



**CITY OF SCOTTSDALE
MCDOWELL SONORAN PRESERVE COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
Thursday, May 6, 2021
Community Design Studio
7506 East Indian School Road
Scottsdale, AZ 85251**

Hybrid meeting held in person and electronically

PRESENT: Chairperson Cynthia Wenstrom, Vice-Chair Laurie LaPat-Polasko, Commissioners Steve Coluccio, Steve Dodd, Mark Hackbarth, Marsha Lipps, and Tawana Parker

STAFF: Kroy Ekblaw, Preserve Director; Scott Hamilton, Senior Trails Planner

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Wenstrom called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m. She noted that for the first time in a year the Commission was meeting together at the Community Design Studio, with some attending electronically.

2. ROLL CALL

Members present as noted above.

3. PUBLIC COMMENT

No public comments were received.

4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Approval of the Regular Meeting minutes of April 15, 2021

COMMISSIONER LIPPS MOVED TO APPROVE THE APRIL 15, 2021 MCDOWELL SONORAN PRESERVE COMMISSION SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES. COMMISSIONER DODD SECONDED THE MOTION, WHICH CARRIED SEVEN (7) TO ZERO (0) BY ROLL CALL VOTE. CHAIR WENSTROM, VICE-CHAIR LAPAT-POLASKO, COMMISSIONERS COLUCCIO, DODD, HACKBARTH, LIPPS, AND PARKER VOTED IN THE AFFIRMATIVE. THERE WERE NO DISSENTING VOTES.

5. MCDOWELL SONORAN CONSERVANCY UPDATE

Justin Owen announced that the Conservancy is continuing the 30th anniversary celebrations in May with a celebration of the first 100 stewards in 2003, the sponsorship of Joan Fudala's book Historic Scottsdale; a Life from the Land in 2001, and the publication of the first McDowell Sonoran Preserve field guide. An in-person reception and happy hour is being planned for the fall.

Mr. Owen gave an update on the Desert Tortoise telemetry project. He showed photographs, highlighting the project activities and how the tortoise are identified and how the monitoring system is attached. The anticipation is that the study will help in understanding how urbanization and climate change are affecting the Desert Tortoise.

Expedition Days online program has approximately 85 teachers and over 2,000 students enrolled, more than tripling the number of students that the program accommodated in with the in-person program. Mr. Owen reiterated that the online program will continue once in-person programming comes back. He noted that they are working with Scottsdale Unified School District to build a curriculum specifically for SUSD and in hopes of developing a program for the Math and Science Academy that is part of Saguaro High School.

Path Finders program continues to receive great reviews from both path finders and the public. It is anticipated that the program will be back in full swing by fall.

Commissioner Coluccio noted that so far ten tortoises have been found and tagged as part of the Desert Tortoise Telemetry project. Surveys are pausing tomorrow until the monsoon season arrives.

6. PIMA/DYNAMITE TRAILHEAD AND AREA TRAIL IMPROVEMENTS UPDATE

Mr. Hamilton shared photographs of the construction at Pima/Dynamite, noting that fencing near the rock pile in Area K has been completed. Work on the signage plan and fabricating signs for the fence and trails is ongoing. Staff and stewards recently surveyed the area and discussed signage concepts. Asphalt and seat walls designed to double as bicycle racks are being installed at the trailhead. In approximately a month, the access off of Dynamite will be closed and access will be shifted to Pima Road, so that paving can be completed.

The project is expected to be substantially completed by early July. Staff is planning for a soft opening at that time and hopes to have a community celebration in the fall.

7. 128TH STREET TO TOM'S THUMB TRAILHEAD CONSTRUCTION ACTIVITY UPDATE

Mr. Ekblaw gave an update on construction along 128th Street to Tom's Thumb trailhead. He noted that a lot of subdivision and home construction is beginning in the area and additional future construction is identified.

As part of upcoming road improvements a project will begin to connect the existing water line that was installed under the trailhead driveway so that a water-based restroom system can be

installed at Tom's Thumb trailhead. It is anticipated that restrooms will be in full operation by fall of 2022.

Commissioners were given an opportunity to ask questions. Mr. Ekblaw said that he will have information on whether developers north of Ranch Gate Road towards Dynamite have approached the City about road improvements.

8. POLICY PROCESS UPDATE

- A. Kroy Ekblaw, Preserve Director, provided an update on the policy process, timeline and public process.

Mr. Ekblaw summarized items presented during the policy process update.

- B. Review cost estimates for Corridor Protection

Mr. Ekblaw recalled that six years ago the Commission requested that \$2million be set aside for a possible wildlife crossing in the Dynamite and 128th Street area as part of the trailhead and trails design. He said primary areas where roads have Preserve on both sides of the road are Dynamite Corridor, Rio Verde Corridor, and 128th Street Corridor.

Staff consulted with Game and Fish to identify the best location for an overpass and with Capital Projects staff to estimate costs for a crossing. A 200 x 100 foot long structure was identified that would cross the road, forming a tunnel with a deck and natural soil built on top. Costs include undergrounding of a nearby power line. What is not included in estimate is potential fencing to direct animals to the crossing and other possible variations. Projected costs for a wildlife crossing as described is approximately \$10 million. Staff will present the Commission with updates as studies continue.

- C. Review cost estimates for Other Policy Elements

Mr. Ekblaw described small animal crossings that could be built into wash crossings for smaller mammals. Pipes and other underground structures could be put in to allow for reptiles and other smaller animals to cross. A crossing of this nature would cost substantially less than the large wildlife crossing.

Commissioners were given an opportunity to ask questions. Commissioner Hackbarth suggested that staff consult with Oracle about their overpass. Mr. Ekblaw said that there are examples of wildlife crossings throughout the country. The challenge is driven by what is being crossed over or under and the width of the crossing. Design has a lot to do with the type of animals that the crossing is trying to accommodate.

Mr. Hamilton noted that the crossing in Oracle was an ADOT and Game and Fish joint project. There are also crossings along the interstate from Phoenix to Los Vegas which cost approximately \$5 million each, but they are narrower and connect from cliffside to cliffside. He noted that the Conservancy has been doing a lot of research in the gooseneck area and will have more detail regarding possibilities for a crossing at a later date.

Mr. Ekblaw explained that although the concept of a wildlife crossing is mentioned in a couple of elements of the transportation plan, no funding has been identified for such a project. This

process is meant to facilitate what things are important for the long-term protection of the Preserve and to identify an estimate of cost. Mr. Ekblaw noted that matching grants could be available as the process moves forward.

He added that that mixing a trail crossing with a wildlife bridge could drive animals away from the crossing.

Once the project is approved by both the MSPC and City Council, the funding mechanism could be put up for a public vote. He estimates that it will be a minimum of five years for a project like this to be ready to move forward.

The goal is to bring the information to City Council over the summer for feedback and direction. Staff hopes to schedule a work study with City Council in the fall of 2021 and spring of 2022 with an anticipated election in either November 2022 or 2024.

9. STAFF REPORTS

Mr. Hamilton said that repairs of an erosion issue near the front entry at Lost Dog Wash trailhead have been completed.

The fire fuel mitigation project along 136th Street towards Granite Mountain is ongoing and is expected to be completed in approximately a week and a half.

10. UPCOMING MEETING DATES, LOCATIONS, AND AGENDA ITEMS

All dates listed are tentative and subject to amendment:

- May 20th –
 - Existing Ordinance Prohibition of Motorized Vehicles
- June 3rd
 - Policy Process
- June 17th
 - Policy Process
- Pima/Dynamite TH Tour - Date TBD in June

- Other 2021 meetings thru November:

Regular meetings

September 2nd

October 7th

November 4th

Special meetings

September 16th

October 21st

November 18th

Mr. Ekblaw noted that the hybrid meeting format will be able to be accommodated for the May 20th meeting. The June 3rd and 17th meetings will be full Zoom meetings, because the Design Studio will be undergoing renovations.

11. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

There were no commissioner comments.

12. ADJOURNMENT

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

With no further business to discuss, being duly moved and seconded, the meeting adjourned at 6:03 p.m.

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