

Attachment 1

Draft Minutes of September 18, 2025

CITY OF NEWPORT BEACH

Utilization of Lower Castaways and Aquatic Center Site Ad Hoc Committee Regular Meeting September 18, 2025 – 3:00 p.m.

I. CONVENE MEETING OF THE LOWER CASTAWAYS AQUATIC CENTER SITE AD HOC COMMITTEE TO ORDER – 3:00 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
Dave Webb, Public Works Director
Lauren Wooding-Whitlinger, Real Property Administrator
Jennifer Biddle, Executive Administrative Assistant

III. PUBLIC COMMENTS ON NON-AGENDA ITEMS

None

IV. CONSENT ITEMS

- a. Minutes of July 10, 2025
Recommended Actions:
1. *Approve and file.*

Motion by Committee Member Langford, seconded by Committee Member Kirby, to approve Item IV.A, as amended.

The motion carried by unanimous vote, with Committee Member Hayes abstaining.

V. CURRENT BUSINESS

- a. Request for Proposals for Lower Castaways Redevelopment
Recommended Actions:
1. *Receive and file.*

Real Property Administrator Lauren Wooding-Whitlinger provided an update on the Request for Proposals (RFP) for the redevelopment of Lower Castaways Park, located at the northeast corner of Dover Drive and Coast Highway. She reported that the RFP was prepared and published in August, seeking developer proposals to partner with the City to redevelop the property. She explained that the RFP identified seven key elements to be included in the project with the idea of transforming the site into a low-intensity park that

maintains community use and water recreation access. She noted that the key elements include flexible commercial space for a café or restaurant, storage and launch for human-powered vessels, and relocation of a historically significant monument sign. She explained that the redevelopment was envisioned as a public-private partnership with a ground lease and revenue-sharing model. She advised that proposals are due by October 3rd, with committee review expected in November and City Council consideration of an exclusive negotiating agreement in January 2026. She further reported that a mandatory pre-bid site walk was attended by 12 firms. She reported that two written questions were submitted on September 12th and will be answered today. Lastly, she advised that the proposals are due no later than 1:00 p.m. on Friday, October 3rd, with the anticipation of the ad hoc committee reviewing them in November, with the matter then going before the City Council in January 2026.

Chair Stapleton opened public comments.

Jim Mosher expressed surprise that the RFP had been published without apparent committee review and questioned whether the public-private partnership was the only path being considered. He stressed that the City might still opt for a traditional public park. He expressed concern that the RFP language seemed to imply that one bidder would ultimately be awarded a contract, and he asked for clarification on whether other options remained under consideration.

Chair Stapleton responded that the City reserved the right to reject proposals if none met expectations, at which point the process could return to the drawing board.

Assistant City Manager Seimone Jurjis explained that the committee had previously voted to delegate review of the scope of work to a subcommittee, and that review had been completed. He noted that the committee also directed staff to release the RFP. He confirmed that all proposals and their recommendations would be shared with the committee before any further action.

Adam Leverenz emphasized the significance of Lower Castaways as the City's last undeveloped waterfront property and stressed the importance of getting its redevelopment right, particularly given the potential for a 50-year lease. He voiced concern that the RFP had been issued without full City Council approval, noting fears it could resemble the Balboa Yacht Basin process, where an exclusive agreement appeared to limit public input. He pointed out covenants tied to the property, including the Irvine Company's right to review improvement plans. He questioned whether restaurants or cafés, as proposed in the RFP, would be acceptable given the Irvine Company's nearby plans for a large restaurant and its prohibition on a commercial marina at the site. He also raised questions about the legality of a proposed floating dock within a state marine conservation area and encouraged better coordination with existing public dock facilities, including expanded parking and longer usage hours.

Chair Stapleton noted that connecting Lower Castaways to the adjacent public park would be a desirable way to tie the two areas together.

Chair Stapleton closed public comments.

The item was received and filed.

There was no further discussion on the item.

b. Concept Designs for Public Aquatic Center at Mariners Park and Bonita Creek Park

Recommended Actions:

1. Provide further direction to staff.

Chair Stapleton explained that the City Council had previously explored potential sites for such a facility, noting that Newport Beach, as a world-class city, lacked a public aquatic center despite 14 other cities in Orange County having one. He noted that Lower Castaways was initially considered, but it was determined unsuitable due to costs and site constraints. He further reported that staff had surveyed all City-owned land and identified Mariners Park and Bonita Creek as possible sites. However, he stated that he personally did not support pursuing an aquatic center at Mariners Park, citing community feedback and the importance of public outreach. He emphasized that the idea was never to take over the entire park, contrary to some misconceptions, and clarified that the aquatic center was envisioned as only part of the site. He expressed his ongoing commitment to infrastructure improvements, particularly for West Newport, where a community center has long been desired. Nonetheless, he indicated that Bonita Creek appeared to be the stronger option.

Recreation & Senior Services Director Sean Levin outlined the current aquatic programming provided through an agreement with Newport Mesa Unified School District. He reported that the City offers lap swim at the Marion Bergeson Aquatic Center from 6–9 p.m. on weekdays and 7 a.m.–2 p.m. on weekends, with summer swim lessons at both Marion Bergeson and Newport Harbor. He emphasized the distinction between community pools and competition pools, explaining that community pools are warmer and better suited for lessons and recreational use, while competition pools are typically kept cooler. He further explained that a new facility would also free high school pools for competitive teams. He noted that a city-owned pool would allow expanded programming, including year-round swim lessons, extended lap swim hours, adult programs, and junior lifeguard preparation. He added that the City could accommodate limited club rentals when space allowed, while also meeting community needs more effectively. Lastly, it would address long-standing requests from the senior community for a warmer adult exercise and/or therapy pool.

Larry Ryan, RJM Design Group, noted that he had revisited the program requirements with staff and applied them to both Mariners Park and Bonita Creek. He acknowledged that Mariners Park was a tight site and less suitable, while Bonita Creek appeared to offer a more successful opportunity for the community.

Chair Stapleton requested that the committee hold a straw vote to confirm its position.

Assistant City Manager Jurjis recommended getting a show of hands from the public before commencing a straw vote.

Chair Stapleton asked for a show of hands from the public of those who are opposed to an aquatic center at Mariners Park. No members of the public offered support for an aquatic center at Mariners Park.

At Chair Stapleton's request, the committee held a straw vote to confirm its position. Committee members unanimously agreed not to pursue an aquatic center at Mariners Park.

Chair Stapleton concluded public input on the Mariners Park option and asked if any committee members wished to continue the discussion. Seeing none, he declared the project

formally closed, stating that Mariners Park would not serve as the site for an aquatic center. He thanked the public for their engagement and noted the rare consensus among all parties.

Mr. Ryan presented four conceptual alternatives for an aquatic center at Bonita Creek Park. He explained that the program elements from prior studies had been applied to this site, which offered more space, fewer conflicts, and better integration with existing park infrastructure. He noted that the proposed layout included a 50-meter pool, a therapy pool, and improved parking circulation with convenient drop-off areas. He advised that access would be from University Drive, with potential for a left-turn pocket to ease traffic flow.

Mr. Ryan reported that Option A placed the main building centrally, tying it to existing park amenities. He explained that Option B reoriented the site to improve spectator comfort, ensuring stands faced away from the setting sun. He further explained that Option C incorporated shade canopies, bleachers, and a more separate therapy pool to avoid conflicts between user groups. Lastly, he explained that Option D shifted the building north to enhance bleacher seating and provide optimal viewing conditions, particularly during afternoon events when sun glare is most problematic.

Chair Stapleton noted that only Options A and B had been included in his packet due to a file issue but confirmed that the designs represented variations on the same concept, considering factors such as sun orientation and use of special zones for rentals. He asked Mr. Ryan which option RJM Design Group favored.

Mr. Ryan indicated that Option D was the strongest and could be refined further with staff input.

Chair Stapleton asked the Recreation & Senior Services Director Levin, to outline the impact on existing programming.

Recreation & Senior Services Director Levin confirmed that one softball field would be lost under the proposal, but explained that demand for softball had declined significantly, from 45 teams in past seasons to just nine currently. He stated that displaced teams could be relocated to other fields and that Bonita Creek offered sufficient space, with less congestion than other parks and convenient access for the community.

Public Works Director Dave Webb explained that the existing community center at Bonita Creek, built in the 1990s, was outdated despite recent minor upgrades. He suggested incorporating the community center and its large concrete plaza into the aquatic center project to better integrate overlapping uses such as restrooms and meeting space. He noted that this approach could also address traffic issues by adding an access point from La Vida, with potential left- and right-turn lanes at the signalized intersection. He explained that this would ease circulation and reduce neighborhood traffic impacts. He added that while the athletic fields were relatively fixed in place, the adjacent community center area could be reimagined as part of the project. He reported that turf replacement was already scheduled, and reconfiguring access through the University and La Vida could further improve site functionality.

Councilmember Barto reviewed design Options C and D, remarking that the community center was in greater need of renovation than when she had used it 15 years earlier. She asked about potential improvements to site access, noting the current layout was difficult.

Public Works Director Webb explained that a new left-turn entry from La Vida could be added near the ball fields, creating a through-access to the parking lot. He noted that this would relieve neighborhood congestion, and additional turn lanes could be added if needed.

Chair Stapleton referenced nine softball teams and asked what relocation for them would look like.

Recreation & Senior Services Director Levin noted that Arroyo would likely be the most suitable alternative location, noting that relocating teams there would ensure they still had a home. He advised that the Girls Fast Pitch program was identified as another group that would be affected. He explained that the program has 88 residents enrolled and could also be moved to Arroyo, as the new field and the existing softball infield at that site would accommodate them.

Committee Member Svrcek asked whether the existing community center at Bonita Creek could be repurposed instead of constructing a new building.

Mr. Ryan explained that the requirements for an aquatic complex, such as showers, lockers, and specialized facilities, were substantially different, making reuse impractical.

Chair Stapleton asked about demolishing the old center and replacing it with a single building.

Mr. Ryan noted that demolishing the old center and replacing it with a single integrated building would be preferred and more cost-effective than maintaining two separate facilities.

Committee Member Svrcek asked about surrounding land uses.

Mr. Ryan confirmed that Bay Point apartments bordered the site to the west, with Newport Canyon single-family homes and apartments nearby.

Committee Member Svrcek inquired about lighting for the pool.

Recreation & Senior Services Director Levin explained that lighting was not considered an issue, as the park was already equipped with athletic field lights used until 9:30 or 10:00 p.m. most nights.

Chair Stapleton agreed that Bonita Creek was well located, with convenient access from the 73 Freeway and Bristol Street. He observed that residents already traveled to Corona del Mar for lap swimming, making Bonita Creek a strong candidate for a new facility.

Councilmember Blom asked about the current status of the existing building in the Facilities Financial Plan (FFP) and Capital Improvement Plan (CIP).

Public Works Director Webb responded that while a bathroom refresh and other minor upgrades had recently been completed, the building, constructed around 1990, was aging and would likely need replacement within the next 10 years.

Councilmember Blom recommended including the area of the existing building in the overall project. He explained that if the City invested significant money into a new facility, it should avoid having two separate buildings side by side, one of which would soon require replacement. Instead, he supported a hybrid model combining a community center and

aquatic center into one structure, with an entrance point designed so that parking access would flow through the building. He noted that this would allow for proper entry control, rather than leaving the facility open and unchecked. He added that while he was not fully aligned with proposed ingress and egress changes via La Vida, he was open to any plan that worked best overall. He emphasized that the goal should be to increase utilization of one of Newport Beach's most underused parks, creating a stronger amenity for the community.

Chair Stapleton agreed, noting that combining the new aquatic facility with the replacement of the old community center would be cost-effective and better integrated with the park.

Committee Member Kirby commented that lighting technology had improved significantly, reducing light pollution, and since the park was already lit, additional lighting for the aquatic center should not create an issue for the community.

Chair Stapleton asked if the lights had been retrofitted.

Recreation & Senior Services Director Levin confirmed that the existing field lights had been retrofitted with LEDs, and any pool lighting would be comparable to what was already in place.

Committee Member Hayes asked whether nearby residents might strongly oppose the project once they became aware, potentially resulting in large crowds at future meetings.

Chair Stapleton acknowledged that past projects had faced resistance from neighbors reluctant to accept change. However, he described Bonita Creek as an underutilized park compared to Mariners Park or Lower Castaways, with weekend activity but far less congestion. He noted that while apartments were located on both sides of the park, the site itself was tucked away as far from Newport Canyon as possible. He suggested it would be wise for himself, staff, or other committee members to proactively meet with the Newport Canyon HOA, which he described as active and strong, to discuss the proposal before it advanced further. He stated that while Dover Shores residents had submitted only a single email opposing the Bonita Creek location, Newport Canyon should be consulted directly to avoid unexpected opposition. He emphasized that the area already experienced significant traffic from Jamboree and the University, and that light, noise, and activity impacts would be minimal compared to other sites.

Committee Member Hayes asked whether the committee was locked into a fixed pool size, noting that Bonita Creek appeared to have a larger footprint than Mariners Park or Lower Castaways. He questioned whether this additional space might allow for a larger pool or an expanded design.

Mr. Ryan explained that while the Bonita Creek site was somewhat larger than Lower Castaways, the additional space was largely allocated to parking. He noted that the program elements remained the same, including a 50-meter Olympic-size pool, therapy pool, deck space, and related facilities.

Committee Member Hayes asked if this was comparable to the other 14 cities.

Mr. Ryan clarified that it was comparable to Lower Castaways. He explained that the design was based on programmatic needs previously confirmed with staff and was intended as a framework for how the site could accommodate those elements, including circulation and parking.

Chair Stapleton clarified that the pool is 50 meters.

Committee Member Hayes questioned how the pool would accommodate water polo and smaller children's swim instructions.

Chair Stapleton clarified that smaller children's instruction would be housed in the therapy pool.

Committee Member Hayes asked about the size of the therapy pool and the age of younger swimmers. He recommended consulting with aquatic experts on pool needs.

Mr. Ryan clarified that the therapy pool was approximately 1,250 square feet.

Chair Stapleton agreed that further consultation with aquatic experts would be needed as the project advanced.

Committee Member Hayes emphasized that this was a "one-time opportunity" to build the facility correctly and questioned whether the size of the pool was correct.

Chair Stapleton explained that if the pool were made any larger, it would not be up to competition standards.

Councilmember Blum added that, unlike neighborhoods such as Dover Shores, where private pools were common, the Bonita Creek area had far fewer backyard pools. He felt nearby residents might view the project as an amenity rather than a burden. He described the proposal as a rallying point for the community and praised the committee's work in shaping it.

Councilmember Barto noted strong demand for master's swimming, with residents currently traveling to Corona del Mar and struggling to find space. She agreed that the location was accessible and that feedback from recently built pools at Estancia and Newport Harbor should be considered.

Committee Member Svrcek inquired if the pool would be funded through a public-private financing.

Chair Stapleton acknowledged that while Lower Castaways had initially been considered a more prominent site, Bonita Creek offered practical advantages and sufficient space to meet the city's long-term aquatic needs. He stated that, based on Committee Member Langford's comments, he would make a motion to proceed with a cost study to determine the financial requirements of the project. He noted that while the expense would be significant, it would not approach the \$50 million level associated with Lower Castaways since there were no seawalls or similar challenges at Bonita Creek. He added that if community members or private partners wished to contribute their name or support to the project, that would be welcomed. He emphasized that the matter remained open for discussion but that moving forward with a cost analysis was the necessary next step.

Committee Member Langford stated that residents on his side of the bay viewed the proposed aquatic center as a valuable amenity. He noted that while the project was originally envisioned for the west side, he was surprised that the location had not gained traction but emphasized that his community would welcome it. He highlighted the strong demand for

swimming lessons, water polo, and master's programs, adding that the facility would also complement development in the nearby airport area. He observed that the project could serve as a connector between different parts of Newport Beach, offering benefits he had not anticipated until seeing the plans.

Chair Stapleton noted that residents in the 2000 new housing units near the airport would be within a five-minute drive of Bonita Creek, where few parks currently exist. He acknowledged that while geographically farther from the west side, he pointed out that access via the 55, 73, or Bristol Street could make travel times comparable, particularly during morning and evening commutes.

Chair Stapleton stated that pursuing a cost study would be the logical next step. He suggested that staff, along with committee members, meet with nearby homeowner associations to explain the concept and gather feedback before returning with further discussion. He added that by the time proposals from Lower Castaways were received, the committee would also have preliminary cost estimates for Bonita Creek. He noted that the architects could then refine the design to reflect a single integrated building, with ingress and egress coordinated alongside Public Works, to ensure the project was functional and well-received. He concluded that the committee now had a likely location identified and should focus on developing the plan cohesively within the same sphere of influence.

Chair Stapleton opened public comments.

Mr. Jim Mosher thanked the committee for its formal vote eliminating Mariners Park, noting it clarified the project's direction. He stated that his earlier confusion about the Lower Castaways RFP arose because no vote had been recorded in the previous minutes. He also observed that Bonita Creek Park was not listed as a possible location and asked what additional sites had since been considered. He noted that nearby apartment complexes have small swimming pools, which, while limited, still provide some resident access and should be acknowledged when discussing the absence of aquatic facilities. He raised concerns about the therapy pool placement in Options B and D, emphasizing that older adults and parents with young children would prefer it closer to restrooms and changing rooms. He further questioned the accuracy of the design renderings, stating that the sun appeared to be shown as coming from due north, whereas in Newport Beach it comes from the south or west in late afternoon. He also remarked that palm trees depicted as shade sources are generally ineffective in providing meaningful shade.

Chair Stapleton acknowledged that Bay Point, Newport Canyon, and Newport North each had their own pools but noted that they were recreational in nature and not comparable to a public aquatic center. He stated that the surrounding communities would likely welcome the opportunity for a facility of this scale and quality. He thanked Mr. Mosher for his comments and assured him that the architects would carefully consider sun orientation to ensure the design avoided problems with sunrise and sunset glare.

Mr. Adam Leverenz stated that siting a City aquatic center had clearly presented challenges and expressed appreciation that public concerns about Lower Castaways and Mariners had been recognized and acted upon. He hoped that Bonita Creek would represent a "third time's the charm" solution, noting that it was already a lit athletic facility, appeared to have fewer nearby residents, and was buffered by vacant spaces. He echoed Councilmember Blum's remarks that it would be unwise to place a new aquatic center next to an outdated 1990s building in need of work. He supported the idea of combining the projects into one integrated facility to avoid parallel renovation costs. He also reiterated a suggestion from

prior meetings about including family-friendly features. He referenced comments about a splash pad, noting their popularity with children and families, and encouraged consideration of either a splash pad or a lazy river as complementary amenities. He added that a smaller pool for children could be designed alongside a therapy pool for seniors, given that Bonita Creek appeared to have enough space to allow flexibility in programming.

Mr. Mark Arblaster, a 37-year Newport Beach resident and founder of the Slammers Newport Mesa soccer club, expressed support for a city aquatic center but highlighted the shortage of lighted soccer fields. He noted there are over 100 club soccer teams in Newport Beach with limited field access. His club uses field five at Bonita Canyon Sports Park, which lacks lights and relies on diesel-powered units that provide minimal illumination. Each evening, 200–250 players across six to eight teams share the field, which must close four months annually for turf recovery. He questioned why Bonita Creek was considered a surplus field and suggested it could serve as a soccer-specific venue with lights. He recommended the City invest in artificial turf at existing fields to expand availability and consider adding a futsal court. He emphasized that his comments were not in opposition to the aquatic center but intended to stress the urgent need for improved soccer facilities.

Chair Stapleton thanked the committee and congratulated them for identifying a potential site for the aquatic center. He explained that other locations, such as the Dunes, had been evaluated but were not feasible with the Dunes being county-owned and the Newport Elementary campus already heavily used. He stated that the City had effectively exhausted all options, and Bonita Creek had emerged as the most viable site. He acknowledged the ongoing demand for soccer fields and assured that efforts would continue to find solutions for that need.

MOTION: Chair Stapleton moved to proceed with a cost study, meet with the Newport Canyon HOA and other nearby communities, and further review the project, seconded by Councilmember Blom. The motion carried as follows:

AYES: Hayes, Kirby, Langford, Svrcek, Barto, Blom, Stapleton
NOES: None
ABSENT: None
ABSTAIN: None

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 – 3:58 p.m.

Submitted by:

Clarivel Rodriguez, Administrative Assistant

Approved by:

Joe Stapleton, Chair

DRAFT