



**CITY OF SCOTTSDALE
McDOWELL SONORAN PRESERVE COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING – MINUTES**

Thursday, February 6, 2025
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, Robert Hallagan, Susan Hirschmann (arrived at 5:19 p.m.), Pruitt Layton, and Ryan Rybarczyk

STAFF: Kroy Ekblaw, Preserve Director; Scott Hamilton, Preserve Manager; Nick Molinari, Community Services Assistant Executive Director

1. CALL TO ORDER

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

2. ROLL CALL

Members present as listed above.

Chair Coluccio discussed meeting etiquette and asked that moving forward Commissioners raise their hand and wait to be acknowledged before speaking.

3. PUBLIC COMMENT

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

4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Approval of Regular Meeting minutes of November 7, 2024

COMMISSIONER RYBARCZYK MOVED TO APPROVE THE NOVEMBER 7, 2024 REGULAR MEETING MINUTES. COMMISSIONER ENGELKING SECONDED THE MOTION, WHICH CARRIED SIX (6) TO ZERO (0) BY ROLL CALL VOTE. CHAIR COLUCCIO, VICE-CHAIR OLSSON, COMMISSIONERS ENGELKING, HALLAGAN, LAYTON, AND RYBARCZYK VOTED IN THE AFFIRMATIVE. COMMISSIONER HIRSHMAN WAS NOT PRESENT. THERE WERE NO DISSENTING VOTES.

5. McDOWELL SONORAN CONSERVANCY UPDATE

Melanie Tluczek, Conservancy Director, gave an update on McDowell Sonoran Conservancy activities. Her presentation included updates on Steward hours for the month of January and for calendar year 2024; Trailhead Ambassadors efforts to help the City with placing signage at three trailheads; Trailhead Safety Day, to be hosted in March by Patrol, Trailhead Ambassadors, and the City of Scottsdale; guided activities to date in 2025; Tour de Scottsdale, scheduled for April 12, 2025; and Parson's Field Institute's Science in an Urban Desert Symposium, which will be held at Scottsdale Community College on November 7th and 8th, 2025.

6. REVIEW OF THE BYLAWS

Mr. Ekblaw said that the City requires Commissions to review bylaws at the first meeting each year. Proposed amendments would need to be introduced or submitted in writing during a regular meeting of the Commission and brought for consideration at the following meeting.

Consensus of the Commission was to move forward with the existing bylaws for the 2025 calendar year.

7. 2024 COMMISSION ANNUAL REPORT

It was noted that on the second page, under key issues "Endowment Concepts" should be changed to "Proposition 490."

COMMISSIONER HALLAGAN MOVED TO APPROVE THE 2024 MCDOWELL SONORAN PRESERVE COMMISSION ANNUAL REPORT AS AMENDED. VICE-CHAIR OLSSON SECONDED THE MOTION, WHICH CARRIED SIX (6) TO ZERO (0) BY ROLL CALL VOTE. CHAIR COLUCCIO, VICE-CHAIR OLSSON, COMMISSIONERS ENGELKING, HALLAGAN, LAYTON, AND RYBARCZYK VOTED IN THE AFFIRMATIVE. COMMISSIONER HIRSHMAN WAS NOT PRESENT. THERE WERE NO DISSENTING VOTES.

8. PRESERVE FY 2025/26 BUDGET PROCESS UPDATE

Staff provided an update on the 2025/26 Preserve budget related to Proposition 490 funding for the Commission's recommendation to the Council for the FY2025/26 Budget. Kroy Ekblaw, Preserve Director, gave an overview of the ongoing process regarding the Preserve budget and the Commission's responsibility as defined by ordinance. He reviewed the key budget categories, explaining adjustments that were made to more clearly align the proposed preliminary budget categories with the City Council approved ordinance language. He noted that the categories of Sonoran Desert Preservation Natural Resource Projects and Periodic Projects were added, and he discussed the types of projects those would cover.

Scott Hamilton, Preserve Manager, presented the adjusted anticipated expenditures for each Cost Center and answered clarifying questions from Commissioners:

- Habitat – Invasive Plant Management
 - The budget allocation total increased from \$300,000 to \$350,000
 - Mr. Hamilton reviewed ways in which invasive plant management is carried out with the assistance of contractors, City staff, and Stewards.

- Cost for preemergent or post emergent can range from \$400 to \$1,200 per acre for grass patches in back country, and \$300 to \$700 per acre on single-track trails.
- The size of barrels being flown by helicopter was recently reduced from 55 gallons to 30 gallons because of the difficulty in managing the larger size.
- Habitat - Wildland Fire Fuel Management
 - The budget allocation total increased from \$300,000 to \$350,000, which is anticipated to cover the cost of 50 to 70 acres per year.
 - In past years, fuel management has been primarily funded through Department of Forestry and Fire Management grants.
 - Mr. Hamilton reviewed a map outlining areas within the Preserve that have been treated in the past and areas planned for future treatment, as well as areas outside the Preserve that could be included as part of the Prop. 490 tax.
- Habitat – Restoration of Disturbed Lands
 - The Financial Services Department has provided updates, allowing for the designation of \$50,000 to the Habitat Restoration category as part of the annual budget. It is envisioned that these funds will be used for smaller projects.
 - Mr. Hamilton explained that the numbers that were previously presented were based upon dollars being taken out for WestWorld. Because there is no longer a reduction for WestWorld, the dollar amounts are able to be increased.
 - The fund adds flexibility and allows money to be readily available for projects without going through the capital process.
- Habitat Protection Monitoring
 - The budget allocation was increased from \$65,000 to \$100,000 for contractual services for research and mapping invasive plants.
 - Mapping costs range from \$30 to over \$100 per acre, depending on the terrain and survey methods used.
 - The goal is to develop a complete understanding of where invasive plants exist in the Preserve.
 - Mr. Hamilton explained that eventually there will be a process for continually surveying areas where treatments have been done to ensure that work doesn't need to be repeated. Eventually, those areas will move into a system of monitoring to ensure the work doesn't need to be repeated.
 - Discussion ensued regarding alternate methods for surveying, including the possible use of agricultural drones.
- Sonoran Desert Preservation Natural Resources Projects
 - The budget allocation was lowered from \$500,000 to \$400,000, with the extra \$100,000 being moved to Future Year Periodic Natural Resources to be used for the deer collaring project, which appears in the FY 2026/27 forecast
- Sonoran Desert Preservation Periodic Projects
 - The budget allocation for FY 2025/26 in the amount of \$100,000 are to be used for larger periodic projects such as deer collaring
- Sonoran Desert Preservation Awareness/Education
 - The primary focus is to support educational outings and events, program materials, and printing in an effort to continue educating residents and visitors about the natural and cultural resources of the Preserve.
- Cultural Resources Protection and Management
 - The budget allocation was adjusted from \$70,000 to \$80,000, which will be used to

survey approximately 2,700 acres of unsurveyed areas within the Preserve boundary.

- Costs are estimated at approximately \$80 to \$100 per acre but will increase if artifacts are discovered.
- Mr. Hamilton explained the requirements of the Historic Preservation Office, should “isolates” be found together, creating a “site” that must be documented on a different level. There would be a cost involved for the Historic Preservation Office and Arizona State Museum recording the sites.
- Areas that have not been surveyed were primarily acquired as part of the private land purchase, which did not require a State Preservation Office class 3 pedestrian survey.

Mr. Ekblaw clarified that the 20 percent Revenue Stabilization Reserve and the 4 percent Major Maintenance/Repair reserve are based on the total uses, not on the source. Discussion ensued regarding the ending fund balance, including the purpose and possible uses of the revenue stabilization reserve, operating contingency, future year periodic natural resources projects, major maintenance/repair reserve, and undesignated, unreserved fund balance. Mr. Ekblaw explained that the Preserve planning and administration allocation is for contractual requirements and is under the purview of City Council. Vice-Chair Olsson expressed concern about the percentage of money being collected that is not under the purview of the Commission.

Nick Molinari, Community Services Assistant Executive Director, gave an overview of the 0.15 percent Preserve Sales Tax process as it related to the Parks Department. He noted that 14 percent has been allocated to parks operating and 51 percent has been allocated to parks improvements. The Parks and Recreation Commission only has oversight over the 51 percent for parks improvements. Mr. Molinari and Mr. Ekblaw discussed the similarities between the budget allocation process for each department.

COMMISSIONER HIRSHMAN MOVED TO APPROVE THE FY 2025/26 PRESERVE BUDGET. COMMISSIONER HALLAGAN SECONDED THE MOTION, WHICH CARRIED SEVEN (7) TO ZERO (0) BY ROLL CALL VOTE. CHAIR COLUCCIO, VICE-CHAIR OLSSON, COMMISSIONERS ENGELKING, HALLAGAN, HIRSHMAN, LAYTON, AND RYBARCZYK VOTED IN THE AFFIRMATIVE. THERE WERE NO DISSENTING VOTES.

9. STAFF REPORTS

- Carefree Fault Research Project

Mr. Hamilton said that the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation has submitted a proposal to increase the height of Bartlett Dam. The City of Scottsdale and 23 other non-federal partners in the Phoenix area have joined into a cost-sharing agreement to do an analysis of the benefits and what it would take to increase the impoundment of water. As part of that agreement, the Bureau of Reclamation has contracted with the Arizona Geologic Survey to do a seismic analysis of the surrounding area to determine the potential impacts of expanding the dam. Mr. Hamilton highlighted the areas affected by the approximately seven-miles of the Carefree Fault Line, noting that the Bureau of Reclamation has tasked the Arizona Geologic Survey to investigate the faults to determine the number and frequency of earthquakes that could be

caused, as well as the approximate size of those earthquakes. He outlined the methodology that geologists use when studying faults, the site selection process, and the site remediation process.

The Bureau of Reclamation has undergone an extensive process to determine a site location to dig a trench across the Carefree Fault Line in search of the youngest and best-preserved alluvial fans which are the most likely to yield results. The site just south of Dry Gulch Trail off the west side of Cholla Mountain has been chosen for the survey. The old location of Corral Trail will be used to access the area, and Arizona Geologic Survey has agreed to help with restoration of the trail so that it will be less appealing for people to use as a social trail. Mr. Hamilton noted that the results of the study will benefit the Preserve because the results will offer knowledge that can be used to educate the public.

Commissioners were given an opportunity to ask questions. Mr. Hamilton said that the educational information obtained through the survey could be used by the Conservancy as part of their programming and could result in interpretive trail signage about Carefree Fault at Brown's Ranch and Granite Mountain Trailheads. He said that because this is a Bureau of Reclamation Project, paid for with federal money, they have gone through the National Environmental Policy Act process and submitted the project as an environmental assessment. He anticipates work to begin in March or April 2025.

- Brown's Ranch Trailhead Update

Mr. Hamilton said that as part of the one-time project list, staff is considering reenvisioning the plaza on the north side of the building at Brown's Ranch to create bypass options similar to those at Pima/Dynamite Trailhead. The project would offer opportunities for better trail connections from the trailhead, potentially creating a better synergy between users. The project planning would include reestablishing the Trail Working Group and community involvement. A multifaceted approach would be used, including improved signage, education, programming, and social media all geared towards promoting the ethical use of the trails. The project would be paid for out of the 2004 tax dollars.

10. UPCOMING MEETING DATES, LOCATIONS AND AGENDA ITEMS

All Dates listed are tentative and subject to amendment:

- Regular Meetings – March 6; April 3; May 1; June 5

Mr. Ekblaw noted April 3rd conflicts with the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy Awards Banquet. He will send Commissioners a survey for availability and will schedule an alternate date.

11. ELECTION OF OFFICERS

COMMISSIONER HIRSHMAN NOMINATED STEVE COLUCCIO TO CONTINUE IN THE POSITION OF CHAIR OF THE MCDOWELL SONORAN PRESERVE COMMISSION. VICE-CHAIR OLSSON SECONDED THE NOMINATION, WHICH CARRIED SEVEN (7) TO ZERO (0) BY ROLL CALL VOTE. CHAIR COLUCCIO, VICE-CHAIR OLSSON, COMMISSIONERS ENGELKING, HALLAGAN, HIRSHMAN, LAYTON, AND RYBARCZYK VOTED IN THE AFFIRMATIVE. THERE WERE NO DISSENTING VOTES.

VICE-CHAIR OLSSON NOMINATED SAVANNAH ENGELKING FOR THE POSITION OF VICE CHAIR OF THE MCDOWELL SONORAN PRESERVE COMMISSION. COMMISSIONER HIRSHMAN SECONDED THE NOMINATION, WHICH CARRIED SEVEN (7) TO ZERO (0) BY ROLL CALL VOTE. CHAIR COLUCCIO, VICE-CHAIR OLSSON, COMMISSIONERS ENGELKING, HALLAGAN, HIRSHMAN, LAYTON, AND RYBARCZYK VOTED IN THE AFFIRMATIVE. THERE WERE NO DISSENTING VOTES.

12. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

Commissioner Hallagan commended staff for their work on the budget presentation.

Mr. Ekblaw noted that staff is working on creating a flow chart of budget process timing. He reiterated that staff plans to keep the Commission updated throughout the year and will pull a final budget proposal together in the fall.

13. ADJOURNMENT

VICE-CHAIR OLSSON MOVED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING. COMMISSIONER LAYTON SECONDED THE MOTION, WHICH CARRIED SEVEN (7) TO ZERO (0) BY ROLL CALL VOTE. CHAIR COLUCCIO, VICE-CHAIR OLSSON, COMMISSIONERS ENGELKING, HALLAGAN, HIRSHMAN, LAYTON, 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 6:51 p.m.

Recorded and Transcribed by eScribers, LLC.