



**STAFF REPORT**

MEETING

DATE: July 10, 2025

TO: Recreation, Cultural and Community Services Advisory Commission

FROM: Katie Gauntlett, Parks, Recreation & Community Services Director

SUBJECT: **REVIEW ONLINE ENGAGEMENT RESULTS FROM LEE GERNER NEIGHBORHOOD PARK SURVEY AND CONSIDER APPROVING PROPOSED DESIGN THEMES TO EXPLORE FOR FUTURE RENOVATIONS AT LEE GERNER NEIGHBORHOOD PARK, 1720 NOVATO BLVD.**

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**REQUEST**

Receive a presentation on the results of the online community engagement survey for future improvements to Lee Gerner Neighborhood Park and consider approving proposed design themes to explore for future renovations of the space.

**BACKGROUND**

Since 2022, the City has operated a Temporary Camp, supporting Novato’s unhoused population, under a court-ordered Settlement Agreement between the City and the Marin County Homeless Union, which expired on October 13, 2024. In January 2025, a federal court determination reinforced the expiration of the Settlement Agreement, and at their February 11 meeting, the Novato City Council unanimously approved the permanent closure of the Temporary Camp at Lee Gerner Neighborhood Park and authorized an agreement for construction services to clean up and restore the park for community recreational use.

The authorized park clean-up has commenced, and planning for future landscaping, irrigation, safety and accessibility enhancements, and additional site improvements is now necessary to fully restore the site to a neighborhood park for recreational use. Implementation of this improvement project reflects the community’s number one priority identified in the Council adopted 2024 Parks Master Plan – to maintain and improve existing parks and recreation facilities before developing new sites.

At their regular meeting on May 8, 2025, the Recreation, Cultural and Community Services Commission (RCCS) reviewed and provided feedback to staff on a draft online survey seeking community feedback on future recreation amenities to be featured at this site. Staff outlined at this meeting that this survey would be the first engagement opportunity with the community to begin to develop the future vision for the park. With a limited budget identified, the feedback from this initial survey would assist staff in understanding the community’s goals for the site and provide an opportunity to develop a phased approach to development if necessary.

**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

Staff developed and utilized a variety of outreach methods to ensure the community was aware of the survey and ready to engage in the process. This consistent and strategic outreach effort included the curation of Lee Gerner Park specific content for a City press release, social media content released on the PRCS and City channels, email campaigns, and a feature in the City’s June e-Newsletter. Additionally, the distribution of flyers, in-person and electronically, in both English and Spanish were shared at public facing customer service counters at the Margaret Todd Senior Center, Downtown Recreation Center, and the Novato Gymnastics Center. PRCS

Staff connected with Staff at the Marin County Library who shared the bilingual flyers onsite at the Novato Library and via their social media channels. PRCS Staff also worked closely with the City's Economic Development Staff to ensure the surrounding businesses were aware of the open survey.

Email campaigns have proven to be an extremely successful outreach method for our community including this engagement process. On June 3, PRCS Staff launched an email campaign that reached over 13,300 unique recipients from the Department's registration database, followed by a second campaign on June 16 sent to more than 10,000 unique recipients. These email campaigns achieved open rates of 69% and 64%, significantly exceeding industry benchmarks for marketing emails.

This mixed method approach to community outreach has proven to be extremely successful with our community resulting in 780 visits to the online survey and 612 submitted survey responses. This level of engagement in an online survey equates to an incredible 30.6 hours of public comment.

### **SUMMARY OF SURVEY RESULTS**

The online survey was available from May 21 through June 22, 2025, in both English and Spanish. A total of 612 responses were collected.

- **Novato Residency:**
  - 92.8% of respondents indicated that they live in Novato (568 out of 612).
  - 46.9% of Respondents – Living in 94947 Zip Code
  - 37.6% of Respondents – Living in 94945 Zip Code
- **Primary Mode of Transportation when visiting:**
  - 72.2% Personal Vehicle
  - 23.4% Walking/Jogging/Running
- **Frequency of current Park, Library, or business visitation on average:**
  - 52.5% - Weekly (321 out of 612)
  - 24.2% - Monthly
  - 11.1% - A Few Times a Year
  - 10.1% - Daily
- **Preferred Enhancements (Ranked Preferences):**

Based on ranked-choice responses from 350 participants, the top recreation enhancements were:

  1. **Public Art and Nature Walk** (e.g., sculptures and native plants)
  2. **Children's Play Area** (e.g., sensory panels, outdoor play equipment)
  3. **Outdoor Fitness Area** (e.g., self-guided body-weight equipment)
  4. **Small Dog Park** (for dogs under 35 lbs.)
- **Frequency of Park Use if Renovated:**

A combined 86.8% of respondents indicated they would visit more regularly if the park were renovated:

  - 10.1% - Daily
  - 52.5% - Weekly
  - 24.2% - Monthly
- **Age of children regularly in care of** (i.e. one's own children, grandchildren, babysitting):
  - 36.9% - I do not have, nor regularly care for, any children.
  - 32.4% - Yes, Ages 6-12
  - 24.5% - Yes, Ages 3-5

In addition to the structured multiple-choice questions, the survey included two open-ended questions that received over 640 written comments from participants. Question 4 asked respondents to suggest any additional recreational activities or amenities they would like considered, while Question 9 invited broader comments or feedback. These write-in responses offer rich and nuanced insight into the community's vision for Lee Gerner Park and often provide context beyond the ranking data. While many suggestions reinforced support for public art and a children's play area, others highlighted recurring themes not fully captured in the multiple-choice rankings. Chief among these was a strong desire to lean into the park's natural character—including requests for native and pollinator-friendly landscaping, shaded seating areas, tranquil and interpretive features that reflect the creekside environment. Several comments emphasized the importance of creating a peaceful, welcoming space that supports quiet reflection, reading, and passive recreation, particularly due to the park's proximity to the library and downtown. These qualitative responses are essential to understanding community values and will complement the statistical data in guiding a thoughtful and inclusive park design.

### **NEXT STEPS**

Based on the results of the community engagement survey, Staff recommend exploring design features that include the top two community ranked amenities:

- A Public Art and Nature Walk, and
- A Children's Play Area

To further align with the community's feedback, staff also recommend exploring incorporating the following elements into conceptual planning:

- Interactive and educational public art installations that celebrate the natural environment and reflect Novato's cultural identity
- Sensory play features that support inclusive and imaginative child play experiences
- Enhanced safety features, such as improved lighting and increased visibility throughout the park
- Improved accessibility, including repairs and upgrades to existing pathways and consideration of necessary improvements to the pedestrian bridge
- Thoughtful landscaping with native and pollinator-friendly plants that enhance the natural character of the park and promote a peaceful, creekside environment

These recommendations will serve as the foundation for future design exploration. Staff will return to RCCS at a future meeting with conceptual renderings, and proposed funding, for review and further community input before moving forward with any final design.

### **PUBLIC OUTREACH**

This item was noticed per standard City of Novato City Council agenda noticing procedures for including posting the agenda at least 72 hours in advance on the community bulletin board in front of City Administrative Offices located at 922 Machin Avenue, posting on the City's website at [novato.org/councilagendas](http://novato.org/councilagendas) and sending an email notification to all e-notification subscribers.

This item will be promoted via the City and PRCS Department's social media channels, Facebook and Instagram, on July 7, 2025.

### **FISCAL IMPACT**

The City's Adopted F/Y 2024/2025 CIP Budget includes CIP 17-003 with a balance of \$101,519

to support enhancements at this site. To date, no funds have been spent.

**RECOMMENDATION**

Approve exploring proposed design themes including a Public Art and Nature Walk, and Children's Play Area for future renovations at Lee Gerner Park.

**ALTERNATIVES**

1. Do not approve proposed design themes.
2. Provide alternative direction to staff.

**ATTACHMENT**

1. Results of Online Engagement Survey for Future Improvements at Lee Gerner Neighborhood Park.