

CITY OF NEWPORT BEACH

Lower Castaways and Aquatic Center Site Ad Hoc Committee Regular Meeting July 10, 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
Brian Cordeiro, Recreation and Senior Services Manager
Clarivel Rodriguez, Administrative Assistant

Councilmember Blom arrived at 3:19 p.m.
Councilmember Barto arrived at 4:45 p.m.

III. PUBLIC COMMENTS ON NON-AGENDA ITEMS

None

IV. CURRENT BUSINESS

a. Potential Uses for Lower Castaways

Recommended Actions:

1. Discuss potential uses for Lower Castaways

Chair Stapleton acknowledged the significance of the Lower Castaways site, describing it as a genuine opportunity. He observed that he had driven past the site for more than 20 years, noting its use primarily for staging heavy machinery. He emphasized the site's historical importance, referring to it as the birthplace of Newport Beach in 1870. He stated that everyone present shares a strong passion for the community and a common desire to see a meaningful project developed at the location.

Chair Stapleton reflected on his service on the Harbor Commission more than a decade ago and his participation in early planning efforts. He noted that the current commission has also been tasked with considering alternative uses for the site. He expressed support for the development of a world-class aquatic center but reported that the proposal has not received the four City Council votes required to move forward. He explained that, as a result, other possibilities must now be explored.

Chair Stapleton explained that there remains a strong community need for an aquatic center in Newport Beach, and if the Lower Castaways site is not viable, the community must

identify another location. He stated that he has been working with Assistant City Manager Seimone Jurjis and Councilmember Noah Blom to evaluate other city-owned properties that may be suitable for such a facility. He stated that the central question is what the site should become if it is not used for an aquatic facility. He reported that individuals outside of the meeting had expressed interest in potential legacy projects for the site. Accordingly, he suggested that the City consider issuing a Request for Proposals (RFP) to determine community interest in developing the property.

Chair Stapleton emphasized the importance of retaining a human-powered launch ramp at the site, noting its existing use by kayaks, paddleboards, and other non-motorized vessels, supported by adequate parking. He stated that such use aligns well with the site's character and described the land-to-bay connection as essential. He expressed support for visitor-serving amenities, particularly a park and green space, along with a historical element recognizing the site as the birthplace of Newport Beach. At a minimum, he suggested relocating the existing monument across the street. He also highlighted the value of connecting Upper and Lower Castaways through a staircase or similar structure and emphasized the need to address traffic challenges at the intersection.

Chair Stapleton noted community interest in a restaurant on the site, referencing the former Castaways Club, and expressed support for a visitor- and resident-serving dining component if consistent with the overall vision. He concluded by recommending that if the City issues a Request for Proposals (RFP), it should include consideration of community-funded legacy investments with potential revenue-sharing opportunities, providing public benefit without direct City expenditure, and allowing the aquatic center to be pursued at an alternative location.

Chair Stapleton invited input from committee members and noted the deliberate inclusion of representatives from the Harbor Commission, Planning Commission, and Parks, Beaches, and Recreation Commission—as well as long-time community members—to ensure a comprehensive and collaborative conversation.

Committee Member Jon Langford agreed with the Mayor's comments and supported the concept of a long-term ground lease in which a private tenant would assume the upfront development costs. He noted that such an arrangement would relieve the City of significant capital expenses, allowing it instead to focus on connectivity and infrastructure improvements. He emphasized the value of preparing the site as a development pad for a private operator to construct and manage a high-quality facility, thereby avoiding the need for the City to undertake a large-scale project directly. He further observed that Newport Beach already has several successful examples of long-term leases with private operators, which enable private investment with sufficient lease terms to ensure cost recovery.

Chair Stapleton referenced the Irvine Company, which owns property in the vicinity. He noted that as long as any proposed development does not conflict with the Irvine Company's interests—particularly regarding competing commercial activity—the company would likely be supportive of an appropriate and complementary use on the site. He mentioned the existing contract with Bluewater Grill and the importance of ensuring any new use aligns with existing agreements. He acknowledged that this contract was likely the result of a negotiated trade involving residential units and the Lower Castaways site between past councilmembers. He concluded by stating that the proposed approach represents a significant opportunity for the City, but any future plans must take existing partnerships and agreements into consideration. He remained optimistic that the Irvine Company would support the right kind of development at this location.

Committee member Langford noted that the Irvine Company serves as both a restaurant landlord and boat slip operator, which informs its perspective. He clarified that while a new launch site exists across the street, known as the Blue Finial, the current discussion concerns a different type of ramp located in a protected area without docks. He explained that the Irvine Company maintains a no-slip policy for a site across the highway designated for a future restaurant, though development has not yet begun. He noted that, from the company's viewpoint, additional activity in the area—such as another restaurant—could strengthen the overall vibrancy of the district and support the viability of multiple establishments. He also highlighted the pedestrian bridge under the Pacific Coast Highway, which enhances safe and convenient access to the area.

Chair Stapleton emphasized the importance of maintaining a good relationship with the Irvine Company and also emphasized that the committee's focus should remain on defining a meaningful and community-serving use for the site. He noted that if a compelling plan emerges, there is reason to believe that the Irvine Company would be supportive. He recalled that the company had supported the pool concept, which was not viewed as competition, suggesting potential alignment with other community-serving ideas.

Committee Member Langford speaker addressed the role of the California Coastal Commission and noted that a restaurant could qualify as a visitor-serving amenity, which aligns with the Commission's priorities. He advised that the inclusion of food service helps fulfill the goal of making coastal resources accessible to the broader public, which could strengthen the case for approval. He also reiterated support for features such as a human-powered launch ramp, a connecting path between Upper and Lower Castaways, and an extended bike trail along the waterfront. He suggested that these components could serve as public benefits required by the Coastal Commission for any development on the site.

Committee Member Keira Kirby noted that several elements, such as the hand-launch area and the connection between Upper and Lower Castaways, were included in prior concept plans and schematics developed under a previous City Council. She suggested that these ideas be revisited, allowing the City to build on prior work rather than starting anew. She inquired about the existing interpretive elements—beyond a commemorative plaque—tied to the harbor's history. She proposed the use of interpretive signage or educational boards that would share the historical significance of the site with the public.

Chair Stapleton observed that many local organizations are already engaged in celebrating the City's history, particularly during this year of historical recognition. He proposed incorporating a historical element into the site, such as a walking path that would provide an interactive way for visitors to experience Newport Beach's heritage. He suggested that knowledgeable community members could collaborate with the committee to develop concepts that extend beyond a traditional plaque. A waterfront walking path, he noted, could function as both a historical timeline and a physical link between the bay and the City's history.

Committee Member Kirby advocated for the continuation of the bike trail in that area. She noted that many visitors mistakenly believe the trail already connects through that segment, only to discover it does not.

Chair Stapleton emphasized the importance of including a historical and educational component in the project. He noted that if a trail is to be developed—whether for bikes or pedestrians—it should be thoughtfully designed, especially given the growing presence of e-

bikes and the issues they have caused on the peninsula. He stressed the value of creating a safe and meaningful connection in the area. He suggested that it would be ideal if the trail could extend under the bridge and continue along the waterfront. He noted that although the current segment is underutilized and lacks appeal, he believes it has the potential to become a truly scenic and enjoyable route.

Committee Member Rudy Svrcek expanded on the waterfront path concept by referencing examples from other cities where raised wooden walkways protect ecologically sensitive areas while accommodating tidal fluctuations. He proposed a similar elevated pathway extending to Dover Shores to improve access and preserve the environment. He noted that such a trail could offer one of the most scenic experiences in the City and compared it to protected areas in New Zealand.

Drawing on his experience on the Harbor Commission and participation in an ad hoc committee for Lower Castaways, Commissioner Svrcek stated that he had previously developed ideas for the site and offered to share a summary with the group. He explained that the concept consisted of a range of ideas presented as a menu of options, not as a single comprehensive project. He explained that elements could be selected individually, such as pairing certain features with a restaurant or adopting complementary components to enhance the visitor experience.

Committee Member Svrcek presented a concept focused on providing an educational experience centered on marine life from the bay and ocean. Referring to the site plan, he described an entry area featuring a whale display to highlight local sea life. He explained that the plan also included a café envisioned as a casual space serving sandwiches and coffee, with the flexibility to expand into a full-service restaurant if desired. He noted that the largest structure in the concept is an interpretive center designed to showcase exhibits on marine species and ocean ecology. He advised that at the center of the site is a touch pool area modeled after those in larger aquariums, where children could safely interact with marine life under supervision.

Committee Member Svrcek further described a circular underwater theater accommodating 30 to 40 people, offering an immersive 360-degree experience that would allow visitors to feel as though they were underwater, observing marine habitats such as sharks. He advised that along the waterfront, the plan includes a series of small display areas featuring three-dimensional fish models accompanied by educational information about native species, including sharks and tuna. He noted that toward the bottom of the plan near Pacific Coast Highway, the concept provides for a kayak tour and launch area, along with storage facilities, although he noted that the final location of the launch ramp could be adjusted. He emphasized that the concept is intended as a flexible framework to inspire discussion and refinement. He explained that the components could be rearranged, scaled, or modified depending on community interest and feasibility.

Commissioner Svrcek explained that the immersive theater concept could accommodate a wide variety of educational themes beyond marine life, including astronomy, desert environments, jungle ecosystems, and the Grand Canyon. He noted that the intent is for the space to be adaptable, providing diverse natural and educational content. He presented a 30-second video clip showing what the theater experience might look like. He explained that the concept was inspired by a smaller version currently in operation in Avalon, which was developed for approximately \$250,000 and is now generating a modest profit. He clarified that costs could vary significantly depending on design and scale; they presented this figure as a point of reference. He compared the experience to a smaller-scale version of the Sphere

in Las Vegas and discussed how the sea life themes could be reflected throughout the entryway and exhibits. He suggested that the City's Arts Commission could contribute creative and historically relevant installations, including sculptural pieces that reflect the local maritime heritage.

Committee Member Svrcek continued the presentation with the concept of interactive sea life displays, including species such as crabs, lobsters, and other local marine animals. He noted that these could be arranged around the site for educational engagement, especially for children. He proposed a kayak tour program launching from the Back Bay, as well as the inclusion of an amphitheater. He advised that this outdoor venue, facing west toward Fashion Island, would offer stunning sunset views and could be used for entertainment, community events, and educational programs.

Committee Member Svrcek reported that further inspiration for design elements came from existing installations in Fashion Island, such as a long-standing art piece featuring Garibaldi fish above simulated seagrass. He envisioned a similar three-dimensional display positioned along the water's edge—marked as red dots on the site plan. He noted that each display would feature a species of fish alongside interpretive signage to educate visitors about the local marine environment. In closing, he emphasized the educational value of the proposal, particularly for children, and expressed enthusiasm for creating something that celebrates both the ocean and the history of Newport Beach.

Committee Member Svrcek noted that one idea is to incorporate an educational program in partnership with local schools as part of the proposed facility. He explained that the concept involves creating a collaborative learning experience in which students visit multiple locations across Newport Beach. He noted that these would include the facility at the Castaways site, the science center located across the bay, and another research center near Corona del Mar. He envisioned a coordinated field trip model in which students would tour one site per day, gaining a comprehensive understanding of the local marine environment. He advised that the goal would be to educate students about the bay, the ocean, and the natural resources unique to Newport Beach.

Committee Member Svrcek referenced the General Plan and emphasized that the proposal aligns well with its stated priorities. He explained that the concept meets goals related to marine-oriented programming, environmental education, and public access to the water. He noted that significant effort had gone into developing the proposal and believed it successfully addressed many of the community's planning objectives.

Councilmember Blom clarified that his primary concern was not the initial construction cost of the project, but the long-term maintenance expenses, which could amount to millions of dollars. He emphasized the importance of evaluating return on investment and questioned how the City could ensure financial sustainability over time. He noted that in conversations with community members, particularly residents of Bay Shores who are directly impacted by the site, there was strong support for creating a continuous pedestrian experience into Newport. He noted that many residents favored the idea of a space that reflects the character of an aquatic park, especially given the waterfront setting and its similarity to Marina Park.

To balance public benefit with fiscal responsibility, Councilmember Blom suggested exploring opportunities for revenue generation, such as leasing a portion of the site for hospitality uses. He cited the example of a coffee shop that could serve both park visitors and passersby along Mariners' Mile, enhancing the experience while contributing to financial viability. He concluded by recommending that the City consider a public-private partnership

model, stressing that a sustainable funding strategy is essential to the long-term success of the project.

Chair Stapleton agreed with the overarching objective—to compile the best elements onto paper, issue a Request for Proposals (RFP), and invite interested parties to return with their interpretations of what would be both viable and meaningful for the site, particularly from a revenue standpoint. He emphasized that the project should pursue a public-private partnership model, incorporating educational, interactive, and historical components, as well as sea life exhibits, hand-launch ramps, and a connection between Upper and Lower Castaways. He believed that putting these ideas into the public domain would likely attract interest, especially from legacy families in Newport Beach. He referenced successful examples such as the Fun Zone, Lido House, and other high-profile local developments, and suggested that many legacy families would be enthusiastic about contributing to a project of this significance. He believed that issuing an RFP would be an effective way to gauge interest and creativity from the community. He noted that once proposals are received, the committee would review them and determine how best to proceed. He expressed belief that there is a clear pathway toward a project that could serve the entire community.

Chair Stapleton inquired about the formal process of issuing a Request for Proposals (RFP).

Assistant City Manager Jurjis explained that if the committee were to proceed with an RFP, the draft should first be brought back to the committee for review. He explained that after revisions, it could then be released to the public for responses. He further explained that once responses are received, staff would review and return with a recommendation for the committee's consideration.

Chair Stapleton recommended that the draft RFP be circulated to the committee members outside of a formal meeting, allowing members to submit input via email and expedite the process. He noted that this would allow the City to move forward more quickly while still incorporating feedback. He inquired how long the RFP would be open.

Assistant City Manager Jurjis explained that, once finalized, the RFP would be open for 30 days, which is the City's typical timeframe, followed by an additional review period. Based on this timeline, he advised that the committee could expect to reconvene and evaluate proposals within 60 to 90 days. He acknowledged that a second meeting could be scheduled before the RFP is officially released if the committee preferred a more in-depth discussion.

Councilmember Blom stated that his preference would be for staff to include a broad range of ideas in the process, reflecting the committee's discussions while leaving room for creativity from potential proposers in the community. He emphasized the importance of not overly restricting the Request for Proposals, noting that many residents have the experience and ingenuity to present compelling concepts. He suggested issuing a broad-based RFP rather than one with a narrow or highly specific scope, which would allow diverse ideas to emerge. He explained that these proposals could then be refined, and contract terms adjusted as needed during negotiations.

Councilmember Blom added that at some point, the City would need to evaluate the financial implications of the proposals, both short-term and long-term, and establish a budget to determine whether the concept is financially feasible and sustainable.

Assistant City Manager Jurjis suggested that it would be appropriate for all committee members to have an opportunity to comment on the RFP draft. He noted that, if necessary, a

smaller review subcommittee could be formed to assist with this process, ensuring transparency and broad input before proceeding further.

Assistant City Manager Jurjis explained that before proceeding, staff would need to prepare a draft RFP and agendaize it for the committee to review. He noted that once the committee has reviewed and approved the draft, it can be released to the market. It will take some time to receive responses, after which staff will evaluate the submissions and present a recommendation to the committee.

Chair Stapleton emphasized a strong desire to move the project forward as soon as possible, noting the exceptional value of the site. He advised that the goal is not simply to complete the project, but to ensure that the final result is meaningful and thoughtfully developed.

Chair Stapleton opened public comments.

Wade Womack raised concerns regarding accessibility for individuals with disabilities. He noted that a designated drop-off area at the site may not be feasible due to restrictions, but emphasized the importance of providing accommodations, particularly for families with members who have mobility challenges. He cited difficulties related to limited parking near the Irvine Company lot and described alternative options, such as Marina Park, as inconvenient and difficult for those with disabilities. He recommended that the City explore solutions to improve accessibility, even if drop-off access must remain restricted, to ensure the site is inclusive and usable for all members of the community. He raised concerns regarding traffic, which have been discussed extensively. He inquired whether relocating parking to the upper Castaways, rather than at the intersection, might help mitigate traffic issues. He referenced the architectural plans, noting that anyone who has reviewed them would recognize the thoughtful design and the collaborative work involved.

Carleen Butterfield, a long-time Heights resident of more than 30 years, expressed enthusiasm for the project, noting its beauty and potential as a popular waterfront destination with financial viability. However, she raised concerns about the site's limited access point. She explained that the small entrance, which serves as a key route for vehicles accessing Pacific Coast Highway from Mariners, the Heights, and Cliff Haven, is already congested. She cautioned that large events could result in 50 or more vehicles attempting to exit simultaneously, further worsening traffic conditions. As an alternative, she suggested exploring the use of space at nearby Boca Park, which provides greater parking capacity and a signalized intersection to relieve pressure on the main entrance.

Committee Member Svrcek acknowledged that traffic remains a major concern and provided background on efforts to address access challenges. He explained that an earlier concept had proposed a new access road at a signalized intersection to divert traffic from the current entrance.

Councilmember Blom noted that this was deemed infeasible due to the presence of a protected bluff containing a sensitive plant species that prohibits grading or excavation. He added that portions of the surrounding land, including areas near the bridge, are owned by Caltrans, further limiting options. He noted that City staff and the Mayor had worked with traffic engineers, including a contracted firm from LSA, to evaluate alternatives such as modifying the median, creating new entrance and exit lanes, and altering the triangular intersection. However, he advised that environmental and logistical constraints restricted feasible solutions. He concluded that the only viable option identified was to maintain a pedestrian access trail, which had been included in the original site design.

Councilmember Blom referenced a long-standing issue concerning the possibility of acquiring land back from Caltrans, which remains a point of concern. He noted that the main challenge is that any agreement to purchase that segment of Pacific Coast Highway (PCH) would likely require the City to also assume ownership of the adjacent bridge. He advised that this bridge is scheduled for a complete rebuild, a project estimated to cost approximately \$200 million—significantly more than the recent pier project. He advised that the City is not in a financial position to take on that level of responsibility at this time.

Ms. Butterfield described the current traffic pattern in the area. She advised that drivers traveling westbound on PCH frequently use a small pocket turn and must cross three lanes of traffic to reach Cliff Drive, a route that she uses. She noted that the maneuver is difficult and often feels unsafe.

Councilmember Blom emphasized that the City Council has spent considerable time reviewing this site, exploring a wide range of possibilities beyond just an aquatic center. He advised that the central concern throughout this process has been traffic mitigation. He explained that the key question remains how to slow traffic onto the property while still creating a high-quality gateway to Newport Beach, something that reflects the City's character, can potentially generate some revenue, and remains cost-effective.

Chair Stapleton noted that the overall goal is to create a win-win outcome for both the community and the City. He agreed that although the site is among the most scenic in the area, its value will be diminished if traffic concerns are not properly addressed.

Adam Leverenz? Recommended a more targeted approach to the RFP process. He suggested narrowing the scope rather than issuing a broad request, explaining that clearer specifications would encourage more competitive responses. He referenced a previous RFP that produced only one qualified bidder, noting that vague objectives discourage participation, while well-defined expectations promote competition, transparency, and better outcomes. He emphasized the importance of maximizing public access at the Lower Castaways site, particularly for residents who do not live on the waterfront. He recalled a Harbor Commission proposal from five to six years earlier that envisioned a simple public dock, restroom, and small park. He clarified that the concept would not include a commercial dock, which would conflict with existing covenants, but instead provide a public amenity consistent with the area's uses. He noted that the design could incorporate ample parking and rack storage for stand-up paddleboards. He further addressed traffic concerns by suggesting a reduced parking footprint supplemented by designated drop-off areas and alternative transportation options such as driverless shuttles and e-bike racks. This, he explained, would allow visitors to access their gear and transition directly to the water without contributing to congestion. He concluded by reaffirming support for a simple, accessible project that enhances public access, remains cost-effective, and aligns with Coastal Commission goals while maintaining environmental sensitivity. He emphasized the importance of keeping any improvements simple, clean, and budget-conscious.

Chair Stapleton recalled that for more than a decade, he had been advised that constructing a dock in the area would not be permitted due to environmental concerns. A member of the staff noted that in 2014, during a previous planning effort, regulatory agencies made it clear that a dock north of the bridge would not be allowed, largely due to protected wildlife habitats. He noted that human-powered watercraft launches, such as for kayaks and paddleboards, could still be supported.

The public speaker advised that although a new public dock exists across the water, it is not ideal. He noted that for users arriving by water, docking there requires parking elsewhere and walking over the bridge. He highlighted that the nearest parking areas are either limited or private, referencing signage indicating “no parking” and sharing personal experiences of encountering access challenges in the area. He suggested that if an agreement could be reached with the adjacent property owner, specifically the Irvine Company, to allow for an official drop-off zone, that would significantly improve public access.

Chair Stapleton emphasized the importance of involving the Irvine Company in any reimagining of the site, noting its ownership and influence. He expressed hope that the company would serve as an active and motivated partner in efforts to enhance the area for public benefit. He agreed with previous comments and stressed that any plan must be harbor-friendly, with strong connections to the bay and waterline. While he voiced personal support for the idea of a public dock, he stated that such a project is not feasible. Based on prior guidance and environmental constraints, construction of a public dock at this location is not a viable option.

Bill Kenney, noting prior service alongside the Mayor on the Harbor Commission. He expressed appreciation for the direction proposed by a fellow committee member and acknowledged the potential in the current concept. He noted the existence of deed restrictions on the site, though the exact terms were not recalled. Additionally, he emphasized that the area falls under the jurisdiction of the Department of Fish and Wildlife, which adds complexity to the entitlement process. He concurred with earlier comments that pursuing a dock at this location would be extremely difficult and unlikely to receive approval. He recalled a prior effort, approximately four years earlier, when Public Works conducted a cleanup of the beaches on both sides of a deteriorating bulkhead. He advised that the goal at that time was to improve safety and access for human-powered watercraft. He noted that at the time, the southern end of the area near Lower Castaways was identified as one of the safest launch zones due to its protection from the current and its location under the bridge. He also suggested that a quick-service food operation would be appropriate and feasible for the site. In contrast, he noted that a sit-down restaurant might be impractical due to parking constraints. While generating revenue from a stand-up paddleboard (SUP) vendor could be considered, he advised that the harbor already hosts approximately 18 SUP rental businesses, making market demand questionable. He proposed that either the staff or the committee conduct a basic pro forma analysis to determine what elements of the project might generate revenue and to estimate overall costs. He supported the idea of breaking the project into multiple components, rather than issuing a single, comprehensive RFP. He noted that this approach could result in more targeted feedback and greater interest from potential partners. He expressed strong support for the idea of enhancing the monument area to better commemorate the site's historical significance as the birthplace of the harbor. He suggested that more than just a plaque is warranted and applauded the formation of the committee, affirming that it is moving in a positive direction.

Mr. Kenney recommended that a list of key work components be drafted, with particular focus on the critical elements of the project. He explained that once the scope is defined, the City would be able to obtain preliminary cost estimates.

Chair Stapleton confirmed that, following completion of the RFP draft, the committee would be dissolved, and the ad hoc subcommittee would take over. He noted that once the RFP is released, the typical timeline would allow for 30 to 60 days for responses. He advised that after that, responses would be collected and reviewed. He confirmed that if there are five or

more submissions, the subcommittee would review the proposals, determine a preferred vendor, and recommend a selection based on alignment with the City's goals.

Chair Stapleton closed public comments.

There was no further discussion on the item.

b. Potential Locations for a Public Aquatic Center

Recommended Actions:

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

Chair Stapleton emphasized that location is the most important factor and stated that the project must be situated in West Newport, west of the bay, given the lack of resident-serving facilities in that area compared to the east. He explained that the focus should be on locations that best serve the west side. He identified Marina Park, the area above Randall Preserve, and Mariners' Park as current considerations.

Chair Stapleton noted that Mariners' Park consistently emerges as the strongest option. He advised that the 6.2-acre park is near Lower Castaways, well-positioned to serve the west side, and accessible via Irvine Avenue, which, despite carrying significant traffic, does not pose major noise concerns. He highlighted the site's existing features, including tennis courts, a half basketball court, and proximity to a school, as well as its accessibility from the east side via MacArthur, the 73, or Bristol. He described the park as offering numerous opportunities for reimagining. He cautioned that summer access, particularly in and out of the peninsula, would be highly problematic. He further expressed concern that Marina Park would attract significant out-of-town usage, making it less desirable for residents. In contrast, he advised that Mariners' Park better serves both its neighborhood and the wider community, and its facilities make it a strong candidate.

Chair Stapleton noted the potential for collaboration with Newport Harbor and the school district, particularly with respect to the tennis courts. He suggested that the tennis courts and possibly the half basketball court could be removed, but emphasized that the sports field, which supports baseball and other activities, must remain.

Councilmember Blom inquired about the lifespan of the fire station.

Assistant City Manager Jurjis advised that the fire station dates back to the 1950s and is expected to have about ten years remaining.

Councilmember Blom suggested that it is time to begin reviewing the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) and Facility Improvement Plan (FIP). He noted that this area of the City has been described as one of the least master-planned sections. He advised that the existing tennis courts are aging, and there are also older features, such as single-person outdoor handball courts.

Assistant City Manager Jurjis noted that the site currently includes a 50-meter pool but emphasized that the adjacent fire station is the oldest in the City and requires significant attention, as all other stations have already been rebuilt. He observed that the area is underutilized and presents many opportunities for improvement. He highlighted parking as a key consideration, noting the potential to create substantial additional capacity. He also stressed the importance of the surrounding sports facilities, which are actively used by both the school and the community. He further noted that an adjacent parcel containing another

baseball field is owned by the school district. He expressed optimism that the district would be open to collaboration, particularly since a pool would benefit them as well. He concluded that this presents an opportunity to reimagine the entire site through a cooperative effort.

Councilmember Blom noted the possibility of incorporating a parking raised, given the growing need for parking to accommodate school events, pool use, baseball games, and other community activities. He advised that this approach could help alleviate pressure on nearby areas, such as Dover Shores and Mariners Park. He emphasized the importance of viewing the site not as a fixed canvas but as a collaborative project, with shared costs and benefits between the City and the school district. He advised that the area is already designed for children and families.

Chair Stapleton advised that it is located in one of the largest residential neighborhoods, where pools are less common compared to the east side of the City. He noted that previous locations under consideration carried more liability concerns and traffic challenges, whereas this area is better suited for development. He remarked that this location offers better accessibility and community alignment. He noted that it is situated in a family-oriented area with existing infrastructure that supports recreation. He concluded by stressing the importance of developing the site to serve residents, especially children and families, rather than focusing on locations with less residential presence.

Committee Member Kirby emphasized the importance of being very cautious and intentional when moving forward with plans for this area, particularly in how the project is presented to nearby residents. She noted that discussions on platforms like Nextdoor often escalate quickly. She reported that residents have already reached out, assuming she was involved in specific proposals simply because her name was associated with the ad hoc group. She clarified that they had not yet discussed or reviewed any proposals, yet there was already speculation and concern from the community. She highlighted the need for thoughtful communication and planning, particularly when considering existing features such as the playground. She noted that the shaded area and playground are frequently used by families with younger children, and these aspects must be carefully evaluated during the planning process.

Councilmember Blom agreed that community-focused features, such as a splash pad, could be incorporated into the project alongside other recreational elements. He emphasized the importance of engaging residents, particularly in this vocal area, and cautioned against moving forward without proper outreach. He recommended first evaluating the viability of each site, then developing action plans and next steps for community engagement. He stressed the need to gather feedback on potential gaps and explore creative ways to reconfigure areas while enhancing, rather than removing, existing features. He underscored the importance of communicating clearly that the goal is to add amenities, not take them away, and highlighted priorities such as preserving shaded areas and ensuring accessible play spaces. While acknowledging that change often meets resistance, he pointed to the success of projects like Bonita Canyon Sports Park, which transformed open fields into a well-used community recreation area. He emphasized that this project, like previous ones, should focus on improving amenities and enhancing the quality of life for residents. He stressed the need to shift the narrative to focus on programming and community benefits, rather than creating the impression of building something overly commercial, such as a water park.

Committee Member Kirby expressed strong support for the value of a City pool, noting that an earlier ad hoc meeting with the Parks, Beaches, and Recreation Commission had already

gathered significant community feedback. She emphasized that aquatic activities are central to the community, yet not all residents have access to pools. She further observed that with the Newport Harbor pool currently out of service, City programming and neighborhood access, particularly on the west side of the bay, have been adversely affected.

Chair Stapleton highlighted the issue of overcrowding at existing pools. Compared to other communities with multiple Olympic-sized pools, Newport's resources fall short, and there is a clear need to improve aquatic facilities. He emphasized the importance of careful messaging to the community to avoid concerns about overcrowding or excessive outside use. He noted that the focus should be on the programming itself—providing opportunities for young athletes, senior citizens, and residents of all ages to engage in swimming, water polo, and other activities. Additionally, he advised that the proposed site offers financial advantages, as it does not require costly infrastructure such as seawalls, potentially reducing construction expenses by millions of dollars.

Councilmember Blom emphasized that the project's focus should remain on children, noting the proximity of the library and public safety facilities. He observed that this cluster of services could function as a secondary civic center for far West Newport. While not a traditional community center, he stated that it could serve as a central hub for the area.

Committee Member Svrcek presented three pool concepts for one of the potential sites, noting that they would not require changes to the existing parking layout. He explained that the site is located on county-owned land, which complicates its use.

Councilmember Blom noted that while the City recently renegotiated its agreement with the Newport Aquatic Center, only part of the area is under City control, with the remainder belonging to the county. He stated that this division has made it difficult for the City to assume full control of the property despite past efforts to do so for important projects. He remarked that the area is ideal, pointing out that he visits it regularly and that the parking lot is frequently full. He clarified that he is not directly connected to the Newport Aquatic Center. He advised that the center currently has about 49 years left on its lease, adding another layer of complexity to any plans.

Committee Member Svrcek referenced Sunset Ridge Park off Superior, explaining that he had superimposed three pools on the site purely for scale and visualization. He noted that the project would require a new bridge costing approximately \$14 million, as well as a new parking lot. While the location in West Newport offers exceptional views and would not take up excessive space, he acknowledged that the proposal would likely meet strong resistance from residents.

Recreation & Senior Services Director Sean Levin noted that the community's reaction to any major changes at Sunset Ridge Park would be intense, with some residents strongly opposed to altering the park's current state. He advised that parking is also a significant issue, as the existing lot is already designated for park visitors and includes spaces reserved under a coastal development agreement. Additionally, he advised that staffing the facility would require constructing a new building. Lastly, he noted that the owners have shown no intention of selling. Additionally, he explained that the complexity of the site includes hotel development rights and other entitlements, making any project a significant undertaking.

Councilmember Blom advised that there is a section of Banning Ranch where building has previously been restricted, and the other is behind Pacifica, near a corner parcel. He described an interesting element within Banning Ranch, where an adjusted parcel exists. He

noted that the property is not entirely owned by a single entity and that there is a section of approximately three acres located near the oil fields. He advised that access would involve driving slightly uphill to reach another parcel adjacent to it. He mentioned that while part of the area is leased, the City also owns a portion, and there remains a larger parcel in the middle of Banning Ranch that could be explored. He still believes Mariners Park is the better location due to its central position but acknowledged that environmental concerns present challenges.

Recreation & Senior Services Director Levin referenced a conversation about the utilities yard as an alternative location. He recalled that a concept was developed years ago to combine the utilities yard and the general service yard, with the plan to build a pool there. He noted that the site offers excellent views, but feasibility would need to be re-evaluated.

Councilmember Blom advised that one major issue is the presence of an underground reservoir, which complicates construction plans. He noted that the original concept would require reconfiguring the layout to work around or relocate this structure.

Committee Member Kirby inquired about the Randall Preserve in Banning Ranch. She noted that part of the property may have been deeded to the school district as part of a sale, though the exact boundaries of that area are unclear. She inquired about the progress.

Councilmember Blom advised that there has been little movement and noted that there is a Council ad hoc committee involved, but the process has been slow and complicated by the involvement of multiple organizations, including Native American groups. Additionally, he advised that there has been discussion about incorporating the area into a coastal agreement, which adds another layer of complexity.

Committee Member Kirby acknowledged that the property could provide more flexibility in terms of potential use compared to the preserve itself.

Councilmember Blom noted that it is located outside the City's official borders, even though it remains within the City's sphere of influence.

Chair Stapleton advised that, from the community's perspective, there are essentially two viable sites under consideration. He recommended engaging with the architect who assisted with the Lower Castaways project to begin developing a site plan for Mariners' Park. He noted that this plan would focus on the area currently occupied by the fire station, the basketball court, and the two tennis courts, including the handball area, to see what could be achieved in that space. He emphasized that partnering with the school could be beneficial but acknowledged that discussions involving parking structures could complicate the process. He suggested incorporating a new fire station into the design, especially given that the current one is approaching the end of its useful life and will likely need to be rebuilt within the next ten years.

Chair Stapleton noted that this project needs to be carefully evaluated, which is why the entire 6.2-acre park must be reviewed in detail. He advised that the goal is to determine if parking can be expanded without reducing shaded areas or playground space.

Councilmember Blom believed that the school board would likely partner with the City on this effort, viewing such collaboration as a positive step toward achieving the broader goal of

programming the site effectively. He emphasized that the pool should not be limited to open swim but should be programmed to offer classes and activities that serve all segments of the community.

Committee Member Kirby pointed to the popularity of programs at OCC's pool, which is known for its high costs and limited availability, as an example of unmet demand for diverse aquatic activities. She noted that the community's interests extend beyond water polo to include adult fitness programs, such as deep-end workouts, as well as master swim sessions.

Chair Stapleton opened public comments.

Ms. Butterfield, building on her earlier comments about traffic, noted that the proposed plan makes sense for the neighborhood since many nearby families already have access to pools within their condominium complexes. She suggested that the site could be organized into three components, with the first being an athletic center featuring activities such as rowing, kayaking, restrooms, picnic areas, and walkways with distinctive features. She noted that the second would provide educational and cultural opportunities, such as a youth center with an amphitheater or outdoor performance space. Lastly, she advised that the third would serve as a community gathering place, complementing the nearby book center, offering social and cultural experiences for both residents and visitors. She emphasized that this vision would create a balanced mix of recreation, community, and cultural amenities that could appeal to local families and attract visitors from outside the area. She also raised the idea of incorporating a revenue-generating attraction, noting that sound and view impacts would need to be managed.

Adam Leverenz highlighted the community support, particularly from water polo players who strongly advocated for an aquatic center at Lower Castaways. He found their enthusiasm compelling, even if the site itself was not ideal. He expressed support for adding a splash pad, noting that they are extremely popular with children and families.

Chair Stapleton noted that the goal would be to activate the pool for multiple uses, including toddler swim lessons and senior programs, while keeping operational costs manageable. He expressed some hesitation about including a splash pad at this site, explaining that its presence could attract large groups of children and visitors from outside the area, potentially creating challenges for the surrounding neighborhood. He suggested that the design should focus on ensuring the right fit for the site.

Wade Womack agreed with others that the west side of Newport is the correct location for this project, as the east side already has a variety of community amenities, while the west side is lacking. He raised the question of purchasing a parcel of land, asking what the minimum footprint would need to be to accommodate the facility. Rather than planning for three pools, he suggested that 1.5 pools or another scaled-down approach might be more practical. He mentioned an 11-acre site owned by the school district, noting that he had read an article suggesting that, by law, surplus properties must first be offered to nonprofits and park districts before going out to a general request for proposals (RFP). He questioned whether this rule still applies and how it might impact potential opportunities. He suggested that if the school district is unable to fully utilize the property, there could be an opportunity to create a parking lot and pool on that parcel as part of a mutually beneficial agreement. He noted that schools in the surrounding area could potentially benefit, and this arrangement could serve as a revenue generator for the City.

Chair Stapleton pointed out that the Dove site had an estimated cost of \$30 million, illustrating the financial challenges of purchasing new land for a project of this scale. He advised that the goal is to avoid a \$10 million to \$30 million upfront cost just to acquire a 2- to 4-acre lot before construction even begins. He explained that various locations across the City had been considered, but ultimately, the most feasible option appeared to be building on property the City already owns.

Chair Stapleton closed public comments.

Chair Stapleton summarized the next steps for the project. He noted that there is potential to move forward with Lower Castaways and that Councilmember Blom, Commissioner Langford, and he will form a subcommittee to meet after the RFP is drafted. He advised that once finalized and approved, the RFP will be distributed to gather ideas, which will then be reviewed collaboratively in an iterative process. He advised that the goal is to ensure that the final plan reflects a well-thought-out and high-quality project that Newport Beach can be proud of, rather than a superficial or inadequate solution.

He advised that there are available resources within the on-call staff to evaluate how the site can accommodate the proposed facilities. He acknowledged that community concerns, particularly from nearby residents, will be a key challenge. He stressed the importance of proactive communication and finding ways to address objections, including concerns about the loss of recreational amenities like tennis courts. He reiterated that the committee must effectively present and advocate for the project to gain public support.

Committee Member Svrcek inquired about how the program for Lower Castaways will be determined, specifically what elements will be included and how the overall concept will be developed.

Chair Stapleton responded that the approach will involve identifying potential platforms and usable spaces that could fit on the site. He noted that one of the preliminary drawings includes approximately 185 parking spaces, and the plan will involve determining how much parking can be accommodated before finalizing other design elements.

Committee Member Svrcek explained that community input will play a role, with some people likely to advocate for fast-casual restaurant options, others for a Castaway Club concept, and other potential uses.

Councilmember Blom noted that the process will involve reverse engineering the design based on traffic and parking constraints to ensure the project remains practical. He advised that once the parking capacity and flow are defined, the team can determine the footprint that complies with parking requirements and consider how much space can be allocated for amenities such as patios and gathering areas. He noted that the approach will be to work backwards, starting with an entitlement perspective focused on parking and traffic, and then bringing forward a refined concept for review.

Chair Stapleton agreed that the site should include some form of food service or hospitality component to activate the space. He noted that without amenities such as bathrooms or small hospitality features, the area risks becoming merely a passive park. He noted that the community, particularly near Mariners or Castaways, would benefit from a more dynamic space. He advised that the goal is to create something with a unique or special feature.

Chair Stapleton asked if any committee members had announcements or items for a future agenda. The committee agreed that another meeting was not immediately necessary, as direction had already been established. Chair Stapleton recapped the process, noting that the group would reconvene once drawings were completed. He stated that Mariners' Park is expected to advance more quickly than Lower Castaways, with the next meeting anticipated in 30 to 45 days to review initial drawings and conceptual plans for Mariners' Park. He added that approximately 45 days later, additional updates from Forward are expected.

There was no further discussion on the item.

V. ADJOURNMENT – 4:32 p.m.

Submitted by:

Clarivel Rodriguez, Administrative Assistant

Approved by:

Joe Stapleton, Chair