



MINUTES
Recreation and Community Services Commission
Adjourned Regular Meeting
March 11, 2026

MEETING WAS CALLED TO ORDER at 6 p.m. by Chairperson Anitza Valles

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE was led by Commissioner Bert Johnson.

ROLL CALL: PRESENT: Chairperson Anitza Valles
Vice Chairperson Dave Allen
Commissioner Bert Johnson
Commissioner Kristie Larison

ABSENT: Commissioner Veronica Lucio

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: Meeting of February 11, 2026. A motion was made by Vice Chairperson Dave Allen and seconded by Commissioner Bert Johnson to approve the minutes of the meeting of February 11, 2026. Minutes were approved as submitted.

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND PRESENTATIONS:

Parks Superintendent Abel Andrade informed the commission that staff would honor the Park Maintenance Worker assigned to City Hall, and soon-to-be retiree, Keith Shindledecker, at Monte Verde Park on Thursday, March 26 at 11:30 a.m. in celebration of his 36-year career with the city. The commission was asked to RSVP with their secretary if interested in attending.

Director Valarie Frost began her announcements by providing information regarding programming and upcoming events. Ms. Frost reported that on Saturday, March 14, the annual Earth Walk event will take place between 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Monte Verde Park; on Tuesday, March 17, Lakewood's annual State of the City Luncheon will take place from noon to 1:30 p.m. at The Centre; on Friday, March 20, FUN-Tastic Family Night will feature Bubblemania at The Centre; on Saturday, March 21, Mother/Son Date Night would take place at the Lakewood Youth Center, from 5 to 8 p.m.; on Thursday, March 26, the third annual LeadHer Lakewood event would take place at The Centre from 5:30 to 8:30 p.m.; on Saturday, April 4, the Easter Bunny would visit eight city parks; and from April 6 through April 10 the Spring Break Day Camp would take place at Monte Verde Park.

Ms. Frost then provided information regarding several construction projects currently underway, including the installation of new playground equipment at Bloomfield Park. She informed the commission that the playground dedication would take place on Saturday, May 9 and asked that the commission RSVP with their secretary if interested in attending. Next, she shared that construction of the Cherry Cove playground had not yet begun, noting that staff were awaiting the contractor's construction schedule. It was said that in preparation for the Weingart Senior Center renovation, senior programming had been successfully relocated to Mayfair Park, where participation has remained strong. Ms. Frost shared that staff were also coordinating relocation plans for the construction period at Palms Park. She noted that DASH operations would move to

Lakewood Center Mall, into the office space previously occupied by the Chamber of Commerce, and that park and maintenance staff would relocate to temporary office trailers at the park.

Ms. Frost then extended congratulations to Sabrina Junkin, Community Services Supervisor at Weingart Senior Center, who was selected as the Senate District 33 Women's History Month Honoree. It was said that she was nominated by a community member and would be recognized at a Women's History Month Celebration hosted by California Senator Lena Gonzalez, Lakewood Mayor Cassandra Chase and Long Beach City Attorney Dawn McIntosh. She shared that the event would take place at The Centre on Saturday, March 28 from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. and that registration details were not yet available. She asked that commissioners interested in attending notify their secretary and noted that when information becomes available, an update would be provided.

Lastly, Ms. Frost asked the commission to save the date for the California Parks & Recreation Society District 10 Awards and Installation Banquet scheduled for Thursday, April 9, at the Fullerton Community Center. She shared that doors would open at 5 p.m., with the program beginning at 6:30 p.m. The commission was informed that Lakewood's own Joe Vasquez would be recognized as the outgoing President of District 10. It was said that Joe has served the district with professionalism, exceptional organization, and a commitment to innovation in professional development for members throughout the region. The commission was asked to rsvp with their secretary if interested in attending.

Vice Chairperson Dave Allen commented that he attended the Arbor Week performance at Esther Lindstrom Elementary School with Commissioner Bert Johnson and shared that staff did a marvelous job with their very entertaining performance.

Commissioner Bert Johnson echoed Vice Chairperson Allen's sentiments regarding the Arbor Day performance. He shared that he attended nearly all of the scheduled performances and commended staff for a job well done.

REPORTS:

1. Volunteer Program Annual Report

Community Services Supervisor Caitlin Cariaso displayed slides and provided information regarding Lakewood's Volunteer Program. Ms. Cariaso reminded the commission that April is recognized as National Volunteer Month, and the Recreation and Community Services Department shows appreciation for the hard work of Lakewood's volunteers by offering several events to both celebrate and encourage volunteerism. Ms. Cariaso noted that many of the department's programs would not be possible without the assistance of volunteers. Events to recognize the efforts of volunteers during April 2026 were said to include the annual Lakewood Volunteer Day recognition luncheon, the Lakewood Youth Sports Coaches Recognition Event, the California Parks and Recreation Society (CPRS) District 10 Awards and Installation Banquet, the and the Older Adult Volunteer Recognition Luncheon. Details regarding each event were provided as noted in the written report.

Ms. Cariaso provided information regarding the 2026 California Parks and Recreation Society (CPRS) District 10 Awards and Installation Banquet scheduled to take place on Thursday, April 9, where Community Services Supervisors Brianna Tavera and Teneale McCullough will be installed as the organization's Administrators Section Representative and Aquatics Section Representative, respectively. Additionally, it was said that Community Services Manager, Joe Vasquez would be de-installed as the D10 President and would be celebrated for his year of accomplishment, which began in April 2025.

Ms. Cariaso shared that Lakewood would also be represented in the awards portion with Meals on Wheels of Long Beach being given the Volunteer Merit Award for their ongoing work in the Lakewood community.

Ms. Cariaso reported on the total number of service hours contributed by volunteers of the Lakewood Youth Sports program, Lakewood Meals on Wheels, Burns Community Center, Weingart Senior Center, the Tax Program, Lakewood Volunteer Day, Teens in Lakewood Care, Halloween Carnivals, and Project Shepherd in 2025 as noted in the written report.

The commission was informed that the annual Lakewood Volunteer Day was scheduled for Saturday, April 11 from 8 a.m. to 12 p.m. The commission was asked to RSVP with their secretary if interested in attending.

Vice Chairperson Allen expressed appreciation for the city's volunteers, identifying them as the driving force behind the community's success.

Ms. Cariaso clarified for Chairperson Valles that, regarding Lakewood Youth Sports (LYS), volunteer hours are strictly recorded for head and assistant coaches. Furthermore, she noted that program volunteer statistics are compiled monthly to ensure an accurate cumulative record of all volunteer service hours within the city. Ms. Frost clarified that the volunteer hours cited in the report exclusively represent the LYS program. She explained that volunteer hours are currently captured electronically via Signup.com based on registration data and noted that staff would attempt to explore methods to track and record contributions from LYS supporters beyond the head and assistant coaching staff in the future.

Commissioner Larison expressed appreciation for the high volume of volunteer hours recorded in 2025, highlighting the significant community impact.

The commission received and filed the annual report on the Volunteer Program.

2. The Centre Operations Annual Report

Community Services Supervisor Jade Vasquez displayed slides and provided information regarding The Centre operations in 2025. Ms. Vasquez reported that The Centre is

Lakewood's premier event and conference venue. She noted that the facility has a reputation for high-quality catering, meeting rooms, and recreational experiences for adults, children, families, business and commerce and community organizations. It was said that in 2025, approximately 1,454 catered and non-catered events and recreation classes were held at The Centre, with 221 of those events being TGIS catered events.

Ms. Vasquez provided the commission with information regarding city-led events and programs offered at The Centre, such as FUN-Tastic Family Nights, Daddy/Daughter Date Night, department-sponsored dance recitals, and several recreation classes, as noted in the written report. Other annual events that are hosted at The Centre were said to include the Patriot Day Ceremony, the Tree Lighting event, the Mother's Day Brunch, and the inaugural LeadHer Lakewood Women's Empowerment Lecture. Details regarding each event were provided by Ms. Vasquez. She shared that over 1,948 participants attended 505 classes and recreation events in 2025, which brought in \$73,193.75 in gross revenue to the city.

The commission was reminded that in July of 2010, the City of Lakewood entered into an agreement with Thank Goodness It's Sofia Catering Services, Inc. (TGIS). In July of 2025 the agreement was renewed for a fourth time extending through June 30, 2036. It was said that the partnership has proven mutually beneficial to both the city and TGIS and continues to serve residents and clients with the highest level of food, beverage and customer service. In 2025 TGIS hosted their annual Mother's Day Brunch where over 400 attendees were served. Additionally, TGIS increased its exclusive client tasting events at The Centre to three times annually, one in January, June, and October

Lastly, Ms. Vasquez provided details regarding the many facility improvements completed at The Centre in 2025, as well as current improvements underway as noted in the written report.

The commission received and filed the annual report on The Centre Operations.

3. RCS Part-Time Staff Recruitment Annual Report

Ms. Frost displayed slides and provided the commission with information regarding RCS Part-Time staff recruitment in 2025. Ms. Frost informed the commission that the department manages 329 part-time staff across nine parks, three community centers, two pools, DASH transit, and the Environmental Resources Division. It was said that 87 new employees were hired since March 2025 which represents a 25% decrease in new hires compared to 2024. Ms. Frost noted that this decrease reflects a return to "typical" seasonal patterns following the significant post-pandemic hiring surge required to rebuild staffing levels in 2024.

Ms. Frost noted that recruitment peaks in spring for summer programming and mentioned that all new staff must complete a series of trainings covering department policies, safety procedures and customer service expectations and are required to be certified in CPR, First

Aid and AED prior to starting their assignment. It was said that at the end of the summer season, some seasonal staff may be offered the opportunity to continue working year-round if vacancies are available.

Ms. Frost noted that supervisors continue to provide ongoing training and conduct performance evaluations throughout the year to support employee development and maintain high service standards.

Concerning sports officials, Ms. Frost informed the commission that officials are recruited three times per year and mentioned that candidates must pass a written exam as well as rules and mechanics trainings. It was said that new hires start with lower-level youth divisions and promote as experience grows.

With regards to the aquatics program, Ms. Frost shared that approximately 20 seasonal lifeguards and swim instructors are employed annually. She noted that key requirements included a swim test and a Water Safety Instructor (WSI) certification for instructors.

Ms. Frost reported that the DASH Transit Program employs 11 part-time staff. She shared that new drivers train on Class C accessible vans with mentors before operating independently, noting that some pursue commercial licenses which allow them to operate larger vehicles within the DASH fleet.

Concerning the Environmental Resources Division, Ms. Frost reported that the division hired 14 new employees in 2025. She informed the commission that the division also operates a two-year maintenance trainee program, which was established in 1996. She noted that the program provides hands-on training for individuals interested in careers in park maintenance. It was said that participants spend one year working on landscape crews and another year working alongside a senior park maintenance worker. The commission was informed that since the program's inception, more than 100 trainees have completed the program, and 37 have gone on to become full-time city employees.

In response to Commissioner Johnson, Ms. Frost verified that criminal background clearances are required for all employees as a prerequisite for hire.

Vice Chairperson Allen recognized the department's commitment to staff development, specifically praising the thorough training curriculum required of all new hires.

Ms. Frost confirmed for Commissioner Larison that the department maintains a high retention rate among seasonal personnel, with a significant number of employees returning for consecutive years.

The commission received and filed the annual report on RCS Part-Time Staff Recruitment.

4. Activities and Maintenance Report No. 9

A written report and discussion of the Recreation and Community Services Department Programs, Services and Maintenance Activities for the month of February and a listing of upcoming activities for April 2026.

The commission received and filed the report.

WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS:

1. Letter to Alex Corrales, Employee of the Month for February 2026.

ORAL COMMUNICATIONS

ADJOURNMENT:

There being no further business brought before the Recreation and Community Services Commission, Chairperson Valles adjourned the meeting at 6:46 p.m. to Wednesday, April 8 at 6 p.m. in the Council Chambers.

Michelle Williams, Administrative Secretary
Recreation and Community Services Commission