



**Sonoma County
Parks & Recreation Advisory Commission
DRAFT Minutes of the June 20, 2022 Meeting**

DATE: Monday, June 20, 2022

PLACE: Virtual Zoom Meeting

1. Welcome & Land Acknowledgement Statement

The meeting started at 5:04 pm.

Sonoma Regional Parks Director Bert Whitaker read the Land Acknowledgement Statement:

“The County of Sonoma recognizes that we are on the ancestral lands of the Coast Miwok, Pomo, and Wappo who are the original caretakers of this area. We respectfully acknowledge the Indigenous peoples who have been stewarding and maintaining relationship on this land as knowledge keepers for millennia. The County of Sonoma is dedicated to understanding and educating the public about historical and ongoing connections between land conservation and social inequities. This includes the histories of genocide, forced removal and displacement, and broken promises with Indigenous peoples as a part of American history. Indigenous people are not just in our histories. We strive to optimize Indigenous voices to share their own history, as to not perpetuate another form of being silenced. While recognizing the past, we honor the resiliency of Native people still in their ancestral territories in relationship with their land and culture.

This acknowledgement does not take the place of authentic relationships with Indigenous communities, but serves as a gesture in respect to the land we are on.”

2. Call to Order

Commissioners Present: Arsel Perez, Beth Steffy, Herman Hernandez.

Commissioners Absent: Karen Collins, Spencer Jones.

Regional Parks Executive Leadership: Director Bert Whitaker and Deputy Director Melanie Parker.

Chair Arsel Perez called the meeting to order and read the mission of the Commission: to act in an advisory capacity to the Board of Supervisors in promoting and encouraging public recreation; to act in an advisory capacity to the Director of Regional Parks in the maintenance, development, and operation of recreational areas and facilities serving the residents of the county; and finally, to establish procedures to carry out the purpose of the Advisory Commission.

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3. Approval of the minutes of the January 24, 2022 meeting of the Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission

Chair Arsel Perez tabled this matter for a future agenda, given the lack of quorum in this meeting.

4. California Parks and Recreation Society Award for Sonoma Regional Parks Caminitos Al Parque Program – Tiarra Warner, State Section Representative, California Parks and Recreation Society; Josselyn Torres, Coordinator of Caminitos Al Parque Program at Sonoma County Regional Parks; Kristina Stanton, Park Program Supervisor; at Sonoma County Regional Parks; Sandi Funke, Sonoma Regional Parks Community Engagement Program Manager.

Sandi Funke introduced this award to the Sonoma Regional Parks Caminitos Al Parque Program.

Park Program Supervisor Kristina Stanton described the Caminitos al Parque Program as a five-year-old program that take Spanish-speaking, Latinx families to the park and experience nature through songs, dance, and nature hikes. She noted that transportation is provided for families in the program. Coordinator of the Caminitos Program, Josselyn Torres described the enthusiasm and excitement of participants in the program and how engaged family members of all ages are in the program.

Tiarra Warner of the California Parks and Recreation Society said it was an honor to award the Caminitos Program with an Award of Excellence for community engagement. She thanked the Community Engagement staff of Regional Parks for their service.

Commissioner Hernandez commented that community outreach from Regional Parks has blossomed and extended his compliments to Bert, leadership staff and all staff for engaging with Latinx community and helping them belong and be more welcomed in parks.

5. Comments from the Public

Public may address the Commission on matters that are not on the agenda.

Members of the public wishing to suggest an item for a future Commission agenda may do so during this public comment period. The Ralph M. Brown Act (the State local agency open meeting law) prohibits the Commission from acting on any matter that is not on the agenda. Speakers are limited to three minutes each; the Commission Chair may adjust the time limit in light of the number of anticipated speakers.

There were no public comments.

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6. Commissioner Reports

Commissioner Steffy said that the Senior Saunters program in Sonoma County Regional Parks has been of great value to her sister. She also said the news on prescribed burns and shuttles to Russian River beaches are exciting. She asked if electric vehicle charging stations are available in Sonoma County Regional Parks.

Director Whitaker replied that these stations are available in several parks and are the result of work with state and county agencies.

Commissioner Perez reported that he visited Crane Creek Regional Park and noted that weeds and brush are high. He also reported that the bilingual story walk at Andy's Unity Park is now there and a great concept for the community. He further reported that Hood Mountain is nearly totally open, and he was glad to lead a hike from Sugarloaf over to Hood Mountain.

7. Director's Report – Sonoma Regional Parks Director Bert Whitaker

Director Whitaker reported the following updates:

- Sonoma Regional Parks is excited to welcome Guadalupe Navarro as the Department's new Community Engagement Manager. She brings deep experience at Latino Service Providers and Santa Rosa Community College, to name just a few. Regional Parks is thrilled to have her on board, and to welcome her here. In addition, new staff roles of a Planning Technician, new parks operations staff, parks memberships staff, parks maintenance workers, and new volunteer coordination staff are being added.
- The Board of Supervisors approved new improvements at Maxwell Farms park.
- Summer operations including the water park, the swimming lagoon and Russian River shuttle are happening. Campgrounds are very busy.
- An ongoing acquisition project called the Demuth property, is making its way through the Board of Supervisors. This is an approximately fifty-acre property near Wohler Bridge that expands the Russian River trail, connecting the communities of Healdsburg with the communities of Forestville.
- Lastly, the next meeting of this Commission will be September 19, 2022.

8. Pickleball at the Occidental Community Center – David Robinson, Parks Manager, Sonoma County Regional Parks

Park Manager David Robinson described the community input received about striping for pickleball at two Occidental Community Center courts. He said parks staff posted notices requesting public input in March. He noted that quite a lot of input was received in March, and was ninety per cent in favor of striping the courts. He said that after all input was received, approximately 78 percent was in favor of the striping and 22 percent indicating that

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striping was not a good idea. He stated that based on this input, staff feel it behooves the Department to move forward with the striping, and that one court should be striped, leaving the remaining court open for tennis.

Chair Perez asked what the timeline is for the project.

David Robinson replied that cost would be about \$5,000.00 and could be completed in about a month.

Commissioner Steffy asked how often the courts are used for tennis. David Robinson replied that Regional Parks does not have that information.

Commissioner Steffy additionally asked about the contention that pickleballs destroy the courts. Park Manager David Robinson replied that he could research this and get back to her about other communities' experiences. He added that the ball is harder, and while it does not compromise the integrity of the court itself, the ball could add more scuffing and therefore require more painting. He also said that because pickleball is more popular, and with a huge increase of use, more wear and tear can result.

Commissioner Steffy asked how many pickleball players are in the area of Occidental. Park Manager David Robinson replied that Parks does not have that data, nor information about how many pickleball players would come into Occidental.

Commissioner Steffy asked what color the striping would be. Park Manager David Robinson said they would be asking the community what color they would like.

Commissioner Steffy asked if only one court would be striped or would two courts be painted. Park Manager David Robinson replied that the staff recommendation is to stripe one at this time and revisit the issue of further painting in the future.

Commissioner Hernandez commented that the Russian River Park and Recreation District converted one area into pickleball and it has done very well. He said he is a strong believer of access and pickleball is a growing game.

Park Manager David Robinson said this item is informational only at this time, given there is no quorum.

Director Whitaker said the Commission could bring it back in the future for a vote, but noted that the next meeting is not until September and it would be good to get any project moving forward if the community is strongly in favor. He said the Department's inclination is, upon hearing the overwhelming vote in favor, to help people get outdoors and create that opportunity. He also noted that anyone from the community can approach the Department at any point in time with their input on this issue.

Chair Perez asked for any comments from the public.

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Kathy Kirst said she has never seen denting of pickleballs on tennis courts that have been converted to pickleball. She said that Finley Park in Santa Rosa painted stripes and did research on the color to be painted. She said they found that the best color was yellow. She noted that pickleballers have many other places to play in the county, and she does not anticipate a lot of visitors from other areas to play pickleball in Occidental. She noted that in Santa Rosa, the city asked her group to give pickleball lessons, which became very popular. She said her group visited Occidental and the enthusiasm in the town for pickleball was very strong. She added that doing a survey of use of the courts would be good to do after the stripes are painted, as well as posting the rules of pickleball on the courts. She concluded by saying she is very happy this change is happening.

Linda Immer said she lives across the street from the Occidental Courts, and drives four to five days a week to Santa Rosa to play pickleball. She said the Occidental courts are very underutilized. She said that painting both courts would be very beneficial as it would enable more use. She said that in Santa Rosa, there are 35 people playing pickleball while only two people playing tennis. She said this is a wonderful, accessible sport and suggested that Regional Parks stripe both courts. She asked if the process will take longer to get the courts striped, or if anything can be done to push this forward soon.

Fawn Nekton thanked the Commission and David for bringing this forward. She also thanked Kathy and the Sonoma County Pickleball Club and hoped the Commission would take her information into consideration. She also thanked Linda for her suggestion to paint two courts. She said a bigger issue might be that one court is in better shape than the other, and the issue might be that one court or sport will get the good court, and the other sport will not. She said the courts are very under-utilized, although she did see tennis players playing there last weekend. She commented that she thinks tennis players and pickleball players can work together in a cooperative way. She added that the price David Robinson quoted is much higher than the estimates her organization received and she would be happy to provide further information on that to Sonoma County Regional Parks.

Director Whitaker said it is fine for each Commissioner to share their own individual comments and recommendation, but any official recommendation would not be possible due to the lack of quorum. He said the key thing is to hear all viewpoints and perspectives from the community and Commissioners.

Commissioner Steffy asked why Sonoma Regional Parks has decided on painting just one court.

Park Manager David Robinson said the reasoning to add one was to see how it went with just one court striped and the public response, and then if indications were positive to stripe a second one based on community response.

Commissioner Steffy said she personally is in favor of striping the courts as this is a growing sport and would be in favor of striping both courts.

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Commissioner Hernandez said he personally is in favor of moving forward with striping both courts.

Chair Perez said he personally and informally is in favor of striping both courts at this time.

9. Leave No Trace Summer 2022 Initiative

Marketing Specialist Sarah Phelps introduced the Leave No Trace Summer 2022 Initiative as a multi-year partnership with Sonoma County Tourism and the larger Leave No Trace initiative. She said Leave No Trace is a framework of best practices to minimize outdoor impacts of visitation, crowding, trash and emissions impacts. She said that Sonoma Regional Parks is taking this framework and customizing it for Sonoma County, including fire impacts, drought impacts and other issues. She stated that Sonoma County Regional Parks is working on messaging, signage and publicity about these best practices. She added that Sonoma Regional Parks is focusing on visitor hot spots to teach people about best practices of Leave No Trace and engage with the public in fun Leave No Trace activities.

Chair Perez asked what public activities will be happening at Steelhead Beach. Sarah Phelps said water-based community services projects will be happening at Steelhead, as well as land-based activities.

Commissioner Steffy said she has observed Leave No Trace principles in action at National Parks, and appreciated that these will be implemented in Sonoma County as well.

Commissioner Hernandez thanked Regional Parks for moving forward on this, and especially the work at Steelhead Beach which gets full of people with serious impacts. Commissioner Hernandez also suggested more bilingual signage and communications, as well as announcements and messaging in La Prensa Sonoma and KDBF.

Chair Perez observed that such Leave No Trace principles are not existent in some places he has visited, such as Guatemala, and we are fortunate to have them.

Chair Steffy asked if staff can move forward with the striping on the pickleball courts, or will the community have to wait. Direct Whitaker replied that he would speak with staff, but he fully recognized that the community wants this project soon.

10. Adjournment – Commission Chair

Meeting adjourned at 6:16 pm.

Respectfully submitted by,

Kathleen Culhane, Executive Assistant