

CITY OF NEWPORT BEACH

**Parks, Beaches & Recreation Commission
Regular Meeting
October 7, 2025 – 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 (arrived late)
Keira Kirby, Commissioner
Travis Pirdy, Commissioner

Absent: Diane Daruty, Commissioner (excused)
Kate Malouf, Commissioner (absent)

Staff: Sean Levin, Recreation & Senior Services Director
Justin Schmillen, Recreation & Senior Services Deputy Director
John Salazar, Acting Deputy Public Works Director
Kevin Pekar, Parks and Trees Superintendent
John Nelson, City Arborist
Mariah Stinson, Administrative Support Specialist

III. NOTICE TO THE PUBLIC

IV. PUBLIC COMMENTS ON CONSENT CALENDAR

None

V. CONSENT CALENDAR

A. Minutes of the Parks, Beaches and Recreation Commission Meeting of September 2, 2025

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

B. PW Activity Report

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

C. RSS Activity Report

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

Chair Yelsey opened public comment. There was none.

Motion by Chair Yelsey, seconded by Commissioner Kirby, to approve Item V. CONSENT CALENDAR.

The motion carried by unanimous vote.

VI. CURRENT BUSINESS

A. Continuation of Reforestation Request – 1716 Santiago Drive

Recommendation: Consider the reforestation request of a City American sweetgum (Liquidambar styraciflua) located at 1716 Santiago Drive due to a blocked yard drain, roots encapsulating the water meter and the applicant's desire to re-grade and renovate the parkway as part of a larger landscape renovation project.

The applicant, Robert Kone, resident at 1716 Santiago Drive, has met the procedural requirements established in City Council Policy G-1 - Retention, Removal, and Maintenance of City Trees (City Council Policy G-1) to apply for reforestation. If approved by the PB&R Commission, staff recommends requiring the replanting of a one-for-one, 36-inch box holly oak (Quercus ilex) replacement tree. The applicant would pay for both removal and replacement, but the work would be performed by a City contractor coordinated by the Public Works Department.

Commissioner Archer joined the meeting during this item.

Parks and Trees Superintendent Kevin Pekar reported that the applicant, Robert Kone, lives at 1716 Santiago Drive, where there is a City American sweetgum considered a problem tree per City Council Policy G-1. He reported that staff requested that Mr. Kone apply as a reforestation request instead of applying as a problem tree. He added that the item was continued from the September 2nd meeting because the Commission requested to hear directly from the applicant, who was not in attendance at the last meeting, in addition to there being an issue surrounding a lack of timely posting of the tree. He confirmed that the tree has been properly posted for this meeting, and all residents within 500 feet of the tree were notified.

Mr. Pekar reported that the parkway has been severely lifted by the tree's roots, making it difficult for a passenger to exit a car parked along the curb. He added that a drain near the tree is likely compromised and, while there is not yet damage to the water meter box, it does have the beginning of root penetration. He added that Mr. Kone would like to relandscape his portion of the parkway and replace this tree with another one closer to the center of the property and farther from the meter box.

Mr. Pekar reported that the replacement tree would be a 36-inch box holly oak, which is appropriate for this sized parkway and is not root invasive.

In response to Commissioner Kirby's inquiry, Mr. Pekar reported receiving no public comments from the tree posting. He added that no receipts were provided for past

damage from the tree's roots and clarified his comments at the last meeting that there has not yet been damage to the drain.

Chair Yelsey opened public comment.

Mr. Kone reported that a landscaper hired to work on his property notified him about the tree being on the problem tree list, leading to consultation with Mr. Pekar in determining that a reforestation request makes more sense in this case.

Chair Yelsey closed public comment.

In response to Chair Yelsey's inquiries, Mr. Pekar clarified that the holly oak does not grow as large as other oaks. He added that the City has planted several holly oaks in similar parkway conditions with an expectation of them reaching 40 feet in both height and spread at maturity in a Southern California climate. He stated that it is an evergreen tree with acorns, which the City began planting 10 years ago, and has yet to see root issues. He noted that the Commission has both approved and denied similar reforestations based on view issues as opposed to root-caused damage. He noted that the Commission denied a request for a magnolia tree reforestation under similar circumstances that was appealed to the City Council, leading to a revision to the reforestation policy. He stated that a holly oak is a great replacement option.

Commissioner Kirby stated that the Commission takes every reforestation request very seriously and has concerns about creating a slippery slope within the policy. She reported visiting the tree and realized that there are many like it around the city whose situations this decision could impact.

In response to Commissioner Pirby's inquiry, Mr. Pekar expressed his surprise that the drain is not already blocked by the roots, adding that he expects to see an issue with the drain within the next five years if the tree remains. He added that the City would also have to replace the sidewalk, curb, and gutter within the next 5-10 years, at which point the City may be forced to remove the tree at its own expense.

Chair Yelsey stated that the raising of the sidewalk is an inevitable issue, making reforestation a cost-benefit to the City.

Motion by Chair Yelsey, seconded by Vice Chair Waunch, to approve the reforestation request as presented.

The motion carried 4-1 with Commissioner Kirby voting against.

B. Review of Urban Forest Inventory Update for Corona Del Mar and Citywide Canopy Cover Analysis, conducted by Dudek, Inc.

Recommendation: *Receive and file.*

Mr. Pekar reported that staff consulted with Dudek, Inc. on a pilot program for Corona del Mar's (CdM) tree inventory to create more data points for value

assessment and problem area analysis. He added that the Citywide canopy cover analysis benefited from the latest arboricultural technology with aerial imaging analysis.

Urban Forester Ryan Allen of Dudek, Inc., reported that CdM has an inventory of 3,353 trees with a full assessment of each being performed. He added that the tree data was viewed through the lens of urban forestry sustainability indicators to see if the trees are resilient and sustainable into the future. He added that pest and disease vulnerability was studied. He stated that Dudek could similarly study the City's other tree maintenance zones in the future (in two phases), but focused on CdM first.

Mr. Allen reported that the first sustainability indicator Dudek studies is species diversity to assess what percentage of the inventory is at risk from any given threat entering the area, such as a specific pest or impacts from climate change. He reported that the recommended sustainability guideline is to have no genus compose more than 10% and, in CdM, only magnolias cross the threshold at 13.3%. He added that no species should be over 5% of the inventory, with southern magnolias (13.3%), Mexican fan palms (9.6%), and king palms (8.0%) exceeding this threshold. He noted that overall, there is a good tree diversity throughout CdM.

Mr. Allen reported that trunk diameter is used to assess the age of trees to ensure a good variety as trees mature. He added that the City has more young trees than should be expected in an ideal range but added that the figure makes sense in the CdM neighborhood, given the timeframe of its development. He reported that 96% of CdM's trees are in good or fair condition, which makes for a healthy overall rating for the inventory. He noted that of the six most common trees, only magnolias and Hong Kong orchids are underperforming in comparison to the overall inventory.

Mr. Allen reported that the CdM inventory was assessed through the Water Use Classification of Landscape Species (WUCOLS) Database for water use and future climate sustainability, finding that 57% of the trees are moderate water users, which is decent for a coastal area like Newport Beach, but would be too high for drier areas of California. He noted that southern magnolias are expected to be less suitable in the future, assuming an evolution to a hotter and drier climate. He noted that the American sweetgum that was the subject of the previous item is also a tree that is likely less sustainable in the future with anticipated climate changes. He clarified that the City should not stop planting these less climate change resilient trees, but there should be a dialogue around reducing them.

Mr. Allen reported that CdM has an impending pest threat in the South American palm weevil, which has been steadily moving north in recent years. He added that there is no known way to prevent the pest from damaging a palm tree once infected, with the best remedy being to remove the palm tree once the pest is identified. He added that the South American palm weevil is lethal to most palm species, with palms comprising 28% of CdM's tree inventory, and 93% of the CdM palm population being vulnerable to the pest. He recommended that the City produce a

control plan for the northerly-migrating pests, which can devastate the palm population.

Mr. Allen reported that the study identified the need for 276 structural pruning's, 20 trees requiring an elevated risk assessment, and 28 trees in need of removal. He reported that overall CdM's trees are safe and healthy, with 96% in fair or good condition, and recommended creating a Monitoring Plan for magnolia trees as they are generally underperforming and less suitable for anticipated climate changes.

Mr. Allen reported that Dudek was also contracted to conduct a Citywide canopy cover analysis, broken down by census tracts, zoning types, and parks, to set a baseline for long-term planning. He stated that 13% of Newport Beach is under the cover of a tree canopy, with most of the City's census tracts within the 10-15% range. He added that the coastal areas are the lowest, noting that this is common. He reported that the average for parks was 24% but the distribution is uneven, with 71% of parks having less than 30% canopy coverage, adding that the City's parks only account for 6% of the overall tree cover. He noted that coastal parks can have a view consideration prohibiting the planting of trees, while several others are focused on open recreational fields.

Mr. Allen reported that planned communities, residential neighborhoods, and public spaces ranked the best when creating a ratio of acreage to canopy cover. He noted that there are challenges to increasing canopy cover in the western portion of the city, as it is densely developed and has water restrictions, with a larger possible planting area existing in the eastern portion of Newport Beach.

Mr. Allen reported that, based on current canopy coverage of 13% and potential growth opportunities, 15% would be a realistic goal for the City using public space. He added that the loss and growth of trees on private property is a significant driver of the overall percentage, but is largely beyond the control of the City.

Mr. Allen reported that his recommendations to the City include taking steps to establish an urban canopy cover goal and aligning it with urban forestry requests like reforestation. He also recommended consideration of a private property tree protection ordinance, refining data to create a planting strategy focused on specific neighborhoods, and the development of partnerships with large private landowners and the school districts to support urban forestry goals.

In response to Commissioner Kirby's inquiries, Mr. Allen stated that no factor was considered in assessing which genus and species were overrepresented, including a past trend of planting those types of trees. He clarified that overrepresentation does not mean that certain trees should not be planted in the future, but rather it serves as a cautionary sign encouraging planting other species to increase diversity. He confirmed that the full Dudek report includes a recommended tree species list.

In response to Commissioner Archer's inquiries, City Arborist John Nelson confirmed that the South American palm weevil has not been identified in Newport

Beach. City Arborist John Nelson added that it has been spotted in the City of Irvine, but it was determined to be a wayward stray. He added that they prefer Canary Island date palms but can infest about a dozen other palm species. He added that the Irvine sighting has led to the creation of a Monitoring Program where the City's palms are being searched for the South American palm weevils during their routine inspections. He reported that the weevils were first identified north of Mexico in 2010 in the City of San Diego and are only now reaching the Inland Empire region with the one stray reaching Irvine. He added that the weevils tend to move further northward when they achieve a certain population density within an area.

In response to Commissioner Archer's inquiry, Mr. Pekar stated that, if the weevil reaches Newport Beach, the City has West Coast Arborists on contract to activate a prevention plan with a focus on the prized Canary Island date palms along Marguerite Ave.

In response to Commissioner Archer's inquiry, Mr. Allen stated that the previous item was a good example of managing reforestation requests while potentially balancing canopy cover. He added that a 36-inch box tree is younger and would be more eager to adapt to the landscape and spread than a 48-inch box tree that may be larger initially but grows at a slower rate. He added that the ideal replacement tree to add canopy cover is a combination of its species and how fast it grows. Mr. Nelson added that there is a factor of identifying the right tree for the right place based upon fit and providing the largest canopy possible without disrupting infrastructure such as overhead powerlines if planted near a right of way. He added that there can also be a matter of policy in developing the best method of replacing trees with an emphasis on maintaining the canopy coverage. Mr. Pekar stated that City staff has been considering updates to City Council Policy G-1, and this could include using Dudek's recommended tree species list as it relates to suitable replacements, along with aligning canopy goals to the reforestation policy.

In response to Commissioner Piridy's inquiry, Mr. Allen reported that the inventory assessment shows that the City's trees are healthy and in a safe condition. He cautioned that Dudek did not perform a management assessment, but the assessment of safe and healthy condition indicates that the City's trees are being managed well. He noted that many factors impact a city's ability to provide canopy coverage, so assessing how good any given city is doing is relative to its potential. He clarified that Newport Beach has some constraints, like the beaches, which do not allow it to reach the same canopy percentage as other Orange County cities.

Commissioner Kirby thanked Mr. Allen for his comments on the constraints within Newport Beach to dramatically increasing canopy cover, such as coastal areas and recreation fields.

Chair Yelsey opened public comment.

Jim Mosher inquired if there are differences between a southern magnolia and a little gem magnolia, how the public can view the more detailed version of Dudek's

report, and what the City's next steps should be based on this report. He added that any potential policy change based on the report should be included in the forthcoming General Plan updates.

Chair Yelsey closed public comment.

In response to Chair Yelsey's inquiries, Mr. Pekar stated that this report is only the first phase of cataloging the City's tree inventory, focused on CdM. He added that there are still two more phases to complete, with the hopes that the data will assist staff in creating an Urban Forest Management Plan. He added that potential updates to Policies G-1, G-3, and G-6 following the completion of the Urban Forest Management Plan will involve higher-level input and, when it comes to the Commission in the future, an Ad Hoc Subcommittee could be an option. He confirmed that this is a receive and file item because it is meant more as an introduction to the work with policy direction requests to come after the work is completed on a Draft Urban Forest Management Plan.

In response to Commissioner Kirby's inquiries, Mr. Pekar confirmed that additional funding will probably be needed to complete the next two phases of the study. He stated that he is happy to see that the Commission is excited about the program. He agreed that the Commission could make a formal recommendation to the City Council to continue the work, but noted it would have to be done at the next meeting because it has not been Agendized.

In response to Commissioner Archer's inquiry, Mr. Pekar confirmed that staff has considered adding certain diseased tree species to the City's problem tree list. He clarified that the City should not stop planting magnolias, but the City should be aware that there is already a disproportionately high number of them in the inventory, and encourage other trees instead. He noted that the tulip tree scale is infesting magnolia trees, so staff has limited the planting of magnolia trees in areas where the scale is a problem, such as CdM. He cited the tulip tree scale as a good reason why diversity is important because one pest is attacking a larger percentage of the inventory. He added that the weevils could someday be viewed similarly to how the City is currently looking at protecting trees from the scale.

Chair Yelsey received and filed the report.

C. General Plan Harbor, Bay, and Beaches Element, Natural Resources Element, and Recreation Element-Ad Hoc Subcommittee Recommendations

Recommendation: Review comments from the Ad Hoc Subcommittee and direct staff to forward to General Plan Advisory Committee for consideration, along with any additional input as appropriate.

Recreation & Senior Services Deputy Director Justin Schmillen reported that, in August, the Draft Recreation Element, Draft Natural Resources Element, and Draft Harbor, Bay, and Beaches Element were presented to the Commission, with the

Commission appointing Commissioners Daruty, Kirby, and Malouf to an Ad Hoc Subcommittee in September to take a deeper dive into the General Plan update.

Commissioner Kirby reported that the Subcommittee met with City staff on September 17th and had an additional internal Subcommittee meeting on September 22nd to compile notes. She reported that the memorandum in the Agenda packet highlights things the Subcommittee liked and disliked about the draft elements, lists things the Subcommittee would like added, and includes some questions about the draft policies, looking for clarity.

Chair Yelsey commended the helpful summary and feedback.

Chair Yelsey opened public comment.

Mr. Mosher reported that he is a member of the General Plan Advisory Committee (GPAC) but is speaking as an individual. He lauded the Subcommittee's recommendations. He noted that the Draft Natural Resources Element includes urging the City to draft an Urban Forest Management Plan as described in the previous item. He added that a focus on improving the tree canopy could be added to the draft based on the previous item's discussion.

Mr. Mosher noted that the focus areas of the Subcommittee's feedback are trees and parks. He reported that the addition of "Beaches" to the Harbor, Bay, and Beaches Element comes from the Water Quality/Coastal Tidelands (WQCT) Committee out of concerns over preserving the beaches, but the City Charter calls for the City Council to look to the Commission to advise them on beach-related matters and not the WQCT Committee. He expressed his hopes that beach-related matters in the future will go to the Commission, lamenting that they have rarely discussed anything related to the beaches over his 15 years of regular meeting attendance.

Chair Yelsey closed public comment.

Commissioner Archer agreed that it has been rare to have a beach-related item heard during his seven years on the Commission, with the closest one being a beach-adjacent discussion about eBikes. He lamented how they have not investigated matters like beach erosion and encouraged more items on subjects like erosion.

Commissioner Kirby reported that the Subcommittee was unaware that this meeting would include the Dudek presentation and commended the Subcommittee for being in line with what the Commission heard about urban forestry in the previous item. She agreed with Mr. Mosher's comment about incorporating canopy cover in the General Plan. She reported that the Draft Harbor, Bay, and Beaches Element led to the most Subcommittee questions.

Recreation & Senior Services Deputy Director Schmillen noted that the City is still taking comments from the public about the draft elements until November 17th. He

encouraged the Commissioners and others to view the latest drafts available on the City's website and continue to comment.

In response to Chair Yelsey's inquiry, Recreation & Senior Services Deputy Director Schmillen confirmed that staff recommends that the Commission review the Subcommittee's comments and direct staff to forward them to the GPAC for consideration.

In response to Commissioner Kirby's inquiry, Recreation & Senior Services Deputy Director Schmillen confirmed that the draft elements will come back to the Commission in early 2026.

Commissioner Pirdy stated that the Commission would intently scrutinize any beach-related items brought before it. He cited the potential boardwalk expansion as a matter where the Commission could offer input with a focus on public safety if the subject reaches their Agenda.

Motion by Commissioner Archer, seconded by Commissioner Kirby, to approve staff forwarding the Ad Hoc Subcommittee's recommendations to the General Plan Advisory Committee for consideration, along with additional input as appropriate.

The motion carried by unanimous vote.

VII. ANNOUNCEMENTS/FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

Recreation & Senior Services Deputy Director Schmillen reported that the annual Halloween Spooktacular will be on October 25th from 3-6:00 p.m. He added that reservations for Witte Hall have been opened for April of 2026 as the facility's construction is making great progress.

Acting Deputy Public Works Director John Salazar reported that the City will hold its annual compost giveaway on October 18th, along with a paper shredding and e-Waste drop-off opportunity.

Chair Yelsey commended last year's e-Waste collection event.

Acting Deputy Public Works Director Salazar stated that the event averages about 600 cars' worth of patrons.

Commissioner Kirby reported that the Lower Castaways Ad Hoc Subcommittee met, determining that the new aquatic center will also not be placed at Mariners' Park. She reported from a September 18th meeting that Bonita Creek Park is now being studied for a potential aquatic center. She added that the Request For Proposals (RFP) for the Lower Castaways site were due last Friday.

VIII. PUBLIC COMMENTS ON NON-AGENDA ITEMS

Mr. Mosher reported that the City is hosting a couple of open houses on October 21st and October 22nd to gather public feedback about the General Plan updating process. He added that a housing development was approved at the last Planning Commission meeting, where a bicycle repair station will be replaced by a tree. He stated that the repair stations promote bicycle riding as a form of recreation and expressed his disappointment that it will not be included in the final project.

Commissioner Kirby added that there is a bicycle repair station at the Sunset Ridge Park Bridge, which could be close enough to the new development. She agreed that more community members should be made aware of the City's bicycle repair stations.

Commissioner Pirby reported that his brother is a past recipient of the Community Service Award given by the Commission. He added that the 10th Ben Did Go paddle occurred in September and expressed his appreciation for the City's, staff's, and Commission's support for the event, even though it is not an official City event.

Chair Yelsey lauded the Ben Did Go event's success.

IX. ADJOURNMENT – 6:30 p.m.

Submitted by: _____
Mariah Stinson, Administrative Support Specialist

Approved by: _____
Anne Yelsey, Chair