

CITY OF NEWPORT BEACH**Parks, Beaches & Recreation Commission
Regular Meeting
June 2, 2026 – 5:00 p.m.**

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
Travis Pirdy, Commissioner

Absent: None

Staff: Sean Levin, Recreation & Senior Services Director
Justin Schmillen, Recreation & Senior Services Deputy Director
Zac Gentry, Municipal Operations Director
Kevin Pekar, Parks and Trees Superintendent
Mariah Stinson, Administrative Support Specialist

III. PRESENTATION**A. Recognition of Sean Levin For 25 Years of Service**

Recreation & Senior Services Deputy Director Justin Schmillen recognized Recreation & Senior Services Director Sean Levin for his 24 years of service to the City and his impact on the growth of its parks, senior services, community events, and other civic matters. He added that Recreation & Senior Services Director Levin has particularly shone as a problem solver for the City's public spaces, earning the trust of all involved from park users up to elected officials. He thanked him for his service to the City.

Commissioner Kirby stated that saying "thank you" seems insufficient, adding that she has learned a lot from Recreation & Senior Services Director Levin and appreciates his love for the City. He commended his dedication.

Commissioner Daruty noted that she has worked closely with Recreation & Senior Services Director Levin since 2007 and lauded his work and level of friendly support.

Vice Chair Waunch thanked Recreation & Senior Services Director Levin for the opportunity to be on the Commission and commended the growth in parks and recreation over the years.

Chair Yelsey congratulated Recreation & Senior Services Director Levin on his retirement. She stated that outdoor spaces are important to the community and expressed her appreciation for dedicated people like him who improve those spaces for generations to come. She expressed her appreciation for sharing his guidance and knowledge.

Commissioner Archer stated that Recreation & Senior Services Director Levin will be missed because his work has meant something. He noted that it is a difficult role that he made look easy.

Commissioner Malouf stated that she is fortunate for Recreation & Senior Services Director Levin's mentorship, friendship, and all he has added to the City while keeping a level head, leading to great accomplishments. She added that he will be difficult to replace.

Commissioner Pirdy stated that Recreation & Senior Services Director Levin hired him for his second-ever job as a flag football coach and has helped him develop as a person ever since, leading to his seat on the Commission. He commended the growth in the City's recreation services under his guidance.

Recreation & Senior Services Director Levin stated that he is humbled and thanked the Commission, adding that the job can be trying, but it is a pleasure to help the community. He thanked the Commission and City staff for helping work through many issues over the years. He added that it has been a pleasure working with outgoing Commissioners Archer and Daruty, singling out Commissioner Daruty's continued management of the Spirit Run.

B. Presentation to Outgoing Commissioners Hassan Archer and Diane Daruty

Recognizing outgoing Commissioners Hassan Archer and Diane Daruty for their eight years of service on the Parks, Beaches and Recreation (PB&R) Commission.

Recreation & Senior Services Director Levin recognized Commissioner Archer for his eight years of service. He stated that Commissioner Archer has been a steadying influence with a great approach, as seen through thoughtful questions and attentive listening to applicants. He added that a tree has been dedicated in Commissioner Archer's honor at Grant Howard Park.

Commissioner Pirdy stated that it has been a pleasure to serve on the Commission with Commissioner Archer, adding that he has learned a lot about the role through observing Commissioner Archer's thought process.

Commissioner Malouf stated that she has been honored to serve with Commissioner Archer, echoing Commissioner Pirdy's comments about learning to be a better Commissioner by observing his thought process. She expressed appreciation for his service to the City and added that it will be hard to replace his genuine caring.

Chair Yelsey agreed with her peers about learning a lot from how Commissioner Archer asked questions and approached different problems in the community. She expressed her appreciation for his guidance and added that he will be missed.

Vice Chair Waunch echoed her peers, adding that she appreciates Commissioner Archer's thoughtful and deliberate delivery that she aims to emulate.

Commissioner Daruty stated that Commissioner Archer has been a brother on the Commission since joining at the same time. She expressed her appreciation for his dedication in balancing his work and children. She commended his love of trees and the way that he votes according to how he feels.

Commissioner Kirby stated that she is fortunate to have met Commissioner Archer before she came on the Commission, so that there was already a familiar and friendly face in a new environment for her. She echoed the thoughts of her peers and lauded how intentional he is about his work.

Commissioner Archer reported that when he was interviewing for the position, former Mayor William O'Neill warned him that he would be dealing with a lot of trees, stating that the Commission has treated the trees with care and careful decision-making like they are their babies. He noted that the decisions are not always popular, but they must consider the long-term enjoyment of Newport Beach. He stated that the people are more important than the trees, thanking his peers and the staff who make the City work. He commended Recreation & Senior Services Director Levin for his guidance on dealing with the public during his year as Chair, Parks and Trees Superintendent Kevin Pekar for all he has taught him about trees and urban forestry, Administrative Support Specialist Mariah Stinson for keeping the show going, and the community for its interest in their meetings, particularly Jim Mosher, lamenting his rare absence. He thanked his peers for their friendship and for their caring for the City, even if they sometimes disagree on what form the caring should take. He encouraged residents to get involved in their City.

Recreation & Senior Services Director Levin reported that Commissioner Daruty, like Commissioner Archer, has served on the Commission for eight years and served on many Ad Hoc Committees. He commended her detailed work on policy and procedure-focused Ad Hoc Committees so that they are properly crafted. He lauded her focus on making decisions based on the possibility of setting precedents that could have negative long-term impacts. He added that she will be missed.

Commissioner Pirdy stated that Commissioner Daruty is insightful and introspective, giving weight to her words. He commended her knowledge of the City's policies and procedures, along with her meeting preparation, and added that it is inspiring to see someone who cares so much for her community.

Commissioner Malouf stated that Commissioner Daruty feels like a big sister on the Commission, expressing her gratitude for all she has learned from her. She added

that Commissioner Daruty has opened her eyes to things the Commission needs to pay attention to and serves as an unofficial legal counsel when it comes to matters of City policy. She thanked her for loving Newport Beach, especially its children, and for how prepared she is to help guide the Commission.

Commissioner Archer stated that Commissioner Daruty caring deeply about her work stands out to him over the past eight years. He commended how thoughtful her words were with a high level of care for the subject matter. He stated that her caring is why the Commission has accomplished so much, and her energy will be missed.

Chair Yelsey stated that it is obvious Commissioner Daruty's heart is in every meeting, and it helped her peers think deeper instead of moving too fast on a subject. She lauded the Spirit Run and Commissioner Daruty's efforts to both keep it alive and expand it over time.

Vice Chair Waunch stated that Commissioner Daruty's knowledge and presence are intimidating in a very good way because they show how figuratively big the shoes are that the Commission needs to fill. She expressed hopes that she can work towards doing it after years of inspirationally watching her.

Commissioner Kirby echoed Vice Chair Waunch's comments, adding how intimidating Commissioner Daruty's well-crafted messaging was when she first joined the Commission. She stated that they have all learned so much from her and will take certain pieces forward. She added that Commissioner Daruty has such a big heart, and it is on display through her actions.

Commissioner Daruty stated that the tributes are overwhelming, agreeing that her heart is in everything she does, creating an intensity. She added that she does not think about it but rather tries to do her best, and the energy comes with it. She encouraged protecting the City's trees, lamenting that there seems to be an increased number of removal requests when they do not need to be removed. She stated that it has been an honor to serve and thanked her peers for the kind words.

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 May 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.*

Chair Yelsey opened public comment, and there was none.

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

The motion carried by unanimous vote.

VII. CURRENT BUSINESS

A. Reforestation Request – 901 Chestnut Place

Recommendation: *approve the reforestation request of a Manna Gum Eucalyptus (Eucalyptus viminalis) located at the Alta Vista side of 901 Chestnut Place.*

The applicant, Geoffrey Darby, residing at 901 Chestnut Place, has provided the required HOA board meeting minutes along with the HOA board signature of approval to remove and replace the tree. If approved by the Commission, the City will pay for the removal of the Manna Gum, while the applicant has offered to fund the replacement of the tree with two 48-inch box Jacaranda trees (Jacaranda mimosifolia).

Parks and Trees Superintendent Pekar reported that the item is a reforestation request for a manna gum eucalyptus at 901 Chestnut Place on the Alta Vista Dr. side of the property. He added that there were two reforestation requests for this tree made by the previous homeowner, coming in 2015 and 2022. He stated that the applicant, Geoff Darby, reports previous root damage, an unbalanced canopy, limited scaffolding root structure, and a perceived elevated risk of whole tree failure during severe weather events. He acknowledged that the tree has lost some limbs in past weather events and agreed that the canopy is unbalanced due to clearance trimming on the property side over the swimming pool. He reported on the root damage, adding that the sidewalk was last repaired in 2010 and the parkway's artificial turf can also be damaging to roots.

Parks and Trees Superintendent Pekar noted that Mr. Darby is unable to attend the meeting as he is currently hospitalized, with his wife accompanying him there. He added that staff recommended that Mr. Darby have a professional arborist perform a Level 3 appraisal of the tree with a focus on the street side due to its previous root pruning and unbalanced canopy. He added that this assessment was performed with a ground penetrating radar (GPR) on March 31st, determining that the tree is at high risk of failure with significant consequences due to a limited number of large deep

roots, with a recommendation of removal at the earliest opportunity. He noted that the consulting arborist added that an alternative mitigation option is a 25% crown reduction. He added that, due to its proximity, the house across Alta Vista Dr. is a likely target should the tree fall, as it is more likely to fall in that direction because of the unbalanced canopy on that side of the tree.

Parks and Trees Superintendent Pekar reported that the City performed the 25% crown reduction on April 23rd to help bridge the time gap until this item could come to the Commission. He added that consultants from Dudek, Inc. peer-reviewed the arborist's report and performed their own Level 2 risk assessment following the crown reduction. He stated that Dudek's report found the likelihood of failure to be possible and not probable during normal weather events but agreed on the high likelihood of impact in the event of failure, and maintaining the significant consequences declaration. He added that Dudek recommended removal of the tree within 12 months, even with the lower finding of moderate risk, due to the long-term forecast of a likely El Niño in the coming winter.

Parks and Trees Superintendent Pekar stated that the moderate risk assessment is why the item is coming to the Commission as a reforestation instead of staff approving removal under City Council Policy G-1. He added that the applicant will pay to replace the tree with two 48-inch box jacaranda trees, with the City paying for the removal of the eucalyptus. He stated that the jacaranda trees will fit with the Alta Vista Dr. promenade and have staff's support. He reported that property owners within 500 feet of the tree were notified and that the Eastbluff Homeowners Community Association (HOA) supports the reforestation.

Chair Yelsey thanked Parks and Trees Superintendent Pekar for this item including more back-and-forth detail than usual before coming to the Commission.

In response to Commissioner Pirby's inquiries, Parks and Trees Superintendent Pekar reported that a eucalyptus tree on the Groves bicycle trail had a similar canopy reduction, and it proved to be needed annually, making the tree physically ugly. He agreed that doing this mitigation annually does not guarantee that the tree will not fall on either the applicant's home or the one across the street.

In response to Commissioner Kirby's inquiry, Parks and Trees Superintendent Pekar clarified that having artificial turf in the parkway was a choice by the homeowner and the artificial turf must be permitted by the City to ensure proper installation and tree protection, including irrigation. He added that the applicant has agreed to reinstate the irrigation for the new trees.

In response to Chair Yelsey's inquiries, Parks and Trees Superintendent Pekar confirmed that such a significant pruning of the canopy would damage the tree's overall health if it were done annually because losing so many leaves slowly starves the tree. He added that regular trimmings of this magnitude would negatively impact the strength of the roots and the tree's ability to fight off insects. He stated that the two jacarandas would grow to where they provide more canopy than the current tree.

Commissioner Daruty reported that she must abstain from voting on this item due to her residence's proximity to the tree. She thanked the homeowner for making the investment in learning the full status of the tree's hazards and recommended that staff encourage other residents to follow this model.

Parks and Trees Superintendent Pekar noted that the applicant made a big investment because a GPR survey can cost up to \$4,000 in addition to the two replacements, which should cost another \$4,000 together. He noted that the City's tree inventory gives the current eucalyptus a value of \$18,000. He added that encouraging two-for-one deals like this one is something staff is considering for a future G-1 Policy revision on reforestations.

In response to Vice Chair Waunch's inquiry, Parks and Trees Superintendent Pekar clarified that the City does sometimes receive independent arborist reports but agreed that it is rare.

In response to Commissioner Archer's inquiry, Parks and Trees Superintendent Pekar reported meeting with the neighbor across the street who supported the reforestation due to the imminent risk to their own property.

Chair Yelsey opened public comment.

Ginny Tagjalli, representing the HOA, confirmed that Mr. Darby has voiced his concerns about the tree at their meetings and that the proposed reforestation has the Board's support. She noted that there was also a past incident with a tree on her property falling onto a car.

Barbara Quist, a member of the HOA's Landscape Committee, lauded Parks and Trees Superintendent Pekar's report as being the most wonderful she has ever seen. She lamented the tree's plight and thanked him for recommending removal out of safety concerns.

Chair Yelsey closed public comment.

Commissioner Kirby echoed Commissioner Daruty's comments about the unusual depth of this report and commended the applicant's investment. She added that the additional information allows the Commission to feel more confident in its decisions and commended Parks and Trees Superintendent Pekar's deep presentation.

Chair Yelsey commended the thorough presentation and its convenient packaging.

Motion by Commissioner Kirby, seconded by Chair Yelsey, to approve the reforestation request.

The motion carried by unanimous vote with Commissioner Daruty abstaining.

VIII. ANNOUNCEMENTS/FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

Recreation & Senior Services Director Levin introduced Municipal Operations Director Zac Gentry, adding that he previously worked for the City as an Inspector in the Public Works Department before leaving to work for Clark County, Nevada, on massive public works projects on Las Vegas Blvd. in the City of Las Vegas.

Recreation & Senior Services Deputy Director Schmillen reported that the Movies in the Park series begins on June 5th in Marina Park with Zootopia 2 followed by a July 10th showing of Goat in Mariners Park. He reported that the City will host a flag installation at the Civic Center from June 22nd through July 6th to celebrate the country's 250th birthday. He added that the annual Independence Day parade will be held on the peninsula on July 4th. He presented some photos of Witte Hall's nearly completed construction, announcing that the ribbon-cutting ceremony will be held on July 9th with a community open house on July 11th.

Commissioner Daruty promoted the annual Spirit Run on October 18th, encouraging school and youth groups looking to use it as a fundraiser to reach out to her.

Municipal Operations Director Gentry announced that there will be an unveiling for the new America 250 plaque and the relocated bicentennial plaque at John Wayne Park on June 23rd.

IX. PUBLIC COMMENTS ON NON-AGENDA ITEMS

None.

X. ADJOURNMENT – 6:15 p.m.

Submitted by: _____
Mariah Stinson, Administrative Support Specialist

Approved by: _____
Anne Yelsey, Chair