Approved as Amended February 5, 2026

CITY OF SCOTTSDALE
McDOWELL SONORAN PRESERVE COMMISSION
SPECIAL MEETING – MINUTES

Thursday, January 8, 2026
Granite Reef Senior Center – Room 1
1700 N. Granite Reef Road
Scottsdale, AZ 85251

PRESENT: Chairperson Steve Coluccio, Vice-Chair Savannah Engelking, Commissioners Pruitt Layton, Kerry Olsson (MS Teams), and Ryan Rybarczyk

ABSENT: Commissioners Robert Hallagan and Susan Hirshman

STAFF: Director Jenna Kohl; Senior Director Nick Molinari; Acting Preserve Manager Madison Barasha-Tang; Jesus Murillo, Principal Planner; Jeff Barns, Principal Planner; Tom Shannon, Fire Chief; Kristi Gagnon, Fire Marshal

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Coluccio called the meeting to order at 5:32 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

Members present as listed above.

3. PUBLIC COMMENT

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

4. PROPOSED TEXT AMENDMENT - FIRE DEFENSIBLE SPACE

Jesus Murillo, Senior Planner, gave an update on proposed changes to the ESL Ordinance and the Scottsdale Fire Code. He noted that the purpose of the text amendment in the ESL Ordinance's "fire defensible space" section was to adapt to more recent environmental changes. His presentation included:

- An outline of the applicable areas, which are primarily ESL areas located in the northern part of the city;
- Clarification that provisions in the text amendment do not govern Preserve lands, and that there is no Natural Area Open Space (NAOS) located within Preserve lands, but the

McDowell Sonoran Preserve Ordinance must be referenced for defensible space parameters;

- Notation that amendments are specifically looking at natural open space areas designed to be in close proximity to walls and structures within private residential property within the ESL area;
- Highlights of proposed text amendment changes:
    - changing the parameters of what can be done within NAOS areas, and
    - ensuring that developments created under previous ESL or Hillside Ordinances were not in violation with new parameters;
- Review of the purpose to create consistency between the Fire Code and the ESL Ordinance;
- Explanation of a scenario where the Fire Chief would have the authority to determine when an “allowance” should become a “mandate” in order to create connectivity;
- Outline of existing fire defensible space dimensions versus proposed fire defensible space dimensions; and
- Overview of completed and upcoming public outreach efforts, and review of public feedback to date.

Commissioners asked clarifying questions throughout the presentation. Mr. Murillo said that Code Enforcement staff and fire inspectors are able to enforce parameters. Kristi Gagon, Fire Marshal, explained that the draft language regarding parameters could potentially change as they go through the public outreach process. Mr. Murillo said that the code includes a requirement to remove all grasses. Chair Coluccio suggested that only invasive grasses be called out, and non-invasive grasses be allowed.

Tom Shannon, Fire Chief, spoke about abatement efforts. He noted that most fire that has impacted the Preserve started outside of the Preserve boundary. He opined that the language change will give the fire department an opportunity to work with the community and afford them the opportunity to do more when appropriate, and in some cases to compel them to do more. Fire Marshal Gagon explained that “interface” is when an area abuts the Preserve or a designated wildland area, while “intermix” is when there is a significant amount of wildland environment that does not abut the Preserve or a designated wildland area. She explained that compliance will be enforced through annual hazard vegetation inspections and by resident reporting. Initial enforcement will be through citation issuance, and more strict consequences will be given if citations are left unresolved.

Chief Shannon mentioned that a fuels mitigation manager who will help guide enforcement efforts is being hired using Prop 490 funds. Fire Department volunteers do hazardous vegetation analysis and data work. The fire department is hopeful that they will be able to facilitate a program enabling drone technology to analyze growth in particular areas of the Preserve.

Maleesa Myer, member of the public, expressed concerns about how clearing large areas at various elevations within a community can affect neighbors. She referenced her particular situation in her community, which Mr. Murillo said is being addressed.

5. PRESERVE FY 2026/27 BUDGET PROPOSAL (490 PARK & PRESERVE TAX AND CAPITAL)

Jenna Kohl, Director, presented the proposed 2026/27 Preserve budget (related to Proposition 490 funding) and an update on Capital Project budgeting for the Commission's recommendation to the Council. As part of her presentation, she reviewed the background of the 2004 Preservation Tax, which is a .15 percent tax supporting land acquisition and improvements to existing amenities, and the 2024 Prop 490 .15 percent Park and Preserve tax. She noted that the Preserve receives 18 percent of Prop 490 funds for McDowell Sonoran Preserve maintenance and protection. Ms. Kohl reminded the Commission that their role is to review and offer a recommendation to City Council on the annual budget proposal for the use of the 2025 .15 percent revenues with a focus on wildlife habitat protection, ecological resource plan and natural resource studies and projects, cultural resource protection, and Preserve management. She reviewed factors that informed the budget proposal. Ms. Kohl presented the Park and Preserve Tax five-year financial forecast for Preserve maintenance.

Ms. Kohl and Madison Barasha-Tang, Acting Preserve Manager, answered clarifying questions from the Commission.

CHAIR COLLUCIO MOVED TO RECOMMEND TO THE SCOTTSDALE CITY COUNCIL FOR FY 2026/27 THE BUDGET PROPOSAL FOR WILDLIFE HABITAT PROTECTION, GRP, AND NATURAL RESOURCE STUDIES AND CULTURAL RESOURCE PROTECTION AS PRESENTED BY PRESERVE STAFF. COMMISSIONER RYBARCZYK SECONDED THE MOTION, WHICH CARRIED FIVE (5) TO ZERO (0) BY ROLL CALL VOTE. CHAIR COLUCCIO, VICE-CHAIR ENGELKING, COMMISSIONERS LAYTON, RYBARCZYK, AND OLSSON VOTED IN THE AFFIRMATIVE. THERE WERE NO DISSENTING VOTES

Ms. Kohl presented the Preserve Capital Project Planning Five-Year Vision, with a focus on the preliminary FY 2026/27 proposal. She explained that the approach this year is to include only known dollars and known expenses. The project list represents the guidance and support of the City Manager's Internal Capital Review Committee. Nick Molinari, Senior Director, explained that as a result of feedback received last year through the budget process and from the Budget Review Commission, new policies and processes have been adopted related to evaluating projects readiness estimates for capital projects across all City departments. Ms. Kohl clarified that the one exception to the only known dollars policy is with the wildlife crossing project, whose numbers will be refined once the feasibility study has been completed and will be reflected in the FY 2028/29 an FY 2029/30 projections.

Discussion ensued regarding the possible early sunsetting of the 2004 tax and ensuring that there will be enough funds available to complete all of the projects on the list and to consider purchasing strategic parcels left within the study boundary. Commissioners felt it was important to extend the tax a few more years beyond the 2027 date that the debt service will be paid off, in order to build up enough reserves to complete projects and consider purchasing strategic parcels. Ms. Kohl said that staff will have a better idea about project funding once they receive the updated projections from the Treasurer's office. Mr. Molinari clarified that the assumption has always been that the 2024 tax would sunset before 2034, but there has not been discussion of a date to sunset the tax. Chair Coluccio requested that staff research the records of parcels identified and that discussion be agendized regarding their findings and the possibility of purchasing additional parcels within the study boundary.

Of the projects listed for the next fiscal year, Ms. Kohl noted, the City plans to start with the Gateway Trailhead design and public outreach, because it would be first to start construction the following year. She pointed out that Brown's Ranch Trailhead improvements are 30 percent planned. The designer is focusing on a trail disbursal area similar to the one at Pima/Dynamite and that will make it look like the enhancements were in place since the trailhead was built.

CHAIR COLUCCIO MOVED TO RECOMMEND TO THE SCOTTSDALE CITY COUNCIL APPROVAL OF THE PROPOSED FY 2026/27 BUDGET FOR CAPITAL PROJECT PLANNING AS PRESENTED BY PRESERVE STAFF. COMMISSIONER LAYTON SECONDED THE MOTION, WHICH CARRIED FIVE (5) TO ZERO (0) BY ROLL CALL VOTE. CHAIR COLUCCIO, VICE-CHAIR ENGELKING, COMMISSIONERS LAYTON, RYBARCZYK, AND OLSSON VOTED IN THE AFFIRMATIVE. THERE WERE NO DISSENTING VOTES

6. <u>PROPOSED RATES & FEES</u>

Madison Barasha-Tang, Acting Preserve Manager, presented the proposed changes to Preserve-related fines & fees. She said that the proposed changes are expected to balance offsetting actual expenses related to permitting with pricing that encourages compliance, streamline and increase clarity and understanding, reflect current practice in photography fees, and consider practices and fees of other entities offering similar services. Proposed changes to rates and fees are expected to generate a 5 percent increase in revenues. Revenues received for permits are deposited in the City's General Fund. Ms. Barasha-Tang noted that the annual revenue generated during FY 2024/25 was approximately $60,000.

Commissioners asked clarifying questions throughout the presentation.

VICE-CHAIR ENGELKING MOVED TO APPROVE THE PROPOSED CHANGES TO PRESERVE-RELATED FINES AND FEES. COMMISSIONER LAYTON SECONDED THE MOTION, WHICH CARRIED FIVE (5) TO ZERO (0) BY ROLL CALL VOTE. CHAIR COLUCCIO, VICE-CHAIR ENGELKING, COMMISSIONERS LAYTON, RYBARCZYK, AND OLSSON VOTED IN THE AFFIRMATIVE. THERE WERE NO DISSENTING VOTES.

7. <u>2025 PRESERVE COMMISSION ANNUAL REPORT</u>

Jenna Kohl, Director, gave an overview of the 2025 Preserve Commission Annual Report and took comments from Commissioners. Commissioner Olsson said he did not have a copy of the document.

COMMISSIONER RYBARCZYK MOVED TO APPROVE THE 2025 PRESERVE COMMISSION ANNUAL REPORT. CHAIR COLUCCIO SECONDED THE MOTION, WHICH CARRIED FOUR (4) TO ZERO (0) BY ROLL CALL VOTE. CHAIR COLUCCIO, VICE-CHAIR ENGELKING, COMMISSIONERS LAYTON, AND RYBARCZYK VOTED IN THE AFFIRMATIVE. COMMISSIONER OLSSON ABSTAINED. THERE WERE NO DISSENTING VOTES.

8. <u>ELECTION OF CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR</u>

Commissioner Layton nominated Steve Coluccio for the position of Chair of the McDowell Sonoran Preserve Commission. Commissioner Rybarczyk seconded the nomination.

Commissioner Olsson nominated Robert Hallagan for the position of Chair of the McDowell Sonoran Preserve Commission. Chair Coluccio seconded the nomination.

Discussion ensued regarding the nominations.

VICE-CHAIR ENGELKING MOVED TO ELECT STEVE COLUCCIO TO CONTINUE IN THE POSITION OF CHAIR OF THE MCDOWELL SONORAN PRESERVE COMMISSION. COMMISSIONER RYBARCZYK SECONDED THE MOTION, WHICH CARRIED FOUR (4) TO ONE (1) BY ROLL CALL VOTE. CHAIR COLUCCIO, VICE-CHAIR ENGELKING, COMMISSIONERS LAYTON AND RYBARCZYK VOTED IN THE AFFIRMATIVE. COMMISSIONER OLSSON DISSENTED.

Commissioner Rybarczyk nominated Savannah Engelking for the position of Vice-Chair of the McDowell Sonoran Preserve Commission. Commissioner Layton seconded the nomination.

CHAIR COLUCCIO MOVED TO ELECT SAVANNAH ENGELKING TO CONTINUE IN THE POSITION OF VICE-CHAIR OF THE MCDOWELL SONORAN PRESERVE COMMISSION. COMMISSIONER LAYTON SECONDED THE MOTION, WHICH CARRIED FIVE (5) TO ZERO (0) BY ROLL CALL VOTE. CHAIR COLUCCIO, VICE-CHAIR ENGELKING, COMMISSIONERS LAYTON, RYBARCZYK, AND OLSSON VOTED IN THE AFFIRMATIVE. THERE WERE NO DISSENTING VOTES.

9. <u>UPCOMING MEETING DATES, LOCATIONS, AND AGENDA ITEMS</u>

All Dates listed are tentative and subject to amendment:
Regular Meetings are scheduled for February 5, March 5, April 2, May 7, and June 4.

Future agenda items could include:

- Conservancy update
- Tourism update
- Annual bylaw review
- Budget update
- A discussion about meeting locations

10. <u>ADJOURNMENT</u>

COMMISSIONER LAYTON MOVED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING. COMMISSIONER RYBARCZYK SECONDED THE MOTION, WHICH CARRIED FIVE (5) TO ZERO (0) BY ROLL CALL VOTE. CHAIR COLUCCIO, VICE-CHAIR ENGELKING, COMMISSIONERS LAYTON, RYBARCZYK, 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 7:47 p.m.

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