

MAY 8, 2025
6:00 P.M. – OFFICIAL MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER by Chair Brown at 6:01pm.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE by Commissioner Leger.

ROLL CALL

= Present = Absent

Commissioners

- Cristian Garcia Arcos**
- Jake Husen
- Jason Komala
- Brandine Leger
- Elizabeth Dorn Parker
- Shayanne Wright, Vice Chair*
- Kelly Brown, Chair

City Staff

- Brian Gruner, Parks and Community Services Director
- Monique Villasenor, Recreation Manager
- Raja Sethuraman, Public Works Director
- Robert Ryan, Public Works Maintenance Manager
- Laura Fautua, Executive Assistant
- Kathia Viteri, Office Specialist II

*Vice Chair Wright attended the meeting via Zoom

**Commissioner Garcia Arcos arrived at 6:05 PM

PUBLIC COMMENTS - None

COMMISSIONER COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS

Commissioner Husen: highlighted the success of the “Songs in the Canyon” concert and strong Earth Day booth turnout, expressing interest in improving future booth visibility. He shared insights from his ride-along with a park ranger, underscoring their critical role in park safety and advocating for additional ranger vehicles and more strategic resource allocation to enhance coverage.

Commissioner Komala: Thanked City staff in organizing Spring Fest, shared his family’s enjoyment of the pirate-themed activities and games, and he appreciated the overall success of the event. He also highlighted the Earth Day event and the memorable opportunity to plant a tree alongside Congressman Min, Senator Choi, Mayor Stevens, and City Council, expressing gratitude for the event’s coordination and fun atmosphere.

Commissioner Leger: reflected on the Earth Day event, noting a lack of signage and materials but emphasized meaningful public engagement and recommended setting up a booth at summer concerts for continued outreach. She also provided updates on Senior Center events, discussed park visits—including challenges at Paularino Park and off-leash dogs.

Vice Chair Wright: Shared her ride-along experience and visited several East Side parks, Lions Park, and the Aquatic Center before departing on a work trip to Japan. She expressed appreciation for the outgoing City Manager, noting her leadership and the respect she held for her. While uncertain of staff sentiment, the commissioner remained hopeful that the City would find a strong successor.

Commissioner Garcia Arcos: Shared his Earth Day experience planting trees in Tucson, AZ, noting how drought-impacted cities make strategic choices in tree care and suggesting similar practices for Costa Mesa. He also promoted the upcoming Love Costa Mesa Day on May 17, emphasizing planned plantings in underused areas to enhance community resources and long-term benefits.

Chair Brown: Expressed gratitude for the Earth Day event and emphasized the value of direct public interaction, suggesting future booths include engaging features like a bubble machine. She shared community feedback on park needs, supported continued outreach at summer concerts, raised concerns about Fairview Park's habitat sensitivity and equity in ride-along experiences, and acknowledged the City Manager's departure with appreciation.

CONSENT CALENDAR

1. Minutes – APRIL 10, 2025 PACS Draft Minutes

2. Department Report – APRIL 2025

Chair Brown pulled the Department Report and Mr. Brian Gruner, Parks and Community Services Director presented Department updates.

Commissioner Garcia Arcos inquired about expanding opportunities to the community gardens.

Commissioner Leger advocated to expand community gardens spaces within the City and spoke about how we can expand on engagement to highlight City resources available for the community.

Commissioner Husen requested more information about the project list and how that ties in with the CIP list.

Public Comment: None.

MOTION: To receive and file Consent Calendar items

MOVED/SECOND: Commissioner Leger / Commissioner Husen.

The motion carried by the following roll call vote:

Ayes: Commissioner Garcia Arcos, Commissioner Husen, Commissioner Komala, Commissioner Leger, Vice Chair Wright, Chair Brown

Nays: none

Absent: Commissioner Dorn Parker

Motion Carried: 6 – 0

OLD BUSINESS:

1. PARK CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS PRINCIPLE AND VALUES WORKSHOP

Mr. Brian Gruner, Parks and Community Services Director presented.

Chair Brown appreciated the ongoing discussion and recognized the importance of the initial conversation from the previous month. She encouraged commissioners to consider new ideas, assess the sufficiency of existing categories, and provide input on both content and formatting to ensure the document effectively supports City Council decision-making.

Public Comment: None.

Commissioner Husen expressed support for the current categories and viewed the framework as a strong first step. He raised the question of how to apply the criteria in future years with varying budget levels and referenced prior suggestions from Vice Chair Wright and Commissioner Dorn Parker regarding the role of budget in planning. He proposed incorporating both short-term and long-term goals to balance immediate fiscal constraints with aspirational priorities, allowing flexibility without limiting vision based on annual funding.

Chair Brown appreciated that the draft was on the agenda and posed key questions about how it would be used moving forward. She asked whether the categories should be prioritized or presented equally and suggested adding narrative descriptions to clarify the meaning behind each value, particularly for equity and access. She emphasized that community-centered planning and equity should be treated as foundational principles rather than separate criteria, noting these values should be integrated across all projects—except perhaps basic maintenance.

Commissioner Komala praised the draft and suggested viewing the framework as a pyramid, with equity, access, and community-centered planning as the base supporting all other values. He emphasized these core principles should guide the evaluation of all other criteria like sustainability and innovation, arguing that without them, a project should not move forward.

Chair Brown agreed and reiterated that community input should be embedded in most projects, distinguishing foundational values from more conditional ones like innovation. She acknowledged the framework was still evolving and called for a clearer introduction to explain its purpose and use. She noted the need to define core values that everything else builds upon and to consider flexibility for maintenance projects.

Commissioner Komala added that, similar to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, if the fundamental values like equity and community-centered planning aren't present, it should be a non-starter. He stressed that these foundational elements must be community-led and responsive to varying neighborhood needs.

Leger: I do like doing this like a pyramid, a hierarchy, but I also think that goes back to what you were saying with the rating system.

Vice Chair Wright stated that the draft effectively summarized the Commission's agreed-upon values and praised the organic direction of the discussion. She emphasized the need to shift toward implementation, suggesting a visual framework (e.g., pyramid) and separating short- and long-term priorities based on budget realities. She also recommended assigning focused outcomes to each value for clarity and proposed that commissioners help define these outcomes for practical use in future decision-making.

Chair Brown distinguished between values and priorities, noting that values guide big-picture thinking while priorities guide action. She questioned whether all items in the document were true values or some were priorities (e.g., safety and maintenance).

Brown encouraged openness to continuing the discussion another month and suggested exploring alternative formats or individual contributions, while avoiding unnecessary staff revisions or premature finalization.

Commissioner Leger proposed an email-based approach where commissioners could individually rank or expand on the values and priorities, such as applying a pyramid format. She believed this could help identify areas of agreement or divergence without the pressure of in-person discussion.

Vice Chair Wright agreed with Brown's distinction and stated that while starting with values was helpful, shifting toward a prioritization framework would better support the Commission's advisory role, particularly regarding CIP and park assessments. She proposed defining short-term priorities—like safety, maintenance, optimization, and community-centered planning—versus long-term priorities tied to expansion and equity. She emphasized incorporating community engagement and resource optimization into current projects and aligning long-term decisions with sustainability, equity, and funding opportunities.

Chair Brown emphasized the importance of separating values from priorities, noting that values guide her decision-making process and influence what gets prioritized. She raised concerns about equity in park access and asked how commissioners could remain actively involved in shaping the framework rather than relying solely on staff. Brown later supported the creation of a subcommittee, stating it would allow a smaller group to incorporate commissioner, staff, and public feedback without excluding broader input. She ultimately made a motion for commissioners to submit comments over the next few weeks and to include interest in joining a subcommittee, which would be formally proposed at the next meeting.

Commissioner Garcia Arcos suggested applying the core values to existing programs, like the mobile recreation unit, to assess their real-world application. She highlighted a missed outreach opportunity in Shalimar and stressed the importance of incorporating community input. She also advocated for using safety and maintenance as educational tools and requested a future definition of "community forestry." Arcos supported forming a subcommittee to reduce individual workload, provided it allows equitable input from all commissioners.

Vice Chair Wright proposed that each commissioner independently draft a version of the framework—including visuals or practical examples—to present at the next meeting. She believed this approach would reduce staff workload and encourage diverse perspectives in a structured, public setting.

Commissioner Leger was hesitant about both the individual assignment and subcommittee ideas. She preferred a method like an email survey to allow broader commissioner input before finalizing the document and expressed concern that a subcommittee could limit participation and create bias.

Commissioner Komala recommended forming a subcommittee instead of assigning individual drafts. He believes a small group could collaboratively align on a direction and produce a polished product, especially with someone skilled in design tools.

Commissioner Husen expressed uncertainty about creating visual frameworks and shared that he might struggle with individual drafting due to limited creativity. He did not take a firm position but wanted to voice his concern about the assignment-based approach.

Chair Brown clarified that the topic's origin could justify forming a subcommittee and sought staff input on how best to proceed. She reiterated that the process should avoid excluding anyone and encouraged staff-collected input before subcommittee formation.

Commissioner Leger inquired about ad hoc size permitted.

These exchanges culminated in Chair Brown's motion: commissioners would send their feedback to staff within a few weeks, indicate if they wished to join a subcommittee, and revisit the topic next month with a recommendation to form a subcommittee to develop the next draft over the summer.

MOTION: To receive and file Consent Calendar items

MOVED/SECOND: Chair Brown / Commissioner Leger.

The motion carried by the following roll call vote:

Ayes: Commissioner Garcia Arcos, Commissioner Husen, Commissioner Komala, Commissioner Leger, Vice Chair Wright, Chair Brown

Nays: none

Absent: Commissioner Dorn Parker

Motion Carried: 6 – 0

NEW BUSINESS:

1. **DONATION OF A MEMORIAL TREE, BENCH AND PLAQUE AT TEWINKLE PARK**
Mr. Rober Ryan, Public Works Maintenance Manager presented.

Public Comment:

Family member: Expressed heartfelt appreciation for the Commission's efforts in maintaining Costa Mesa parks, sharing how much their daughter enjoys daily visits to TeWinkle Park and specifically the Lower Fill Pond area. They supported the idea of adding a bench to that location and thanked the Commission for their dedication.

Commissioner Leger asked whether city staff conducts background checks or online research on individuals before approving memorial bench or tree dedications, clarifying that the question was general and not related to the current request.

MOTION: To approve the tree, bench and plaque at TeWinkle Park.

MOVED/SECOND: Commissioner Komala / Commissioner Leger

The motion carried by the following roll call vote:

Ayes: Commissioner Garcia Arcos, Commissioner Husen, Commissioner Komala, Commissioner Leger, Vice Chair Wright, Chair Brown

Nays: none

Absent: Commissioner Dorn Parker

Motion Carried: 6 – 0

ADDITIONAL COMMISSIONER MEMBER & STAFF COMMENTS

Mr. Gruner provided a follow-up regarding Earth Day, acknowledging it was the first event with active commission participation and committing to improvements for future events, especially during the summer. He also noted that staff would follow up on the ride-along program.

Commissioner Husen asked whether there is a limit to how many memorial benches can be placed in parks and whether memorial plaques have a set timeframe or expiration, expressing concern about long-term park space usage

ADJOURNMENT by Chair Brown at 7:42 PM.