



MINUTES

City of Flagstaff Open Spaces Commission

June 1st, 2020
4:00 pm – 6:00 pm
VIRTUAL MEETING

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:

Andy Bessler
Jim Burton
Mark Loseth
Eric Nolan

Joseph Thomas
Jack Welch
William Wilson

STAFF LIAISON:

Robert Wallace, Open Space Specialist

1. **Call to Order**

Mr. Wallace called the meeting to order at 4:03pm.

2. **Roll Call**

Commissioner Bessler
 Commissioner Burton
 Commissioner Loseth
 Commissioner Nolan

Commissioner Thomas
 Commissioner Welch
 Commissioner Wilson

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 24th, 2020 Meeting Minutes**

Commissioner Wilson motioned to approve the February 24th, 2020 minutes. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Nolan. All voted in favor.

5. Business

A. Open Spaces Commission Introduction and Review (15 minutes) – All,
Requested Action: Discussion/Decision

There were three new Commissioners at the meeting: Commissioner Loseth, Commissioner Bessler, and Commissioner Thomas. Everyone introduced themselves.

Ms. Antonopoulos gave a brief overview of the Sustainability Section program areas in addition to Open Spaces and Mr. Wallace reviewed the Open Spaces Commission's authority. Councilmember Aslan explained his role as liaison with City Council; the Commission typically reports annually to Council and Councilmember Aslan can take any specific issues directly back to Council. There is a new process being developed for more frequent updates to City Council.

B. Chair and Vice Chair Appointments (20 minutes) – All, Requested Action:
Discussion/Decision

Chair Burton fulfilled his term, and Vice Chair Thomas stepped down, so different Commissioners need to be appointed.

Nomination for Commissioner Wilson as Chair – 5-0 (passes unanimously)

Nomination for Commissioner Bessler as Vice-Chair – 5-0 (passes unanimously)

C. Environmental Management Fee Restructure and Wildland Fire Protection Fee (20 minutes) – Nicole Antonopoulos and Neil Chapman, Requested Action:
Informational

Ms. Antonopoulos (Sustainability Manager) and Mr. Chapman (Forest Health Supervisor, Flagstaff Fire Department) gave an overview of the proposed restructure of the Environmental Management Fee and the new proposed Water Resource and Infrastructure Protection Fee. These fees would provide revenue for and support the goals of both the Sustainability Section and the Flagstaff Fire Department. However, the City does not have the fee authority to allocate any of those funds to the Open Space program, so the entire program is funded by the general City budget.

The intent of the restructured Environmental Management fee is to distribute the fee more equitably among customers. The current flat fee of \$4 currently put a disproportionate burden on single-family residences as they tend to use less water than high-occupancy housing units with less per capita service bills. The new fee would be a 3.5% consumption-based rate to also encourage people to save money by consuming less. Examples were given on how the cost for services could change for different types of customers.

The new Water Resource and Infrastructure Protection fee is intended to provide a stable and long-term funding source to maintain watershed investments and City water infrastructure. Most of the work related to protecting the water supply and Flagstaff's fire-adapted forests has been funded by the Flagstaff Watershed Protection Program bond, but those funds will be exhausted within the next 6-10 months. However, the need for this work will continue to increase with the changing climate and higher risk of catastrophic wildfire. This fee would fund both permanent and seasonal staff salaries. The fee would be \$0.52 for 1,000 gallons of water used and will rise to \$0.53 by 2022.

Both fees will be on the same bill for customers. For the average low water user consuming about 3,500 gallons a month will see a charge of \$3.85. Higher water users consuming about 10,000 gallons a month would be charged \$9.97.

There is a lot of outreach planned, including additional presentations to the Sustainability and Water Commissions and widespread social media outreach. City Council already gave initial direction on these proposed fees, and the first read will be on June 2 with the second read on June 16. The fee would then go into effect on August 1.

The Commissioners discussed these fees. Chair Wilson asked for clarification on what the new fee will be used for, and Mr. Chapman explained that it would cover the main programmatic areas for Wildland Fire but that additional funding sources will need to be secured for specific projects such as Flagstaff Watershed Protection and Community Smoke Mitigation. Ms. Antonopoulos stressed that the restructured Environmental Management Fee is primarily focused on equitable distribution after additional questions about the sustainability of revenues from a consumption-based fee and the impact of the proportion of rentals and vacation rentals in Flagstaff.

Vice Chair Bessler motioned to support and recommend to City Council the restructure of the Environmental Management Fee and the new Water Resource and Infrastructure Protection fee. Commissioner Nolan seconded the motion. All voted in favor, motion passed.

Mr. Wallace gave an overview of the current effort to obtain grant funding to conduct an updated cultural survey for McMillan Mesa and help support future projects like educational signage. The Open Spaces program will be applying for the National Trust Preservation Funds grant for \$3000 with matched funds carried over from the current fiscal year to the next. The application requires three letters of endorsement. Letters have already been provided by Museum of Northern Arizona and Flagstaff Trails Initiative, and Mr. Wallace requested a letter from the Open Spaces Commission. Mr. Wallace showed a draft letter to the Commission who made suggestions and edits. The letter needs to be finalized by the middle of June before the next Commission meeting.

Commissioner Loseth motioned to allow Chair Wilson to approve and sign the letter of endorsement on the behalf of the Open Spaces Commission. Chair Wilson seconded the motion. All voted in favor, motion passed.

D. Legally Designated Open Space Management Plan (15 minutes) Robert Wallace, Requested Action: Informational/Discussion

Mr. Wallace reviewed the Legally Designated Open Space Management Plan. The updated plan will go in front of Council for adoption by resolution on July 7th to allow for Legal to read through the recent changes from Wildland Fire and the US Fish and Wildlife Service related to Mexican spotted owl and goshawk habitat. Some of those changes have been made already, but Mr. Wallace is still waiting on the Mexican spotted owl edits.

Chair Wilson suggested some minor changes for clarity and asked for more information about the fencing situation in Observatory Mesa. Mr. Wallace explained that there are large gaps in the fencing infrastructure, so cattle can sometimes make their way into the open space area. Some of the fencing is owned and maintained by the City and some by the US Forest Service, but the City can repair US Forest Service fencing if needed.

Vice Chair Bessler pointed out that annual visitor numbers were provided for Observatory Mesa but not for McMillan Mesa. Mr. Wallace explained that the Open Space program has a limited number of trail counters and nearly all of those are currently at Picture Canyon. There is one counter at McMillan Mesa, but as there are many different access points to the area the count will not be very accurate. This is a future project for the program.

E. FY21 Commission Plan (15 minutes) – All, Requested Action: Discussion

The Commission had an initial discussion on what they would like to accomplish over the next fiscal year. Mr. Wallace reviewed the goals of the recently updated strategic plan for the Open Spaces Commission. The Commission was in general agreement that their work should build off what was already done for the PROS bond measure efforts.

Councilmember Aslan gave some context to the conversation by setting the stage for upcoming changes. He reminded the Commission that there will be a new Council in November, and this will be an opportunity to proactively and strategically further the goals of Open Space more than in the recent past. The current budget realities with the impending recession will have repercussions for Commissions, and energy should be focused on what can be achieved. Councilmember Aslan stressed the importance of habitat connectivity, equitable community connection, and education efforts.

Vice Chair Bessler suggested seeking out COVID-19 relief funds and new partnerships for additional funding. He is particularly interested in trying to help young people gain interest in Open Space by working trails and there are many opportunities to develop partnerships to further this idea including Flagstaff Trails Initiative.

This conversation will be continued at the next meeting. Commissioners will send their priorities to Mr. Wallace who will create a short outline for review.

F. COVID-19 and Future Meeting Guidelines (5 minutes) – Robert Wallace,
Requested Action: Informational/Discussion

Commissions will continue to meet through Teams until facilities are open to the public. As Boards and Commissions are no longer being live streamed due to budget constraints, the Commission will not need to use Council Chambers anymore. Once facilities are reopened, Mr. Wallace recommended moving the meetings to the Sustainability Office at 419 N. Mogollon.

6. Reports and Updates

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

Mr. Wallace sent the report in advance and suggested that Commissioners send questions by email. More time will be allocated at the next meeting to go into more detail.

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

Commissioner Nolan expressed that he is looking forward to working with everyone and with a full and experientially diverse Commission.

8. Future Agenda Items (5 Minutes) - All

- Next meeting: June 22nd, 2020 (Virtual or Sustainability Office 419 N. Mogollon St.)
- Fee authority information

9. Adjournment

Mr. Wallace adjourned the meeting at 6:01pm.

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