



MINUTES
Recreation and Community Services Commission
Adjourned Regular Meeting
March 12, 2025

MEETING WAS CALLED TO ORDER at 6 p.m. by Chairperson Veronica Lucio.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE was led by Commissioner Dave Allen.

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

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: Meeting of February 12, 2025. A motion was made by Commissioner Kristie Larison and seconded by Commissioner Allen to approve the minutes of the meeting of February 12, 2025. Minutes were approved as submitted with Commissioner Ted Spaseff abstaining.

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND PRESENTATIONS:

Director Valarie Frost began her announcements by sharing with the commission that a progress report on the Parks, Recreation and Community Services Long Range Plan was provided to the City Council meeting on Tuesday, March 11. Ms. Frost shared that the plan was slated for committee review by the end of the month, with a public review available in the month of April, followed by a council study session in May, or early June.

Ms. Frost thanked the commissioners in attendance at the recent Legends of Lakewood Reception. She noted that the event celebrated the contributions to the Lakewood community from former RCS Commissioner Kirk Real, former RCS Director and Olympic track & field coach Dave Rodda, the author of the Boys at Del Valle Park poem Dennis Lander, and the Project Shepherd Program.

Next, Ms. Frost reported that on Wednesday, March 26, she would represent the City of Lakewood at an informational meeting regarding Los Angeles County's Olympic and Paralympic Games planning. She shared that Lakewood had indicated their support to provide Lakewood Center Mall and Mayfair Park for watch-parties, or other community events. It was said that Lisa Fernandez Field at Mayfair Park would be used for softball practices and the Lakewood Equestrian Center for horse-boarding and riding. She noted that she would keep the commission updated on whether or not Lakewood is selected for any of the named activities.

In addition, Ms. Frost shared that she would attend the California Parks and Recreation Society (CPRS) Conference and Expo in Sacramento, Tuesday, March 18 through Friday, March 21.

The commission was encouraged to RSVP with their secretary for the LeadHer Lakewood 2025 Women's Empowerment and Health Seminar and Mixer taking place at 5:30 p.m. on Thursday, March 27 in the Weingart Ballroom at The Centre, and for the CPRS District 10 Awards and Installation Banquet taking place at 5 p.m. on Thursday, April 10, also in the Weingart Ballroom at The Centre. She noted that several RCS staff and volunteers would be recognized at the banquet. In addition, she shared that the department would accept a Parks Make Life Better! award for its efforts at the 2024 College Fair.

Lastly, Ms. Frost informed the commission that the Older Adult Volunteer Recognition event would be held on Wednesday, April 16, and noted that Gayle Noel, a Project Shepherd and Meals on Wheels of Long Beach volunteer would be recognized as the Volunteer of the Year. She asked the commission to RSVP with their secretary if interested in attending.

Assistant Director Kevin Bright provided information on programming and events. Mr. Bright reported that the LYS Championship basketball games, scheduled for Thursday, March 13 at 5:30 p.m. at Del Valle Park, were on course. He informed the commission that if it rains and games cannot be played, they will be rescheduled for Saturday, March 15 at 9:30 and 10:30 a.m. at Del Valle Park.

Secondly, Mr. Bright shared that Earth Walk would take place on Saturday, March 15 from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Monte Verde Park. It was said that the annual event showcasing Lakewood's commitment to sustainability and maintaining the environment—both within the city and throughout the earth—will go on rain or shine. He shared that staff had been watching forecasts and plans are in place to alter the set up if it is raining, or to avoid heavily saturated areas of the turf and trails if the rain comes in heavily the day prior. It was said that vendors, city partners and city departments would be present, showing residents and little ones how they can be good stewards of a green and healthy earth. Children would be able to complete a Passport to Planet Earth to receive a plush toy, Henrietta the Chicken, and crafts and other interactive experiences will help to make the event memorable for all.

Parks Superintendent Abel Andrade shared with the commission that the gopher abatement and irrigation work scheduled for late February on Phase I of The Nature Trail was completed. He mentioned that this would not only alleviate the gopher activity on the trail but also in the surrounding neighborhood. Lastly, he shared that with heavy rain expected, ERD crews would be active removing water from parks, placing sandbags at facilities, and clearing debris from public rights-of-way and thoroughfares.

Commissioner Allen shared that he and Vice Chairperson Anitza Valles attended the Arbor Day performance at Palms Elementary School, and mentioned that it was a marvelous performance. He gave kudos to the RCS supervisors for putting on a great show. In addition, he shared his appreciation for the amazing presentation at the Legends of Lakewood event, noting that it was a nice tribute to beloved former RCS Commissioner Kirk Real.

Vice Chairperson Valles echoed Commissioner Allen's sentiments regarding the Arbor Day performance at Palms Elementary School, noting that it was a lot of fun for all in attendance. She shared that, as a newer member of the commission, she appreciated the entire Legends of Lakewood program. She mentioned that she enjoyed learning about all of the amazing heroes and legends who made Lakewood so great.

Commissioner Larison shared that she attended the Arbor Day performance at Cleveland Elementary School, and mentioned that it was incredible.

Commissioner Ted Spaseff mentioned that he too enjoyed the Arbor Day performance, and shared that it is always nice to see how involved the children get with the performance. He proposed that in the future, staff organize a performance at the Weingart Senior Center for the seniors. Additionally, he shared that he attended the Legends of Lakewood event as well and noted that RCS stole the show. He also mentioned his appreciation for seeing Kirk Real recognized for his many years of dedication to the community and to the RCS Department. Lastly, Commissioner Spaseff commented that he attended the Lakewood Youth Hall of Fame Awards Banquet and commended staff for a job well done.

REPORTS:

1. Volunteer Program Annual Report

Community Services Supervisor Caitlin Carias displayed slides and provided information regarding Lakewood's Volunteer Program. Ms. Carias 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. Carias 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 2025 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. Carias provided information regarding the 2025 California Parks and Recreation Society (CPRS) District 10 Awards and Installation Banquet scheduled to take place on Thursday, April 10, where two Lakewood volunteer groups will receive the Volunteer Merit Award. It was said that the AARP Tax Assistance Program at Weingart Senior Center and Chris Wilkinson, Past President of the Lakewood Community Gardens would be honored. Ms. Carias noted that volunteers of the AARP Tax Program donate hundreds of hours to prepare annual income tax returns free of charge to Lakewood seniors. And Chris Wilkinson will be celebrated as he ends a five-year run supporting gardeners at the Lakewood Community Gardens, diligently keeping the facility organized and working closely with city staff to ensure a fruitful relationship.

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 2024 as noted in the written report.

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

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

2. The Centre Operations Annual Report

Community Services Supervisor Lorraine Anthony displayed slides and provided information regarding The Centre operations in 2024. Ms. Anthony 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 2024, approximately 1,500 catered and non-catered events and recreation classes were held at The Centre, with 236 of those events being TGIS catered events.

Ms. Anthony 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. Anthony. She shared that over 1,230 participants attended the 465 classes and recreation events in 2024, which brought in \$40,711.00 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 2016 the agreement was renewed for a second time and in June of 2021, the agreement was extended for another five-year term. 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 2024 TGIS hosted their annual Mother's Day Brunch where over 450 attendees were served, and two tasting events.

Lastly, Ms. Anthony provided details regarding the many facility improvements completed at The Centre in 2024, as well as current improvements underway as noted in the written report.

Commissioner Larison thanked Ms. Anthony for an excellent presentation, and mentioned the events held at The Centre are always amazing. She noted that she appreciated the

addition of arts and crafts, and the new audio-visual components to Fun-Tastic Family Night events.

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

3. RCS Part-Time Staff Recruitment Annual Report

Community Services Manager Chuck Martucci provided information regarding the RCS Paid Internship Program, noting that the program was a partnership with the Cal State Long Beach (CSULB) Leisure Services Department. Mr. Martucci introduced two current RCS interns, Marlene Carbajal and Alexis Chavez. Both interns provided the commission with information regarding their personal and educational background, their role as an RCS intern, and spoke of their goal of becoming a recreation professional after graduation.

Mr. Martucci shared that the RCS Department has always assisted its part-time employees with their internship needs, and in 2018, the department created a formal internship program, forming a partnership with the CSULB Leisure Services Department, providing an unpaid internship position with City of Lakewood. It was said that since that time, the department has had multiple CSULB student interns who were either non-employees, or part-time RCS employees, who were staffed at an RCS facility. Mr. Martucci noted that all CSULB Leisure Services students must complete spring, summer or fall semester-long 400-hour internship as one of their final classes before graduation.

The commission was informed that in the 2023 budget development process, the RCS Department had updated the internship position, creating a new paid position for the CSULB Recreation and Leisure Studies Department partnership program that would begin in the fall semester of 2024. Mr. Martucci noted that the student intern who began at that time was Luz Ramirez. He shared that Luz began her internship in September 2024, and did an amazing job in her role as intern, so much so that the department extended her a part-time recreation leader II position at the Weingart Senior Center, which she graciously accepted.

Mr. Martucci reported that the RCS interns assist the department with various administrative tasks and department assignments, and in turn gain experience in areas of recreation that they have yet to be exposed to. It was said that interns take tours of every city facility and attend and assist with various programs and special events. Mr. Martucci shared that Marlene and Alexis were busy conducting interviews with RCS management and supervisory staff to learn more about their various roles within the department. He shared that the interns had also assisted the department with an in-depth holiday calendar, and a comprehensive outside agency survey.

Mr. Martucci informed the commission, that as the internship manager, he reviews bi-weekly reports on the progress of the interns, and confirms what they are learning and working on. He shared that a progress meeting is set up with the student, as well as the CSULB Leisure Services internship professor, as well as a final evaluation with the intern.

Additionally, he mentioned that he and the intern visit two Leisure Services classes before the semester end, to market the position to students who will also need an internship in order to graduate.

Commissioner Spaseff thanked Mr. Martucci for an informative and interesting presentation. He spoke about the tremendous value that an internship program has, and mentioned it was amazing that the department was able to make it a paid position.

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

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 2025.

The commission received and filed the report.

WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS:

1. Letter to Aimee McSparren, Employee of the Month for January 2025.

ORAL COMMUNICATIONS

ADJOURNMENT:

There being no further business brought before the Recreation and Community Services Commission, Chairperson Lucio adjourned the meeting in honor of Joan Rainier at 6:54 p.m. to Wednesday, April 9 at 6 p.m. in the Council Chambers.

Michelle Williams, Administrative Secretary
Recreation and Community Services Commission