



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

Thursday, March 23, 2023
Community Design Studio - Nave
7506 E. Indian School Rd.
Scottsdale, AZ 85251

PRESENT: Chairperson Laurie LaPat-Polasko, Vice-chair Marsha Lipps, Commissioners Steve Coluccio, Mark Hackbarth (arrived at 5:10 p.m.), Kerry Olsson, Jeffrey Smith

ABSENT: Commissioner Savannah Engelking

STAFF: Kroy Ekblaw, Preserve Director; Scott Hamilton, Preserve Manager; Dave Myers, Coordinator; Gina Kirklin, Enterprise and Finance Director; Mike Murphy, Senior Management Analyst

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chair LaPat-Polasko called the meeting to order at 5:02 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

Members present as noted above.

3. PUBLIC COMMENT

Carla asked that staff think carefully about increasing marketing for the purpose of driving more Preserve use and that they keep in mind that it is a Preserve, not a park. She spoke in support of educating the public about the benefits of the Preserve, such as protecting wildlife and resources, helping the tax base without straining infrastructure, and the Conservancy's efforts to educate future generations about the Preserve.

4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Approval of the Regular Meeting minutes of March 2, 2023

COMMISSIONER COLUCCIO MOVED TO APPROVE THE MARCH 2, 2023 MCDOWELL SONORAN PRESERVE COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES. VICE-CHAIR LIPPS SECONDED THE MOTION, WHICH CARRIED FOUR (4) TO ZERO (0) BY ROLL CALL VOTE. VICE-CHAIR LIPPS, COMMISSIONERS COLUCCIO, OLSSON, AND SMITH VOTED IN THE AFFIRMATIVE. CHAIR LAPAT-POLASKO ABSTAINED. COMMISSIONER HACKBARTH NOT YET PRESENT. THERE WERE NO DISSENTING VOTES.

5. QUESTIONS RELATED TO MARKETING AND AWARENESS OF PRESERVE

Commissioners discussed marketing and awareness expectations and goals. The discussion included conversation about how busy Gateway Trailhead is and ways to disperse use by encouraging people to use other trailheads; tracking usage; raising voter awareness of the Preserve and educating the public on how it benefits the City, the environment, and wildlife habitat; and using geofence software to track cell phone data by geographic area to capture statistics about the number of out of town visitors versus local visitors. Discussion will be scheduled to further discuss measuring usage; gaining a better understanding of what it will take to maintain and protect the flora and fauna and cultural resources of the Preserve; and what constitutes too much usage.

6. PROTECT THE PRESERVE PROCESS UPDATE

- Council and Task Force Process update

Kroy Ekblaw, Preserve Director, gave an update on costs and programs to protect the McDowell Sonoran Preserve. As part of his presentation, he reviewed the updated forecasts that will be presented to the task force, noting that it is important to focus on need and not on "funded" versus "unfunded" and achieving a dedicated funding source. Staff will continue reviewing elements of the cost projections and updating the numbers based on current numbers. He noted that public safety is scheduled to give a presentation to the Commission during the April 6, 2023 meeting and the finance department will present on April 13, 2023.

- Daily Preserve Activities and Operations - Forecast updates

Mr. Ekblaw reviewed the Daily Preserve Activities and Operations updated cost projections, which include daily support details. He noted that as staff revisits the process, they removed indirect costs of \$90,000 because they are a City responsibility and will go to the General Fund.

Commissioners were given an opportunity to ask questions. Mr. Hamilton said that projections include increased staff hours as well as cost of living and merit increases. Mr. Ekblaw said that descriptions for items include clarifications outlining costs. For example, volunteer support costs are similar to those of other departments. Any ballot language will be very generalized. Mr. Ekblaw explained that projections have always been based on current costs, with consideration given to cost of living increases, inflation, and growth. Mike Murphy, Management Analyst, explained that the budget forecast for FY 2023/24 will be larger than the projections, because requests for increases were submitted to cover things such as invasive plant chemicals, that have not been budgeted in the past and personnel cost increases and personnel additions. Mr. Ekblaw noted that staff anticipates that grants and other funding opportunities will be available.

Mr. Ekblaw said that the Commission will have an opportunity to prioritize funding recommendations for the following fiscal year. It will be critical for voters to be made aware that there is citizen oversight at the Commission level. It is crucial for the public to know that all decisions will be made based on guiding documents such as the ERP and the Cultural Resource Plan.

- Habitat Protection - Restoration Studies

Mr. Ekblaw presented invasive wildland and restoration numbers. He noted that projections are based on approximately 50 to 200 acres are being targeted for treating buffelgrass and fountain grass. The process will include contractor involvement in addition to volunteers. Approximately 335 acres of corridors have been identified for wildland fire mitigation, to be treated on a three-to five-year rotating cycle. Projections for wildland fire mitigation were increased by approximately 20 percent, based on recent numbers. Discussion ensued regarding the reasons for leaving roots behind instead of removing them either by grubbing them out or chemical removal. Analysis of the areas will include cycling back to the areas with preemergent to minimize seed growth over time.

Commissioners were given an opportunity to ask questions. Mr. Ekblaw noted that restoration is a one-time cost. It was suggested that the \$50,000 per acre projection be clearly explained for the general public.

Mr. Hamilton reviewed the Cultural Resource projections, noting that items with a direct specific cost were identified. Educational venues, site treatment implementation, and a historical fence documentation project were highlighted in the projections.

7. **STAFF REPORTS**

- Climbing Plan update

Mr. Hamilton reviewed the updates to the climbing plan. His presentation included a brief history of climbing in the area, and an outline of areas where existing routes will be used. The plan will go through the same public input process as the original plan did in 2016, including representatives from the climbing community and the general public. The vision is to put together a website that will include an explanation of the history, maps, and also information for the climbing community.

Mr. Hamilton said that the ERP purchasing process expects to move forward with awarding a contract within the next couple of weeks.

- Power Utility Update

Mr. Ekblaw said that the utility companies have reevaluated their plans and are now considering undergrounding the telecom fiberoptic line, which would be confined primarily within the existing maintenance access road. Staff will meet with the utility company representatives this week to get more details and talk about concerns such as vegetation and fire management. Work is expected to occur May through September 2023.

8. **UPCOMING MEETING DATES, LOCATIONS, AND AGENDA ITEMS**

All dates listed are tentative and subject to amendment:

- ❑ April 6 – Police Staffing for the parks and Preserve – Protect Preserve Costs
- ❑ April 13 – Finance update– Protect Preserve Costs
- ❑ April 27 – Protect Preserve Costs
- ❑ May 4 – Large Mammal Survey– Protect Preserve Costs
- ❑ June 1– Protect Preserve Costs

Other topics to be scheduled include Transit access to Preserve,

9. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

There were no further comments.

10. ADJOURNMENT

VICE-CHAIR LIPPS MOVED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING. COMMISSIONER COLUCCIO SECONDED THE MOTION, WHICH CARRIED SIX (6) TO ZERO (0) BY ROLL CALL VOTE. CHAIR LAPAT-POLASKO, VICE-CHAIR LIPPS, COMMISSIONERS COLUCCIO, HACKBARTH, OLSSON, AND SMITH VOTED IN THE AFFIRMATIVE. THERE WERE NO DISSENTING VOTES.

With no further business to discuss, being duly moved and seconded, the meeting adjourned at 6:55 p.m.

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