



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

Thursday, June 4, 2026
Via Linda Senior Center
10440 E. Via Linda
Scottsdale, AZ 85258

PRESENT: Chairperson Steve Coluccio, Vice-Chair Savannah Engelking (arrived at 5:11 p.m., departed at 6:15 p.m.), Commissioners Robert Hallagan, Ryan Rybarczyk, and Cynthia Wenstrom

ABSENT: Commissioner Susan Hirschmann and Pruitt Layton

STAFF: Director Jenna Kohl; Senior Director Nick Molinari; Natural Resources Supervisor Madison Barasha-Tang; Fire Chief Clint Steeves; City Planner Jesus Murillo

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

There were no members of the public who wished to speak on non-agendized items.

4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Approval of the Regular Meeting minutes of May 7, 2026

COMMISSIONER WENSTROM MOVED TO APPROVE THE MAY 7, 2026 MCDOWELL SONORAN PRESERVE COMMISSION REGULAR MEETING MINUTES AS PRESENTED. COMMISSIONER HALLAGAN SECONDED THE MOTION, WHICH CARRIED FOUR (4) TO ZERO (0) BY ROLL CALL VOTE. CHAIR COLUCCIO, COMMISSIONERS HALLAGAN, RYBARCZYK, AND WENSTROM VOTED IN THE AFFIRMATIVE. VICE-CHAIR ENGELKING

WAS NOT PRESENT. THERE WERE NO DISSENTING VOTES.

5. BROWN'S RANCH TRAILHEAD IMPROVEMENT PROJECT UPDATE

Carla commented that the City's first responsibility is to protect the Preserve, not enhance the user experience. She recalled that the Preserve Ordinance and the Charter state that protecting the natural asset comes first and they specify that only appropriate access should be given. She said that the founders were concerned about over use and felt that trails should be closed when they reached capacity. She stressed that it is a Preserve, not a park.

Jenna Kohl, Preserve Director, reviewed the goals of the project, which are intended to enable mitigation of the congestion when accessing trails. The plan includes creating a new trail dispersal plaza, addressing maintenance needs, and improving functionality of the parking lot.

Madison Barasha-Tang, Natural Resources Supervisor, gave an update on the Brown's Ranch Trailhead improvements. Her presentation included an overview of the anticipated timeline, shared aerial views of existing conditions, proposed improvements, and planned rerouting of trails. She confirmed that trailhead access will be closed during the project and signs can be installed suggesting alternate options for users and the closure will be posted on social media sites. She clarified that the parking stall size is being increased, but the parking lot is not being expanded.

Assistant Fire Chief Steeves explained that there are two options available at Brown's Ranch for helicopter landing, depending on the operation. The equestrian parking lot and the cul-de-sac are both available. Trucks use the parking lot.

Commissioner Wenstrom expressed concern about setting precedent with this project.

CHAIR COLUCCIO MOVED TO APPROVE THE BROWN'S RANCH TRAILHEAD IMPROVEMENTS AS PRESENTED. VICE-CHAIR ENGELKING SECONDED THE MOTION, WHICH CARRIED FOUR (4) TO ONE (1) BY ROLL CALL VOTE. CHAIR COLUCCIO, VICE-CHAIR ENGELKING, COMMISSIONERS HALLAGAN AND RYBARCZYK VOTED IN THE AFFIRMATIVE. COMMISSIONER WENSTROM DISSENTED.

Commissioners requested that a report be prepared outlining the impact of the project on the water usage and flora and fauna in the area. Ms. Kohl said that typically assessments are done as part of the assessment contract with the Conservancy. She will provide the report during the next meeting.

6. ESL TEXT AMENDMENT AND DEVELOPMENT PLANNING UPDATE

Carla reported that the Planning Commission treated the ESL Text Amendment personally, and did not carefully evaluate in the same way that they typically do. They were not moved by the fact that the changes will not be mandated, just encouraged. Carla opined that the Planning Commissioners should be educated about the 1995 Rio fire, which burned 23,000 acres including most of the county park. Planning Commissioners have been unmoved and some have commented that any fire prevention being done in NAOS should also be done in the Preserve.

Jesus Murillo, Senior Planner, gave an update on proposed changes to the Environmentally

Sensitive Lands (ESL) Text Amendment and the Fire Code. He noted that the purpose of the text amendment the ESL Ordinance's "fire defensible space" section is 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 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;
- Highlight of Proposed Text Amendment Changes, which include changes based on prior Commissioner comments:
 - Respond to the increased threat of wildfires, with extended fire seasons, and the need of the fire department;
 - Housing the fire defensible space parameters within the City of Scottsdale Fire Code;
 - Provide consistency between ESL Ordinance and Scottsdale Fire Code;
 - Amend ESL Ordinance to avoid non-conforming conditions;
 - Provide Scottsdale Fire Department with code authorization to implement fire defensible space.
- Review of the purpose to create consistency between the Fire Code and the ESL Ordinance;
- Explanation of 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 vs proposed fire defensible space dimensions;
- Overview of completed and upcoming public outreach efforts and review of public feedback to date.
- Non-action points:
 - Many ideas and concerns are potentially more appropriate for the overall ESL text amendment;
 - Some proposed elements could delay the text amendment and timing is important;
 - Fire defensible space is strongly encouraged, not required;
 - Language was added to disassociate the McDowell Sonoran Preserve from the application of the parameters and techniques identified in the text amendment language.

Commissioners asked clarifying questions throughout the presentation. Mr. Murillo said that it has been determined that the threat of fire is increasing, based on documented increase in overgrowth of vegetation. Clint Steeves, Assistant Fire Chief, explained that a lot of fires start from construction sites. He noted that the Rio fire that was mentioned by Carla was in an area where there is now all residential development. It was suggested that staff look at locations that are not dedicated NAOS, but are protected through a conservation easement. Mr. Murillo confirmed that preemergent is not allowed in NAOS areas at this time, because there have not been enough studies on the types of chemicals being used.

Commissioners expressed support for the proposed ESL text amendments.

7. SCOTTSDALE FIRE REPORT

Clint Steeves, Assistant Fire Chief, provided an update on Fire Department activities and initiatives related to the McDowell Sonoran Preserve. As part of his presentation, he gave an overview of the anticipated 2026 wildfire season concerns; reviewed the winter and spring fire preparations; types of patrols the department uses; and ongoing education and enforcement efforts. He said that the department is implementing a Hot Works permitting program, which will require new build construction or home renovation in areas designated as Scottsdale Wildland Urban Interface areas to make notification of hot work being performed and fire department crews will check the sites. They are also implementing a fuel modeling program designed as predictive analysis and risk assessment. The department is building a new strategic plan for fuel management. The new Wildfire Preparedness Coordinator is scheduled to start on Monday, June 8th.

Commissioners were given an opportunity to ask questions. Chief Steeves said that it is difficult to prosecute people who negligently start a fire and takes many hours to enforce the \$150 fine. He hopes to research alternate penalty options. Chief Steeves explained that the fire department currently has four wide-area search dogs and that the police department has an additional dog. Four of the dogs are life scent trained and one is a cadaver dog. The K-9s are called any time that a call comes in for a missing person off the trail. The dogs are housed with four of the fire fighters and go on shift at the station together with their handler.

8. STAFF REPORT

- Gateway Trailhead Parking Lot Erosion Repair

Madison Barasha-Tang, Natural Resources Supervisor, shared before and after photographs of the Gateway Trailhead parking lot erosion repair, completed on May 11, 2026. She said that the mitigation cost approximately \$78,000.

- FY 2026/27 planning

Jenna Kohl, Preserve Director, noted that Fiscal Year 2027/27 planning will begin on July 1, 2026. Discussions will include budget and scheduling for Prop 490 projects.

- User Group

Ms. Kohl said that a new user group is being formed, which will consist of approximately two representatives from each of the user groups. The goal is for the group to focus on harmonious use of the trails, provide communication to their respective communities, and provide input on Preserve projects and initiatives.

- Upcoming Projects

Ms. Kohl provided an update on the following projects:

- Kovach Trail sign replacement is reaching completion.

- Paradise Mine work will be done through a contract with Arizona Game and Fish. Safety repairs will ensure that the bat population has access and humans do not.
- Fire break herbicide application work will begin at the end of June, in time for monsoon season. Work is being done using the Invasive Plant Grant. Scottsdale's program is modeled after the State of Arizona program requirements.
- Social Trails repair update. Educating surrounding neighborhoods about trail restoration and appropriate trail access points.
- Fencing inventory will be assessed over the course of the next year.
- July 4th Closure

Ms. Barasha-Tang gave an update on July 4th closure preparations.

- Behind the Scenes

Ms. Barasha-Tang shared before and after pictures of work done by a maintenance worker to clear a fallen saguaro from a trail.

- Canine Safety Day

Ms. Barasha-Tang gave an update on Canine Safety Day held on April 11, 2026. She highlighted the various event locations and partnerships and shared examples of educational messaging that was provided.

9. COMMISSIONER COMMENT

There were no Commissioner comments.

10. UPCOMING MEETING DATES, LOCATIONS, AND AGENDA ITEMS

Dates listed are tentative and subject to amendment.

Regular Meetings:

- September 3, 2026 at Via Linda Senior Center
- October 1, 2026 at Via Linda Senior Center
- November 5, 2026 at Granite Reef Senior Center

11. ADJOURNMENT

COMMISSIONER WENSTROM MOVED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING. COMMISSIONER RYBARCZYK SECONDED THE MOTION, WHICH CARRIED FOUR (4) TO ZERO (0) BY ROLL CALL VOTE. CHAIR COLUCCIO, COMMISSIONERS HALLAGAN, RYBARCZYK, AND WENSTROM 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 6:45 p.m.

Recorded and Transcribed by eScribers, LLC.