Approved September 4, 2025

CITY OF SCOTTSDALE
MCDOWELL SONORAN PRESERVE COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING – MINUTES
Thursday, June 4, 2025
Granite Reef Senior Center - Room 1
1700 N. Granite Reef Road
Scottsdale, AZ 85251

PRESENT: Chairperson Steve Coluccio, Vice-Chair Savannah Engelking (MS Teams, arrived at 5:45 p.m.), Commissioners, Robert Hallagan, Pruitt Layton, Kerry Olsson, and Ryan Rybarczyk

ABSENT: Commissioner Susan Hirschmann

STAFF: Kroy Ekblaw, Preserve Director; Madison Barasha, Natural Resources Supervisor; Marci Sanders, Management Analyst

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Coluccio called the meeting to order at 5:01 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

Members present as listed above.

3. PUBLIC COMMENT

Carla recommended that the Commission agendize discussion about using the second preserve tax that is set to expire in 2034 to purchase additional land. She noted that the last time City Council reviewed land purchase was in 2022, when their direction was that because the land is State Trust land and it wasn't feasible to do whole scale purchases but to look at key strategic parcels. She said that the community of Legend Trail is advocating to City Council for some key strategic parcels between their property and the Preserve, that are currently zoned as "resort", to be purchased for the Preserve. She opined that it would be beneficial for the Commission to have a presentation to know what land is left, what it is selling for, and what the key parcels are.

Carla also suggested that the Commission add a new line item called "Fire Recovery Fund" to the next budget process, for the purpose of considering using the 2004 tax to build up a reserve that would be available to cover the cost of rebuilding access areas or revegetation efforts in case of a major disaster in the Preserve. She commented that Tonto National Forest typically helps with catastrophic events but are losing staff as part of the federal cutbacks. She noted that she confirmed with the City Treasurer that it is possible to use the 2004 tax funds for the purpose of building a contingency fund.

4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Approval of the Regular Meeting Minutes for May 1, 2025

COMMISSIONER RYBARCZYK MOVED TO APPROVE THE MAY 1, 2025 MCDOWELL SONORAN PRESERVE COMMISSION REGULAR MEETING MINUTES. COMMISSIONER LAYTON SECONDED THE MOTION, WHICH CARRIED FIVE (5) TO ZERO (0) BY ROLL CALL VOTE. CHAIR COLUCCIO, COMMISSIONERS HALLAGAN, LAYTON, OLSSON, AND RYBARCZYK VOTED IN THE AFFIRMATIVE. VICE-CHAIR ENGELKING 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 4th of July Fire Watch; the restoration project related to the Diamond and Gate fires; the heat advisory plan; tortoise health checks; and invasive species work.

Commissioners were given an opportunity to ask questions. Discussion ensued regarding the effectiveness of the herbicides and pre-emergent and how many seasons it could take to manage each species.

In response to a question regarding changes that are ongoing at the Conservancy, Ms. Tluczek invited Commission members to visit the Conservancy office to discuss Conservancy matters.

6. FY 2025/26 PROJECTS

Kroy Ekblaw, Preserve Director, gave a detailed overview of the recommended Preserve Projects that are scheduled to begin during FY 2025/26. Commissioners asked clarifying questions throughout the presentation. Recommended projects included the following:

- Ecological Resource Plan (ERP) Projects for 2025/26
  - Establish baseline scope elements for all scientific monitoring projects – important year one to establish a baseline scoping and criteria that will establish baseline and consistent format for all scientific monitoring projects.
  - Projects to support wildlife crossing study – items important to development of the initial concept design and long-term design.
    - Mortality study along Rio Verde
    - Initiate deer collaring study
  - Other projects yet to be prioritized
- Invasive Plant Management – this is a rolling program, and some identified projects will require multi-year applications. Grant funding could be available for applying pre-emergent.
  - Various methods to be used
    - Contractor ROW pre-emergent application
    - Preserve pre-emergent applications
    - Contractor post-emergent application
    - Stewards pre- and post-emergent application
    - Contractors applying pre-emergent to trail routes
- Wildland Fire Fuel management
  - Maps have been put together showing the five-year program. Work will be done strategically based on conditions.

- There has been an increase of participation in the Firewise program.
- GIS based maps are being created and polygrams are enabling documentation of when the work has been done and enables analysis on a six-month or yearly basis.

- Cultural History Protection – approximately 2,700 acres of the Preserve have not been previously surveyed by professional archeologists
  - Consultants are already on contract who are available to do survey work in year one.
  - Archeological experts are critical in this work. Volunteers would be better used in the program of protection of archeological sites.
  - Ms. Barasha explained the difference between Class One surveys and Class Three surveys.
- Rio Verde Wildlife and Trail Crossing – Concept design to analyze wildlife and safety benefits of grade separated crossings (Overpass/underpass)
  - The City of Scottsdale will initiate study work with a consulting team after July 1, 2025 .
  - Staff has been meeting with Arizona Game and Fish, Procurement, and Capital Projects staff.
  - Commissioners will be provided with updates on the process during the summer break.
- Draft Preserve Trailhead Improvements - from Working Group
  - Brown's Ranch Trailhead
    - Mr. Ekblaw reviewed improvements indicated for the trailhead and highlighted the plans for the trail patio.
      - Project design is expected to be completed quickly and the project completed within the next year.
- Gateway Trailhead 2024-2025-2026
    - Mr. Ekblaw reviewed improvements indicated for the trailhead

Commissioners were given an opportunity to ask additional questions. Ms. Barasha indicated that existing signage is currently being replaced as needed through the City's maintenance department. Mr. Ekblaw clarified that the project list is a first step based on identified priorities. He anticipates that over the course of the coming year, other projects from the ERP will come forward.

7. **<u>STAFF REPORTS</u>**

- Carefree Fault Research Project Completion

Madison Barasha, Acting Preserve Manager, gave an update on the Carefree Fault Research Project. She said that the trench has been filled in, fencing removed, and Old Coral trail mitigation is complete. Ms. Barasha noted that two fault lines were located. A review of the findings will be brought forward at a later date.

- 4th of July Closure

Madison Barasha, Acting Preserve Manager, said that staff will coordinate with Stewards on closing the Preserve at noon on the 4th of July. Messaging to the public will begin two weeks in advance of the closure. Stewards will be stationed at trailheads and at major access points and Park Rangers and the fire department will be available to assist.

- Staff Recruitment Process for Summer 2025

Kroy Ekblaw, Preserve Director, gave an update on the staff recruitment. He announced that Madison Barasha has been appointed as Acting Preserve Manager. The goal is to be fully staffed by early Fall 2025.

Mr. Ekblaw announced that Ruth Johnson will be retiring in two weeks. Madison Barasha and Marci Sanders will be filling in in Ruth's role until a replacement has been found.

- Budget Process Update

Mr. Ekblaw, Preserve Director, gave an update on the budget process. Budget recommendations will be going to City Council next week. He said he is not aware of any changes in the budget recommendations related to the Preserve.

Mr. Ekblaw indicated that the issue with Goldwater Institute and their lawsuit against Proposition 490 does not affect the current budget recommendations. It is premature to speculate on how that situation will be resolved.

8. UPCOMING MEETING DATES, LOCATIONS AND AGENDA ITEMS

All Dates listed are Tentative and subject to amendment:

- Regular Meetings – Summer Break; September 4; **October 16**; November 6

Mr. Ekblaw emphasized that, due to observances, the October meeting will be a Special Meeting on October 16th not the 9th as previously stated.

10. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

Future agenda items could include:

- Review of land that could be available for purchase using 2004 tax funds
- Wildlife restoration fund
- Hunting map update

11. ADJOURNMENT

COMMISSIONER RYBARCZYK MOVED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING. COMMISSIONER LAYTON SECONDED THE MOTION, WHICH CARRIED FIVE (5) TO ZERO (0) BY ROLL CALL VOTE. CHAIR COLUCCIO, COMMISSIONERS HALLAGAN, LAYTON, OLSSON, AND RYBARCZYK VOTED IN THE AFFIRMATIVE. VICE-CHAIR ENGELKING WAS NOT PRESENT. THERE WERE NO DISSENTING VOTES.

With no further business to discuss, being duly moved and seconded, the meeting adjourned at 6:31 p.m.

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