APRIL 23, 2026
6:00 P.M. – UNOFFICIAL MINUTES

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

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE by Vice Chair Wright.

ROLL CALL

☒ = Present ☐ = Absent

Commissioners	City Staff
☐ Cristian Garcia Arcos	☒ Brian Gruner, Parks and Community Services Director
☒ Jake Husen	☒ Monique Villasenor, Recreation Manager
☒ Jason Komala	☒ Robert Ryan, Maintenance Services Manager
☐ Brandine Leger	☒ Laura Fautua, Executive Assistant
☒ Elizabeth Dorn Parker	☒ Kathia Vitier, Recreation Specialist
☒ Shayanne Wright, Vice Chair	
☒ Kelly Brown, Chair	

SPECIAL ITEMS:

1. **COMMUNITY GARDEN UPDATE**

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

Commissioner Komala asked about enforcement of the community garden rules, including the edible crop requirement and reassignment timeline.

Vice Chair Wright requested information regarding participation costs, average member tenure, and waitlist turnover data.

Chair Brown asked when the garden guidelines and program structure were last evaluated, including comparisons to other cities and analysis of community garden program benefits and costs.

Commissioner Dorn Parker discussed the raised bed pilot at and noted the subcommittee was exploring additional and creative garden locations.

Public Comment:

Lynn Redman: shared his long-term experience at the Hamilton Garden, highlighted the educational and community benefits of gardening, thanked staff, and encouraged the City to preserve and expand community gardens.

Sevi Gilpin: discussed the community benefits of the Hamilton Garden, raised concerns regarding limited parking and accessibility. Suggested voluntary plot downsizing opportunities, and encouraged further evaluation of plot size calculations.

Ashley Arvinites: Shared that the Hamilton Garden strengthened her connection to the community, supported expanding access to gardens, expressed concerns regarding reducing plot sizes, and suggested reviewing pricing structures and early renewal

check-ins to address waitlist turnover.

Carol Buchanan. Expressed opposition to limiting garden tenure or reducing existing plot sizes, raised concerns regarding non-residents and underutilized plots, praised improvements at the Del Mar Garden, and thanked the City for maintaining the gardens.

Commenter 5: Suggested additional garden opportunities could be created at Del Mar Garden through better use of shaded areas and mulch space, offered assistance with raised bed construction, and praised staff support and maintenance efforts.

Commenter 6: Reiterated suggestions regarding maximizing unused garden space, utilizing existing materials for additional plots, and commended staff for maintaining the gardens and infrastructure.

Nathan Mann: Raised concerns regarding parking limitations at the Hamilton Garden, encouraged the City to preserve the garden property for its intended purpose, supported identifying additional garden locations, and shared appreciation for the community benefits of the program.

Chair Brown encouraged community members to think broadly about future garden opportunities, referenced the Commission's prior recommendation for community garden funding, and expressed support for forming a subcommittee to further research the topic.

Vice Chair Wright expressed support for expanding community gardens within existing parks and City facilities, suggested exploring future opportunities at the golf course and other City properties, and emphasized utilizing existing infrastructure and staffing resources.

Commissioner Dorn Parker volunteered to serve on a subcommittee, discussed the need for improved security and ADA accessibility at the gardens, encouraged incorporating gardens into future housing developments and underutilized City spaces, highlighted staffing and funding considerations.

Commissioner Komala reflected on the balance between maintaining larger plots for food production and expanding access through smaller plots, emphasized the community-building aspects of gardening, supported exploring additional garden space and infrastructure improvements, and encouraged prioritizing accessibility, high-density residents, and long-term program sustainability.

Chair Brown expressed enthusiasm for expanding community gardens, emphasized the importance of intentional public engagement and data collection before implementing future projects, encouraged researching successful community garden models and partnerships, supported educational gardening opportunities for youth, and highlighted the importance of long-term planning, outreach, and communication.

Commissioner Dorn Parker suggested involving educational partners such as Orange Coast College and encouraged Commissioner Garcia Arcos' participation in the subcommittee due to his expertise and community perspective.

Chair Brown thanked Commissioner Dorn Parker for volunteering and invited additional commissioner interest regarding the community garden subcommittee.

Commissioner Husen echoed prior comments regarding the demand for community gardens, supported public engagement efforts to address cost structures, and maximizing existing space, and expressed interest in future program development.

Vice Chair Wright suggested exploring partnerships with special districts for additional garden locations, recommended involving current gardeners in future site planning discussions, requested additional information regarding program costs and staffing, and discussed balancing program affordability with long-term financial sustainability.

Chair Brown supported community participation and empowerment ideas within future public engagement discussions and asked if additional direction was needed from the Commission.

2. PARKS AND COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMISSION ANNUAL REPORT

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

Chair Brown highlighted the significance of the Commission preparing a presentation to City Council, discussed priorities including Capital Improvement Project review timelines, commissioner education opportunities, community outreach efforts, and proposed future subcommittee work integrating park assessments, tree canopy, and master planning efforts.

Commissioner Dorn Parker supported coordinating Picnic Day with Newport-Mesa Unified School District, emphasized collecting meaningful public engagement data at community events, encouraged formal onboarding and training opportunities for future commissioners, and suggested exploring multi-use park concepts including small enclosed dog areas and expanded park utilization analysis.

Commissioner Komala supported the proposed priorities, emphasized the importance of continued monitoring and community engagement regarding senior transportation services, and encouraged maintaining ongoing attention to park assessment needs throughout the year.

Chair Brown suggested returning to more frequent updates regarding park projects and discussing how those projects align with park assessment efforts.

Commissioner Komala expressed support for Picnic Day and suggested incorporating community garden outreach and local produce displays at community events and farmers markets to promote locally grown food and public engagement.

Commissioner Husen expressed support for the Picnic Day concept.

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Vice Chair Wright requested additional education regarding joint use agreements with Newport-Mesa Unified School District and the City's landscaping contract, encouraged integrating multiple planning documents and assessments into future park planning efforts, supported exploring public access pilot programs for community centers, advocated for additional public-private partnerships and park activations, and reiterated support for advancing dog park improvements and expanded off-leash opportunities.

Chair Brown noted a compilation of the Commission's feedback will be converted into presentation categories for the future City Council presentation.

Public Comment: None.

ADJOURNMENT by Chair Brown at 7:31 PM.

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