



# MINUTES

## City of Flagstaff Open Spaces Commission

February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2020

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 4:00pm.

#### 2. **Roll Call**

Chair Burton

Vice-Chair Thomas

Commissioner Wilson

Commissioner Burton

Commissioner Welch

Commissioner Stanley

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 February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020 Meeting Minutes**

Commissioner Burton motioned to approve the February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020 minutes. The motion was seconded by Vice-Chair Thomas. All voted in favor.

#### 5. **Business**

##### A. **Picture Canyon thinning project update.** (30 minutes) – Neil Chapman, Requested Action: Informational/Discussion

Neil Chapman, Forest Health Supervisor with Wildland Forest Management (WFM), gave an overview of the Flagstaff Watershed Protection Project (FWPP) and the planned forest thinning in Picture Canyon. Mr. Chapman gave a brief history of the role of fire in the forests around Flagstaff. Flagstaff's forests are currently much denser than they were about 100 years ago, and the goal of thinning projects is to rehabilitate those forests to a less dense state to return to a more fire-adapted environment and avoid the high costs of large wildfires.

Picture Canyon is considered a priority area for the FWPP, so they have been working with Open Space to plan thinning operations on 200 acres of the property. Along with reducing the density of trees, the thinning project is focused on producing stands of trees with different ages and sizes to maximize habitat availability and make the forest more resilient to fires. There will not be any equipment to drive in to minimize damage, and WFM is working with archaeologist Neil Weintraub to protect cultural resources in the area.

WFM is also working with Open Space to put up signage during operations to keep visitors safe, and signage after operations to educate the community on the importance of the project. This thinning project aligns with many management plans besides FWPP including the Four Forests Restoration Initiative, the Climate Action and Adaptation Plan (CAAP), and the Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network.

Commissioner Burton expressed appreciation that WFM is taking the CAAP goals into consideration and asked whether there will be invasive species monitoring after the thinned materials are burned. Mr. Chapman explained that while there are not currently plans in place, he would like to work with Open Space to create monitoring maps for invasive plants including locations of fires and thinning operations. There are plans in place to do some weeding after thinning in addition to revegetating with native seeds with the help of volunteers.

Commissioner Nolan asked about the total cost from the Museum Fire. Mr. Chapman said it cost approximately \$10 million to put out the fire, but it is not clear how much it will cost to deal with the aftermath. He highlighted that it costs the City much less money to prevent wildfires than to respond to them, but there is rarely enough money available for prevention.

Chair Burton requested more information about how to go about making other Open Space properties fire-wise, and Mr. Chapman explained that the Commission should connect with Jerolyn Byrne at WFM.

The Commission requested to see the scientific papers that have informed this plan, and Mr. Wallace offered to send them after the meeting.

**B. Integrated Open Space System Discussion.** (80 minutes) – All, Requested  
Action: Discussion/Decision

Mr. Wallace expressed interest in furthering the conversation and keeping the momentum that was built to create an integrated open space system that the Commission has been discussing for the bond measure. He gave a brief overview of what will be presented to City Council on March 3<sup>rd</sup> when the full bond measure is presented. The three priority areas are as follows:

1. Create an integrated open space system, including connections between natural areas and with FUTS.
2. Conserve and protect City-owned Open Space.
3. Create a trail plan for Observatory Mesa.

Commissioners Wilson and Nolan shared the need to better educate the community on the bond process. Mr. Wallace agreed and offered to generate a short list of talking points to explain what the bond is, where the money is coming from, and the nature of the collaboration between Housing, Wildland Forest Management, Parks and Recreation, and Open Space.

The Commissioners also made suggestion of things to elaborate on in the short presentation such as spelling out acronyms, explaining what will be included in the Observatory Mesa trail plan and elaborating on what the map is showing, and reminding Council of the partnership with Lowell Observatory.

Vice-Chair Thomas pointed out that the cultural survey for Observatory Mesa may end up being more expensive than anticipated if cultural resources are found in order to go through the permitting and filing process with the Arizona State Museum. She suggested talking to Neil Weintraub about the process.

The Commission then discussed options and ideas for continuing to develop an integrated system to ultimately compress into a goal to add to the guiding document for the Commission. The Commissioners agreed on the following three categories of open space properties: regional preserves as large hubs of recreation and open space, connectors, and complementary open space to provide additional value to existing trail networks.

Commissioner Nolan asked for clarification on how viewsheds fit into the Open Space network. Mr. Wallace explained that it can affect the zoning of the Open Space property, and Mr. Ince further elaborated that viewsheds also include corridors with natural features such as forests that help to preserve the character of the community. Chair Burton mentioned that viewsheds are already included in the matrix for prioritizing properties, but that viewsheds are assessed on an individual basis. Commissioner Welch suggested connecting with Nat White for more information.

The Commission also discussed potential methods to protect these areas. Chair Burton expressed appreciation for trying to integrate with County areas and suggested that open space properties be given protection beyond codes and zoning. Commissioner Nolan, however, urged that the Commission needs to make sure codes are enacted to ensure protections desired by the public.

When Chair Burton mentioned the need for balance between growth/development and open space, Mr. Ince reiterated that some small open space areas can be protected through the development process and the Commission can help guide the optimization of those areas to start adding them together as connectors, particularly if those goals and expectations for new easements or acquisitions are clear in advance. Chair Burton also reminded the Commission of the need to consider maintenance expenses when making recommendations.

Mr. Wallace explained that there has already been an inventory map created of where FUTS and Open Space opportunities are aligned. After looking at the map, Vice-Chair Thomas requested looking into the property currently for sale by the Museum of Northern Arizona just to the south of the Schultz “Y” as it is used by many people in those neighborhoods despite not being part of an authorized trail system.

Mr. Wallace also mentioned that some of the money provided by a bond in 2004 intended for FUTS easements may be left over once the areas identified for FUTS are secured and could be used to pursue tracts of land larger than easements in alignment with FUTS and Open Space. He reviewed areas of interest for the Commission to consider including a buffer for the trail to Ft. Tuthill, vacant residential lots currently being used for forest access, and a portion of the floodplain near Fox Glenn. Mr. Wallace and Mr. Ince are currently looking into a State Parks grant that would match the cost of these acquisitions.

The Commissioners discussed these properties and highlighted the importance of retaining access and locations with the highest current and future recreational traffic.

Chair Burton reiterated the importance of having potential parcels for Open Space be reviewed by City staff before coming to the Commission, and Vice-Chair Thomas agreed.

The Commission also expressed the need to have more information and education on planning and zoning processes to be able to make more informed decisions on land acquisition and Open Space protections. Chair Burton suggested also having a joint meeting with the Planning and Zoning Commission.

The Commissioners agreed to reflect on this discussion and continue the dialogue in future meetings once these suggestions are incorporated into an outline. Mr. Wallace suggested that Commissioners send examples of other community Open Space plans to use as a model, and by request of Chair Burton, agreed to continue the discussion and collaboration with Parks and Recreation.

## **6. Reports and Updates**

**A. Open Space Management and Events and Outreach Report (5 minutes),**  
Requested Action: Informational

Mr. Wallace did not have a report for February but will have one for the next meeting.

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

The Commissioners further discussed the need for education prior to and during the March 3<sup>rd</sup> City Council meeting, and Commissioner Wilson suggested incorporating where the bond money is coming from into the beginning of the presentation. Vice-Chair Thomas also highlighted the value of utilizing the Flagstaff Trails Initiative maps showing high trail use to explain that these recommendations are based on supporting and maintaining what is already occurring in the community. Chair Burton recommended explaining the matrix for prioritizing properties as well. Mr. Wallace urged Commissioners to attend the meeting and reminded them that they can provide public comment as a private citizen to help give some of this additional information considering the tight timeframe for the presentation. He also agreed to try to add this information to the informational packet given to City Council.

**8. Future Agenda Items (5 Minutes) - All**

- Next meeting: March 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2020 CR – Staff Room
- Legally Designated Open Space Management Plan update
  - The McMillan Mesa chapter in this plan is complete and the small amount of public feedback has been incorporated.
- Education on zoning and codes including the differences and overlaps with Open Space
- Communication/collaboration with Housing Commission
  - Mr. Wallace was a part of an internal meeting with the Housing Commission liaison, and there is a plan to coordinate more regularly with them.

**9. Adjournment**

Chair Burton adjourned the meeting at 5:45pm.

**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