



Sonoma County  
Parks & Recreation Advisory Commission  
DRAFT Minutes of the October 8, 2024  
Meeting

DATE: Tuesday, October 8, 2024

PLACE: In Person at the Rohnert-Park-Cotati Regional Library, 6250 Lynne Condé Way, Rohnert Park, California 94928

1. Welcome & Land Acknowledgement Statement

The meeting started at 5:34 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: Beth Steffy, Luis Gonzalez, Nathan Junge, Amara Galvan, Thomas Mercado

Commissioners Absent: Carol Eber

Regional Parks Leadership: Director Bert Whitaker; Fiscal and Administrative Services Manager, Robert Gonzalez; Community Engagement Manager, Guadalupe Navarro; Accessibility and Inclusivity Manager, Nubia Padilla; Park Program Supervisor, Kristin Suarez.

3. Approval of the minutes of the November 14, 2023, meeting of the Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission

Vice-Chair Beth Steffy requested a motion to approve the minutes of the November 14, 2024, meeting of the Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission.

VOTED to approve the minutes of November 14, 2024, as follows:

MOTION:	Commissioner Gonzalez	AYES: 2	ABSTAIN: 0
SECOND:	Vice-Chair Steffy	ABSENT: 1	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 considering the number of anticipated speakers.*

The Vice-Chair Steffy asked for any comments from the public. There were none.

5. Director's Report –Bert Whitaker, Director of Sonoma Regional Parks

Director Whitaker introduced and welcomed three new Commissioners to the Parks & Recreation Advisory Commission. Nathan Junge will be representing District 5 and two new Youth Commissioners, Amara Galvan, senior at Cloverdale High School and Tomas Mercado, junior at Montgomery High School.

Director Whitaker also reported the following updates:

- On October 8, 2024, the Board of Supervisors approved a new public art project at the entrance of the Joe Rodota trail in Sebastopol. The artwork was created by the late Bruce Johnson.
- At Mark West Creek, new roads and culverts are under construction to replace those that were damaged in the 2017 wildfires and 2019 floods that destroyed them.
- A new half-mile paved path was completed at Schopflin Fields allowing for additional accessibility around the park.
- Park Ranger authority was modified in September. The changes include a Parks Unit in conjunction with the Sheriff, development of new tools and responsibilities for Park Rangers. Recruitment will be initiated at some point to fill vacancies as half of the ranger allocations are currently vacant.
- Pond restoration at Shiloh Ranch is completed. The project repaired erosion and restored habitat for native plants and animals.

- Bidding is underway for Maxwell Farms, Phase I which will include all weather fields, stormwater improvements, and three new restrooms. The cost is estimated at \$7.2M with funding provided by Measure M and several partners.
- Danielle Poole will be starting next week to provide administrative support and replaces Kathleen Culhane.

## 6. Commissioner Reports

Commissioner Nathan Junge reported in the 5<sup>th</sup> District a project is underway in the Russian River Parks District to replace signage and make them bilingual. In May, sports courts, picnic areas, playground improvements were added to parks in the district.

Commissioner Luis Gonzalez reported visits to Shiloh Ranch, Foothill and Healdsburg Veteran Memorial Beach. He noted the dam at Healdsburg Veteran Memorial Beach was down for the summer. He also discussed his recent trips to National Parks that included Yellowstone and Teton.

Commissioner Amara Galvan she had been in Cloverdale open space preserves. She was interested in learning more about the environment and Regional Parks.

Commissioner Tomas Mercado participates in cross country running and has been in Annadel State Park and Taylor Mountain for these meets. He noted how lucky we were as a county to have these environments for this type of activity. He is interested in learning more about how things are accomplished behind the scenes.

Vice-Chair Beth Steffy reported in April she visited Larson and was saddened by the condition of the tennis courts and the picnic tables that were removed. She would like to see an opportunity for some type of ramp to allow accessibility to the water. She attended the Foothill dedication ceremony for the new gathering area. She was impressed at the work done since the fire with the new gathering area, artwork, and quality of the construction. She also thanked Nubia Padilla, Accessibility and Inclusivity Manager for her energy working on Regional Parks inclusion efforts. She also reported she spoke with a member of the public who was upset about the development and use of synthetic fields in Regional Parks and had spoken to Parks Manager, David Robinson and shared those concerns.

In response to Vice-Chair Steffy's comments on Larson, Director Whitaker reported on the renovation efforts that are currently out to bid. It is estimated the improvements to this park to be around \$4.5M. Community Engagement manager, Guadalupe Navarro discussed a new garden contract was issued at Larson. Director Whitaker also noted an accessible pathway to the water would not be in this phase of work.

## 7. Parks and Recreation Commission Bylaws (Action Item)

Director Whitaker introduced this item. After some research, it was noted the bylaws for the Parks and Recreation Commission have not been updated since 1990. He asked for the commission's support in adopting the changes as noted in the tracked changed version of the bylaws with the intent of moving the bylaws for Board of Supervisors' review and approval next year. Noteworthy changes include:

- Term limits for commissioners not to exceed 2 terms.
- Changes to ages of youth commissions from over 18 years old to 16-24.
- Quorum change. Action items would move to a majority vote depending on the current number of commissioners in place.

Vice-Chair Steffy commented the commission doesn't meet enough due to the quorum issue and is supportive of the changes.

VOTED to approve the revisions as noted on the Parks and Recreation Commission bylaws.

MOTION:	Vice-Chair Steffy	AYES: 6	ABSTAIN: 0
SECOND:	Commissioner Gonzalez	ABSENT: 1	VACANT: 0

8. Summer 2024 Park Programs Update (Informational)  
Community Engagement Manager, Guadalupe Navarro and Park Program Supervisor, Kristin Suarez provided a summary report of Community Engagement program activities and included details on the programs offered, camping and interpretive program statistics and an overview of the aquatics and recreation programs. A review of the volunteer programs and partner and community outreach programs and events was also discussed.
9. Accessibility and Inclusivity Framework (Informational)  
Accessibility and Inclusivity Manager, Nubia Padilla presented information on the Department's efforts to develop an Accessibility and Inclusivity Framework. Using public input, once completed the document will help Regional Parks create a just and inclusive environment, promote belonging and develop a plan towards access to park spaces. A short interactive activity and discussion followed.
10. Adjournment – Commission Vice-Chair  
  
Meeting Adjourned at 6:56 pm.

Respectfully submitted by,

Robert Gonzalez, Fiscal and Administrative Services Manager