



**CITY OF SCOTTSDALE
MCDOWELL SONORAN PRESERVE COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES**

Thursday, February 1, 2024
Granite Reef Senior Center – Room 1
1700 N. Granite Reef Rd.
Scottsdale, AZ 85257

PRESENT: Chairperson Laurie LaPat-Polasko (MS Teams), Vice-Chair Marsha Lipps, Commissioners Steve Coluccio (Chair), Mark Hackbarth, Kerry Olsson (Vice Chair), Jeffrey Smith, and Savannah Engelking

STAFF: Kroy Ekblaw, Preserve Director; Scott Hamilton, Senior Trails Planner; Sonia Andrews, City Treasurer; Gina Kirklin, Finance Director

1. CALL TO ORDER

Vice-Chair Lipps called the meeting to order at 5:02 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

Members present as noted above.

3. PUBLIC COMMENT

Jerry Van Gasse, citizen advocate for Phoenix Mountain Preserve, gave an update on efforts being made to encourage the City of Phoenix to make improvements to Papago Park.

4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Approval of the Regular Meeting minutes of November 2, 2023

Commissioner Hackbarth asked to have his comment that there could be an archeological site at one of the trailheads included as part of Item 7, One Time Preserve Costs.

COMMISSIONER COLUCCIO MOVED TO APPROVE NOVEMBER 2, 2023, MCDOWELL SONORAN PRESERVE COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES AS AMENDED. COMMISSIONER HACKBARTH SECONDED THE MOTION, WHICH CARRIED SEVEN (7) TO ZERO (0) BY ROLL CALL VOTE. CHAIR LAPAT-POLASKO, VICE-CHAIR LIPPS, COMMISSIONERS COLUCCIO, HACKBARTH, OLSSON, SMITH, AND ENGELKING VOTED IN THE AFFIRMATIVE. THERE WERE NO DISSENTING VOTES.

5. MCDOWELL SONORAN CONSERVANCY UPDATE

Conservancy representatives were not present.

6. REVIEW OF THE BYLAWS

Kroy Ekblaw, Preserve Director, stated the City Attorney's office has confirmed the McDowell Sonoran Preserve Commission bylaws are still in compliance with City ordinances. He noted amendments can be made at any time during the year if necessary.

7. 2023 COMMISSION ANNUAL REPORT

Mr. Ekblaw gave a brief overview of the 2023 McDowell Sonoran Preserve Commission annual report.

Commissioners were given an opportunity to comment. A comment was made that the accounting of the number of meetings and Commissioner attendance was unclear. Mr. Ekblaw will review the information with Ms. Johnson and make the necessary adjustments. Discussion ensued regarding opportunities that the Commission has had to provide input and direction on items versus taking formal action on items in the past year. It was noted that the Commission can expect to see action items related to the ERP and the second tax along with some other possible action items in the upcoming year.

COMMISSIONER COLUCCIO MOVED TO APPROVE THE 2023 MCDOWELL SONORAN PRESERVE COMMISSION ANNUAL REPORT. COMMISSIONER HACKBARTH SECONDED THE MOTION, WHICH CARRIED SEVEN (7) TO ZERO (0) BY ROLL CALL VOTE. CHAIR LAPAT-POLASKO, VICE-CHAIR LIPPS, COMMISSIONERS COLUCCIO, HACKBARTH, OLSSON, SMITH, AND ENGELKING VOTED IN THE AFFIRMATIVE. THERE WERE NO DISSENTING VOTES.

8. PROTECT THE PRESERVE PROCESS UPDATE

Sonia Andrews, City Treasurer, provided an update on the work of the Task Force, including discussion of actions taken, financial considerations, and other information related to the work of the Task Force. Her presentation included a detailed review of priority unfunded needs. Staff have been directed to ensure cost inflation is factored into expenditure projections, to prioritize Indian Bend Wash Parks first, and project revenues to ensure funding for future needs including future improvements for parks in the central and north areas. The recommended allocation of the 0.15 percent tax after paying debt obligations includes 14 percent for parks maintenance; 18 percent for Preserve maintenance, preservation, protection, and education; 7 percent for Police Park Rangers and open space security needs; 10 percent for the fire fuel mitigation program and Technical Rescue Team for parks and open space; and 51 percent for parks capital improvements. The Task Force recommendation is to extend the 0.20 tax that is expiring in 2025 for another 30 years with a 0.05 percent reduction. Ms. Andrews presented a comparison of city sales tax rates, showing that Scottsdale has a rate lower than many other cities. On Monday, January 29, 2024, the Task Force decided to recommend to the City Council how to deal with the remaining funds. They will also recommend that the City Council expand duties of the Parks and Recreation Commission and the McDowell Sonoran Preserve Commission to include oversight of the 0.15 percent going to maintenance and care. Task Force Members

Cynthia Wenstrom, Raoul Zubia, and Carla were on hand, and offered additional input throughout the presentation and during the question-and-answer period.

Cynthia Wenstrom spoke about the Task Force recommendation, highlighting the importance of having dedicated funding for Preserve maintenance and noting if the tax is passed, it would equate to approximately \$3.71 per month per resident and approximately four times that amount for visitors. She explained they are starting with South Scottsdale because they have the oldest parks.

Mr. Ekblaw explained the Task Force made a recommendation last Monday to take no action on the 0.15 percent tax which does not expire until 2034. The recommendation is for the City Council to study the tax annually to determine if the tax is still needed in future years, and once the debt service is paid off, they could consider terminating the tax. The process will include an annual update to the City Council and the Preserve Commission related to the tax. The citizen survey has been forwarded to commissioners for review and staff will be prepared to answer questions during the next meeting.

Commissioners were given an opportunity to ask questions. Ms. Andrews explained that ordinance language dictates unused funds to stay within the pot of money dedicated to the Preserve. She said that WestWorld will be funded by debt and will not get an annual operating allocation, because they are self-supporting. WestWorld infrastructure improvements will be issued traditional 20-year debt, and no more than 25 percent of the tax revenues will be taken for debt service. Ms. Andrews stated to use the 0.15 percent tax for maintenance, it would require a vote and the legal department stated even if voters approve the change, only future fund collections could be used for that purpose, existing collections could not be used. Mr. Ekblaw explained the fire mitigation will be funded under fire and facilities. Carla added it is important to clarify when speaking to voters that the park ranger unit is for the Preserve and parks and the increase in the expenditure limit cap needs to be part of the package.

9. ONE TIME PRESERVE COSTS UPDATE

Mr. Ekblaw provided a review of costs for possible future improvements to the McDowell Sonoran Preserve, including a summary of one-time costs associated with trailheads, a future wildlife crossing, and annual projects across the Preserve. A more in-depth presentation will be agendized for the March meeting.

10. ERP (ECOLOGICAL RESOURCE PLAN) UPDATE AND SCHEDULE

Mr. Hamilton gave an update on the status of the Ecological Resource Plan (ERP) noting staff have received input from the Conservancy and Game and Fish, which will be presented to the Commission next week for input. Stakeholders are being asked to review the indicators, highlight parameters of the study, and to consider what these things mean. He said that the Commission will be critical in figuring out the adaptive management process and establishing it in the ERP. The ERP is one of the master plans to be utilized in establishing annual priorities. Once the working draft reaches a point where everyone is comfortable, it will be presented to the public for citizen input to be considered by all the stakeholders. The ERP is a living document that will continue to be analyzed as needs and opportunities change.

11. STAFF REPORTS

- Rock Climbing Plan

Mr. Hamilton noted the Ecological Review has been completed with the Conservancy. Most of the fieldwork is done, and final items are being wrapped up with the cultural experts. He anticipates the plan will be on the Commission's March agenda.

Commissioners were given an opportunity to ask questions. Mr. Hamilton stated there is nothing of significance, threatened, or endangered in the ecological review other than some small unique items that will be taken into consideration when planning the trail alignments.

- Browns Ranch Homestead Trail

Mr. Hamilton reviewed the trail map, project timeline, and next steps. Staff worked with Past Finders to wrap up the production section for themes, ideas, and written words. The completed package has been transferred to the art team. Trail construction is expected to start on February 26, 2024. The major components of the project include trail construction, development of copy, graphic art, fabrication, and the cultural side. Initial construction will include trail grading with an archeologist on site during the initial rough cutting and sign instillation for documentation purposes.

- Wildland Fire Fuel Treatment Planning

Mr. Hamilton reviewed the 2024 Fire fuel treatments schedule, noting the area of Pima Road, north of Legacy Trail is currently underway. The south side of Stagecoach Pass, adjacent to the Preserve including the area from the dead end to the WAPA power line area will be next. Treatment will also be done at Granite Mountain Trailhead and Fraesfield. Crews will move to Tom's Thumb and 128th and Jomax corridors in the spring.

12. UPCOMING MEETING DATES, LOCATIONS, AND AGENDA ITEMS

All Dates listed are Tentative and subject to amendment:

- Special Meeting – February 7
- Regular Meetings – March 7; April 4; May 2; June 6

13. ELECTION OF OFFICERS

VICE-CHAIR LIPPS NOMINATED STEVE COLUCCIO FOR THE POSITION OF CHAIR OF THE MCDOWELL SONORAN PRESERVE COMMISSION. COMMISSIONER OLSSON SECONDED THE NOMINATION WHICH CARRIED SEVEN (7) TO ZERO (0) BY ROLL CALL VOTE. CHAIR LAPAT-POLASKO, VICE-CHAIR LIPPS, COMMISSIONERS COLUCCIO, HACKBARTH, OLSSON, SMITH, AND ENGELKING VOTED IN THE AFFIRMATIVE. THERE WERE NO DISSENTING VOTES.

Chair Coluccio assumed the duties of chair immediately following the vote.

COMMISSIONER ENGELKING NOMINATED KERRY OLSSON FOR THE POSITION OF VICE CHAIR OF THE MCDOWELL SONORAN PRESERVE COMMISSION. COMMISSIONER HACKBARTH SECONDED THE NOMINATION WHICH CARRIED SEVEN (7) TO ZERO (0) BY ROLL CALL VOTE. CHAIR COLUCCIO, VICE-CHAIR LIPPS, COMMISSIONERS COLUCCIO, HACKBARTH, LAPAT-POLASKO, OLSSON, SMITH, AND ENGELKING VOTED IN THE AFFIRMATIVE. THERE WERE NO DISSENTING VOTES.

Vice-Chair Olsson assumed the duties of chair immediately following the vote.

14. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

Commissioners requested an update on the Transportation Action Plan, regarding the designation of 128th Street closure be agendaized for a future meeting.

Mr. Ekblaw stated the Task Force presentation to the City Council is scheduled in the Kiva on February 27, 2024, at 4:00 p.m. He suggested the Commission consider drafting a letter to the City Council, expressing support for the Task Force recommendation.

Mr. Ekblaw anticipates the new commissioners will be appointed in time for the April meeting.

15. ADJOURNMENT

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

With no further business to discuss, being duly moved and seconded, the meeting adjourned at 6:47 p.m.

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