



**CITY OF SCOTTSDALE
MCDOWELL SONORAN PRESERVE COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES - Thursday, June 3, 2021
Meeting held electronically**

PRESENT: Chairperson Cynthia Wenstrom, Vice-Chair Laurie LaPat-Polasko, Commissioners Steve Coluccio, Mark Hackbarth, Marsha Lipps, Kerry Olsson, and Jeffrey Smith

STAFF: Kroy Ekblaw, Preserve Director; Scott Hamilton, Senior Trails Planner; Gina Kirklin, Enterprise and Finance Director; Dave Ramirez, Wildfire Mitigation Coordinator; Mark Zimmerman, Fire Marshal

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Wenstrom called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

Members present as noted above.

3. PUBLIC COMMENT

There were no public comments received.

4. THANK YOU TO PAST COMMISSIONERS AND WELCOME NEW COMMISSIONERS

Chair Wenstrom thanked Steve Dodd and Tawana Parker for their service on the Commission. She welcomed new Commissioners Kerry Olsson and Jeffrey Smith.

5. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Approval of the Regular Meeting minutes of May 6, 2021

At the request of Commissioner Olsson, Mr. Ekblaw gave clarification regarding the estimated 200 x 100-foot-long structure identified under Item 8(b).

VICE-CHAIR LAPAT-POLASKO MOVED TO APPROVE THE MAY 6, 2021 MCDOWELL SONORAN PRESERVE COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES. COMMISSIONER HACKBARTH SECONDED THE MOTION, WHICH CARRIED SEVEN (7) TO ZERO (0) BY ROLL CALL VOTE. CHAIR WENSTROM, VICE-CHAIR LAPAT-POLASKO, COMMISSIONERS COLUCCIO, HACKBARTH, LIPPS, OLSSON, AND SMITH VOTED IN THE AFFIRMATIVE. THERE WERE NO DISSIDENTING VOTES.

6. CONSERVANCY UPDATE

Justin Owen announced 30th anniversary events scheduled for the month of June. Activities include celebrations of the creation of the Parsons Field Institute in 2010 and launching the Pathfinder program in 2009. He mentioned that one year after the launch of the Pathfinder program Pathfinders found remnants of the original Stoneman Road military supply route, which led to a 2012 presentation of the findings. Work is being done to create a special edition of Mountain Lions Magazine to celebrate the anniversary and to plan for possible in-person celebrations in the fall.

Parsons Field Institute recently held their annual update, which included stewards, supporters, academic and scientific partners as well as members of the public. The event was held virtually, which was well received, prompting consideration of offering future updates with both in-person and virtual options.

The tortoise telemetry project has tagged 14 tortoises to date. The project will include two years of tracking, which will provide more understanding of the species and impacts of urbanization and other stressors through their areas of habitat and migration.

The Education Implementation Committee has finalized work on the creation of a full education program. The program is operating under the theme of "Everything is connected and always changing." Mr. Owen noted that Expedition Days is transitioning to offer individualized programs to coordinate with the 3rd and 4th grade curriculums (ED3 and ED4). Mesa and Scottsdale school districts have committed to participating in the updated program. Conservancy Kids online video summer programs are being increased to sending out a new video each week during the 12 weeks of summer.

The Pathfinders pilot program at the trailheads continues to be successful. The Conservancy is working with city staff to finalize plans in hopes of restarting all Pathfinder activities in the fall.

Mr. Owen announced that thanks to a generous donation, a new topographical map has been created for Gateway Trailhead.

Commissioners were given an opportunity to ask questions. Mr. Owen noted that the Conservancy is continuing to follow the City of Scottsdale Covid guidelines pertaining to volunteers, contractors and employees maintaining face coverings when engaging with the public. Mr. Ekblaw said that he expects that the City's policies will continue to be updated over the summer.

7. UPDATE ON WILDLAND FIRE MITIGATION PLANS AND PROJECTS IN THE PRESERVE

Fire Marshal Mark Zimmerman gave an update on the Firewise program and fire protection efforts in Scottsdale and the Preserve. He highlighted communities surrounding the Preserve who are participating in the Firewise program and the levels of participation that each has achieved to date. The program is voluntary, and the fire department actively markets to communities to encourage participation.

Dave Ramirez, Wildfire Mitigation Coordinator, gave an update on mitigation projects and grant proposals. He highlighted work being done in the areas of 136th northeast of the Preserve, near Dove Valley, north of Rio Verde Drive, and at Dynamite and Pima near Troon North.

Mr. Ramirez said that the city is submitting a grant request for \$500,000 for fire mitigation projects, which, if awarded, would be combined with an approximately \$600,000 City matching contribution.

Mr. Hamilton gave an update on the upcoming Fourth of July closure and fire watch. Notice of the closure and of areas that will remain open will be sent out to the public soon. He thanked the Conservancy and the Stewards who have been crucial in helping monitor the Preserve entrances each year.

8. POLICY PROCESS NEXT STEPS AND FINANCIAL REPORT UPDATE

Gina Kirklin, Enterprise and Finance Director, gave a financial update and reported on the recent bond transactions. In response to historically low interest rates, the City Treasurer's Office recently took the necessary steps to refund existing General Obligation (GO) bonds issued to finance Preserve land acquisitions and land improvements in September of 2020. Issuance of the GO refunding bonds, taxable series 2020 was completed in December 2021. Bonds were issued for \$168 million at an all-in true interest cost of 1.3 percent. The refunding maturity is close to the same as those that were refunded, and the deadline to pay of the long-term debt remains 2034. The refunding generated \$13.3 million in net present value savings, approximately \$1 million annually. The deal is a taxable deal and carries a call option, with the investor receiving par, accrued interest, plus 15 basis points. An important element of the City's ability to issue refundings at low interest rates is its strong rating history. In November of 2020, the three major rating agencies reconfirmed the City's AAA rating.

Ms. Kirklin reviewed the Preserve cash flow assumptions including FY 2021 through 2025 tax cash flow assumptions; sales tax cash flow 14-year forecast, FY 2021 through 2034; total uses, which are forecast at \$371 million; the estimated ending fund balance, which is \$90 million; and a review of the McDowell Sonoran Preserve 2045 comprehensive funding options. She briefly revisited the prior discussions had by the MSPC regarding the Preserve sales tax.

Commissioners were given an opportunity to ask questions. Ms. Kirklin explained that any remaining funds at the end of 2034 could be used for improvements, trailheads, or additional land acquisitions, but could not be used for maintenance of any kind.

Mr. Ekblaw announced that on Tuesday night, City Council identified priorities and the top of the list included land acquisition and long-term maintenance of the Preserve, which supports the Commission's goal of focusing on sustainability of the Preserve for the next 25 years and beyond. He anticipates that there will be an opportunity for the Commission to have a work study session with City Council to review the ideas that have been reviewed over the major categories the Commission has identified, including conceptual ideas and definitions. City Council's input will be used to refine the package for a final review and decision by Council about a possible vote in November of 2022 or 2024.

Once refined, information on the seven major categories, including identified costs, including annual, recurring and capital improvement one-time costs, will be made available on a webpage dedicated to the effort. Mr. Ekblaw suggested that the Commission consider the possibility of holding an open house with Commissioners and staff manning workstations on each individual category. Commissioners were in favor of holding an in-person open house, if possible.

9. STAFF REPORTS

Mr. Hamilton gave an update on the progress of the Pima/Dynamite Trailhead construction. Commissioners will be given an opportunity to tour the site in June.

10. UPCOMING MEETING DATES, LOCATIONS, AND AGENDA ITEMS

All dates listed are tentative and subject to amendment:

- Tour - Pima/Dynamite TH and new trails - June 17th – 5pm @ Pima/Dynamite Trailhead
- Other 2021 meetings thru November:

Regular meetings

September 2nd – Policy Process
October 7th – Policy Process
November 4th – Policy Process

Special meetings

September 16th – Policy Process
October 21st – Policy Process
November 18th – Policy Process

Mr. Ekblaw noted that he will survey the Commissioners for available dates in case a special meeting is needed in July or August.

11. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

Commissioner Olsson requested an update on the 128th Street through the Preserve and potential impacts on wildlife movement, options being considered, and next steps if the Commission wishes to move forward with making a recommendation to City Council.

Mr. Ekblaw said that he will contact the transportation department, police, fire, and planning to coordinate a discussion in early fall.

Commissioner Hackbarth asked if there has been any progress in coordinating with Maricopa County Flood Control District. Mr. Ekblaw said he has not received a response yet. He noted that staff could plan to give an update on general data questions.

Commissioner Coluccio asked that a presentation be agendaized on the challenges of crossing Rio Verde Drive at the gooseneck.

Commissioner Lipps inquired about the disappearance of signage regarding e-bikes.

Mr. Hamilton said that staff is not sure what happened to the signs and is working to create a more permanent signage solution.

12. ADJOURNMENT

COMMISSIONER HACKBARTH MOVED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING. COMMISSIONER COLUCCIO SECONDED THE MOTION, WHICH CARRIED SEVEN (7) TO ZERO (0) BY ROLL CALL VOTE. CHAIR WENSTROM, VICE-CHAIR LAPAT-POLASKO, COMMISSIONERS COLUCCIO, HACKBARTH, LIPPS, OLSSON, AND SMITH VOTED IN THE AFFIRMATIVE. THERE WERE NO DISSENTING VOTES.

With no further business to discuss, being duly moved and seconded, the meeting adjourned at 6:25 p.m.

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