



**CITY OF SCOTTSDALE
MCDOWELL SONORAN PRESERVE COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
Wednesday, February 17, 2022
Volanti at the Scottsdale Airport
15000 N. Airport Dr.
Scottsdale, AZ 85260**

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

STAFF: Kroy Ekblaw, Preserve Director; Scott Hamilton, Preserve Manager; Tom Shannon, Fire Chief; Mark Zimmerman, Fire Marshal; Dave Ramirez, Community Wildfire Mitigation Coordinator

GUESTS: Justin Owen, Executive Director, McDowell Sonoran Conservancy; Jace McKeighan, Former Commissioner

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

Mr. Ekblaw said that one comment was submitted regarding installing weather announcement screens at trailheads.

4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Regular Meeting minutes of November 3, 2021

COMMISSIONER HACKBARTH MOVED TO APPROVE THE NOVEMBER 3, 2021 MCDOWELL SONORAN PRESERVE COMMISSION REGULAR MEETING MINUTES. VICE-CHAIR LAPAT-POLASKO 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.

Regular Meeting minutes of November 18, 2021

Commissioner Coluccio asked for clarification about the comment regarding the connection along 119th Street to Rio Verde. Mr. Ekblaw explained that in 2015, 118th Street did not

connect between Jomax and Rio Verde Drive, which was a key consideration for neighborhood circulation. Since then, that area of 118th Street has been built and does connect.

COMMISSIONER HACKBARTH MOVED TO APPROVE THE NOVEMBER 18, 2021 MCDOWELL SONORAN PRESERVE COMMISSION REGULAR MEETING MINUTES. 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.

Work Study minutes of December 2, 2021

COMMISSIONER HACKBARTH MOVED TO APPROVE THE DECEMBER 2, 2021 MCDOWELL SONORAN PRESERVE COMMISSION WORK STUDY MEETING MINUTES. COMMISSIONER SMITH 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.

5. MCDOWELL SONORAN CONSERVANCY UPDATE

Justin Owen, Executive Director of the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy, congratulated the Commission on their presentation to City Council. He thanked the Fire Department for awarding the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy with the Community Partner of the Year Award.

Highlights included Expedition Days program for third and fourth graders has been moved from March to November 2022 due to COVID; Expedition Days online program will launch this spring to over 3,000 students across the Valley; "Expedition Days on the Road" will bring learning stations to SUSD school locations; Seventh grade classes were given the opportunity to take field trips to the Preserve; the Conservancy continues to work with teachers to build lesson plans that will fill learning gaps experienced during COVID; and to partner with the City to identify the most effective ways of removing invasive non-native plants and a new restoration technique will be tested; the chronology project recorded 39,820 observations in 2021; the degraded lands mapping project was recently presented by Conservancy staff at the National Conference of The Wildlife Society; a new partnership with Rio Reimagined, an initiative to restore and enhance the Salt River as a unifying public space that connects people to the desert and waterways; Steward programs are back to full capacity, including guided hike and bike activities; "iNaturalist Walk", a pilot program, was recently launched, using existing technology to engage people in the Preserve and the work of the Conservancy.

6. SCOTTSDALE PREPARATION RELATED TO REDUCING RISKS OF WILDLAND FIRES

Fire Chief Tom Shannon and his team gave a presentation outlining preparations being discussed and implemented related to reducing the risks of wildland fires in and around the Preserve. Chief Shannon announced that Kristi Gagnon is the first official Scottsdale Fire Marshal.

Highlights included:

- Troy Lutrick, Scottsdale Emergency Manager, talked about the City Infrastructure Vulnerability Task Force, which focuses on the wildland fuels reduction program.
- Mark Zimmerman talked about the Firewise program and progress that has been made with involving communities bordering the Preserve.

- Dave Ramirez, Community Wildfire Mitigation Coordinator, talked about hazardous wildland fuels and efforts being made to identify areas that are threatened.
- Scottsdale received a \$350,000 Healthy Forest Initiative Grant, which will be used to fund a multipronged approach to treat areas with pre-emergent chemicals.

Commissioners were given an opportunity to ask questions.

Staff advised:

- The greatest threat to the Preserve is the roadways and construction along the perimeter. Focus is being given to those areas to mitigate the critical threat.
- Re: concerns about the 128th Street gooseneck, the Fire Department is supportive of the request as long as there is gate access.
- Typically new communities are enrolled in the Firewise Program after the homes have been built and an HOA has been established.
- The Fire Department would like to give the Commission an annual report on the progress of their programs.

Mr. Ekblaw said that the Preserve Staff will work with the Fire Department and the Conservancy to explore new ways to promote the Firewise program. Fire Marshal Zimmerman noted that word of mouth has been the best advertising for the program so far. A promotional video has also been put out on all of their social media websites.

7. DISCUSS SUMMARY OF COUNCIL FEEDBACK FROM THE JANUARY 11, 2022 WORK-STUDY SESSION

Mr. Ekblaw noted the City Council provided excellent feedback. Jace McKeighan noted that the presentation was given based on how it had been formulated by the Commission over the years, creating different buckets based on the Preserve Ordinance, but Council feedback did not necessarily match.

Commissioners reviewed and discussed the summary of comments compiled after the January 11, 2022 Council work study session related to Preserve Strategic Objectives.

Daily Preserve Activities and Operations

- All seven City Council members showed strong support for prioritizing daily needs and maintenance, Council members' definition of "maintenance" differs from the definition the Commission worked with in developing priorities.

Habitat Protection

- Elements were included in the general Council desires to protect the Preserve and wildlife through maintenance and proactive management. More clarity is expected.

Corridor Protection

- Council members commented on support for the general concept of corridor protection.

Cultural History Protection

- There were limited direct comments relating to cultural history protection. The 4 protection categories could fit under the title of "protection of the Preserve," which would help with how the items are presented to Council and the community in the future.

Sonoran Desert Preservation and Education

- Council members gave minimal direct comment regarding preservation and education. The general sense was that funding should be kept as it is. Strategy would be to the ERP and use that as an opportunity for the Commission, the public and Council to have a better understanding of the meaning and benefits.
- Commissioners were given an opportunity to ask questions.

- It is premature to give direction on what feedback from Council would be regarding the budget process with the ERP. It has been included in the budget package, which will be reviewed in the spring.

Jace McKeighan said that education and some archeological items were included as items Council gave reduced priority on. He said one possible interpretation of that is they have a better understanding of what they consider maintenance and upkeep and are comfortable with it but have not yet received enough information on other topics to make an informed decision. He opined that some Council members are willing to consider some things for sustainable funding on a long-term basis and other things they would rather consider on a case-by-case basis. There was no rejection of any topic that was presented, more of a prioritization and consideration of what they are prepared to support for a broad-based tax and what they would rather continue to review as a General Fund item.

It was noted that Mayor Ortega mentioned destination marketing as a tool for archeological education.

Trails and Trailheads

- Generally, there was not support for a major expansion of the trailheads. Council indicated that they would be open to case-by-case presentations and justification of specific requests. The intent will be to provide detailed updates or refinements to some of the core proposals and refine those and to be prepared as Council looks at long-term funding in the future.

Public Safety

- Public safety will be coming forward as part of the budget process for further discussion.

Land acquisition

- Consensus comments from City Council that in general land acquisition is a lower priority, although some limited specific strategic parcels are within existing tax funding capacity, which would be subject to further evaluation and prioritization. Initial comments focused on protecting what is already in the Preserve.
- It was good clarity on the issue, because it had always been thought that Council wanted to complete the recommended study boundary and the cost. Additional significant funds are not going to be raised for acquisition; any further acquisitions will have to use the funds that are currently available.
- Discussion ensued regarding future acquisition and becoming familiarized with the available land and landscape and educating council on various parcels that are out there and why they would or would not be beneficial to the Preserve.

Funding

- Funding will be deferred until Council, the City Manager, and the City Treasurer begin an active process of debating long-range funding.

Cost projections will be brought back to the Commission in April, May, June and then again in the fall.

- There was one public comment about the 128th Street recommendation. A work study between City Council and the Transportation Commission is scheduled for Tuesday, February 22nd. Chair Wenstrom noted that Councilwoman Littlefield expressed support for the recommendation.

8 REVIEW OF THE BYLAWS

There were no suggested changes.

9. 2021 COMMISSION ANNUAL REPORT

COMMISSIONER COLUCCIO MOVED TO APPROVE THE 2021 MCDOWELL SONORAN PRESERVE COMMISSION ANNUAL REPORT. COMMISSIONER LIPPS 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.

10. STAFF REPORTS

Mr. Hamilton mentioned that approximately ten days ago, four individuals who were actively building their own trails in the preserve were apprehended. There is an ongoing legal case. Volunteers met this morning to begin putting plants left in the corridor back in the ground.

Mr. Ekblaw said that last week, City Council accepted funding of \$500,000 from APS. The City is also looking at long-term strategic vegetation management approaches and anticipates continuing the partnership with APS.

Mr. Hamilton outlined an area where wholesale invasive plant eradication will begin. Initial work will be done by a contractor with stewards helping to identify areas for treatment. He highlighted areas where recent full reduction work has begun along the north side of Rio Verde Drive, near the 132nd Street alignment, Rio Verde Drive near Fraesfield, and Via Dona Trail near Pima Dynamite trailhead.

11. UPCOMING MEETING DATES, LOCATIONS, AND AGENDA ITEMS

All dates listed are tentative and subject to amendment:

- March 3, 2021 – (Virtual Meeting)**
 - Maricopa County Flood Control District
- April 7th; May 5th and June 2nd**
 - Arizona Game and Fish update on large mammal survey
 - Studies related to cooler pavement options
 - Public safety in the Preserve – strategies, future costs, etc.
 - Possible field tour

12. ELECTION OF OFFICERS

COMMISSIONER HACKBARTH NOMINATED LAURIE LAPAT-POLASKO TO SERVE IN THE POSITION OF CHAIR OF THE MCDOWELL SONORAN PRESERVE COMMISSION. COMMISSIONER COLUCCIO SECONDED THE NOMINATION, 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.

CHAIR WENSTROM NOMINATED MARSHA LIPPS TO SERVE IN THE POSITION OF VICE CHAIR OF THE MCDOWELL SONORAN PRESERVE COMMISSION. COMMISSIONER HACKBARTH SECONDED THE NOMINATION, 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.

Newly appointed officers conducted the remainder of the meeting.

13. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

Mr. Ekblaw said that staff will look into what the City of Phoenix has planned for summer closures this year. This will be agendaized for a future meeting.

Commissioner Coluccio noted he took the time to observe traffic at the 128th Street gooseneck at different times and found that cars are passing at a high rate of speed. Mr. Ekblaw noted that a future item be agendaized for the Commission to understand transportation opportunities for evaluating the area, possible signage alerting cars of the crossing and to be aware of crossing traffic.

14. ADJOURNMENT

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

With no further business to discuss, being duly moved and seconded, the meeting adjourned at 7:03 p.m.

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