



**CITY OF SCOTTSDALE  
MCDOWELL SONORAN PRESERVE COMMISSION  
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES**  
Thursday, February 2, 2023  
Florence Ely Nelson Desert Park  
8950 E. Pinnacle Peak Road  
Scottsdale, AZ 85255

**PRESENT:** Chairperson Laurie LaPat-Polasko, Vice-chair Marsha Lipps, Commissioners Steve Coluccio, Mark Hackbarth, Kerry Olsson

**ABSENT:** Commissioners Jeffrey Smith and Savannah Engelking

**STAFF:** Kroy Ekblaw, Preserve Director; Scott Hamilton, Preserve Manager; Dave Myers, Natural Resources Supervisor; Gina Kirklin, Enterprise and Finance Director; and Sonia Andrews, City Treasurer

**1. CALL TO ORDER**

Chair LaPat-Polasko called the meeting to order at 5:02 p.m.

**2. ROLL CALL**

Members present as noted above.

**3. PUBLIC COMMENT**

There were no members of the public who wished to speak.

**4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Approval of the Regular Meeting minutes of November 3, 2022

Commissioners Coluccio and Olsson indicated they would be abstaining from a vote, because they had not had an opportunity to review the minutes.

The November 3, 2022 meeting minutes were not approved by a necessary quorum of the commission. Formal approval of the minutes will be on the next commission meeting agenda.

## **5. TOURISM UPDATE**

Stephanie Pressler from Experience Scottsdale gave an update on tourism relative to the Preserve. She outlined how McDowell Sonoran Preserve is incorporated into the City's brand and messaging. Outdoor opportunities and the beauty of the Sonoran desert are highlighted through print advertisement, social media, digital marketing, email blasts, radio ads, and television commercials aired in key markets. The official visitor guide, a hiking, biking, and trail guide, and a one-sheet about desert safety are available in print and on the website. A new section on sustainability will be added to the Experience Scottsdale website in the spring.

Commissioners were given an opportunity to ask questions. Ms. Pressler said that Experience Scottsdale has been preparing for Super Bowl since 2018 and information on Preserve activities, Super Bowl activities, Barrett Jackson, and the golf tournament can be found at SuperSeason.com. The top areas of interest for visitors are hiking, biking, horseback riding, and the beauty of the desert. Experience Scottsdale focuses on promoting to cities across the country and internationally. The City and the Conservancy focus on educating the local community. Kroy Ekblaw, Preserve Director, noted that the Scottsdale Area Guide is made available at trailheads and has great information about stewards, safety, geology, and desert wildlife.

## **6. MCDOWELL SONORAN CONSERVANCY UPDATE**

Melanie Tluczek, Conservancy Director, gave an update on McDowell Sonoran Conservancy activities. Her presentation included updates on the Brown's Ranch signage and donor wall; Mustang Library lectures and Lunch and Learn; the new Community Education program; outreach events; an update on the joint invasive species plan; activities of Trailhead Ambassadors and Pathfinders; Expedition Days, which is scheduled for February 28th through March 4th; the Children's Learning and Play Festival, scheduled for June 24th; Living Labs, high school program; and the Bajada Explorers middle school program.

Commissioners were given an opportunity to ask questions. It was suggested that the Conservancy work towards a system where Living Labs volunteers are able to stay with the same group of high school students for the entire year. Discussion ensued regarding Preserve marketing and education specific to the local community.

## **7. REVIEW OF THE BYLAWS**

The Commission reviewed the current by-laws and no changes were recommended. The current by-laws will remain as the governing rules for the Commission.

## **8. 2022 COMMISSION ANNUAL REPORT**

Mr. Ekblaw presented the 2022 McDowell Sonoran Preserve Commission Annual report. It was noted that under "Major Topics of Discussion" the date shown should be changed from 2023 to 2022.

COMMISSIONER COLUCCIO MOVED TO APPROVE THE 2022 ANNUAL REPORT AS AMENDED. COMMISSIONER HACKBARTH SECONDED THE MOTION, WHICH CARRIED FIVE (5) TO ZERO (0) BY ROLL CALL VOTE. CHAIR LAPAT-POLASKO, VICE-CHAIR LIPPS, COMMISSIONERS COLUCCIO, HACKBARTH, AND OLSSON VOTED IN THE AFFIRMATIVE. THERE WERE NO DISSENTING VOTES.

## **9. PROTECT THE PRESERVE PROCESS UPDATE**

Gina Kirklin, Enterprise and Finance Director and Sonia Andrews, City Treasurer, gave an update on the process to review costs and programs to protect the McDowell Sonoran Preserve. The presentation included a review of the history behind the September 2022 establishment of the Protect the Preserve Task Force. The purpose and duties of the task force are to develop a recommendation to City Council and a financial strategy to protect and preserve Scottsdale's open spaces and quality of life through identifying and quantifying the unfunded needs for the protection, preservation, and perpetual maintenance of the City's open spaces, public safety, and other needs. City Council adopted a work plan by resolution in January of 2023. The ultimate goal of the task force is to develop a recommendation for a financial strategy, based on unfunded needs. The first protect the Preserve Task Force meeting is scheduled for February 8, 2023, and will continue throughout 2023, with the goal of reporting to City Council between November 2023 and January 2024.

Kroy Ekblaw, Preserve Director, gave an update on the process to review costs and programs to protect the McDowell Sonoran Preserve. He reviewed the previous Commission forecasts shared with City Council in January of 2022. Over the next few months, staff will review elements of the cost projections and update the numbers based on current numbers. The Commission will have an opportunity to review the cost projections over the next few months with a goal of presenting the update to Task Force and Council in August. Discussion about restoration and an update on daily activities and operations will be agendaized for discussion, beginning with the March meeting.

Commissioners were given an opportunity to ask questions. Discussion ensued regarding funded vs unfunded needs. Mr. Ekblaw reiterated that the first preserve tax is for land acquisition only, the second for land acquisition and improvements, but funding maintenance of the Preserve has always been in discussion. The Task Force could recommend moving maintenance and non-improvement expenditures out of the General Fund and into a dedicated funding source, or they could recommend keeping those items funded by the General Fund. Ms. Andrews further explained that the General Fund funds the majority of the City's operations, which means that items are competing with other priorities for funding. A dedicated funding source would be restricted to maintenance of the Preserve, based either on voter approval or a restricted revenue source.

Further discussion will be scheduled for the March meeting and, if needed additional special meetings will be scheduled.

## **10. STAFF REPORTS**

- Brown's Ranch Homestead Trail

Scott Hamilton, Senior Trails Planner, gave an overview of the working concept for the Brown's Ranch Homestead Trail. He said that Corral Junction would, if left where it is, conflict with the Brown's Ranch Homestead Trail, so the proposal will likely include rerouting Corral Junction. Reroute of Corral Junction would be monitored by an archeologist in case there are any significant finds. The area of Brown's Ranch is rich in cultural and environmental resources, so they are being sensitive about how to best manage the use of the area. The area is eligible to be registered as a cultural site and a nomination form will be filled out to formally list things. The goal is to develop an interpretive trail, while focusing on ranching as a window to human history. Mr. Hamilton anticipates construction to start in fall of 2023.

A question was raised about whether information about Goldie's House would be included. Mr. Hamilton explained that in conversations with cultural experts it was determined that there is not much to be learned from it, plus it is not safe for visitors.

- Invasive Grass Management

Mr. Hamilton recalled that in January, City Council acted to accept the \$192,000 grant from the Arizona Department of Forestry and Fire Management for invasive plant management of approximately 485 acres, located in four priority areas that were chosen based on work of the stewards and using GIS to map locations dense with buffelgrass and fountain grass. Mitigation will continue in the priority areas between now and June 30, 2024. Mr. Hamilton noted that Intel will be using drones to scan the area highlighted in yellow on Sunday. He hopes to eventually have the ability to scan the entire Preserve using drones.

Brief discussion ensued regarding efforts being made by neighboring communities to mitigate invasive plants.

- Wildland Fire Fuel Management - Gateway Area

Mr. Hamilton gave an update on the wildland fire fuel thinning in the Gateway area. Fire mitigation work is primarily led by the Scottsdale Fire and Emergency Management departments. The Bell Road area has been completed and work has begun at Thompson Peak Parkway and Gateway Trailhead. He noted that thinning involves creating space between plants and those that are removed, are not removed by the roots, so they eventually grow back and are more manageable. Areas will need to be revisited every three to five years.

## **11. UPCOMING MEETING DATES, LOCATIONS, AND AGENDA ITEMS**

All dates listed are tentative and subject to amendment:

- March 2 – Sustainability, Restoration, Daily Activities, Operations
- April 6, May 4, June 1

## **12. ELECTION OF OFFICERS**

VICE-CHAIR LIPPS NOMINATED LAURIE LAPAT-POLASKO FOR THE POSITION OF CHAIR OF THE MCDOWELL SONORAN PRESERVE COMMISSION. COMMISSIONER HACKBARTH SECONDED THE NOMINATION, WHICH CARRIED FIVE (5) TO ZERO (0) BY ROLL CALL VOTE. CHAIR LAPAT-POLASKO, VICE-CHAIR LIPPS, COMMISSIONERS COLUCCIO, HACKBARTH, AND OLSSON VOTED IN THE AFFIRMATIVE. THERE WERE NO DISSENTING VOTES.

CHAIR LAPAT-POLASKO NOMINATED MARSHA LIPPS FOR THE POSITION OF VICE-CHAIR OF THE MCDOWELL SONORAN PRESERVE COMMISSION. COMMISSIONER HACKBARTH SECONDED THE NOMINATION, WHICH CARRIED FIVE (5) TO ZERO (0) BY ROLL CALL VOTE. CHAIR LAPAT-POLASKO, VICE-CHAIR LIPPS, COMMISSIONERS COLUCCIO, HACKBARTH, AND OLSSON VOTED IN THE AFFIRMATIVE. THERE WERE NO DISSENTING VOTES.

**13. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS**

Commissioner Olsson said that he recently attended an Environmental Advisory Commission meeting and the group expressed an interest in receiving input from the MSPC on the sustainability plan. Mr. Ekblaw said that it is important to remember that the sustainability plan is more of an aspirational document and is not a controlling document of the Preserve.

**14. ADJOURNMENT**

COMMISSIONER COLUCCIO MOVED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING. VICE-CHAIR LIPPS SECONDED THE MOTION, WHICH CARRIED FIVE (5) TO ZERO (0) BY ROLL CALL VOTE. CHAIR LAPAT-POLASKO, VICE-CHAIR LIPPS, COMMISSIONERS COLUCCIO, HACKBARTH, AND OLSSON VOTED IN THE AFFIRMATIVE. THERE WERE NO DISSENTING VOTES.

With no further business to discuss, being duly moved and seconded, the meeting adjourned at 6:49 p.m.

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