

Attachment 1

Draft Minutes of November 20, 2025

CITY OF NEWPORT BEACH

Lower Castaways and Aquatic Center Site Ad Hoc Committee Regular Meeting November 20, 2025 – 3:00 p.m.

I. CONVENE MEETING OF THE LOWER CASTAWAYS AQUATIC CENTER SITE AD HOC COMMITTEE TO ORDER – 3:02 p.m.

II. ROLL CALL

Present: Joe Stapleton, Chair
Michelle Barto, Councilmember
Noah Blom, Councilmember
Jonathan Langford, Committee Member
Keira Kirby, Committee Member
Rudy Svrcek, Committee Member
Laird Hayes, Committee Member

Staff: Seimone Jurjis, Assistant City Manager
Sean Levin, Recreation & Senior Services Director
David Webb, Public Works Director
Lauren Wooding Whitlinger, Real Property Administrator
Clarivel Rodriguez, Administrative Assistant

III. PUBLIC COMMENTS ON NON-AGENDA ITEMS

None

IV. CONSENT ITEMS

- a. Draft Minutes of September 18, 2025
Recommended Actions:
1. Approve and File.

Chair Stapleton moved to approve the minutes of September 18, 2025, seconded by Committee Member Kirby. The motion carried unanimously.

V. CURRENT BUSINESS

- a. Proposal Received for Lower Castaways Redevelopment
Recommended Actions:
1. Provide further direction to staff.

Real Property Administrator Lauren Wooding Whitlinger provided an update on the Request for Proposals (RFP) issued in August for redevelopment of Lower Castaways. She explained that the proposals were due in October, and one proposal was received from Burnham-Ward Properties. She noted that the RFP sought a public-private partnership to redevelop the site, including commercial areas, storage and launch facilities for human-powered vessels, and park uses with a connection to Upper Castaways Park. She reported that the proposal includes approximately 14,000 square feet of commercial retail and restaurant space, recreational buildings, replacement of the deteriorated seawall, and

construction of a new parallel dock for small vessels. She advised that public park features would include outdoor event space, walking trails, hand-launch areas, and parking.

Real Property Administrator Wooding-Whitlinger reported that Burnham-Ward estimated the total project cost at just under \$25 million. She explained that the developer would contribute approximately \$7.4 million for vertical commercial construction, while the City would fund the remaining \$17.5 million for park improvements, seawall repair, dock, and parking. She emphasized that Burnham-Ward would perform all work and deliver the property, with the City covering costs for non-commercial spaces. She noted that the proposal projects annual site revenues of \$1.2 million, operating expenses of approximately \$455,000, and a net operating income of \$740,000. She explained that under the proposed lease, the developer would remit 5% of gross revenues to the City, estimated at \$60,000 annually.

Assistant City Manager Seimone Jurjis emphasized that no negotiations have occurred. This is the initial proposal.

Chair Stapleton expressed surprise at receiving only one proposal. Assistant City Manager Jurjis agreed and noted that he expected to receive two or three RFPs.

Councilmember Blom inquired regarding rent calculations and inquired if it was based on rent per square foot in addition to the 5% or if the 5% was on top of the \$60,000 per year.

Real Property Administrator Wooding-Whitlinger explained that it would just be 5% of the gross revenues of the property and confirmed that there is room for negotiation.

Committee Member Keira Kirby noted that one of the items in the RFP was the addition of a dock and inquired if that was allowed.

Chair Stapleton confirmed that there will never be a dock on the site and expressed doubts that the California Department of Fish and Wildlife would approve a dock though the existing launch ramp would remain.

Committee Member Jon Langford inquired about maintenance responsibilities for public areas.

Real Property Administrator Wooding-Whitlinger explained that it would likely fall to the City but could be negotiated in the lease agreement.

Councilmember Blom noted that a passive park would generate no return on investment and suggested incorporating leasable pads for small-scale commercial uses, such as a coffee shop or restaurant, to activate the site and provide revenue. He included ideas such as allocating square footage for two pads, one around 3,200 square feet for full service and another around 800 square feet for grab-and-go service. He expressed interest in exploring more ways to see a larger return for the City.

Chair Stapleton inquired about why the cost for the City increased from \$10 million to \$17.5 million. Assistant City Manager Seimone Jurjis advised that there is an alternative proposal on the agenda.

Councilmember Michelle Barto stated that the RFP differed from her expectations but expressed support for creating additional reasons for people to visit the park and for aligning the park more closely with prior visions of its layout.

Chair Stapleton referenced the proposed site plan and noted the lack of open space and the abundance of parking spaces.

Recreation & Senior Services Director Sean Levin stated that the site would be activated in a manner similar to North Star Beach, with hand-launching of kayaks and paddleboards as the primary activity. He noted that two rowing groups currently lease space at the site and that the City could also generate revenue through those uses under the proposed plan. He emphasized that the site includes a bicycle connection and a bicycle repair (“fix-it”) station, which he stated would contribute significantly to overall activity at the location.

Councilmember Blom noted that residents have expressed concerns about North Star Beach regarding traffic and parking impacts, particularly during peak periods and inquired if the same impact would occur at Lower Castaways. Recreation & Senior Services Director Sean Levin remarked that this site does not have the same type of beach but has little strips where users can get in and out of the water.

Committee Member Rudy Svrcek noted that he had looked at the project from the standpoint of a return on capital to recover the \$17.5 million for the City and noted that it would take years for the City to recover the money. He suggested the City analyze selling the property and ask the buyer to provide the wanted features to see if the financial outcome changes.

Councilmember Blom stated that a major obstacle to selling the property is that the Irvine Company still holds encumbrances on the site. He explained that a sale would trigger complex requirements under the Surplus Land Act, including a lengthy process and potential affordable housing obligations that could be contentious for nearby neighborhoods such as Bay Shores and Kings Road. He further noted that it would be difficult for the City to request the release of existing encumbrances while simultaneously placing new restrictions on the property. He concluded that, while not impossible, making the site viable for sale would likely require navigating years of regulatory and bureaucratic hurdles.

Committee Member Svrcek noted that the Irvine Company also imposed restrictions on commercial use of the property, which had already created challenges. He stated uncertainty about how the City could renegotiate or modify the existing agreement with the Irvine Company but added that the issue warrants further review.

Chair Stapleton stated that the City previously traded to acquire the property. He described the site as the most historic location in Newport Beach, calling it the City’s “Plymouth Rock” and birthplace. He emphasized the City’s limited open space and stated that the property presents a unique opportunity. He expressed opposition to selling the site for development, noting its waterfront location and strong potential for public harbor access, including stand-up paddleboarding, kayaking, and other water-based recreation.

Chair Stapleton acknowledged that funding a project of this scale is significant and stated that no one is proposing an immediate \$10–\$20 million General Fund investment. He noted, however, that the City has available in-lieu park fees, approximately \$3.5 million, and emphasized that additional funding opportunities may arise as new development projects move forward under state mandates.

Committee Member Svrcsek stated that any potential sale would likely include specific conditions and would not simply allow unrestricted development. He noted that the City may want to define desired components and outcomes more clearly. He observed that the RFP was broad, which may have contributed to the limited response. He suggested that a more focused plan, supported by the committee, could attract a broader pool of bidders.

Assistant City Manager Jurjis explained that recent housing activity has generated park funding through the Quimby Fee Act, which applies to for-sale residential developments. He reported that the City currently holds more than \$3 million in Quimby park fees and projected that, as additional for-sale housing projects come online, the balance could grow to approximately \$32 million over several years. He stated that these funds could be allocated toward park improvements, including redevelopment of Lower Castaways or other park projects as directed by the City Council. He concluded that this represents a viable future revenue stream to help fund the project.

Chair Stapleton stated that, from a purely private-sector perspective, the project would not make financial sense, noting that no private entity would invest approximately \$17 million for a \$60,000 return. He explained, however, that the public sector operates differently, as the City receives dedicated funding that must be used for park purposes. He stated that this creates an opportunity to invest in park improvements, whether at Lower Castaways or other park locations within the City.

Councilmember Barto expressed concern regarding ingress and egress traffic impacts, noting that this issue was a key factor in prior discussions. She stated that traffic along Pacific Coast Highway is already heavily congested at certain times of day, and she was concerned that additional parking or visitor-attracting uses could exacerbate those conditions. She observed that even small-scale uses, such as coffee shops, often generate significant parking and traffic demand in Newport Beach. While she expressed support for increased open space and stated that she liked the concept of a coffee shop, she remained concerned about the potential traffic impacts associated with any increased visitation.

Chair Stapleton noted that the increasing use of e-bikes and other alternative transportation has resulted in more people traveling on the west side of the City without relying on automobiles. He stated that, regardless of differing views on e-bikes, their use has expanded mobility options. He added that the area includes extensive and well-connected bike trails, which could allow visitors to access the site by bicycle or other non-vehicular means rather than by car.

Chair Stapleton opened public comments.

Wade Womack, a thirty-year Newport Beach resident, expressed concern regarding the proposed commercialization of the site, noting that it is currently a City park and that Newport Beach has historically not commercialized its parkland. He stated that existing park-related revenues from development fees could fund improvements without introducing commercial uses. He cautioned that commercialization could limit public access, particularly along the waterfront, which he noted is heavily used for fishing, beach access, and hand-launch watercraft, especially on weekends and during summer months. He also raised concerns about the proposed 50-year lease, noting that the City would fund a substantial portion of tenant improvements for a single bidder, effectively transferring use of a valuable public asset. He further expressed concern about the appearance of potential conflicts of interest involving the bidder and urged the City to avoid any perception of favoritism. He

concluded by urging the City to preserve the site as a public park, prioritize public access, and minimize commercialization.

Chair Stapleton noted that the City does have precedent for limited commercialization within parks, citing Marina Park and the Lighthouse Café as an example where the City receives revenue. He emphasized, however, that there is no intent to commercialize one of the City's greatest assets.

Jim Mosher stated that the proposal did not appear to be a good deal for the City. He expressed concern that the applicant was seeking to design and control the park while asking the City to fund it, which he found problematic. He suggested that if the City were to build the park itself and desired a coffee shop, it could issue a separate request for proposals and likely receive broader interest. He noted that while the restaurant appeared small on the site plan, the proposal described it as approximately 10,000 square feet, which he considered large, especially in comparison to a previously proposed 14,000-square-foot restaurant by the Irvine Company nearby. He stated that the scale of the proposed restaurant was inconsistent with the intent of the property's donation to the City for marine-related uses with only incidental commercial activity. He concluded that a passive park would be more appropriate and that the proposal, as presented, was not in the City's best interest.

Mark Frazier, a 37-year Newport Beach resident, stated that he was commenting on both Proposals A and B. He said the strongest element of the proposal was the connection to Upper Castaways. He suggested eliminating most commercial uses and instead developing a Newport Beach history museum on the site to honor the City's origins, noting the site's significance as the birthplace of Newport Beach. He proposed incorporating a small grab-and-go café as an incidental use, similar to the Muth Interpretive Center. He stated that this approach would allow for reduced parking while still capturing many elements of Proposals A and B, creating a family-friendly park that honors the City's history. He further recommended enlarging the covered gathering structures shown in the proposals, stating they should accommodate at least 30 to 40 people to support group gatherings. He concluded that a larger structure, combined with improved access, would encourage visitors to walk down from the bluffs, park nearby, bike to the site, and spend time enjoying the park.

Jim Palmer, a long-time Newport Beach resident, stated that he has observed the site since it operated as Wil Wright's ice cream and noted the long history of use at the location. He asked whether any studies exist documenting current usage of the site, noting that approximately 20% of the area functions as a park while the remainder is used for storage. He stated that, based on his experience as a frequent user, 25 to 30 vehicles regularly use the site, with 50 or more on a typical weekend and 75 to 100 vehicles on a busy summer weekend for hand-launching watercraft, fishing, and access to Castaways Beach. He expressed concern that discussions about future park or commercial uses, traffic, and ingress and egress lacked a clear baseline understanding of current conditions and requested that usage data be provided if available.

In response, Chair Stapleton stated that the discussion was currently conceptual and that formal usage studies had not yet been completed.

Mr. Palmer noted anecdotally that 35 to 40 vehicles are commonly observed, with counts increasing to 50 to 75 on busy weekends and approaching 100 vehicles on peak summer days. He added that current activity utilizes approximately 20% of the site's footprint and acknowledged the significant existing demand for harbor access from the location.

Nigel Bress, a longtime Newport Beach resident, stated that Lower Castaways is heavily used by the hand-launch, outrigger, and paddleboard community and functions primarily as a staging and storage area with substantial parking demand. He emphasized that these regular users should be central to decisions about the site's future. He expressed concern that a large restaurant would restrict access and detract from the park's function, particularly during busy weekends. He supported smaller-scale amenities, such as a coffee shop, which would enhance connectivity between Upper and Lower Castaways without overwhelming the site. He also supported recognizing the area's historical significance through signage or interpretive features and questioned the removal of public benches, stating that eliminating existing public amenities was concerning.

Bob Randolph, a longtime Newport Beach resident, asked whether visual renderings were available showing how the proposed development would appear from the bridge, noting that this corridor represents a significant and highly visible entry view into Newport Beach. He also raised safety concerns related to bicycle and vehicle conflicts at the site's driveway, stating that he and his wife frequently bike past the location and have already experienced near-miss incidents despite the site's current low level of use. He noted that increased activity could exacerbate these issues and should be addressed in the design. He further questioned whether the financial information presented was limited to a static income pro forma, observing that it appeared to be an idealized snapshot rather than a long-term projection for a restaurant use.

Chair Stapleton confirmed it was very much an early concept.

Mr. Randolph acknowledged staff's clarification that the proposal is in an early conceptual stage but emphasized that driveway safety could become a significant issue as planning advances.

Chair Stapleton closed public comments.

There was no further discussion on the item.

b. Alternate Design for Lower Castaways Park

Recommended Actions:

1. Discuss potential locations where a public aquatic center may be located.

Public Works Director Dave Webb presented two City-led park concepts developed with landscape architect RJM as alternatives to the private development proposal. He stated the concepts incorporate committee direction by emphasizing parking, passive green space, water access, outrigger storage, permanent restrooms, bicycle connectivity, and family-oriented amenities. He explained that both options provide structured parking, walking paths, a passive lawn, a playground for older children, restrooms, outrigger staging and hand-launch access, and a bicycle node with water and repair facilities. He noted that the existing Irvine Company marine lease would remain in place for now, generating approximately \$4,000 per month.

Public Works Director Webb explained that Option A uses a circulating parking layout with a roundabout, provides approximately 73 parking spaces, and includes a central lawn, playground, restrooms, and bay-front access. He identified potential operational concerns with trailer circulation under this layout. He explained that Option B replaces the roundabout with a dead-end parking configuration, improves trailer access, adds picnic

shelters, and increases parking to approximately 75 spaces while retaining similar amenities. He noted that both options reroute bicycle circulation to reduce conflicts at the driveway.

Public Works Director Webb estimated total project costs at approximately \$16.4 million for Option A and \$15.9 million for Option B, inclusive of construction, design, permitting, environmental review, and construction administration. He noted that both concepts remain adjustable based on desired activity levels and parking demand.

Council Member Barto suggested that the City could lease a portion of the site, such as a pad for a coffee shop or sandwich vendor, allowing a private operator to fund tenant improvements. She noted that this approach could reduce City costs while generating ongoing fee or lease revenue and stated that it presents a potential opportunity worth exploring.

Public Works Director Webb noted that, similar to Corona del Mar State Beach, the City could incorporate a vendor into the site. He explained that a joint-use building could house both restrooms and a concession vendor and stated that this approach would be feasible if the City chose to pursue it.

Chair Stapleton remarked that activating the space could include combining a restroom with a small take-away use, such as a coffee or sandwich vendor. He noted that this approach could provide dual functionality at a lower overall cost and observed that, similar to pier locations, the City could allow a commercial operator to construct and operate the facility at its own expense.

Public Works Director Webb stated that staff could evaluate that option if the City wished to pursue it. He noted that similar models exist, citing Huntington Beach Park, where a small café located within the park is highly popular and could serve as a suitable precedent.

Council Member Blom stated that he supports a bifurcated approach for the site. He said a 10,000-square-foot restaurant is neither feasible nor appropriate and noted that smaller restaurants better align with Newport Beach's character and the site's historical significance. He emphasized that food-oriented uses have traditionally served as community gathering places. He explained that limited uses such as a coffee shop would only activate the site in the morning, while a modest restaurant could support activity throughout the day and evening. He stressed that consistent activation is essential because the site functions as a gateway to the City.

Council Member Blom expressed concern about weak financial returns under the current RFP and suggested a percentage-of-gross revenue model to improve long-term value. He noted that the City should evaluate returns over decades, not short investment cycles. He highlighted the site's importance as a connector between neighborhoods and stated that improved connectivity could support broader revitalization efforts, particularly along Mariner's Mile. He cautioned against bike-pedestrian conflicts and emphasized the need for safe circulation. He concluded that he does not support the current RFP or a fully passive park with no return and urged a balanced approach that provides activation, community benefit, financial feasibility, and long-term safety.

Committee Member Langford stated that after reviewing both concepts, he favors including a commercial component. He said a four-acre site dedicated solely to passive use does not meet the City's needs, noting that Newport Beach already has numerous neighborhood parks, including Bob Henry Park and Mariners Park in the surrounding area. He

acknowledged the site's use by hand-launching groups but emphasized that the property should function as a destination for families and residents citywide. He supported incorporating a restaurant or similar use to draw visitors and activate the site.

Committee Member Langford highlighted the site's historical significance and suggested a concept that honors Newport Beach history, similar to how City Hall incorporates the Lido House legacy. He envisioned a modest restaurant that respects the site's heritage while avoiding a sunk public cost. He explained that under a lease model, a private developer could fund construction while the City retains long-term ownership of the asset, creating a sustainable revenue stream over decades. He added that shifting maintenance responsibilities, such as parking and site upkeep, to a private operator would reduce long-term costs and ongoing obligations for the City. He concluded that a thoughtfully scaled commercial use could provide financial benefit, historical recognition, and operational efficiency while preserving public ownership.

Chair Stapleton summarized that the discussion appeared to be coalescing around a hybrid concept. He stated that the vision resembles a "Marina Park-light" model, combining significant public benefit with a scaled-down commercial element. He described a park that emphasizes open space, children's use, and human-powered water access, including a launch ramp, while also incorporating a modest commercial component similar to Lighthouse Café that operates throughout the day. He expressed support for the City constructing the pad and then issuing a request for proposals to select an appropriate operator to build out and run the commercial space. He concluded that his preference lies between a purely passive park and a fully commercial development, blending public access with limited activation.

Council Member Blom stated that he fully agreed with the Mayor's approach and supported bifurcating the project. He explained that if the City performs the underground and public works improvements, stubbing out building pads would be straightforward.

He noted that by preparing fully serviced pads in advance, the City could work through Community Development Department (CDD) entitlements upfront, resolving parking allocations and avoiding future variances or waivers. He explained that this approach would allow the City to define parameters, such as a 3,500-square-foot building footprint, utilities, power, and infrastructure, before issuing a request for proposals. He stated that the resulting RFP would focus solely on selecting an operator to construct and operate a building on a City-prepared pad, rather than asking a private party to design or fund the park itself. He emphasized that this parallel approach would reduce City costs, increase control, and strengthen revenue potential. He added that the site's unique features should not be unnecessarily scaled back, but rather refined and organized to best serve the community. He concluded that this process would allow the City to reset the direction of the project, identify optimal pad locations, issue targeted RFPs, and avoid becoming dependent on a private developer to deliver a public park.

Chair Stapleton stated that the site offers some of the best views in the City, including the harbor, downtown, Fashion Island, and Upper Castaways, making it well suited for a modest commercial component. He expressed support for requiring any such use to be named the "Castaways Club." He added that the site currently lacks sufficient historical elements. While he acknowledged the existing plaque, he stated that relocating it across the street was a mistake and suggested returning it to Lower Castaways along the waterfront, where it would be visible and meaningful. He further suggested incorporating additional interpretive features along the grassy area and seawall. He proposed creating an interactive, walkable

experience that highlights the City's history, the harbor, and marine life, helping connect the bay, the land, and Newport Beach's origins in a more engaging way.

Recreation & Senior Services Director Sean Levin stated that the City implemented a similar concept at Marina Park through the playground design. He explained that interpretive panels there highlight local fish species and the marine food cycle. He noted that a comparable approach could be applied at this site by incorporating historical elements into the playground design, creating an engaging and educational feature for visitors.

Chair Stapleton stated that, similar to walking through historically rich cities such as Philadelphia, Newport Beach has a strong historical narrative to share. He suggested that incorporating interpretive panels or plaques throughout the site would provide meaningful opportunities to highlight the City's history in an accessible and engaging way.

Chair Stapleton inquired about the feasibility of coordinating with the Irvine Company to improve connectivity between Upper and Lower Castaways. He noted that a recently constructed public dock across the way—capable of accommodating numerous Duffy boats—is largely underutilized. He explained that with the existing walking trail, bridge crossing, and underpass connection, users could easily reach the site if a direct staircase were added near the dock. He stated that this would eliminate the need to walk around existing commercial properties and would leverage existing public access. He emphasized that establishing a clear physical connection between Upper and Lower Castaways would represent a significant opportunity to enhance access and activate the area.

Committee Member Svrcek stated that if the City issues another RFP the concept should be defined. He recommended developing a detailed site plan that reflects the elements the committee agrees should be included, allowing the RFP to be more specific and prescriptive. He noted that greater clarity would reduce uncertainty for potential bidders and better communicate the City's expectations for the project.

Committee Member Svrcek stated that the City should include a conceptual, rough site plan in any future RFP. He noted that while the plan could remain flexible, it would provide clear vision and guidance regarding what the City wants to see.

Chair Stapleton agreed and stated that his preference would be to present a largely finalized concept, including a defined building pad. He explained that the City could provide a sketch identifying the pad location and parameters and then ask proposers what they would recommend or bring forward, allowing them to "plug and play" rather than propose concepts from scratch.

Council Member Barto suggested that the City retain responsibility for the historical and ecological components of the site rather than delegating those elements to a private developer.

Chair Stapleton concurred, stating that the City should complete the site improvements and visioning, with the private role limited to a restaurateur or developer who would construct the restaurant at their own cost, with revenue shared with the City.

Chair Stapleton stated that he may be misunderstanding the committee but observed that the original RFP appears complete and that the City should not reissue an RFP for the entire site. He suggested that any new RFP should focus narrowly on a commercial component, such as a restaurant concept.

Committee Member Svrcek responded that regardless of the site configuration, the City should be more specific in any future RFP. He noted that the prior broad approach did not generate strong results.

Chair Stapleton agreed and stated that if the City pursues a restaurant concept, it would issue an RFP similar to other peer projects, focused solely on that use.

Committee Member Svrcek added that entitlement challenges remain significant. He recommended clarifying how much of the entitlement and permitting process the City is willing to assume, including coordination with the California Coastal Commission and other agencies. He stated that reducing entitlement uncertainty could attract more bidders, given the complexity of approvals required for the site.

Chair Stapleton agreed and noted that the California Coastal Commission would likely support the project due to the enhanced public access it provides.

Council Member Blom stated that the project should not pose a negative issue for Coastal approval. He emphasized that if the City issues an RFP for a defined building pad, the entitlement should be locked in as part of that pad, including parking and site constraints. He explained that doing so would allow the City to solicit operators based on clear parameters, asking proposers to identify what they would build, what revenue they would generate, and what they would pay the City—rather than submitting conceptual ideas.

Assistant City Manager Jurjis summarized that committee members support activating the site, generating revenue, and pursuing a retail path focused primarily on a café or restaurant use. He asked whether the City should pursue a single, focused path rather than multiple alternatives.

Council Member Blom stated that he envisions two complementary commercial components. He suggested a primary restaurant of approximately 3,500 square feet, paired with a smaller secondary pad of roughly 600 to 750 square feet for a quick-service coffee use. He explained that this configuration would activate the site from morning through evening. He noted that the coffee component could be located closer to Pacific Coast Highway, similar in scale to the coffee shop planned for the library, while the larger “Castaways Club” restaurant would sit closer to the historic site.

Council Member Barto asked whether the proposal reflected operational realities within the restaurant industry.

Council Member Blom responded that operating breakfast, lunch, and dinner service within a single concept is extremely difficult and often compromises quality. He explained that restaurants typically succeed by focusing either on breakfast and lunch or on lunch and dinner. He stated that a lunch-and-dinner concept aligns well with the historical identity of the Castaways Club, noting that original menus from the site—still displayed at the Balboa Island Fire Station—reflect a classic dinner-oriented experience. He added that pairing a lunch-and-dinner restaurant with a separate coffee-oriented use would activate the site throughout the day while distributing parking demand more evenly across morning, afternoon, and evening periods, rather than concentrating traffic during a single peak window.

Committee Member Kirby offered a comment unrelated to revenue generation and expressed appreciation for the emphasis on the site's historical significance. She stated that history and nature are effectively integrated at Marina Park and suggested expanding that approach beyond children's play elements. She proposed partnering with local historical organizations to incorporate features such as a small display case or rotating exhibits that highlight the history of the Castaways Club and the area. She emphasized that this would not require a full museum, but rather a modest, thoughtful addition that strengthens the site's historical connection, noting that it would serve an educational purpose rather than a revenue-generating one.

Chair Stapleton stated that the site still has available space and agreed with the emphasis on historical elements, referencing the Junior Lifeguard building as a potential model. He cautioned against allowing the project scope to expand excessively, noting that costs could easily escalate to \$20 million. He emphasized that the historical component is critical and that the site should meaningfully connect the City to its past. He summarized the committee's direction as activating the space to ensure consistent use, preventing blight, and strengthening its role as a connector within the City, given the multiple trails that converge there. He supported designing bicycle circulation in a way that avoids conflicts similar to those experienced at McFadden Square. He highlighted the importance of preserving hand-launch access for canoes and other human-powered watercraft and reiterated the significance of the site's historical context. He questioned whether a playground is essential at this location, noting the proximity of existing parks such as Bob Henry Park and Mariners Park. He suggested that removing the playground could allow for expanded open space or a small coffee shop, while clarifying that he was open to discussion and not adamantly opposed to including one.

Councilmember Blom stated that, despite having a young child, he would support removing the playground from the site. He indicated a preference for using that area for additional parking instead. He noted that the City already has a substantial number of parks and commented that, despite being born and raised in Newport Beach, he continues to discover parks of which he was previously unaware existed.

Chair Stapleton stated that removing the playground would free up additional space for parking and potentially allow for a second small retail use, such as a coffee vendor. He added that extending the launch ramp along both sides of the site would be a strong enhancement and could further improve access and functionality if feasible.

Committee Member Svrcek suggested incorporating an educational component focused on marine life in and around Newport Beach. He proposed interpretive elements that explain ocean and harbor ecosystems, including tides, Back Bay habitats, and local marine species. He noted that a marine-life education exhibit could help distinguish the site, enhance community value, and complement the connectivity features discussed earlier.

Councilmember Barto agreed with prior comments and suggested incorporating adult-oriented educational and historical elements rather than features focused solely on children. She referenced the interpretive exhibits along the Santa Barbara pier as an example and proposed similar installations throughout the site, noting that such features could replace portions of park space while providing meaningful value to visitors.

Chair Stapleton stated that placing features along the seawall would activate the waterfront, encourage walking, and strengthen connections to the harbor.

Public Works Director Webb raised the issue of park lighting, noting that staff would prefer lighting to support activity and safety. He referenced Sunset Ridge, where the community opposed lighting and the park was built without it, and emphasized that staff wanted to address lighting expectations upfront.

Councilmember Blom asked whether the intent was to light the park. She clarified that prior concerns typically related to environmental impacts and low-level lighting and asked whether staff envisioned standard parking-area lighting rather than only bollards or minimal illumination.

Chair Stapleton responded that lighting should be approached carefully and stated that excessive lighting would not be necessary.

Public Works Director Webb clarified that staff was not proposing sports-style lighting, but rather functional lighting to maintain activity and safety, explaining that similar debates at Sunset Ridge ultimately resulted in a decision to include lighting despite initial opposition.

Committee Member Svrcsek asked whether the next step should be developing a vision statement that outlines agreed-upon components, followed by a site plan aligned with that vision.

Chair Stapleton responded that the committee appeared to be identifying those core elements through the current discussion. He asked whether any key components were missing and stated his preference to return at a future meeting with the architect present and a conceptual drawing rather than holding another meeting focused solely on vision statements and bullet points.

Public Works Director Webb stated that staff understood the committee's direction and would work with RJM to return with revised concepts, including a defined pad and parking layout, to help the committee move toward more final decisions.

Chair Stapleton emphasized that while he was not attempting to fast-track the process, he wanted to maintain momentum, noting that the site has been under discussion for decades and deserved a thoughtful but forward-moving approach.

Committee Member Langford asked whether the restaurant component would be limited to a single story.

Assistant City Manager Jurjis stated that the site would include a defined pad with entitlements for approximately 3,500 square feet. He explained that while height limits would apply, a developer could theoretically propose a two-story structure, though he did not believe a two-story café would be practical.

Committee Member Laird Hayes asked whether swimming would occur in front of the site.

Assistant City Manager Jurjis responded that the area is a public harbor, and individuals would be permitted to swim if they choose.

Committee Member Hayes then asked whether the site includes a beach.

Chair Stapleton replied that the site would not include a beach beyond existing conditions.

Recreation & Senior Services Director Levin clarified that the area does not function as a traditional beach. He described it as sufficient for kayak and outrigger launching but noted that currents make it unsuitable for regular swimming. He contrasted the site with North Star Beach, which operates as a calm, family-oriented swimming area, and stated that similar conditions should not be expected here.

Chair Stapleton summarized that the site functions primarily as a launch area rather than a swimming beach and commented that he was more concerned about bridge jumping than swimming activity.

Chair Stapleton stated that the committee had reached a good outcome and described the direction as a strong hybrid approach.

Assistant City Manager Jurjis asked whether the committee was requesting a revised plan incorporating defined commercial pads and the committee's feedback, to be brought back for a follow-up meeting.

Chair Stapleton confirmed that direction and suggested returning in early to mid-January, allowing staff time to develop revised concepts.

Chair Stapleton encouraged committee members to submit any additional ideas in the interim and recommended visiting the site in person, noting its size, potential, and high level of weekend activity.

Chair Stapleton opened public comments.

Jim Mosher stated that the committee's work reflects long-standing frustration with the gravel construction staging area that has occupied the site for decades. He said retaining the CalRecycle trailers within a gravel enclosure would undermine efforts to beautify the area and should not be part of any conceptual plan. He noted that the Burnham-Ward proposal requested the City replace and raise the existing seawall by 3 to 5 feet at City expense. He said the current plan references the seawall as "existing concrete seawall" and asked for clarification on what work is proposed and the associated cost. Regarding a potential connection between Lower and Upper Castaways, he explained that the primary issue may not be Coastal Commission opposition but the City's own Local Coastal Program. He cited Policy 4.4.3-8, which allows bluff work only when no feasible alternative exists, and noted that an existing public sidewalk and staircase already connect the two areas, potentially complicating entitlement approval. He supported a small coffee shop as a way to activate the site but questioned the need for a 3,500-square-foot restaurant. Finally, he addressed lighting concerns, noting that nearby homes already use substantial nighttime lighting, suggesting that light sensitivity may not be a significant neighborhood constraint when designing the park.

Chair Stapleton agreed with Mr. Mosher's point regarding lighting, noting that the surrounding area is already well lit. He then questioned whether the City should continue leasing the space for approximately \$4,000 per month, stating that the area could potentially be repurposed for a higher public use. He asked whether the committee felt committed to retaining that use.

Recreation & Senior Services Director Levin responded that staff anticipates needing the area for additional parking under the proposed concepts. He added that a major waterline easement runs beneath the site, limiting what can be built there. He stated that staff will

need to work through those constraints in the next iteration but emphasized that increased parking demand is expected.

Chair Stapleton stated that he agreed with Mr. Mosher and expressed concern about retaining gravel and trailers within a redeveloped park. He indicated support for removing those uses unless the committee objected and asked that the issue be addressed in the next rendering.

Turning to the seawall, Public Works Director Webb explained that the City will need to evaluate the seawall regardless of design preferences. He stated that the seawall has been in place for many years and currently stabilizes the area, but its structural capacity will need review. He noted that the seawall appears to be located on City property rather than within the marine area, giving the City flexibility to modify it if required, subject to engineering and regulatory considerations.

Chair Stapleton asked staff to evaluate the condition of the seawall and determine whether removal or reconstruction would be required. He noted that replacing the seawall would represent a significant cost and emphasized that the potential financial impact should be clearly understood. He concluded by acknowledging the issue and stating that it was duly noted.

Heidi Hall, a 62-year Newport Beach resident, expressed concern about preserving the site's primary function as a hand-launch location for small boats. She emphasized that this area remains one of the last accessible places for residents to launch boats without fees and stated that this use should remain the site's highest priority, with any commercial activity secondary. She questioned how many parking spaces the current concept would provide and warned that introducing a 3,500-square-foot restaurant could significantly reduce parking needed by existing users. She cited examples of restaurants in other parks, such as Marina Park, Corona del Mar, and Huntington Beach, noting that those locations have substantially more parking capacity. She cautioned against allowing restaurant parking needs to displace access for boaters and other park users. She stressed that the site's value lies in its active, working history and urged the City to protect the park's core purpose rather than allowing commercial uses to overtake it.

Chair Stapleton agreed that the launch ramp plays a critical role in connecting the bay to the harbor and should remain a core feature of the site.

Council Member Blom concurred, noting that restaurant uses typically operate during hours that do not conflict with peak park use, particularly if focused on lunch and dinner service. He added that parks are generally less utilized at night, especially by families with young children.

Chair Stapleton added that, based on his experience at North Star Beach, human-powered water activities such as paddling and canoeing primarily occur in the morning, reinforcing the compatibility of these uses.

Kathy Temple, a longtime Newport Beach resident since 1961 who grew up on Balboa Island, expressed appreciation that the City is moving forward with improvements to the site. She stated a preference for minimizing commercialization of the area, supporting at most a small coffee kiosk but opposing a full restaurant. She cautioned that a waterfront restaurant would likely attract excessive vehicle traffic and over-commercialize the site. She emphasized that the primary value of the location lies in water access and use and urged the City to prioritize

those functions while minimizing auto impacts. She thanked the committee for considering public input.

Mr. Randolph thanked the committee for the discussion on parking and emphasized the historical significance of the site as the initial landing area of Newport Beach. He stated that water access has always been central to the site's history and urged the City to enhance that access rather than limit or diminish it. He noted that the location is currently one of the easiest water access points in the City. While it was once a relatively unknown spot prior to COVID, he explained that social media exposure has significantly increased its use in recent years. He clarified that the area is not a designated swimming beach; however, during anything above a medium high tide, people can walk along the shoreline from this location to Polaris Drive, Morning Star, Evening Star, and even to North Star Beach—a distance of approximately one-third of a mile. He explained that while the sand conditions vary, the shoreline is actively used for walking and access. He also noted that there is parking at the northern end near North Star Beach, as well as additional parking near Westcliff Park. He stated that these existing access points demonstrate that connectivity already exists along this stretch of shoreline. He concluded that, although the area is not a swimming beach, it is a functioning beach used for water access and related activities, and that this role should be preserved and strengthened.

Mr. Womack stated that he strongly prefers the hybrid approach over full commercialization of the site. He emphasized that maximizing public access should remain the City's top priority. He criticized the current RFP process as flawed, noting that it was overly vague, attracted only a single bidder, and discouraged competition because potential bidders were required to speculate on scope and intent. He stated that the emerging hybrid concept, where the City defines the vision, would correct these issues. He urged the City to develop detailed drawings and a clear site plan, then issue a competitive RFP so bidders know exactly what they are proposing on and can compete effectively. He explained that this approach would protect taxpayers by encouraging competition, lowering costs, and allowing the City to retain control of the site. He suggested that the City follow a concession-style model similar to Corona del Mar, where the City builds the infrastructure and leases a small commercial component, such as a coffee shop, to activate the space without overwhelming it. He stated that a modest coffee concession would support activity while preserving the character of the park. He noted that the City is financially strong, with significant park-related revenues from development and property taxes and argued that the City could reasonably invest in building the park itself rather than relinquishing control through a long-term lease. He expressed concern about handing a public asset to a single bidder under a 25- or 50-year lease and stated that this undermines public trust. He recommended a two-step approach: first, issue an RFP to construct the park and facilities based on a City-defined plan; second, issue a separate RFP for an operator to lease and run a small concession. He stated that this structure would ensure public ownership, accountability, and long-term control. Finally, he asked for clarification regarding the architect involved, expressing concern that using a proposer's architect could create an unfair advantage.

Chair Stapleton clarified that the architect is under contract with the City.

Chair Stapleton stated that limiting a restaurant to lunch and dinner service could be beneficial. He explained that this approach would preserve morning access for hand-launch users during their busiest period and could help alleviate parking and access conflicts. He noted that this scheduling balance warranted further consideration.

Mr. Womack added that the City could further reduce vehicle traffic by installing public paddleboard storage racks on site. He suggested that residents could bike or e-bike to the park, retrieve stored boards, and access the water without driving. He stated that this approach would provide low-cost, convenient access for nearby residents, enhance harbor connectivity, and align with past Harbor Commission efforts to improve non-vehicular access to the waterfront.

Chair Stapleton closed public comments.

There was no further discussion on the item.

VI. COMMITTEE ANNOUNCEMENTS OR MATTERS WHICH MEMBERS WOULD LIKE PLACED ON A FUTURE AGENDA FOR DISCUSSION, ACTION OR REPORT (NON-DISCUSSION ITEM)

None.

VII. ADJOURNMENT – 4:25 p.m.

Submitted by:

Clarivel Rodriguez, Administrative Assistant

Approved by:

Joe Stapleton, Chair