Approved February 6, 2025

CITY OF SCOTTSDALE
McDOWELL SONORAN PRESERVE COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING – MINUTES
Thursday, November 7, 2024
Granite Reef Senior Center - Room 1
1700 N. Granite Reef Road
Scottsdale, AZ 85251

PRESENT: Chairperson Steve Coluccio, Vice-chair Kerry Olsson, Commissioners Savannah Engelking, Mark Hackbarth, Robert Hallagan, Susan Hirshman (arrived at 5:05 p.m.), and Ryan Rybarczyk (arrived at 5:27 p.m.)

STAFF: Kroy Ekblaw, Preserve Director; Scott Hamilton, Preserve Manager

1. CALL TO ORDER

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

2. ROLL CALL

Members present as listed above.

3. PUBLIC COMMENT

Carla spoke on behalf of the Vote Yes/Yes political action committee. She thanked the McDowell Sonoran Preserve Commission for the ten years spent working on the comprehensive easy to understand package. She thanked individuals who worked on the campaign. She noted that in the beginning of September the ballot measure would not have won and thanks to work from the community it was successful.

4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Approval of the Special Meeting minutes – October 10, 2024

Chair Coluccio pointed out a spelling error and duplicated words on pages one and two.

COMMISSIONER ENGELKING MOVED TO APPROVE THE OCTOBER 10, 2024 MCDOWELL SONORAN PRESERVE COMMISSION SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES AS AMENDED. VICE-CHAIR OLSSON SECONDED THE MOTION, WHICH CARRIED FIVE (5) TO ZERO (0) BY ROLL CALL VOTE. CHAIR COLUCCIO, VICE-CHAIR OLSSON, COMMISSIONERS ENGELKING, HACKBARTH, AND HALLAGAN VOTED IN THE AFFIRMATIVE. COMMISSIONERS HIRSHMAN AND RYBARCZYK WERE NOT PRESENT. THERE WERE NO DISSENTING VOTES.

Chair Coluccio announced that this was Commissioner Hackbarth's final meeting. He thanked him for his dedication to the Commission and the Preserve. Mr. Hamilton presented Commissioner Hackbarth with a gift of an original watercolor print from the Camino Campana artwork series and thanked him for all the help he has provided.

5. McDOWELL SONORAN CONSERVANCY UPDATE

Brian Whitehead, Conservancy Senior Program Manager, gave an update on McDowell Sonoran Conservancy activities. His presentation included a review of Steward activities and volunteer statistics; Trailhead Ambassadors; the hike and bike program; education programming; Diamond Fire restoration efforts; and biodiversity projects. He noted that the GPS trackers have been removed, but many of the tortoises still have radio transmitters for radio telemetry. Most tortoises are in brumation for the season.

Commissioners were given an opportunity to ask questions, Mr. Whitehead explained the new process for bike and hike program online registration. Scott Hamilton, Preserve Manager, explained the guidelines for group activities in the Preserve. He said that groups under 35 do not require a permit and there is a separate category for commercially guided groups. Preserve policy requires that activities be limited to groups of 10 or 12 people. A brief discussion ensued regarding the Diamond Fire restoration process, using processes learned from previous experiments, and plotting areas to test the effectiveness of different processes. Mr. Ekblaw said that detailed discussion regarding how both the existing tax and the recently approved tax can be applied towards future restoration efforts and strategies can be agendized for a future meeting.

6. UPCOMING 2025-26 BUDGET PROCESS UPDATE

Mr. Ekblaw provided an overview of the process for the Preserve 2025/26 Budget. As part of his presentation, he reviewed the history of the budget process and highlighted the draft projections and recommended funding amounts, which include added detail since the last meeting. He highlighted the Commission's detailed worksheet dated December of 2021, the November 2, 2023 projections and recommended funding amounts and the annual distribution allocated by ordinance. He reminded the Commission that because the vote was successful, the Commission will have oversight, effective July 1, 2025. He noted that the City Treasurer expects that the numbers will remain fairly consistent. Mr. Ekblaw reminded the Commissioners that there will be an annual allocation of 18 percent to Preserve Maintenance and Protection, a 20 percent set-aside, as well as an additional 10 percent emergency contingency withheld in the first year, which affects the first year's numbers.

Commissioners asked clarifying questions throughout the presentation. Discussion ensued regarding how the budget authorization process will work; how potential grant funding opportunities could affect the plan; examples of instances where the 10 percent contingency fund could be spent; the addition of a line item for volunteer support and project management; eligibility requirements and responsibilities for a new project manager; and Mr. Hamilton's management responsibilities. Mr. Ekblaw noted that unlike the current operating budget where unspent dollars go back into the General Fund at the end of the fiscal year, the taxes are dedicated and will stay in the Preserve account. Staff will be responsible for communicating to City Council on an annual basis how the funds were allocated. Mr. Ekblaw reviewed budget projections for ERP projects for FY 2025/26, including desert awareness, desert preservation, invasives projects, habitat monitoring, habitat restoration, cultural resource protection. He said that he anticipates that moving forward the Commission can expect biannual presentations from

the City Treasurer's office.
Staff will schedule a special meeting over the winter break to further discuss the FY 2025/26 budget projections.

7. STAFF REPORTS

- Brown's Ranch Interpretive Trail

Mr. Hamilton gave an update on the Brown's Ranch Interpretive Trail grand opening on October 18, 2024. Brown family members attended the event and were offered an opportunity to visit the ranch prior to the ceremony. Mr. Hamilton shared photographs of the trail sign unveiling and Brown family members and stewards that were in attendance. He thanked everyone who was involved with the project.

- Protect the Parks and Preserve Process Update

Mr. Hamilton announced that the City has been awarded the DFFM Grant for invasive grass treatment and is waiting for the final contract from the state to schedule with City Council for approval. He highlighted the planned treatment areas, explained the reason for focusing on those areas, and shared pictures of the fire line from the recent Boulder View fire.

- Ecological Resource Plan Process - ERP

Mr. Hamilton announced that Commission's Ecological Resource Plan (ERP) recommendation is scheduled as a consent agenda item on City Council's December 4th meeting agenda. The Council report will include an explanation of the ERP, an outline of the process that the Commission underwent to reach their recommendation, and a summary of public comments. Council will be asked to approve Resolution 13285, which will include the ERP.

8. UPCOMING MEETING DATES, LOCATIONS AND AGENDA ITEMS

All Dates listed are Tentative and subject to amendment

- Possible Special meeting – Dec./Jan. – If needed for Budget process
- 2025 Regular Meetings
  - February 6, 2025
  - March 6, 2025
  - April 3, 2025
  - May 1, 2025
  - June 5, 2025
- Likely Spring Topics (not a complete listing of possible topics) – Game and Fish Update, Emergency Services Update, Details related to Invasive Plants, Wildland fire reductions, Cultural Resource Protections and General ERP project planning for 2025-2026

A special meeting to discuss the FY 2025/26 budget process will be scheduled sometime in December or January.

9. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

Commissioner Hackbarth said it has been a privilege working on the Commission and he thanked staff for educating him on the processes.

Vice-Chair Olsson thanked staff for providing the financial history. Mr. Ekblaw said that Commissioners are welcome to contact staff with questions and requests. During the winter break, Commissioners will be invited to schedule a one-on-one discussion with staff so they can ask more detailed questions and share their ideas of how to improve processes.

10. ADJOURNMENT

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

With no further business to discuss, being duly moved and seconded, the meeting adjourned at 7:09 p.m.

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