



**Sonoma County  
Parks & Recreation Advisory Commission  
DRAFT Minutes of the October 2, 2023 Meeting**

DATE: Monday, October 2, 2023

PLACE: Virtual via Zoom and In Person at Sonoma Regional Parks Main Offices, 2300 County Center Drive, Santa Rosa, CA 95403

**1. Welcome & Land Acknowledgement Statement**

The meeting started at 5:01 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, Luis Gonzalez, Carol Eber

**Commissioners Absent:** Karen Collins, Herman Hernandez

**Vacancies:** There is one Youth Commissioner vacancy.

**Regional Parks Executive Leadership:** Director Bert Whitaker, Deputy Director Melanie Parker, and Park Manager David Robinson

---

3. **Approval of the minutes of the May 22, 2023 meeting of the Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission**

Chairman Perez requested a motion to approve the minutes of the May 22, 2023 meeting of the Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission.

VOTED to approve the minutes of May 22, 2023 as follows:

MOTION:	Commissioner Steffy	AYES: 4	ABSTAIN: 0
SECOND:	Commissioner Gonzalez	ABSENT: 2	VACANT: 1

4. **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.*

Dale Hetzer suggested an agenda item for a future meeting, which is to have official and permanent pickleball courts built in Occidental.

5. **Commissioner Reports**

Commissioner Carol Eber reported seeing the results of a recent controlled burn at Tolay Regional Park. She asked what the impact of controlled burns on wildlife in the park may have been. She also suggested that the road into the park needs upgrading or paving, and asked if the grazing contract is ongoing. She additionally asked if there will be a bridge between the Creek Trail and the Buckeye Trail at Crane Creek Regional Park. She also reported a visit to Sonoma Valley Regional Park and conveyed her attendance at an open house for the Mark West Community Park.

Commissioner Beth Steffy reported that she continues in conversation with Regional Parks managers and staff about electric vehicle chargers in parks and was pleased to use an electric vehicle charger at Taylor Mountain Regional Park. She noted that the 1.4-mile loop trail at Taylor could use a sign at the end noting that it is indeed a loop. She reported that work parties at the cemetery have been very successful. She noted that a recent letter to the Press Democrat about the lack of bathrooms in the parks could warrant a response from the Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission.

Commissioner Gonzalez reported that he has hiked extensively around Shiloh and Riverfront Parks. He suggested that a new kayak launch at Riverfront would be ideal.

Commissioner Arsel Perez reported that he visited Taylor Mountain Regional Park and noted that there were many people loitering in the parking lot after closing time. He noted that the Colgan Creek Trail has occasional littering, and he suggested that Regional Parks implement a feedback mechanism for the public to report problems in the parks.

## 6. Director's Report – Sonoma Regional Parks Director Bert Whitaker

Director Whitaker reported the following updates:

- Construction bid awards at Calabazas Creek and Foothill will enable new improvements to the road and gathering areas, respectively.
- Grants have been awarded to Regional Parks for new work in hazardous fuel reductions, and towards acquisition of the Schellville Trail. Other grants will be put toward a Shiloh Ranch Riparian Restoration Project, and work at Doran to benefit Snowy Plovers and salmonid habitats.
- Regional Parks recently acquired the Chanslor Ranch.
- Tolay Lake Regional Park recently was the site of Regional Parks' first cultural burn, a preventive burn conducted with cultural practices and rituals in collaboration with the Graton Rancheria Tribe.
- Planned improvements at Maxwell Farms are nearly complete.
- Larson funding has been consolidated for that park's renovation.

Director Whitaker announced that Commission Chair Arsel Perez will step down from his position on the Commission. Director Whitaker thanked Chair Perez for his service and for sharing his insights, and also for contributing his volunteer work in Regional Parks' facilities.

## 7. Occidental Community Center Pickle Ball Courts (Action Item) - Presented by David Robinson, Park Manager, Sonoma County Regional Parks

Park Manager David Robinson stated that this topic returns to the Commission for a decision on how to proceed in striping courts at the Occidental Community Center. He highlighted the following for the Commission and the community:

- There are two tennis courts at the community center; one is striped for pickleball and tennis; the other court is striped for tennis only.
- Considerable community input in the past year has brought the current question to the Commission this evening.
- All courts at the Occidental Community Center need to be resurfaced irrespective of whether they are painted for tennis or pickleball use.
- Regional Parks has researched the issue and proposes that the courts be re-surfaced such that four pickleball courts are made from one tennis court, and the other remaining court be retained for tennis.
- Regional Parks does not currently have the funding – estimated to be between \$35,000.00 and \$40,000.00 - to proceed immediately with the re-surfacing. However,

with Measure M funding and Foundation support, Regional Parks will be able to continue with the proposed re-surfacing in the following fiscal year.

- As an interim measure, Regional Parks proposes striping two pickleball courts on the one court already striped for pickleball and tennis; and maintain the other court dedicated to tennis on an interim basis as well.

Chair Perez asked for any public comment.

Dale Hetzer introduced himself as an avid pickleball player in Santa Rosa who has been assisting the pickleball players in Occidental in their efforts. He stated that the Occidental group has been documenting their numbers of pickleball players, and they report having up to 12 pickleball players at a time at the courts. He stated that the pickleball group has the funding and nets to install the pickleball courts. He noted that, in his experience, having four pickleball courts and one tennis court will work well.

Mary Colby stated that pickleball has been a great way for the community to come together in Sonoma County.

Linda Immer stated that there is overwhelming demand for pickleball not only in Sonoma, but in the state, throughout the country, and in the world. She stated that pickleball players spend a lot of time waiting around to play due to the lack of courts. She said she would like to see both courts striped and she does not believe it will be long before she and other pickleball players will be back before Regional Parks to ask for additional courts.

Commissioner Carol Eber asked if the Foundation has been involved in fundraising for pickleball courts. Park Manager David Robinson replied that the Foundation has not been involved in pickleball court fundraising previously but could be in the future.

Commissioner Luis Gonzalez asked if the courts would need resurfacing in the future, or if they can be simply re-painted, especially if a new configuration might be desired in the future. Park Manager David Robinson replied that all courts need resurfacing and most likely will be done next year. He added that the resurfacing is the most costly expense, and repainting is less costly.

Commissioner Carole Eber asked about the timeline of the resurfacing. Park Manager David Robinson replied that the timeline depends on funding, and funding will likely be in part from Measure M funds and Foundation support. He explained that this funding would make an August 2024 timeframe feasible.

Mary Colby stated that her group of pickleballers has collected sufficient funds to pay for striping and have prototyped separators between the pickleball courts and the tennis court. She said their group is offering to do the striping work themselves and pay for it, until the County can resurface the area. She would like to know if the County would authorize the group to paint the courts.

Park Manager David Robinson replied that this proposal could be considered by the Commission this evening. He added that any investment of funds at this point should be considered in light of more permanent resurfacing and investment next year.

Chair Perez stated that he appreciates the community members present and the information they presented. He said he favors the position of the community members present and supports the community members using their funds as they suggested.

Commissioner Steffy agreed and noted that sufficient community input and research has already been gathered.

Commissioner Gonzalez stated that he also agreed, although he would have preferred that the County could pay for the interim measures instead of the community pickleballers having to fundraise for it.

Commissioner Perez asked how community members will work with Regional Parks to paint the courts. Park Manager David Robinson replied that Project Specialist Corbin Johnson and other staff will collaborate closely with community members to ensure a smooth process.

Dale Hetzer thanked Regional Parks, Park Manager David Robinson, and the Commission for their time, work, and consideration of this item.

Chair Perez asked for a motion from the Commission to adopt the staff recommendation to allow the community to paint four pickleball courts, install temporary netting, and barricades as needed.

VOTED to adopt the staff recommendation and allow the community to paint four pickleball courts with temporary netting, barricades and other repairs as needed as follows:

MOTION:	Commissioner Eber	AYES: 4	ABSTAIN: 0
SECOND:	Commissioner Steffy	ABSENT: 2	VACANT: 1

**8. Joe Rodota Trail: Public Art Project (Action Item) - Presented by Kari Svanstrom, Planning Director, City of Sebastopol and Bert Whitaker, Director, Sonoma County Regional Parks**

Planning Director for the City of Sebastopol Kari Svanstrom and Director of Regional Parks Bert Whitaker presented a proposal to the Commission to support the utilization of County owned property for an art installation to be owned and maintained by the City of Sebastopol in partnership with Regional Parks.

Kari Svanstrom described highlights of the art installation project including its location at the intersection Joe Rodota Trail and Petaluma Avenue in Sebastopol. She explained that the Sebastopol City Council has approved the City's Public Art Committee to pursue the site and seek approval from the Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission. She presented details

about the location and the value of public art to the immediate and surrounding communities.

Chair Arsel Perez invited public comment on this item.

Barbara Harris introduced herself as a member of Sebastopol's Public Art Committee and stated that the project is a benchmark for an entry to the western part of Sonoma County, and that it is a really great way to promote Sonoma County as a destination. She encouraged the Commission to support this initiative.

Chair Arsel Perez requested a motion from the Commission on the proposal presented.

VOTED to support the request from the City of Sebastopol to utilize County owned parcel (APN 004-072-010) for an art installation to be owned and maintained by the City of Sebastopol.

MOTION:	Commissioner Steffy	AYES: 4	ABSTAIN: 0
SECOND:	Commissioner Gonzalez	ABSENT: 2	VACANT: 1

**9. Climate Adaptation and Resilience Plan (Informational Item) - Presented by Mindy Craig, BluePoint Planning**

Mindy Craig of Bluepoint Planning presented on the Climate Adaptation and Resilience Plan for Sonoma Regional Parks and explained its goals to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from County Parks, help County Parks adapt to climate change, and identify strategies for community resilience through County Parks. She highlighted the Plan's goals of mitigation and adaptation, described climate change impacts in Sonoma County, and social vulnerabilities to climate change.

Chair Arsel Perez invited public comment on this item. There was none.

**10. Adjournment – Commission Chair**

Meeting Adjourned at 7:05 pm.

Respectfully submitted by,

Kathleen Culhane, Executive Assistant