



**CITY OF NOVATO**  
PARKS & RECREATION

**Recreation, Cultural and Community Services Advisory Commission**

**SPECIAL MEETING**

**Minutes**

**Tuesday, September 17, 2024 – 6:00 PM**

**A. CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL**

The meeting was called to order by Chair Weber at 6:02 PM.

**Commissioners Present:** Erin Lacey, Emily Larsen, Mavi Pilloton, Betsy Ricketts, Zachary Schmechel, Nancy Weber, Beverley Winsor

**Commissioners Absent:** Dennis Bentley, Suzanne Crow

- Commissioner Crow arrived at 7:10 PM.
- Commissioner Winsor left the meeting at 7:30 PM.

**Staff Present:** Director of Parks, Recreation, and Community Services Katie Gauntlett; Community Services Division Manager, Drew Bendickson, and Recreation Division Manager Alexandra Kambur.

**B. APPROVAL OF FINAL AGENDA**

**Commission Action:** Upon motion by Commissioner Ricketts and seconded by Commissioner Lacey, the Commission voted **7-0-0-2** to approve the final agenda.

**Ayes:** Lacey, Larsen, Pilloton, Ricketts, Schmechel, Weber, Winsor

**Noes:** None

**Abstain:** None

**Absent:** Bentley, Crow

**Motion Carried**

**C. PUBLIC COMMENT**

None

**D. CONSENT ITEMS**

**D.1. Approval of the Meeting Minutes from May 9, 2024**

**D.2. Approval of the Meeting Minutes from July 11, 2024**

**Commission Action:** Upon motion by Commissioner Lacey and seconded by Commissioner Larsen, the Commission voted **7-0-0-2** to approve the consent calendar.

**Ayes:** Lacey, Larsen, Pilloton, Ricketts, Schmechel, Weber, Winsor

**Noes:** None

**Abstain:** None

**Absent:** Bentley, Crow

**Motion Carried**

**E. UNFINISHED AND OTHER BUSINESS**

None

**F. GENERAL BUSINESS**

**F.1. REVIEW, CONSIDER AND PROVIDE RECOMMENDATIONS ON PROPOSED PLAY EQUIPMENT AND PLAYGROUND DESIGN, AND CONSIDER MAKING A RECOMMENDATION TO NOVATO CITY COUNCIL TO APPROVE A DRAFT PLAYGROUND DESIGN FOR JOSEF HOOG COMMUNITY PARK, 558 MARIN OAKS DRIVE, AS PART OF THE HOOG PARK PLAYGROUND & ACCESSIBILITY ENHANCEMENTS PROJECT, CIP #17-004**

Novato Parks, Recreation and Community Services Director, Katie Gauntlett provided an overview on the proposed playground, equipment selections and surfacing recommendations.

Director Gauntlett opened the presentation with an overview of Josef Hoog Community Park, a nearly 10-acre park in the Ignacio area. The park features a rolling landscape, walking paths, a half basketball court, a playground, benches, picnic tables, and a reservable barbecue area. Gauntlett noted that the playground at Hoog Park is one of five identified in the Parks Master Plan as needing replacement.

Director Gauntlett outlined the funding sources for the playground project, which include \$200,000 from Facilities Long-Term Maintenance, \$520,000 in one-time funds from the American Rescue Plan Act, and up to \$200,000 from a matching grant awarded to the City of Novato through the GameTime Community Champions Playground Grant. She noted that the American Rescue Plan funds must be encumbered by December 31, 2024, and that, according to the terms of the GameTime grant, playground equipment must be purchased by October 25, 2024. Gauntlett emphasized that these funding timelines have expedited the project.

Director Gauntlett emphasized the community engagement efforts aimed at gathering feedback on desired features and amenities for the new play structure and play area. This included an online survey that received 204 responses and an in-person community meeting at Josef Hoog Community Park, which drew around 30 adults and 14 children on June 27, 2024. Gauntlett explained that insights gathered from these initiatives helped shape the draft design, equipment, and surfacing recommendations for the playground.

Director Gauntlett presented visual renderings of the proposed playground design. Gauntlett explained that the scale and scope of this project is limited due to the playground's footprint and the topography of the park, which backs up to a hillside.

Although perimeter fencing was not included in the visual renderings, Gauntlett explained that staff recommends it, as 66.7% of survey respondents expressed interest in an enclosed play area. She emphasized that perimeter fencing is a priority for Novato's adaptive needs community, as it helps ensure that children of all abilities can play safely in our parks. For playground surfacing, staff recommended rubberized surfacing, which was the preferred option for 74.5% of survey respondents. Gauntlett explained that the Poured-In-Place surfacing, commonly referred to as PIP, enhances accessibility for individuals with limited mobility and those using mobility devices, while also requiring less ongoing staff maintenance.

Additionally, Director Gauntlett shared that staff recommends a nature-based playground theme inspired by a treehouse motif. The proposed design includes nature-themed equipment – a butterfly climber, mushroom balancing steps, and sound boards featuring nature sounds.

When selecting play equipment for the park, Gauntlett shared that staff prioritized incorporating swings, climbers, and slides, as these were the most requested elements identified through community engagement. Staff also focused on equipment that meets the requirements of the Play On! Initiative, a standards-based physical education program developed in partnership with SHAPE America. By including play equipment that encompasses six essential elements—spinning, sliding, swinging, climbing, brachiating, and balancing—Gauntlett stated that the site would qualify as a National Demonstration Site.

Additionally, staff considered equipment that enhances accessibility and sensory experiences to create an inclusive play space. This includes nature-themed sound boards at the ground level, a discovery table that serves as a sensory retreat space, expression swings, and an adaptive swing seat equipped with a safety harness and supportive backrest.

Gauntlett explained that the core structure of the playground, estimated to cost \$144,000, is eligible for the matching grant, meaning that the grant would fund 50% of the primary equipment costs. Auxiliary equipment included in the proposed playground design like the swing bank, sensory sound panels, and cat tail spinner are not eligible for the matching grant.

Commissioner Ricketts asked for clarification regarding the equipment purchase deadline to ensure the City could utilize the matching grant funding. Gauntlett responded that the play equipment must be purchased by October 25, 2024, to qualify for the grant. Ricketts then inquired about the swing bays and the types of swings that could be included in that area. Gauntlett explained that each swing bay is limited to two swings, allowing for a maximum of four swings with two swing bays.

Commissioner Ricketts also asked about the perimeter fence and the locations of the entrances and exits. Gauntlett indicated that there would be two entrances/exits: one near the core structure and the other closer to the swing bay.

Commissioner Schmechel sought clarification on the recommended types of swing seats. Gauntlett responded that staff recommend including an adaptive seat as one of the swing options.

Commissioner Larsen then inquired about the types of swings that could be combined in one swing bay. Leo Seavey, a representative from GameTime, explained that due to fall zone requirements, a tandem expression swing is required to be placed next to another tandem expression swing and cannot be swapped out. Larsen also asked about the location of the nature-themed bike racks. Gauntlett mentioned that the bike racks would be relocated to avoid obstructing the walking path, likely moving them to the south side of the playground closest to the half basketball court. Gauntlett also shared that, in addition to the bike racks, three nature-themed benches are included in the renderings and recommended by staff.

Lastly, Larsen asked about the project completion timeline and what the community can expect. Gauntlett indicated that construction could begin as early as late January 2025.

Commissioner Lacey expressed interest in expression swings and inquired about other inclusive and accessibility-friendly features. Gauntlett explained that this play structure differs from the one at Pioneer Park due to limitations in physical space.

Given the playground's footprint and this project's limited funding, Gauntlett explained that ramps and slopes for a fully accessible play structure cannot be accommodated. However, Gauntlett indicated that some of the auxiliary features are designed to be adaptive or to enhance the play experience for the adaptive and disabled community, including ground-level sound boards, adaptive swing seats, and rubberized surfacing.

Commissioner Pilloton asked about the age ranges that this play area supports. Gauntlett explained that the play structure is designed for children ages 5-12, but that staff recommend including a swing seat that would support a younger child.

Commissioner Weber inquired about the shade provided by the central umbrella depicted in the renderings. Gauntlett explained that a shade study was not conducted, but noted that the play area benefits from shade provided by nearby trees.

The Commission engaged in an extensive discussion about playground surfacing options, specifically comparing rubberized surfacing to engineered wood fiber. They also considered a split surfacing option that would combine both materials. Gauntlett clarified that due to fall zone requirements, transfer platform specifications, and the total surface area, staff would not recommend a dual surface option.

Commissioner Lacey expressed preference for consistent rubberized surfacing throughout the play area to prioritize accessibility for the adaptive and disabled community. She also inquired about the durability of Poured-In-Place (PIP) surfacing in high-traffic areas, such as underneath the swings. Leo Seavey, a representative from GameTime, responded that PIP typically requires patching in high-traffic areas, estimating that patches might be needed in five years. Seavey added that a roll-coat urethane layer could be applied to enhance durability, noting that some communities choose to apply this coating every two years as part of their ongoing maintenance strategy.

Commissioner Weber then asked about the cost of the roll-coat application. Seavey noted that the cost is based on square footage, estimating that it would cost approximately \$2,000 to apply the coating to the playground area at Hoog Park.

Commissioner Ricketts sought clarification on the difference between engineered wood fiber and wood chips. Director Gauntlett explained that engineered wood fiber, when properly maintained, can be tightly compacted to meet ADA requirements. Gauntlett explained that the engineered wood fiber can become loose and shift, particularly in high-traffic areas. Gauntlett noted that it requires regular and ongoing staff time to adequately maintain and periodic refilling to ensure a smooth, continuous, and level surface. Gauntlett added that limited staff

resources would make this ongoing maintenance challenging for the Novato Public Works team.

The Commission discussed various types of swing seats and swing configurations, fall zone requirements, and equipment selections that would best serve the community. Commissioner Ricketts expressed interest in adding an inclusive whirl to the design to enhance inclusive play elements. Gauntlett stated that staff could explore the possibility of incorporating the inclusive whirl into the design as a replacement for the cat tail spinner.

### **Public Comment**

- Jack R.
- Piper Primerose
- Alicia Ncho-Oguie
- Adrienne Hoke
- Marisa Hoke

**Commission Action:** Upon motion by Commissioner Ricketts and seconded by Commissioner Pilloton, the Commission voted **7-0-0-2** to approve the proposed playground design with the recommendation that the cat-tail spinner be replaced with the inclusive whirl, approval of PIP surfacing, approval of perimeter fencing, recommendation to move the bike racks to the south end of the playground, and replacement of the belt seat with an expression swing, and to leave all other swings as shown in the playground rendering.

**Ayes:** Crow, Lacey, Larsen, Pilloton, Ricketts, Schmechel, Weber

**Noes:** None

**Abstain:** None

**Absent:** Bentley, Winsor

**Motion Carried**

## **G. COMMITTEE AND LIAISON REPORTS**

### **G.1. Staff Updates**

Recreation Division Manager Alexandra Kambur provided a recap of Summer 2024 activities, programs and events and a preview for Fall 2024. Kambur noted that the Parks, Recreation, and Community Services (PRCS) Department successfully hosted nine weeks of summer camps at the Novato Gymnastics Center, Hamilton Community Center, and Hill Education/Recreation Area. There were notable increases in various youth programs, including All Sports Camp, Gymnastics Classes, Musical Theater Camps, and STEM Camps such as Chess, Comic Book Creations, Special Effects, and LEGO. This summer, PRCS also launched two new

programs: Soccer Stars, which offers ongoing weekly soccer classes, and a Counselor in Training program for tweens and early teens. Camp Ton-of-Fun, the City of Novato's traditional day camp program, experienced a decline in enrollment. Kambur indicated that the decline may be attributed to the expanded options offered at little or no cost to Novato families through the Novato Unified School District (NUSD).

In terms of aquatics, Kambur shared that the Department sold 279 Hamilton Community Pool memberships, reflecting a 20% increase compared to pre-pandemic levels. The peak weekend of June 22-23 saw 1,040 drop-in visitors, excluding members and those in attendance for swimming lessons. Additionally, PRCS served 749 participants in group swim lessons and 104 in private lessons; a remarkable 260% increase from Summer 2023. Popular events such as Inflatable Fridays and the presence of food vendors enhanced the experience for visitors of the Hamilton Community Pool.

Kambur explained that Summer is typically peak park reservation season. Kambur reminded the commission that the Department launched a new rental inquiry website, [novato.org/rentnovatofun](http://novato.org/rentnovatofun), in February of 2024. Since February of 2024, PRCS has received 580 park rental inquiries, and over the Summer 2024 season 198 park reservations were booked. Miwok Park was the most popular site, with 64 reservations, followed by Hamilton Community Pool with 50, Pioneer Park with 42, Hoog Park with 21, and South Hamilton Park with 11.

PRCS hosted two summer concert series, Concerts on the Green and Hot Amphitheater Nights. The final concert of the Summer, Pride & Joy SF, attracted over 1,400 attendees, showcasing the community's enthusiasm for summer concerts.

Kambur noted that registration for Fall 2024 programs opened on August 13, generating over \$100,000 in revenue within the first 24 hours—a record-breaking first day total for the fall season. Youth programming offered this fall includes gymnastics, soccer, musical theater, and boys' basketball. For adults and seniors, programs include pickleball, martial arts, exercise and group fitness classes, as well as basketball and volleyball leagues.

The Fall 2024 special event calendar includes the Multicultural Advisory Commission's United Against Hate Week Event on September 25, the Trash to Treasures Flea Market on September 28, a showing of the movie *A Bug's Life* on October 12, the Floating Pumpkin Patch on October 12, the Silver Celebration for the 25th Anniversary of the Novato Gymnastics Center on October 19, and the Not-So-Scary Halloween Magic Show on October 26.

Looking ahead to the holiday season, PRCS will be hosting several special events including the Holiday Crafts Fair, Photos with Santa, Letters to Santa, and the Gingerbread Build event.

Kambur concluded by mentioning that Recreation Supervisor, Teresa Ehteshami and staff from the Margaret Todd Senior Center will participate in the annual Senior Fair at the Marin Civic Center, where over 100 exhibitors will provide information and resources for seniors and their caregivers.

Lastly, Kambur announced that the Rotary Club of Ignacio had selected Novato's Youth Financial Assistance Program as the beneficiary of their "Fund A Need Event," titled Burgers, Brews, and Comedy, scheduled for September 21 at the Jonas Center at IVC.

## **G.2. Commissioner Reports**

None

## **H. ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned at 8:07 PM

**I HEREBY CERTIFY that the foregoing minutes were duly adopted at the RCCS Commission Special Meeting of November 21, 2024.**

/ Alexandra Kambur /

Alexandra Kambur, Recreation Division Manager