



MINUTES

City of Flagstaff Open Spaces Commission

December 9th, 2019

4:00 pm – 6:00 pm

COUNCIL CHAMBERS, CITY HALL

211 West Aspen Avenue, Flagstaff, Arizona

A quorum of the Flagstaff City Council may be in attendance of the Open Spaces Commission meeting.



In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, if you need assistance to participate in this meeting, please contact 928-213-2154. Notification at least 48 hours in advance will enable the City to make reasonable arrangements.

CALL TO ORDER

COMMISSION MEMBERS:

Bryan Burton, Chair
Jackie Thomas, Vice-Chair
William Wilson

Jim Burton
Jack Welch
Kate Stanley
Eric Nolan

STAFF LIAISON:

Robert Wallace, Open Space Specialist

1. Call to Order

Chair Burton called the meeting to order at 4:02pm.

2. Roll Call

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Chair Burton	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Commissioner Burton
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Vice-Chair Thomas	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Commissioner Welch
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Commissioner Wilson	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Commissioner Stanley
	<input type="checkbox"/> Commissioner Nolan

3. Public Participation

At this time, any member of the public may address the Commission on any subject that is not scheduled before the Commission on that day. The Arizona Open Meeting Law prohibits the Commission from discussing or taking action on an item which is not listed on the prepared agenda. Commission members may, however, respond to criticism made by those addressing the Commission, ask staff to review a matter, or ask that a matter be placed on a future agenda. To address the Commission on an item that is on the agenda, please wait for the Chair to call for Public Comment at the time the item is heard.

No public participation.

4. **Approval of November 25th, 2019 Meeting Minutes**

Vice-Chair Thomas motioned to approve the November 25th, 2019 minutes. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Welch. All voted in favor.

5. **Business**

A. **Southside Neighborhood Plan Public Review – Parks and Open Space**

Discussion. (30 minutes) – Sara Dechter and Carlton Johnson, Requested Action: Informational/Discussion

Sara Dechter (Comprehensive Planning Manager) gave an overview of the Southside Neighborhood Plan (the Plan). The Plan is intended to be a bridge between the Flagstaff Regional Plan 2020 and the more specific implementation plans for housing, zoning, annual budgets, etc. This draft of the Plan has taken two and a half years to complete as it has been highly iterative. A stakeholder group of eight people was convened by the Southside Neighborhood Association to provide a structure for feedback in the last six months, and this group has given their approval for the current draft. The Plan just opened for 60 days of public comment last Friday, and will be presented to 12 different Commissions during that time.

The issues and opportunities relevant to the Open Spaces Commission are as follows:

- Find appropriate locations for parks, considering the expense of property in the Southside and parity with other urban neighborhoods
- Desire for a vibrant urban neighborhood including the value of trees
- Mixed feedback on what to do about the Rio de Flag

Ms. Dechter showed a map of the eight park options the stakeholder group initially came up with. As the group wanted to prioritize areas that could become parks soon rather than areas that would be perfect for a park (e.g., centrally located), the following five options are currently included in the Plan.

1. Mikes Pike Pocket Park: This area will likely turn into some sort of utility as part of the infrastructure of the Army Corps of Engineers flood control project if it is not saved as green space. The adjacent property may also have a change of ownership in the near future, and the creation of a park here could add additional parking spaces.
2. Ellery Street Pocket Park: Located between South Verde Street and South Agassiz Street, this small section of East Ellery Street would be converted into a smaller alley with a natural green space next to it. This park is contingent on the completion of flood control efforts.
3. Little Rio de Flag: Widening public right-of-way in alleys adjacent to the current Rio de Flag channel could provide more space for Flagstaff Urban Trail System (FUTS) trails in those areas.
4. Under Lone Tree Park: This would be a bigger park large enough for a basketball court with opportunities for public art and would ensure that the area under the new overpass be usable for the community and not

just the pedestrian pathway on top. BNSF Railway Company owns the property on either side of the proposed park area, though the rails are not currently active there.

5. O'Leary Street FUTS connection: The plan includes a proposal to connect South Lone Tree Road to Ashurst Avenue and South O'Leary Street as an alternate route option for bikes to avoid riding on Butler Avenue. Increased efforts of crime prevention will be needed as some of the property owners very close to the proposed trail have concerns about safety.

Vice-Chair Thomas asked if there was a required ratio of people to open space for a specific area. Ms. Dechter explained that there are some guidelines from the National Recreation and Park Association, but no guidelines specific to Flagstaff.

Vice-Chair Thomas also inquired about the open area near REI. While that is currently open, Ms. Dechter explained that it is set aside for future affordable housing.

Chair Burton posited about the fate of the current channel of the Rio de Flag after the Army Corps of Engineers flood control project, and suggested that in areas where the Rio de Flag may be buried underground, parks could be placed on top. Ms. Dechter elaborated that while there is currently no plan for that channel, there are many historical ties for people who still live in Southside and the channel will still be needed to convey extra water during high flow events. Mr. Johnson also mentioned that much of the area adjacent to the current Rio de Flag is private property with no easements or setbacks, so that property would need to be purchased to make any parks in those areas and the residents of Southside have little affection for the Rio de Flag because of the flooding danger they have been facing.

Chair Burton also asked whether Northern Arizona University might purchase more property in Southside. Ms. Dechter responded that while it is possible, it would take a lot of time. Additionally, many people in Southside value the amenities on campus like the green spaces, so it may benefit the community further.

The complete set of maps, videos from Commission meetings, and information on the upcoming public meetings are available on the project website (www.flagstaff.az.gov/southsideplan). The next public meeting focusing heavily on parks will be held on January 11 from 10 am-12 pm at Riverside Church on Verde Street.

B. Flagstaff Trails Initiative Update and Draft Regional Trail Strategy Plan. (30 minutes) Mark Loseth, Requested Action: Informational/Discussion

Mark Loseth (American Conservation Experience), as a core team member of Flagstaff Trails Initiative (FTI), showed the Commission the presentation given to City Council on December 3rd. FTI recently completed a draft of the Trails Regional Strategy intended to provide a Memorandum of Understanding between all of the trail management entities in the greater Flagstaff area. There is already a

good existing trail system in and around Flagstaff, but the public agreed that it could be better.

FTI started up in September 2017 through a grant and facilitation assistance from the National Park Service Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program. The public has been actively involved since the first public meeting in fall of 2018, and the vision of this effort is “Plan + Build = Balance” as balance was very important to everyone involved. The draft Trails Regional Strategy was recently completed for the Flagstaff Metropolitan Planning Organization (FMPO) Boundary and includes 355 miles of system trails that are authorized and maintained and 300-350 miles of unauthorized trails that have been either built or created by people using shortcuts or accessing system trails where there is no official access. The process has been cross-jurisdictional, just like the trail system in the FMPO boundary.

Commissioner Stanley asked how the unauthorized trails were found. Mr. Loeth explained that they were found on Strava, as well as through efforts such as Forest Service surveys and Mountain Bike Project. These trails are all currently located on the map on the FTI website.

Public feedback from meetings and a survey showed that the Flagstaff community loves the trails, but better experiences could be provided for a full range of ability levels and user types, and limited funding is a concern, especially for trail maintenance.

The draft Trails Regional Strategy was crafted by recommendations from subcommittees on Education and Outreach, Trail System Planning, Financial Sustainability, and Conservation and Restoration. The draft includes eight distinct goals and over 30 proposed strategies including restoration of unauthorized trails, protecting and constructing key trail connections, creating the Flagstaff Trail Academy to recruit and train skilled volunteers, creating the Flagstaff Trail Fund, and transitioning FTI into a non-profit (501c3) organization.

Flagstaff is also now included on the list of cities on the Pledge for the Wild website for people to donate to support the trail system. This donated money will go to a general fund, currently overseen by United Way as FTI is not yet a 501c3. Ms. Antonopoulos inquired about the other cities on Pledge for the Wild, how they have used the money, and how long each one has been on the list. While Mr. Loeth did not have an answer on this, he will find out the information and pass it along to the Commission.

The next steps for FTI are related to the transition to a non-profit, including securing funding to support and select an interim FTI coordinator and finding board members. The draft Trails Regional Strategy is currently open for public comment until February 7th, and is available to read and comment on at flagstafftrailsinitiative.org. There will also be a public meeting on January 15th from 4:30-6:30 pm at Flagstaff High School.

C. Potential Land Transfer. (5 minutes) – Robert Wallace, Requested Action: Informational/Discussion

As a follow up to the land parcel presented at the last meeting, Mr. Wallace shared with the Commission that there is a retention basin on the property but the Homeowners Association (HOA) has not spent any money on maintaining it. There will be more of an update at the next Commission meeting; Mr. Wallace will send along information related to deed responsibilities and the HOA.

D. Open Space Matrix and Property Review. (50 minutes) – Robert Wallace,
Requested Action: Informational/Discussion

Chair Burton and Mr. Wallace reviewed the list of potential properties for future Open Space again, and narrowed down the options. Vice-Chair Thomas highlighted that these properties be selected with the Parks and Recreation/Open Space (PROS) Bond Measure in mind. At the last meeting, the Commission reviewed the Open Spaces matrix to be used for parcel assessment and more properties were added to the list to assess based on the recent review by Real Estate. Mr. Wallace began to gather additional information about these properties, starting with properties that meet the conservation criteria of the Commission.

The first set of parcels are located east of Picture Canyon. There used to be an access point off of Townsend-Winona Road that had been maintained by property owners, so that access is no longer available. There are two potential properties to assess that could provide access again while also preserving a stretch of the Rio de Flag. Many of the parcels in that area are owned by long-time residents, but Mr. Ince suggested that the City could just buy the floodplain portion of the properties so that those residents can continue to live there.

On the southern side of Picture Canyon, there are parcels that could connect Picture Canyon to the new Continental Park with a FUTS trail. The City already has easements for some of the parcels and where the trail would go has already been graded. Part of this connectivity includes a State Trust parcel that has a contentious history including the presence of an historic and unofficial landfill, but Commissioner Wilson mentioned that this area would be a good candidate for additional parking.

The Commission discussed other options for additional parking at Picture Canyon such as the west side of the current access road or the State Land parcel to the southeast of Picture Canyon where the Arizona Trail currently goes through.

Vice-Chair Thomas mentioned that University Heights is one of the areas that does not have public open space nearby, and equity should be considered in these discussions. There is State Trust land just to the west of University Heights that many people use, but there is a potential that the forest there could be developed. Mr. Ince explained that there are some planned trails in that area, but access for equestrians needs to also be considered particularly for residents in Equestrian Estates.

The Commission will start with assessing areas for connectivity, taking equity into consideration. The Conservation Study Forum will be giving recommendations soon, and Mr. Wallace will continue to narrow down the list of

parcels to only those that fit with the Open Spaces Strategic Plan. Chair Burton urged the need to prioritize and assign values to these parcels for the PROS bond list.

6. Reports and Updates

A. Open Space Management and Events and Outreach Report (5 Minutes) – Robert Wallace, Requested Action: Informational

Mr. Wallace emailed a report to the Commission.

While it was not in the emailed report, the McMillan Mesa Management Plan went in front of City Council who did not give much feedback. The plan will go back to City Council in February after the public comment period is complete.

7. Information Items To and From (5 Minutes) – All

None

8. Future Agenda Items (5 Minutes) - All

- Next meeting: January 27th, 2020
- Property Review Discussion

9. Adjournment

Chair Burton adjourned the meeting at 5:48pm.

CERTIFICATION OF POSTING OF NOTICE

The undersigned hereby certifies that a copy of the foregoing notice was duly posted at Flagstaff City Hall on _____, at _____ a.m./p.m. in accordance with the statement filed by the Disability Awareness Commission with the City Clerk.

Dated this _____ day of _____, 2019.



Robert Wallace, Staff Liaison