacz

I apologize for being late. It was disappointing missing the first half of the meeting, especially the WeCan project. I walked through Brookfarm Park over the weekend and noticed the cans being prepped. I will go back this weekend to see them finished. I really enjoyed the E-communication segment. It was helpful to learn these all exist. I would encourage everyone to attend the Choralaires concert. The spring and Christmas concerts were excellent, and I would recommend. A closing observation of the three-month window the commissioners have. I was going through the notes, and it struck me that we have a rare opportunity with the minutes and the look ahead for the staff. It is a three-month window. Looking back, I attended Day of the Dead on a hot day in late October and now I just drove here in snow. Looking ahead, we have Christmas and Santa Claus events.

Commissioner Torimoto

The WeCan presentation was awesome. The kids were a little intimidating with their use of Google Docs. They have a bright future. I enjoyed reading the Master Plan. The comparison standards section was interesting, the number of parks served by residents was just unbelievable. The section on the efficiency of the operations of the park is interesting and that you've committed to keep this up for the next few years. Thank you for being able to provide a capable service to the city.

Commissioner Staab

I want to echo and reinforce the WeCan presentation. It was great. I would like to have them back on the docket in the spring and as they do future endeavors. It was great to have the excited children and their teacher to interact with the Commissioners. The strategic plan is always a good time to consider adding, do a hard look, send it to council for approval and get it implemented. People's Express has been a smashing success. I see them in my neighborhood all the time. The community has been raving about it with the availability and so on. I'd like to wish everybody on the commission and staff a Happy Thanksgiving.

Student Representative DiDomenico

I see the People's Express vans every single day around town. The social medial is really cool. I am glad that we have Instagram because Gen Z does not use Facebook. I want to give a shout out to the Veteran's Day Luncheon. I was part of the choir that sang. We had a great time coming out. The highlight of the meeting was the WeCan update. It was great seeing the kids and what they came up with.

Commissioner Riggins

It was great seeing everybody here. I could not believe that at their age they were using PowerPoints and Google Slides. The kids were all well-spoken and not shy at all. The ITC presentation was great too. I learned a lot. I read and learned from my homework. It is a great plan very well laid out.

I did not know we had all the Facebook pages. Hopefully the people watching will go follow those pages as well.

I hope everybody has a great, safe, Happy Thanksgiving.

Commissioner Dooley

The future is really bright in our city when you see the kids that came today. It continues to amaze me with the creativity and passion that individuals have for something so worthy of that presentation this evening. I hope people get a chance to see the rubbish barrels out there at the park. I am so glad the leader came to us in August. It was just so much fun to interact with them because they are brilliant young kids. They should be very proud.

Thanks for doing the homework for the Master Plan. It was an extremely well-done job putting that together. The City Council will be very impressed.

The communication in the city is unbelievable with the functionality that is within. It is just magnificent. The city is so lucky!

The older adults are in great hands with Kit. I had the opportunity to watch Kit and Cheryl on Novi TV. They did a wonderful job and should be very proud.

Thanks to the Commissioners for the wonderful comments. It was the best recap I have heard in my life.

Harry, such a smart presentation tonight was very visionary, and I learned a lot.

Happy Thanksgiving

Chairman Joseph

The tough part about going last is what can be said? It was a great summary this evening. Great presentation Harry. I am just overall always impressed and inspired by what is going on in the city. To see the future leaders taking initiative to do something to give back to the community.

Happy Thanksgiving to everyone.

ADJOURNMENT

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

Voice Vote

Unanimous

The meeting was adjourned by Chairman Joseph at 8:37p.m.

DATE APPROVED: _____

Joseph, Chairperson

Dooley, Vice Chairperson