



MINUTES
Recreation and Community Services Commission
Adjourned Regular Meeting
January 14, 2026

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

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE was led by Commissioner Veronica Lucio.

ROLL CALL: PRESENT: Chairperson Anitza Valles
Vice Chairperson Dave Allen
Commissioner Veronica Lucio
Commissioner Kristie Larison

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: Meeting of November 12, 2025. A motion was made by Vice Chairperson Dave Allen and seconded by Commissioner Veronica Lucio to approve the minutes of the meeting of November 12, 2025. Minutes were approved as submitted.

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND PRESENTATIONS:

Director Valarie Frost began her announcements by informing the commission that the Greater Lakewood Chamber of Commerce was planning to dissolve. She noted that the Executive Board of the Chamber would soon provide a public statement regarding the dissolution of the Chamber.

Ms. Frost provided the committee with updates regarding Capital Improvement Projects. Regarding the Weingart Senior Center Project, Ms. Frost reported that at the City Council meeting on January 27, the Public Works Department would bring the Award of Contract before the City Council for approval. It was said that the project was expected to start in late February or early March. Ms. Frost noted that in early February, Weingart Senior Center programming would relocate to Mayfair Park during the renovation of the building.

Regarding the planned Palms Park Community Center renovation, Ms. Frost reported that the Public Works Department had received 11 prequalification packages from contractors to perform the construction work for the project. She shared that they intend to bring the Award of Contract before the City Council in February with a tentative start date of construction in April. It was said that DASH Transit operations would relocate to a leased space at Lakewood Center Mall, while recreation and park maintenance staff would remain on the grounds in an office trailer.

Next, Ms. Frost informed the commission that the Award of Contract for the installation of the new playground equipment for Cherry Cove and Bloomfield Park was approved by the City Council on December 9, 2025. She mentioned that RCS staff were awaiting a construction schedule for the project from the Public Works department. It was said that the park would be closed to the public when construction begins to install the playground equipment.

Ms. Frost reported that a Community Promotions Committee Meeting was scheduled for Monday, January 26, where staff will bring before the two-person Council Committee, a report on hosting

a FIFA World Cup Watch Party event at Lakewood Center on Sunday, July 19 in line with the championship match scheduled that day.

Additionally, on Thursday, February 5, Ms. Frost reported that staff would report to the Park Development Committee on the department's operational budget recommendations for various park amenity replacements and a report on the progress of current grant programs, as well as potential new grant opportunities that might be available to the city. The commission was informed that they are welcome to attend the meeting and sit in the audience as a member of the public.

Parks Superintendent Abel Andrade reported that with recent rainy weather, Environmental Resources Division (ERD) crews had actively responded to weather impacts across the city including addressing standing water at parks, baseball fields and facilities, as well as clearing storm debris from public rights-of-way. Mr. Andrade noted that as the city continues to experience seasonal weather patterns, crews were prepared for an increase in weed growth and associated abatement throughout the city would be scheduled.

Lastly, Mr. Andrade shared that the Recreation and Community Services Department, in collaboration with the Development and Operations Section of the California Parks and Recreation Society, will host a Parks Symposium at Del Valle Park on Tuesday, March 10. It was said that this all-day professional event would bring together parks, and turf and landscape professionals from throughout the region, along with industry vendors, to share best practices, innovations and operational strategies. He asked that the commission RSVP with their secretary if interested in attending.

Assistant Director Kevin Bright provided information on programming and upcoming events. He announced that on Thursday, January 8, the Lakewood Youth Hall of Fame Board of Electors met to deliberate on the 2025 class of Lakewood's finest athletes to be inducted. He shared that the top award, the 2025 Athlete of the Year, would be Anthony Eyanson from Louisiana State University; a Lakewood resident and graduate of Lakewood High School. It was said that he and his fellow 2025 inductees would be honored at the 2026 Hall of Fame Banquet on Monday, February 23. The commission was asked to RSVP with their secretary if interested in attending. Mr. Bright thanked Chairperson Valles for her presence and participation at the meeting. He shared that a full report on the Lakewood Youth Hall of Fame would be provided to the commission at the February Commission Meeting.

Secondly, Mr. Bright reported that the Lakewood Youth Sports (LYS) basketball season was set to tip off on Saturday, January 17, throughout the city. It was said that the season would run for seven weeks and conclude the regular season on March 7, with championships the following week.

Lastly, Mr. Bright informed the commission that unfortunately, the Hoover Middle School gym would begin renovation in early March, and the school administration has notified staff that the gym will be unavailable for city programming following the current LYS basketball season. It was said that with the announced closure of the school following the 2025-26 school year, it is uncertain

whether the city would be able to use the gym in the future following the renovation project. He shared that it would be dependent upon the new administration when it reopens as a dual immersion magnet school for the 2027-28 school year. It was said that staff were already looking to partner with other schools and districts to provide indoor sports programming and will update the commission when a new site is secured.

Vice Chairperson Dave Allen mentioned that he assisted at the recent Project Shepherd Holiday Program Distribution Day, and commended Community Services Supervisor Caitlin Cariaso for organizing the program.

Chairperson Anitza Valles shared that she too assisted with distribution for Project Shepherd and was highly impressed with the logistics and organization at the event, noting that it was a lot of fun. She also shared that she attended the recent Hall of Fame Board of Electors meeting and took part in the voting process. She thanked staff for the opportunity to attend and mentioned that it was an honor to assist.

Mr. Andrade confirmed for Chairperson Valles that ERD staff try and retain rainwater as much as possible. He mentioned that at The Nature Trail there are areas that are similar to a bioswale and added that projects recently installed in areas throughout the city also assist with retaining water. He noted that due to safety concerns, excess rainwater is required to be pumped out of areas such as ball diamonds and fields.

Commissioner Veronica Lucio shared that she also assisted with distribution for the Project Shepherd Holiday Program; she echoed Chairperson Valles' sentiments regarding how well-organized and fun the experience was.

REPORTS:

1. Spring Programs and Events

Community Services Manager Nancy Hitt reported that the 2026 Spring Recreation Catalog cover highlights spring activities and events, such as Woody the Tree and Earth Walk, LYS Basketball, Karaoke at the Weingart Senior Center and a gymnastics contract class. It was said that the new catalog featured an exciting variety of classes, programs and community events guaranteed to engage the entire family. Ms. Hitt informed the commission that the catalog would be posted online on Thursday, January 15, at which time registration for recreation classes will open for residents. It was said that non-resident registration opens on Monday, January 26, with most classes and activities beginning the week of Monday, February 2.

Ms. Hitt provided the commission with details regarding programs and events such as the Pan Am Fiesta, upcoming FUN-Tastic Family Nights, Play at Palms events, Mother-Son-Date Night, Daddy-Daughter Date Night and Earth Walk, as noted in the written report.

Ms. Hitt reported that spring vacation activities would be offered at city parks during spring recess from school, taking place April 6-10. She shared that programmed activities would include a variety of arts and crafts, outdoor sports, indoor games and specialized activities, and an excursion to Boomers Park in Irvine on April 8.

Information regarding upcoming travel trips, and older adult and Active+ programming was shared with the commission as noted in the written report.

Finally, Ms. Hitt provided the commission with details regarding the 2025 Lakewood Volunteer Day taking place on Saturday, April 18. She noted that the event would once again demonstrate how Lakewood supports aging and disabled residents through this demonstration of neighbors helping neighbors.

Commissioner Kristie Larison thanked Ms. Hitt for her report and commented that she was pleased with the number of offerings in the recreation catalog and appreciates how there are classes and events for every age group.

Chairperson Valles mentioned that she loves receiving the recreation catalog in the mail and exploring all the amazing classes and events offered.

The commission received and filed the report on Spring Programs and Events.

2. Teen Programs Annual Report

Community Services Supervisor Brianna Tavera displayed slides and provided details regarding teen programs in 2025. Ms. Tavera reported that the Teen Resource Center (TRC) at Bloomfield Park and the Lakewood Youth Center (LYC) at Del Valle Park, each offer a diverse palette of programs, while integrating new opportunities for the community's teen population. Details regarding programming and events offered at both the TRC and the LYC, as well as hours and days of operation, were provided to the commission as noted in the written report.

Ms. Tavera informed the commission that a TRC Showcase, which was specifically designed to familiarize teens with available activities at the start of the 2025-2026 school year, was held in August. It was said that staff continue to seek new ways to promote the TRC to nearby schools, including meeting with school administrators to develop collaborative partnerships and creating engaging promotional materials. Ms. Tavera reported that attendance remains modest, averaging three teens per week, which highlights the need for further outreach and engagement efforts.

Ms. Tavera noted that in 2025, Summer Kickbacks were introduced, which allowed teens to actively participate in physical activities in a team pick-up style manner, playing sports such as basketball, softball and kickball. Additionally, newly added Lego Days provided an activity focused on science, technology, engineering and math, also known by the

acronym STEM, exploring engineering principles for those interested in the field. Teen Book Club and Paint and Sip nights continued to show success amongst teens in 2025, and as a result, the Art Club debuted. Hosted on Tuesday evenings, it was said that the Art Club introduced teens to various art techniques and mediums, and allowed teens to express themselves creatively through art.

Next, Ms. Tavera provided the commission with information regarding the Junior Rec Leader Program, which continued to remain popular amongst teens in the summer. Ms. Tavera shared that the six-week program increased participation numbers from 28 to 32 teens; and of the 32 participants, 5 returned from previous years, and have participated in the program since it was reintroduced in 2023. It was said that in 2025, program staff implemented a career day component, which included guest speakers throughout the Recreation and Community Services Department to present on their experience and career growth in the field. For 2026, Ms. Tavera reported that the Junior Rec Program would expand to seven weeks and include an opportunity for participants to assist in the planning and facilitation of activities for the Lakewood Youth Sports Team Day held at Bolivar, Del Valle, Mayfair, and Palms parks in August.

Finally, Ms. Tavera provided the commission with a recap of the 2025 College Fair, which took place at The Centre on Tuesday, October 14, as noted in the written report.

Commissioner Lucio commented that it was great to see programs that assist teens with gaining life skills.

Ms. Tavera confirmed for Chairperson Valles that teen programs were also open to non-residents.

The commission received and filed the annual report on Teen Programs.

3. Project Shepherd Program Summary

Community Services Supervisor Caitlin Cariaso reported that Project Shepherd had completed its 52nd year of assisting Lakewood residents. Ms. Cariaso shared that registration for the Holiday Assistance Program began on November 3 and continued through November 16, 2025 at the Burns Community Center and Palms Park. Palms Park registered 116 families, while the Burns Community Center registered 321 families for a total of 437 families registered in 2025.

Ms. Cariaso informed the commission that the Scouting of America food collection generated hundreds of boxes of food items, and 13 Lakewood schools participated in food drives for the program, donating 245 boxes of food and 154 grocery gift cards. It was said that food collected from both the scouts and the schools would be utilized for the year-round pantries at Burns Community Center and Palms Park.

Ms. Cariaso reported that Project Shepherd had purchased \$36,055.74 in food and household care items to be utilized for the holiday program. She pointed out that the program only needed to purchase \$2,612.50 worth of grocery gift cards in 2025, thanks to the Nourishing Neighbors campaign at the Lakewood Vons, Pavilions and Albertsons which donated \$13,300 in grocery gift cards. She provided details regarding the different options for online donations, including a virtual food drive, virtual toy drive, and virtual monetary donation drive. It was said that online donations on the city's website for the virtual food, toy and monetary drives totaled \$9,690. In addition, Golden State Water provided a donation of \$480 for the purchase of gift cards for fresh food items, such as turkeys. Ms. Cariaso shared that approximately 104 volunteers contributed 494 hours assisting in the warehouse, packing boxes and distributing and delivering them to residents in need.

Information regarding the Teddy Bear Tree Program, scooter and helmet purchases, the Backpack Program, and recreation scholarships was provided as noted in the written report.

Lastly, Ms. Cariaso provided information regarding the Project Shepherd Extension Program. She shared that the program provides help with emergency food and utility bill assistance. It was said that in 2025, the extension program assisted 322 families and provided \$5,064.13 in utility bill assistance, which was said to be a 5% increase from 2024.

Commissioner Lucio expressed appreciation for the Rotary Club of Lakewood and all the volunteer work they do for the city.

Chairperson Valles echoed Commissioner Lucio's sentiments regarding the Rotary Club of Lakewood. She added that she loves the addition of the recreation scholarships, noting that it was an amazing offering.

Vice Chairperson Allen commented that the public/private partnership had been very successful over the years and that it was a pleasure to witness the growth of the Project Shepherd Program. He too shared his appreciation for the Rotary Club of Lakewood and their dedication to their volunteerism in the Lakewood community.

The commission received and filed the annual report on the Project Shepherd program

4. Activities and Maintenance Report No. 7

A written report and discussion of the Recreation and Community Services Department Programs, Services and Maintenance Activities for the month of December 2025 and a listing of upcoming activities for February 2026.

The commission received and filed the report.

WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS:

1. Letter to Sarah Ladd, Employee of the Month for December 2025.

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, February 11 at 6 p.m. in the Council Chambers.

Michelle Williams, Administrative Secretary
Recreation and Community Services Commission