



CITY OF NOVATO
PARKS & RECREATION

Recreation, Cultural and Community Services Advisory Commission

SPECIAL MEETING

Minutes

Thursday, October 9, 2025 - 6:00 PM

A. CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

The meeting was called to order by Chair Larsen at 6:01 PM.

Commissioners Present: Commissioner Bentley, Commissioner Lacey, Commissioner Pilloton, Commissioner Weber, Commissioner Whiteside, Commissioner Winsor, and Chair Larsen.

Commissioners Absent: Commissioner Crow, Commissioner Weber

Commissioner Crow arrived at 6:30 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 Bentley and seconded by Commissioner Weber, the Commission voted **6-0-0-2** to approve the final agenda.

Ayes: Bentley, Lacey, Larsen, Pilloton, Whiteside, Winsor

Noes:

Abstain:

Absent: Crow, Weber

Motion Carried

C. PUBLIC COMMENT

- Chris Benigni

D. CONSENT ITEMS

D.1. Approval of the Meeting Minutes from July 10, 2025

Commission Action: Upon motion by Commissioner Winsor and seconded by Commissioner Lacey, the Commission voted **6-0-0-2** to approve the consent calendar.

Ayes: Bentley, Lacey, Larsen, Pilloton, Whiteside, Winsor

Noes:

Abstain:

Absent: Crow, Weber

Motion Carried

E. UNFINISHED AND OTHER BUSINESS

None

F. GENERAL BUSINESS

F.1 Election of Vice Chair

Due to Commissioner Crow's absence during the first portion of the meeting, the Commission decided to move item. F.1. Election of Vice Chair to later in the meeting, when Crow would be present.

Public Comment:

- None

Commission Action: Upon motion by Commissioner Bentley and seconded by Commissioner Winsor, the Commission voted **7-0-0-1** to elect Commissioner Crow as Vice Chair.

Ayes: Bentley, Crow, Lacey, Larsen, Pilloton, Whiteside, Winsor,

Noes:

Abstain:

Absent: Weber

Motion Carried

F.2 Receive a presentation by the Rotary Club of Novato and Rotary Club of Novato Sunrise and consider approving a recommendation to the City Council to approve Installation of the Education Public Art Display Outside of Hamilton Arts Center, 500 Palm Drive, Under the Art in Public Places Policy, admin Policy 5.13

Sylvia Barry, representing the Rotary Club of Novato and the Rotary Club of Novato Sunrise, presented a proposal for a public art installation commemorating Hamilton's role as the Hamilton Transit Center from 1980 to 1983. During this time, Hamilton supported the safe passage of more than 180,000 Southeast Asian refugees following the Vietnam War.

Barry outlined the project goals: to honor those who assisted refugees at Hamilton Air Force Base between 1980 and 1983; to recognize the humanitarian role of the Hamilton Transit Center during this critical period; to highlight the contributions of Southeast Asian refugees to American society; and to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Fall of Saigon.

The proposed artwork would depict the journey from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos to Hamilton and include two informational plaque stands providing historical context. The design would be inspired by Hmong "story cloths," originally created in refugee camps to document experiences and generate income, and would incorporate Vietnamese, Khmer, and Hmong refugee narratives, culminating at the Hamilton Transit Center as the refugees' first U.S. destination.

Barry shared the following key dates:

- January 9, 2025: Public Comment at the Recreation, Cultural & Community Services Advisory Commission
- October 9, 2025: Formal presentation to the Recreation, Cultural & Community Services Advisory Commission
- City Council approval of the artwork (date TBD). Pending approval, the artwork, plaques, and stands will be ordered, followed by a ribbon-cutting ceremony.

Barry explained that the total estimated budget for the project is \$4,650.00. Barry noted that the Rotary Club will fund and maintain the displays resulting in no initial or ongoing costs to the City of Novato.

- Artwork created by Susan Cummings and Laurie Reemsnyder \$0.00
- Image printing (42" x 28.25") on aluminum with lamination \$650.00
- Kiosk for main artwork, tax and shipping included \$2,000.00.
- Sixteen anchor bolts, \$100.00.

- Plaque stands, tax and shipping included \$1,900.00.

Commissioner Pilloton shared their appreciation for the artwork and the public art installation project.

Commissioner Winsor inquired if they had plans to notify the community that came through the Hamilton Transit Center of the art installation project. Barry responded that they were planning on reaching out to different communities, such as the Asian American Society, Chinese American Society and Canal Vietnamese, also groups located in Sonoma County to notify them of the project.

Commissioner Winsor recalled that they were hoping to have this finished last spring and since that did not happen, she asked when they were hoping to have the project completed/ Barry indicated that they hoped to have the artwork installed and completed by the end of the year or early 2026, pending Council approval.

Commissioner Bentley inquired about protection of the artwork to physical elements and graffiti. Jim Spillman of Novato Rotary indicated that they would apply a 10-year graffiti prevention coating which also provides UV protection to the artwork. He indicated that this was the same product used on the plaques installed at Scottsdale Pond.

Commissioner Bentley asked about the long-term plans for the building. Gauntlett explained that the museum space is currently vacant and that the City will be discussing a long-term lease for that space. She noted that the art studio space continues to be used by artists, and that the basement is used by the Historical Guild and the Novato Parks, Recreation and Community Services Department for storage. Gauntlett confirmed that the building is City-owned and, to her knowledge, there are no plans at this time to change ownership.

Public Comment:

- None

Commission Action: Commissioner Bentley motioned, and Commissioner Pilloton seconded to approve a recommendation to City Council to approve the installation of an educational public art display outside the Hamilton Arts Center to commemorate the historical role of the Hamilton Transit Center. The Commission voted, **6-0-0-2**.

Ayes: Bentley, Lacey, Larsen, Pilloton, Whiteside, Windsor

Noes:

Abstain

Absent: Crow, Weber

Motion Carried

F.3 Consider approving the 2025-2026 Utility Art Box Program, Endorse Seven Locations, and making a recommendation to City Council \$7,000 Public Art Fund Allocation

Community Services Division Manager, Bendickson, provided an update on the 2024-2025 Utility Box Art Project. Bendickson indicated that stickers had been installed on the Utility Boxes which were completed in the Spring of 2025 as part of the inaugural program ensuring that Leadership Novato, Novato Parks and Recreation, and Rotary Club of Novato are represented as partners.

Bendickson then continued with his presentation of the 2025-2026 Utility Box Art Program, building on the success of the inaugural program launched in 2024. The concept for year two is "Where Stories Grow".

Bendickson asked the Commission for their approval of the following: Approve the 2025-2026 Utility Box Art Program concept, endorse seven proposed utility box locations identified in coordination with Public Works, and recommend that City Council approve a \$7,000 allocation from the Public Art Fund to support the program.

Bendickson presented a recap of the success of the inaugural program that launched in 2024. The first year, themed, "A Vision for the Present" resulted in 13 submissions from 12 artists, with seven completed utility boxes installed along Grant Avenue between April and May of 2025. Funding was provided jointly by the Public Art Fund (\$3,000) and the City's Sustainability Division (\$3,000) with each artist receiving up to \$850 in reimbursements. The program was well received, generating positive community feedback and strong interest from participating artists to continue.

Bendickson explained that for year two of the program, staff propose the theme, "Where Stories Grow" encouraging artist to highlight Novato's natural beauty, local traditions, heritage, legacy, community pride and inclusive spirit.

Bendickson outlined the proposed timeline which pending approval would begin with the call for artists in November 2025. The application deadline would be set for mid-February 2026. Submissions would be presented to the Commission for review in March 2026. City Council will do final approval at their March meeting. Bendickson shared that installation will be the same as last year, April through May 2026, with the goal to have all boxes completed by June 2026.

Bendickson went over the application process, sharing that the applications are open to all artists, including minors. Minors, however, require guardian or parent signature. Novato residents will have priority consideration. Requirements include application form, conceptual rendering, and up to three digital images of work. Applications will be accepted via email or in-person at one of our City offices. Bendickson stressed the

importance of the artwork being original and appropriate for all ages. The program prohibits political statements, religious references, discrimination, and copyright material. Artwork cannot obstruct utility box function access panel or warning labels. The artists will be required to use high quality exterior acrylic paint with anti-graffiti coating supplied by staff. Bendickson shared that complete program information will be on the website; this includes last year's artwork, so applicants have an idea of what the utility boxes look like.

Bendickson assured the Commission that staff will promote the call for artist through multiple channels, including the city e-newsletter, social media platforms and a dedicated website for the project. In addition, Bendickson indicated that he would utilize Novato Unified School District's Peach Jar flyer service to help promote the program.

Bendickson planned to contact all artists from the previous year to let them know that they are welcome to submit again, whether they were chosen or not. Staff will also be reaching out to organizations that can help connect us with artist, such as Marin School of the Arts, Marin Museum of Contemporary Art, Museum of the American Indian at Miwok Park, and the Novato Chamber of Commerce.

Bendickson recognized Rotary Club of Novato who has agreed to volunteer to sand and prepare the utility boxes for artwork and Pini Hardware who has agreed to donate primer. Bendickson reported that Public Works confirmed that all seven locations are city owned Utility Boxes, and that Public Works would be responsible for graffiti removal as needed, in alignment with the City's existing graffiti removal policy.

Bendickson explained that he would be requesting an allocation of \$7,000 from the public art fund, to support the program. The current balance of the public art fund is \$324,000. This allocation will provide \$1,000 per artist for material reimbursement. Bendickson reported that this is a modest increase from an \$850 allocation the previous year. Bendickson explained that the increase accounts for inflation and serves to ensure artists have adequate resources for producing quality artwork.

Commissioner Bentley had no questions but complimented the great public art program.

Commissioner Crow expressed her appreciation for the public art program, stating that it's been such a positive addition to downtown Novato and is looking forward to its expansion.

Commissioner Lacey stated that the artwork on the utility art boxes have brightened up downtown and expressed her support for the next phase of the project.

Chair Larsen asked about the utility boxes that have cages. Bendickson confirmed that they could be removed for painting by Public Works. Larsen asked if the cages could be painted and Bendickson said that he would check with Public Works. Larsen asked if we received any interest or participation from Marin School of the Arts last year. Bendickson said that they did not.

Commissioners Whiteside and Pilloton offered positive remarks on the program, noting the Commission's shared sentiment that it is an excellent program.

Public Comment:

- Sylvia Barry

Commission Action: Upon motion by Commissioner Crow and seconded by Commissioner Bentley, the Commission voted **7-0-0-1** to approve the 2025-2026 Utility Box Art Project, with the concept Where Stories Grow, to endorse the locates as listed, and recommend the allocation of funds from the Public Art Fund.

Ayes: Bentley, Crow, Lacey, Pilloton, Whiteside, Winsor, Chair Larson

Noes:

Abstain:

Absent: Weber

F.4. Review online engagement results from Hamilton Amphitheatre Park Playground Survey and provide Recommendations on Design Themes to Explore for Future Renovations, 601 N. Hamilton Pk

Kambur began the presentation on Hamilton Amphitheater Park, by providing an overview of the park. Kambur explained that Hamilton Amphitheater Park is one of Novato's 23 neighborhood parks. The park is notable for its historic 1930s-style amphitheater, which serves as a venue for concerts and performances, including the City of Novato's free annual summer concert series, *Hot Amphitheater Nights*. In addition to the amphitheater, Kambur shared that the park offers open green space, a playground designed for children ages two to five, picnic tables, a reservable barbecue area, and restrooms. Kambur highlighted findings from the Parks Master Plan, which identified the community's top priority as maintaining and improving existing parks and recreational facilities before developing new sites. In alignment with this priority, the replacement of the existing playground at Hamilton Amphitheater Park has been designated as a short-term priority project.

Kambur reported that the existing playground at Hamilton Amphitheater Park is well over 15 years old and has reached the end of its useful life. Replacement equipment is no longer supported by the original manufacturer, and ongoing challenges arise as components break and age. In addition, the playground is currently set in sand, which is not an approved accessible surface, and will need to be updated as part of the renovation. The planned replacement will remain within the existing arc-shaped footprint, which is slightly smaller than the recent renovation completed at Hoog Park. Photos provided for comparison highlighted the split rail fence, curbing, and mature

landscaping that help define the playground area, as well as a mature tree located at the main entry and exit point. Based on these existing features, Kambur stated that staff do not recommend that the playground be enclosed with a fence, but instead continue to rely on the current infrastructure to naturally enclose and define the play space.

To begin the community engagement phase of the Hamilton Amphitheater Park playground replacement project, staff launched an online survey to gather feedback and input regarding desired features for the new playground. The draft survey was approved at the July 2025 RCCS meeting and subsequently opened to the public on July 31, 2025. Parks and Recreation staff emphasized the importance of broad community involvement and employed a mixed-method approach to maximize outreach. The survey was promoted in both English and Spanish, with targeted communication to Hamilton residents to ensure awareness of the project and opportunity to participate. Outreach included posts on Facebook and Instagram through both the City's and Novato Parks and Recreation accounts, as well as inclusion in the City's August e-newsletter, which reaches over 37,000 subscribers and achieved a 63% open rate. A separate Parks and Recreation email campaign was also conducted, reaching more than 13,800 unique recipients with nearly a 70% open rate. Flyers were distributed at City customer service sites including the Gymnastics Center, the Margaret Todd Senior Center, and through Novato Unified School District's electronic flyer distribution system, Peach Jar.

The survey remained open from July 31 through September 1, 2025 during which time 394 site visits were recorded and 287 responses were collected, representing over 14 hours of public comment. Results indicated strong community support, with 96.9% of respondents indicating they were Novato Residents. 57.8% indicated that they live in the 94949-zip code, which encompasses Hamilton, followed by 24.4% in the 94947-zip code and 15% in the 94945-zip code.

When asked about frequency of visits, 32.8% indicated they visit the playground a few times per year, 26.8% reported monthly visits, and 22.3% reported weekly visits. Nearly half of respondents (47%) stated they have or regularly care for children ages three to five, with similar response rates of approximately 37% each for ages zero to two and six to twelve.

When asked to rank preferred playground themes, the nature theme emerged as the top choice, followed by airplane or boat, and then music. In terms of play elements, 76.3% prioritized climbers, balance, and agility structures, followed by slides and swings at 69%, motion play at 49%, and sensory or music play at 36.2%. Blue tones were the most preferred color scheme at 39.7%, with bright and nature-based palettes receiving nearly equal support at 29.6% and 30.7%, respectively. Regarding surfacing, 69.7% favored rubberized material, while 17.8% preferred engineered wood fiber.

Open-ended responses provided further qualitative feedback. Many respondents praised features at recently renovated playgrounds, including the rubberized surfacing, shade structures, and variety of play elements. Specific features such as the tube slide

and mushroom steps at Joseph Hoog Park, and the diverse swing options and spider web climber at Pioneer Park, were highlighted as favorites. Numerous comments commended the City's efforts to create accessible play spaces for all children. Additional feedback emphasized the importance of adding shade, expressed interest in themes tied to Hamilton's history such as boats and airplanes, and requested consideration for equipment that would serve older age groups.

Staff also identified challenges and opportunities related to this project. Kambur explained that the existing playground footprint is arc-shaped, which may limit equipment options due to fall zone requirements. However, opportunities exist to enhance accessibility by replacing the current sand surface with an approved accessible material, ensuring broader use by children and families. Kambur explained that project budget is set at \$700,000, which will guide planning and implementation.

Based on the survey results and staff's assessment of the playground space, Kambur indicated that staff recommend to maintain the designation of the Hamilton Amphitheater Park playground for younger children ages two to five. Staff expressed support for incorporating a musical theme or musical play elements that are socially and developmentally appropriate for this age group and require less square footage based on fall zone requirements. Play panels and similar features in cool and natural color tones could be included to reflect community preferences. Rubberized surfacing was strongly recommended, as nearly 70% of survey respondents indicated this as their preferred option. Staff also advised incorporating additional shade structures to supplement the existing tree, which provides limited shade depending on the time of day. Kambur explained that staff anticipate opening the formal bid process for the playground renovation in winter/spring of 2026.

Commissioner Whiteside asked about shade. Kambur explained that both Hoog and Pioneer Park have large umbrellas that attach to the playground itself, providing shade right over the top of the playground. She explained that there are also shade sails, which are another viable option for playgrounds.

Commissioner Winsor asked if the City would consider adult fitness in this space rather than replacing it with another children's playground. Kambur explained that the survey specifically asked the community for feedback on a children's playground and the intention of this project is to replace the existing playground with one that meets current safety requirements, rather than adding something new. Director Gauntlett added that the number one takeaway from our Master Plan was that the community wants the City to invest in what we currently have, not to develop new.

Chair Larsen expressed interest in the music theme and the idea of adding sail shades. Larsen also asked about improvements to the restroom. Director Gauntlett shared that during discussion of the playground replacement project, staff noted that the dollar amount of the enhancement triggers evaluation of ADA accessibility requirements, specifically the "path of travel" from designated ADA parking spaces to the playground and restroom facilities. Fortunately, an ADA assessment was previously completed as

part of the Parks Master Plan, which identified areas for improvement. Gauntlett indicated that minor restroom improvements may be necessary, such as restroom counter height, door swing orientation, or stall hardware to meet ADA requirements. A detailed report will confirm the specific items, but Director Gauntlett anticipates only slight modifications to meet accessibility needs.

Commissioner Lacey stated that staff's recommendations align well with the space but requested clarification on the proposed music theme. Kambur explained that staff initially explored a boat or airplane theme to reflect Hamilton's history; however, concerns related to the project footprint and budget may limit the ability to fully realize that concept. She noted that a more robust boat or airplane theme could be pursued in the future at South Hamilton Park. Kambur further explained that while a nature theme was considered, the recently completed project at Joseph Hoog Park and the Commission's direction for future improvements at Lee Gerner Park are already nature-focused. To diversify play spaces and provide variety that complements the park's historic amphitheater, staff recommend a music theme as a suitable alternative. She also noted that music-based elements are developmentally appropriate for children ages two to five.

Commissioner Pilloton asked if the Gazebo was part of the plan and if there were opportunities to add benches. Kambur responded that they could consider the opportunity to add benches, depending on the budget and available space.

Commissioner Lacey commented that she liked the ideas presented and would suggest that we move forward with the Music Theme, incorporating a mix of play structure, musical elements, and shade. Director Gauntlett shared an idea to include public art, which could include a mural tied to the music theme to complement the new playground and historic amphitheater. Gauntlett clarified that this would be a separate project and would require use of public art funds.

Public Comment:

- Trish Mc Curdy
- Rob Crow

G. COMMITTEE AND LIAISON REPORTS

G.1. Park & Facility Updates

Rod Crow, Public Works Maintenance Superintendent, provided a brief report on recent park and facility upgrades. Rod Crow shared that new engineered wood fiber had been added to Arroyo Avichi and South Hamilton Park playgrounds to meet safety standards and to maintain park aesthetics. Additionally, at Josef Hoog Park, various cosmetic and ADA enhancements had been made to the restrooms and freshly paved pathways throughout the park to enhance safety and improve accessibility had been completed.

He shared that parking lot improvements were in progress and once done, would complete the Josef Hoog Park project.

Director Gauntlett reported that the Hill Gymnasium floor, a natural wood floor, had recently been refinished. She shared that this is done annually to maintain the natural wood floors performance, safety and longevity. Gauntlett also shared that roof replacements at the Margaret Todd Senior Center and the Novato Gymnastics/Downtown Recreation Center had been completed.

G.2. Recreation Program Updates

Recreation Division Manager, Alexandra Kambur, presented Recreation programming highlights. She focused on upcoming special events and holiday themed programming and asked the Commission to add the following events to their calendars:

- Floating Pumpkin Patch on Saturday, October 11, 2025
- Not-So-Scary Halloween Magic Show on Saturday, October 18, 2025
- Halloween LEGO themed workshop on Saturday, October 18, 2025
- Halloween Themed Tain Paint Night on Friday, October 25, 2025
- Dia De Los Muertos Event on Saturday, November 1, 2025
- Novato Classic Gymnastics Meet on Saturday, November 8, 2025
- Letters to Santa opening on Monday, November 10, 2025
- Holiday Crafts Fair on Friday, December 5 and Saturday, December 6, 2025
- Photos to Santa at the Crafts Fair on Saturday, December 6, 2025
- Gingerbread Build on Saturday, December 13, 2025
- Winter Wonderland Developmental Gymnastics Meet on Saturday, December 13, 2025

G.3. Commissioner Reports

None

H. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 7:58 PM by Chair Larsen.

I HEREBY CERTIFY that the foregoing minutes were duly adopted at the RCCS Commission meeting of January 8, 2026.

/ Katie Dunn /

Katie Dunn, Senior Office Assistant