



**Sonoma County
Parks & Recreation Advisory Commission
DRAFT Minutes of the September 19, 2022 Meeting**

DATE: Monday, September 19, 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, Karen Collins.

Commissioners Absent: None.

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

Chairman Perez requested a motion to approve the minutes of the May 24, 2021 meeting of the Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission.

VOTED to approve the minutes of January 24, 2022 as follows:

MOTION:	Commissioner Hernandez	AYES: 4	ABSTAIN: 0
SECOND:	Commissioner Steffy	ABSENT: 0	VACANT: 0

4. Approval of the minutes of the June 20, 2022 meeting of the Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission

Chairman Perez requested a motion to approve the minutes of the May 24, 2021 meeting of the Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission.

VOTED to approve the minutes of June 20, 2022 as follows:

MOTION:	Commissioner Hernandez	AYES: 4	ABSTAIN: 0
SECOND:	Commissioner Collins	ABSENT: 0	VACANT: 0

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.

6. Commissioner Reports

Commissioner Hernandez described his visit to Riverfront Park, as well as his meetings with the Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District and Sonoma Land Trust.

Commissioner Steffy described her visits to Riverfront, Spring Lake and Sonoma Valley Regional Park. She conveyed her appreciation to Regional Parks' social media team for keeping the community very informed of events in the parks. She reported her concern for having more charging stations for electrical vehicles in all parks. Lastly, she expressed her condolences for the cyclist who died recently on a Regional Parks bicycle path.

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Commissioner Karen Collins stated that she received several emails concerning the accident in which the cyclist died. She asked which agency manages the bike path in question.

Director Whitaker responded that the bike path is owned and operated by Sonoma Regional Parks, and that he would elaborate more on this incident in his Director's Update. He noted that the accident was a horrible tragedy and that Regional Parks is taking steps to prevent any further similar accidents.

Commissioner Collins reported that there is a lot of interest in Larson Park at this time, in terms of raising money for improvements and developing the park.

Commissioner Perez reported that he attended an event at Andy's Unity Park, which Regional Parks staff attended. The event focused on music and culture and was a great event. He noted that it was especially great to see rangers at the event. He also reported that he joined a volunteer event at Colgan Creek which John Ryan led, which was a very worthwhile event for the community.

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

Director Whitaker reported the following updates:

- It has been a busy summer at Regional Parks, including a heat wave through Labor Day weekend that made coastal parks very crowded.
- Guerneville River Park is now open for the community to use. New signs and better access have meant a lot for this park. The project was about a decade in the works and it is great to see this hard work come to fruition.
- The Annual Water Bark at Spring Lake Park was a huge hit and a major fundraiser for the Parks Foundation.
- Doran Regional Park has a new parks map, which is exciting for one of the most visited parks in Sonoma County.
- Sonoma County's Leave No Trace initiative continues apace, and Sarah Phelps does an amazing job on social media content. Sonoma Regional Parks hosted a cleanup event with about thirty volunteers on the Russian River.
- Sonoma County Regional Parks is gearing up for the fiftieth anniversary of Spring Lake Park. Spring Lake will also be the pilot project area for new signage. In addition, for the fiftieth anniversary trail renovation will be happening as well as improvement of parking areas and restrooms.
- There is a new online portal for buying parks passes which is a far better technology than in the past.
- Regional Parks has a new Administration and Fiscal Manager, Robert Gonzalez. He joins Regional Parks after a decade within the County's Department of Health Services. He will play a key role in budget systems, front office management, and Measure M monitoring.

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- Regional Parks awarded phase one construction for improvements at Maxwell Farms Regional Park, which will be a large scale set of improvements including two new all-weather fields, traffic improvements, and many other overdue improvements.
- Substantial resources in the Sonoma Valley are focused on Larson Park right now.
- Taylor Mountain is also seeing extensive improvements.
- Regional Parks is excited to finalize a Comanagement agreement with the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria that envisions a new partnership with the Tribe.
- The horrible tragedy that happened in late August on the West County Trail is under intense review. Regional Parks is on the agenda this week for the Sonoma County Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Commission to hear and discuss this issue. Regional Parks has been expeditiously working with a traffic safety engineer to look at different standards and updating standards along the entry and exit of trails. Regional Parks is doing our best to be responsive and do a thorough inventory and inspection of the existing safety features along the trail, to ensure that these tragedies will not be repeat events.

Commissioner Perez asked when the Bicycle and Pedestrian meeting will take place. Director Whitaker replied that the meeting will be held virtually on Wednesday at 6:00 p.m.

8. **Taylor Mountain Trail Expansion (Informational) – Emily Podolak, Planner, Sonoma County Regional Parks**

Emily Podolak, Sonoma County Regional Parks Planner, introduced herself and her presentation on the Taylor Mountain Phase Two Project. She stated she has worked closely with Mark Cleveland, who is the Project Manager on this project, over the past two years.

She provided the following highlights of the project:

- The exiting ranch road at Taylor Mountain is currently being graded and resurfaced to become the multi-use Panorama Trail, which then will connect to the Colgan highlands Trail and offers expansive views of Santa Rosa and Bennett Valley below.
- This project continues the work approved in the 2012 Taylor Mountain Master Plans. In addition to the new trails, the project adds three new walk-on/bike-in neighborhood access points. When complete, the project will provide public access to several hundred acres in the northeast of the park not currently open to the public.
- The project is funded by a recreational program grant, local fund donations, in-kind contributions, Measure M funds, and funding from the Sonoma County Parks Foundation.
- Current trail designs include eight miles of new trails, which includes 0.8 miles of repair to existing trails, and 7.2 miles of newly constructed trails. The trails are designed to minimize environmental impacts and offer trail users comfortable use, expansive views, and diverse landscapes. Also included is an accessible trail.

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- Six bridges will be built along the trails. Regional Parks is currently awaiting approval of building permits for this construction in order to install them in the spring of 2023. The target date to open all trails is late spring or early summer of 2023.
- A key component of the plan is the decommission of the popular Eastern Route in order to improve habitat and reduce erosion. This work is planned for the fall of 2023.

Commissioner Steffy asked how many of the trails will be accessible, and how many parking spaces will be ADA-designated. Emily Podolak responded that the accessible trail is about a mile in length, and she would respond by email to Commissioner Steffy regarding the exact number of accessible parking spaces. Emily Podolak noted that the trail does not have to be paved to be ADA-compliant. She explained that to be ADA-compliant, trails must be hard and firm and have a certain percent of grade slope.

Commissioner Perez asked if the new developments would impede on habitat restoration areas.

Emily Podolak replied that none of the new trails will impact the designated habitat restoration areas.

Commissioner Perez asked if there was any public comment on this agenda item. There was none.

9. Three Year Strategic Priorities (Discussion) – Melanie Parker, Deputy Director, Sonoma County Regional Parks.

Melanie Parker, Deputy Director of Sonoma County Regional Parks, introduced the Department's draft strategic priorities for the next three years.

She noted the following highlights about these strategic priorities:

- Climate Change
 - Decarbonization and electrification, including more vehicle charging stations in parks
 - Resilient Infrastructure, including greywater attachments systems and plans for sea level rise
 - Manage ecologically for landscape resilience including vegetation management and prescribed burning, among many other things.
 - Emergency readiness and training
 - Minimize and manage waste
- Equity and Accessibility
 - ADA Accessibility
 - Language Access
 - Training for staff
 - Tribal Partnership
 - Design a tracking system for public feedback on accessibility

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- Access to park passes and programs
- Destination Stewardship
 - Expand visitor communications
 - Improve infrastructure in parks
 - Manage natural resource impacts
- Organizational Stability
 - Improve staff onboarding process and training
 - Develop workforce housing opportunities
 - Improve staff retention
 - Develop staffing assessment and community needs assessment
 - Improve internal communication
 - Develop Measure M communications
- Enhancing Visitor Experience
 - Improve signage and branding
 - Improve infrastructure
 - Create diversified parks and trails
 - Diversify park programming
 - Update and improve technology

Commissioner Hernandez commented that this material is very well-defined and understandable.

Commissioner Steffy asked how many vehicle charging stations are in the parks system, and how many exist per park.

Director Whitaker responded that four or five parks have charging stations, and there are approximately twelve in total. He noted that it has been a major challenge to expand this number but the department recognizes the importance and need of it, and is working hard to substantially increase the number of stations.

Commissioner Steffy noted that charging a fee at the stations could be a source of revenue.

Commissioner Collins asked if there is any kind of community feedback for the plans.

Deputy Director Parker responded that early and ongoing outreach to stakeholders and partners has happened and is continuous. She noted that this is an integral and important part of the plan, to engage and collaborate with communities.

Director Whitaker noted that the Leave No Trace initiative has involved multiple stakeholders and encompasses various aspects of these strategic priorities, including engagement with the community and staff training.

Commissioner Steffy asked if it is a goal of Regional Parks to make sure every visitor has a parks pass.

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Director Whitaker responded that it is a goal to promote membership, but an overarching perspective is to promote park visitation for the benefits the parks provide, in any way that a person may choose. He noted that providing a choice to visitors is important as well.

Commissioner Collins offered to be of assistance in gathering community input about the strategic plans.

Commissioner Perez asked for any public comment regarding Deputy Director Parker's presentation. There was none.

10. Adjournment – Commission Chair

Meeting adjourned at 6:09 pm.

Respectfully submitted by,

Kathleen Culhane, Executive Assistant

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