

**CITY OF NEWPORT BEACH****Parks, Beaches & Recreation Commission  
Regular Meeting  
March 3, 2026 – 5:00 p.m.**

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**I. CONVENE MEETING OF THE PARKS BEACHES & RECREATION COMMISSION TO ORDER – 5:00 p.m.****II. ROLL CALL**

Present: Anne Yelsey, Chair  
Amy Waunch, Vice Chair  
Hassan Archer, Commissioner  
Diane Daruty, Commissioner  
Keira Kirby, Commissioner  
Kate Malouf, Commissioner

Absent: Travis Piridy, Commissioner (excused)

Staff: Sean Levin, Recreation & Senior Services Director  
Justin Schmillen, Recreation & Senior Services Deputy Director  
John Salazar, Acting Deputy Municipal Operations Director  
Kevin Pekar, Parks and Trees Superintendent  
Mariah Stinson, Administrative Support Specialist  
Kyle Aube, Associate Civil Engineer  
Ben Zdeba, Acting Deputy Community Development Director

**III. PRESENTATION****A. Presentation to Community Service Award Recipient Karen Yelsey**

*Recognizing Karen Yelsey for her leadership, service and contributions to the community through the Parent Teacher Association (PTA), Newport Mesa Unified School District (NMUSD), and Newport Beach Police Foundation (NBPF) over the last four decades.*

Recreation & Senior Services Deputy Director Justin Schmillen reported that Karen Yelsey has been selected for a Community Service Award, adding that she began her service to the City as a Parent Teacher Association (PTA) volunteer and later President, before becoming a 16-year member of the Newport Mesa Unified School District (NMUSD) Board, including four years as its President. He added that Mrs. Yelsey was an advocate and active liaison for community programs, including the Mayor's Youth Council, the Spirit Run, and Newport Beach Special Olympics. He stated that she was also instrumental in creating the School Resource Officer partnership with the Newport Beach Police Department. He added that she also chaired the Newport Beach Police Foundation (NBPF) Board.

Recreation & Senior Services Director Sean Levin reported on observing Mrs. Yelsey's dedication to helping children while working with the Mayor's Youth Council. He thanked her for her service to the community and the City.

Commissioner Daruty stated that Mrs. Yelsey is heartfelt and open-minded. She lauded Mrs. Yelsey's support of the Spirit Run and added that she is happy to bestow this honor.

Commissioner Kirby stated that nearly all residents know of Mrs. Yelsey and her community involvement through both the City and the NMUSD. She stated that the award is well-deserved and congratulated her.

Commissioner Malouf stated that Mrs. Yelsey is legendary and that she would not be doing what she is now for the City without Mrs. Yelsey's mentorship and advice. She commended Mrs. Yelsey's listening ability for all groups, adding that it is an honor to be part of this recognition. She added that she enjoys serving on the NBPF Board with Mrs. Yelsey.

Chair Yelsey read a note of commendation from Mrs. Yelsey's children for her past work with school children and her ongoing work with the NBPF, making the community a better place.

Mrs. Yelsey expressed her gratitude and appreciation to the Commission for the award. She stated that she and her husband have loved living in Newport Beach for 50 years. She noted that her grandchildren will keep her interested and involved in the City's schools even in retirement. She accepted the award.

**IV. NOTICE TO THE PUBLIC**

**V. PUBLIC COMMENTS ON CONSENT CALENDAR**

None

**VI. CONSENT CALENDAR**

**A. Minutes of the Parks, Beaches and Recreation Commission Meeting of February 3, 2026**

*Recommendation: Waive reading of subject minutes, approve and order filed.*

**B. MOD Activity Report**

*Recommendation: Receive/file Report of past and upcoming projects and events.*

**C. RSS Activity Report**

*Recommendation: Receive/file Report of past and upcoming projects and events.*

**D. Request by Slammers Futbol Club for Weekend Light Usage at Arroyo Park**

*Recommendation:* Approve the request from the Slammers Futbol Club to use lights on Sunday, March 22 & March 29 at Arroyo Park from Dusk to 8 p.m.

Chair Yelsey opened public comment.

Jim Mosher noted that the Municipal Operations Department (MOD) Report in Item No. VI-B reported that the Newport Bay Trash Interceptor collected 5.5 tons of trash during the February 18<sup>th</sup> storm, while 15 tons of trash were collected with the boom near the Newport Aquatic Center, in addition to the trash collected on the City's beaches. He inquired whether the trash collected on the beaches was predominantly man-made or vegetation. He noted that the Commission's light usage decision in Item No. VI-D can be appealed to the City Council.

Chair Yelsey closed public comment.

**Motion by Chair Yelsey**, seconded by Commissioner Malouf, to approve item VI. CONSENT CALENDAR.

**The motion carried by unanimous vote.**

**VII. CURRENT BUSINESS**

**A. Bonita Creek Park Synthetic Turf Replacement and LED Lighting Retrofit Project**

*Recommendation:* Review and provide feedback for the proposed synthetic turf replacement, LED lighting retrofit and park upgrades at Bonita Creek Park.

Recreation & Senior Services Deputy Director Schmillen reported that the City installed a synthetic turf field at Bonita Creek Park in 2015, which has been used regularly for youth sports activities but has reached the end of its useful life.

Associate Civil Engineer Kyle Aube reported that Bonita Creek Park was the first of three City athletic fields to be converted to synthetic turf, occurring in 2015, and since then it has serviced youth flag football, soccer, and softball, along with adult slow pitch softball. He added that the service life of the field was anticipated to be 10 years, noting that this window has expired.

Associate Civil Engineer Aube reported that the Public Works Department has worked with youth sports leagues to figure out a better striping arrangement for the new turf to maximize use with fewer confusing field lines. He added that the dirt infield on the softball field will also be replaced by synthetic turf for better maintenance, while the backstop fencing and dugout benches will also be replaced. He added that the existing lighting will be upgraded to Light-Emitting Diode (LED) lighting, noting that the existing lighting is substandard in addition to being costlier and less efficient. He reported that the drainage system will also be improved.

Associate Civil Engineer Aube reported that the benefits of synthetic turf are an increase in field capacity, especially after rain events, and limited maintenance costs, while switching to more energy-efficient LED lights will also save money for the City. He reported on the preventative maintenance efforts to maximize the life of the City's synthetic turf, including anti-microbial spraying applications for safety.

In response to Commissioner Kirby's inquiry, Associate Civil Engineer Aube confirmed that the LED lights will create less light pollution because they are more narrowly focused on the field. He noted that the LED lights installed at Arroyo Park reduced light pollution in the neighboring community.

In response to Commissioner Archer's inquiry, Associate Civil Engineer Aube clarified that gaps between the current lights leave dark spots on the field, while LED lights are also brighter.

In response to Chair Yelsey's inquiry, Associate Civil Engineer Aube clarified that the only changes to the dugouts are replacement benches.

In response to Chair Yelsey's inquiry, Recreation & Senior Services Deputy Director Schmillen reported that City staff worked with youth sports organizations on the synthetic turf infield. He added that benefits include cleaner bounces, less time expended preparing the infield, and resilience to puddles after rain events. He added that Arroyo Park has a synthetic turf infield that has been deemed successful.

In response to Commissioner Archer's inquiry, Associate Civil Engineer Aube reported that there were no community comments on the proposed lighting changes.

Chair Yelsey opened public comment.

Ms. Curran inquired if the area outside of the playing fields would remain natural grass.

Associate Civil Engineer Aube confirmed that the area outside of the playing fields will remain natural grass.

Chair Yelsey closed public comment.

**Motion by Commissioner Archer**, seconded by Commissioner Daruty, to approve the proposed synthetic turf replacement, LED lighting retrofit and park upgrades at Bonita Creek Park.

**The motion carried by unanimous vote.**

**B. General Plan Update: Final GPUSC/GPAC Draft Harbor, Bay, and Beaches Element, Natural Resources Element, and Recreation Element**

*Recommendation: Review the Final GPUSC/GPAC Draft Harbor, Bay, and Beaches Element, Natural Resources Element, and Recreation Element, which have been revised to incorporate the Commission's input from October 2025. The Commission may provide additional input and should conduct a vote to consider recommending the City Council adopt them as part of the comprehensive General Plan Update anticipated in May or June 2026.*

Acting Deputy Community Development Director Ben Zdeba noted that this is the fourth time the Commission has discussed the ongoing comprehensive update to the City's General Plan. He reported on the updating process, noting that the City is in its final steps, with staff presently seeking formal approval from each board, committee, and commission on the final draft elements that are relevant to their work. He noted that the Commission has previously provided feedback on drafts, adding that staff seeks a recommendation from the Commission for the City Council to approve these final drafts.

Commissioner Kirby commended how responsive Acting Deputy Community Development Director Zdeba was to the changes recommended by the Commission and its General Plan Ad Hoc Committee.

Commissioner Daruty agreed.

Chair Yelsey agreed.

Chair Yelsey opened public comment.

Mr. Mosher reported submitting written comments, noting some defects in the current drafts. He stated that the Draft Harbor, Bay, and Beaches Element is an imperfect marriage of the previous Harbor and Bay Element, with beach-related policies taken from other elements. He expressed concerns about Policy No. HBB-5.5 assigning matters of coastal resilience to the Water Quality/Coastal Tidelands (WQ/CT) Committee despite the City Charter stating that the Commission should be the body advising the City Council on all beach-related matters. He stated that Figure NR-4 in the Natural Resources Element is missing many views from parks and other locations. He stated that the Draft Recreation Element includes a prominent image of a surfer but does not discuss surfing in any detail.

Laura Curran stated that the Natural Resources Element calls for the use of native plants in landscaping, a focus on water conservation, and the extensive retention of open space. She encouraged the Commission to consider how parks fulfill all three of these goals, citing positive experiences enjoying Civic Center Park. She commended City staff's work on keeping the promise made to residents at the park's creation of giving Civic Center Park a garden-like feel. She encouraged the commissioners to take her formal tour of the park to learn more about its native plants and wildlife.

Chair Yelsey closed public comment.

In response to Commissioner Kirby's inquiry, Acting Deputy Community Development Director Zdeba confirmed that Figure NR-4 can be updated in the future. He added that the figure is vastly improved from the current General Plan and can continue to improve.

In response to Commissioner Daruty's inquiry, Acting Deputy Community Development Director Zdeba agreed that the addition of beaches to the current Harbor and Bay Element is imperfect. He reported that the General Plan Advisory Committee (GPAC) and General Plan Update Steering Committee (GPUSC) had a great discussion of who should be charged with beach oversight as it relates to matters such as sand replenishment. He stated that the GPAC found it to be more closely aligned with the WQ/CT Committee but noted that the Council can change the designation to this Commission. He added that the draft has only recommended language and remains a draft until approved by the Council. He stated that this concept can be flagged for Council review as part of its General Plan discussion.

In response to Chair Yelsey's inquiry, Recreation & Senior Services Director Levin confirmed that staff would like a recommendation to the Council. Acting Deputy Community Development Director Zdeba clarified that staff requests a Commission vote to support moving the drafts forward for Council adoption. He added that the Commission can include comments with its recommendation, such as its thoughts on the concept of the WQ/CT Commission being the point group for beach-related matters like sand replenishment.

**Motion by Commissioner Kirby**, seconded by Commissioner Daruty, to approve the item with a requested amendment to Draft Harbor, Bay, And Beaches Element Policy No. HBB-5.5 stating that the Parks, Beaches and Recreation Commission should be considered as an authority on beaches in partnership with the Water Quality/Coastal Tidelands Committee, if appropriate.

**The motion carried unanimously.**

**C. Continuation of Reforestation Request – 1441 Sandcastle Dr. – Front 4(a), 4(b), and 5**

*Recommendation: Consider approving the reforestation request of two Lemon-Scented Gum Eucalyptus (Corymbia citriodora) located at 1441 Sandcastle Drive due to a lack of structural roots present in a review of documentation. Also, Staff recommends PB&R Commission consider the reforestation request of a third Eucalyptus (with ID 8656649) due to various private property damage issues.*

*The applicant, Mr. Ammer Alselham (residing at 1441 Sandcastle Dr.), has provided the required association board meeting minutes along with the association board signature of approval to remove and replace the trees. If approved by the Commission, there will be a one-for-one replacement tree for each tree removed with Magnolia "Little Gem" (Magnolia grandiflora "Little Gem") 36-inch box trees installed at the applicant's cost.*

Parks and Trees Superintendent Kevin Pekar reported that this item is the continuation of a reforestation request by Mr. Ammer Alselham of 1441 Sandcastle Dr. for three lemon-scented gum eucalyptus trees. He added that the home was extensively remodeled and newly occupied in 2025. He noted that the Commission saw the video clips included with the application at the February meeting documenting debris from the trees and damage caused by droppings and falling branches. He referenced the discussion at the February meeting and confirmed that eucalyptus beetle frass could be causing some of the stains, adding that the City has a prevention program for eucalyptus beetles that has shown some success.

Parks and Trees Superintendent Pekar reported that, since the last meeting, staff has investigated root pruning conducted during the home's reconstruction before the driveway and segments of the sidewalk, curb and gutter were repaved. He reported that the contractor stated that he did not remove any roots but also did not find any concerning ones. In fact, photos illustrate no large structural roots, which concerns staff, as there have been issues in the Westcliff neighborhood with eucalyptus tree instability. He added that the contractor reported a major limb failure on one of the trees by the driveway during reconstruction, providing pictures. He stated that the updated recommendation from staff is to approve the reforestation of the two trees next to the driveway and let the Commission also consider reforesting the tree on the south side of the property.

Parks and Trees Superintendent Pekar reported that the recommended replacement for the neighborhood is the Little Gem magnolia, noting that it can have an issue with tuliptree scale insect, although they have not been a concern in this community. He confirmed that the requisite area was notified of this meeting, adding that the applicant has received Homeowners Association (HOA) approval.

In response to Chair Yelsey's inquiries, Parks and Trees Superintendent Pekar confirmed that the root situation is critical and the lack of structural roots increases the likelihood of the trees causing damage. He stated that the trees would be considered a moderate to high risk level due to the new information gained over the past month about their roots. He theorized that the lack of structural roots could be from an inability to penetrate the base of the road and a failure to grow in other directions. He added that it is possible that the third tree has a similar root system but noted that there was no reconstruction work around it for a root system inspection. He reported that there have been eucalyptus tree limb failures in this area, including two on the tree to the west side of the driveway, but there have not been any complete tree failures in this area. He noted that the documented repeated limb failure is considered a cause to remove the tree west of the driveway.

Commissioners Kirby and Malouf thanked staff for obtaining the additional documentation based on the previous meeting's discussion.

In response to Commissioner Malouf's inquiries, Parks and Trees Superintendent Pekar stated that the tree to the south of the house appears to have a good structure

and canopy with no documentation of limb failure. He stated that it is in good condition and would likely be at a low to moderate risk of failure.

Commissioner Daruty stated that the evidence of potential danger from the trees is helpful in her decision-making and leaves a cleaner record.

Chair Yelsey opened public comment.

Steven Bright reported that he is a neighbor across Sandcastle Dr., the HOA Treasurer, and speaking on behalf of the applicant, stated that this is an easy decision due to the evidence of damage. Speaking on behalf of the HOA, he pondered why there would be any controversy if there was no net loss of trees. He reported that he has seen many eucalyptus tree limbs fall throughout the community over his 17 years living there, criticizing the infrequent City pruning. He added that the neighborhood is in a very high fire risk zone, so they should remove eucalyptus trees because they are full of pitch and oil, noting that a dozen other trees on Sandcastle Dr. are equally problematic.

Chair Yelsey closed public comment.

**Motion by Commissioner Malouf**, seconded by Chair Yelsey, to approve the reforestation of the two trees next to the driveway and deny the reforestation of the third tree (ID 8656649).

**The motion carried by unanimous vote.**

**D. America 250 Plaque Donation – John Wayne Park**

*Recommendation: Review and approve The Newport Beach Foundation's request to donate a plaque at John Wayne Park commemorating the United States of America's 250th Anniversary and forward to City Council for consideration.*

Parks and Trees Superintendent Pekar reported that The Newport Beach Foundation (NBF) has requested a dedicated plaque at John Wayne Park to commemorate the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the United States. He added that the NBF would be paying for the plaque and its pedestal, with installation to occur in May or June next to the plaque recognizing the country's bicentennial. He noted that the City Council would have final approval of the plaque, and staff is requesting the Commission's recommendation on the plaque. He added that the plaque is comparable to the one recently installed in Corona del Mar, recognizing the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Duke Kahanamoku's heroism.

Chair Yelsey stated that the plaque is a great idea and thanked the NBF.

In response to Commissioner Kirby's inquiry, Parks and Trees Superintendent Pekar reported that staff is planning to remove the bicentennial plaque from its concrete and form a matching pedestal.

Chair Yelsey opened public comment.

Will O'Neill reported that John Wayne Park is an ideal place for the plaque because several others there recognize American history. He stated that the plaque's verbiage was created by the NBF, and the project will be entirely funded by the NBF. He clarified that the plan is to put both the bicentennial and 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary plaques side-by-side on the same pedestal with an increased elevation from the current foot-level bicentennial plaque location, but still low enough as not to obstruct views.

Commissioner Daruty stated that the plaque is a great idea.

Commissioner Archer expressed his support for the plaque.

Ms. Curran commended Mr. O'Neill's reference to the Daughters of the American Revolution in his application. She stated she would like the application to request more information from the applicants.

Mr. Mosher inquired procedurally why this is only a Commission recommendation to the City Council and is not something that the Commission can approve on its own, like many other comparable donations, citing benches as an example.

Chair Yelsey closed public comment.

In response to Chair Yelsey's inquiry, Recreation & Senior Services Director Levin clarified that plaques are not allowed per Council Policy. City Council would have to waive its policy to accept it.

**Motion by Commissioner Archer**, seconded by Commissioner Malouf, to approve The Newport Beach Foundation's request to donate a plaque at John Wayne Park commemorating the United States of America's 250th Anniversary and forward to City Council for consideration.

**The motion carried unanimously.**

## **VIII. ANNOUNCEMENTS/FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS**

Recreation & Senior Services Deputy Director Schmillen reported that the 2026 Youth Track Meet of Champions will be held on Friday at Newport Harbor High School with over 400 students registered. He stated that the Mayor's Egg Race will be held on March 28<sup>th</sup> at Civic Center Park. He added that Camp Newport registration opens on March 26<sup>th</sup>, encouraging residents to be ready to apply for the most popular programs when registration opens at 8:00 a.m. He reported that a festive St. Patrick's Day party will be held at the Organization for Active Seniors in Society (OASIS) Senior Center.

Acting Deputy Municipal Operations Director John Salazar reported that April 25<sup>th</sup> will be the City's annual e-waste and shredding event. He added that they do not

have a formal mulch give-away, but that mulch can be obtained for free at Bonita Canyon Sports Park, Grant Howald Park, and the Avon Street Parking Lot.

Commissioner Daruty recommended forming an Ad Hoc Committee to discuss the City Council's recent amendments to Policy G-1 with City staff on a more in-depth level to help inform the Commission about the implications.

Parks and Trees Superintendent Pekar clarified that the Commission could form an Ad Hoc Committee to more robustly discuss the policy changes with staff, or the amendments could be presented to the full Commission without the additional step of an Ad Hoc Committee.

Commissioner Daruty recommended an Ad Hoc Committee because of a smaller setting's ability to take deeper dives into a subject, noting the efficiency of the General Plan Ad Hoc Committee.

Parks and Trees Superintendent Pekar noted that such a staff presentation would be strictly informational.

Commissioner Daruty agreed and stated that it would allow a more intense initial study with only three commissioners present.

Recreation & Senior Services Director Levin noted that an item to consider an ad hoc would need to be agendaized at a future meeting.

In response to Commissioner Kirby's inquiries, Recreation & Senior Services Director Levin reported that City staff is in discussions with the State about the expiring lease for the 15<sup>th</sup> St. bathroom, which is holding up the work. He added that the project is otherwise funded and ready to begin. He added that the new park signage will be coming back to the Commission at a future meeting.

## **IX. PUBLIC COMMENTS ON NON-AGENDA ITEMS**

Mr. Mosher reported that the City Council recently approved an Ordinance creating new rules about shade structures on the City's beaches, expressing concerns that its phrasing is too broad. He lamented that the Ordinance was not reviewed by the Commission. He expressed concerns about the amendments to Council Policy G-1 and how it interacts with the Commission's scope of work, noting past Commission difficulties in properly interpreting Policy G-1 and an applicant's inability in the future to appeal decisions to the Policy's authors.

Ms. Curran agreed that the stakes are high on tree-related hearings. She noted that there were no printed meeting Agendas and staff reports available in the lobby outside of the Council Chambers, adding that the video screen outside says that the next meeting in this space is Thursday's Planning Commission meeting. She

encouraged having QR codes included in the new park signage for easier access to information about the parks on the City's website.

Commissioner Malouf thanked Mr. Mosher for his comments that questioned why the beach structure Ordinance was not brought to the Commission, agreeing that they should have been included in the process. She stated that the subject matter falls under the Commission's purview. She clarified that she does not fully disagree with the Ordinance but would have preferred it if the Commission was included in the process.

**X. ADJOURNMENT – 6:33 p.m.**

Submitted by:

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Mariah Stinson, Administrative Support Specialist

Approved by:

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Anne Yelsey, Chair