



MINUTES

City of Flagstaff Open Spaces Commission

October 26th, 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

Vice Chair Bessler called the meeting to order at 4:00pm.

2. Roll Call

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

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.

Wendy Wetzel, 1182 N. Skyview, is involved in a project that will raise money for elk habitat on Schultz pass road. The project is run by the Peaks Neighbors of Colton Meadow, with the goal of keeping the area as a green space. They will be having a quilt

auction and taking donations to raise funds. Peaks Neighbors of Colton Meadow have more information on their Facebook page and will be highlighted in the Arizona Daily Sun on Sunday.

4. Approval of September 28th, 2020 Meeting Minutes

Commissioner Nolan motioned to approve the September 28th, 2020 minutes. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Loeth. All voted in favor.

5. Business

A. Lowell Observatory Congressional Bill Update (15 minutes) – Jeffery Hall, Requested Action: Informational

Mr. Hall, Lowell Observatory, gave a presentation to provide more information to the Commission on the current Congressional bill concerning their property (Section 17, the parcel just southeast of Observatory Mesa Natural Area). The property was deeded to Lowell Observatory in 1910 as an act of Congress to be used for observatory purposes while retaining the government's rights to timber in the area. In that original act, the parcel would revert to the government if the Observatory dissolves or uses the land for non-observatory purposes.

Over the past 10 years, Lowell Observatory has grown substantially both in visitation and in facilities, including the new Visitor Center and the installation of a water line through the property for Snowbowl's use and as an emergency source of water for fighting wildfires. Some of these additions could potentially be considered not to be "observatory purposes", and in the past, Observatory staff have discussed potential partnerships with groups such as the Flagstaff Shakespeare Festival, TGen North, and the City of Flagstaff. Future plans involve building a new Astronomy Discovery Center and putting in an emergency egress road, and the time is right to get more clarity from Congress on what is permissible on the property.

The current bill is the Revised Section 17 bill S. 242, and proposed language would change "observatory purposes" to "observatory and related educational purposes" in addition to striking out the merchantable timber rights. Lowell Observatory will be doing a lot of outreach and education to the community with the intent of transparency and keeping everyone informed. There will be a portal on their website to gather feedback as well as a biweekly email update, both starting on October 28th. The intent of Lowell Observatory is to continue to follow their organizational mission and to protect the area as an open space.

Commissioner Nolan asked for more information about the potential partnership with TGen North and the Arboretum. These partnerships are being considered as between the three organizations, they represent three different branches of sciences and would help build Flagstaff's reputation as a STEM City. Between the three organizations, opportunities could be incorporated for a variety of students from NAU, CCC, and local high schools.

Alicyn Gitlin, private citizen, pointed out that there has been a lack of awareness in the community and a lack of communication from Lowell Observatory with only neighbors being informed of what is happening. Because the public are being

asked to change what they are willing to accept on the parcel, they deserve an explanation and need to be able to provide input on the new language. Ms. Gitlin mentioned that there seems to be a lack of understanding on the Congressional level as well. In addition, Ms. Gitlin quoted a letter from the Mayor written three years ago that referred to the egress road to Lowell Observatory as an opportunity for traffic diversion from Snowbowl. Mr. Hall explained that the bill is currently in the Senate committee and that he will be posting all the information they receive as it comes in. Mr. Hall reiterated that Lowell Observatory will strive to be as transparent as possible moving forward and focus on doing good for the community.

Councilmember Aslan expressed appreciation that Lowell Observatory and Mr. Hall are striving for the additional transparency.

Diane Hope, private citizen, highlighted that in 1910 the town was tiny and access to forest was easy. This area is increasingly more important as wildlife habitat and as open space, so the revised bill needs to include wording that protects some amount of the parcel from development for any reason.

Vice Chair Bessler asked about the timeframe for the Senate bill to move forward. As it is currently in committee, nothing will happen until after the election and potentially not until the new administration comes in. Mr. Hall will be sharing all of the language from the Senate committee, and hopes that this process will be a partnership between Lowell Observatory, City of Flagstaff, and the public.

B. Arizona Game and Fish Department Agreement Update (10 minutes) – Robert Wallace, Requested Action: Informational

Mr. Wallace gave a brief update on the agreement with Arizona Game and Fish Department. Their regional staff found that a new agreement is not needed, so they are not looking to renew. This means that the Open Space Program will not have the funding that would have been provided from the agreement as has been awarded in the past.

Chair Wilson asked how the decrease in funding will impact work on Observatory Mesa. There are still some funds left from the most recent agreement that have already been allocated to developing the trail plan. As for additional funds, Mr. Wallace is hoping to provide a concept plan in an application for the Arizona Trails Conservation grant.

C. Potential City Council Update (20 minutes) – All, Requested Action: Discussion

The Commission will be providing an update to City Council on what they have been working on and what support is needed from Council. Mr. Wallace listed all of the work that has happened in the past year or so as examples of what could be presented to Council with general agreement from the Commission. These examples include the McMillan Mesa rezone application, the Legally Designated Open Space plan update, and the recent work with the Parks and Recreation Commission for the bond measure.

Vice Chair Bessler asked when this update would be given to Council, as it would be great to have the opportunity to advocate for Open Space funding before the budget retreat in February. Mr. Wallace was not sure but will provide more detail later.

D. Open Space Development Protocol Drafting (30 minutes) – All, Requested Action: Discussion

Mr. Wallace drafted up a protocol for how to better manage Open Space and Commission approval for developments associated with Open Space properties like the rip rap basin that was requested for the Arizona Department of Veteran Services facility. The process would follow the following steps:

1. Submit an application.
2. The application goes through internal review from Open Space staff and Legal.
3. If internal review is passed, the Open Space Commission will review and score based on specific criteria.
4. If the Commission approves, they will make a recommendation for City Council review and a final decision.

The Commissioners appreciated the clear process and detailed system.

Commissioner Nolan asked for more information on what the process will look like to incorporate this protocol. Mr. Wallace explained that he is still waiting for more information from Legal on this subject but can ask them more detailed questions about how to adopt it.

Commissioner Loseth requested that an addition be made to the criteria to ensure that development limits outlined in conservation easements are not exceeded. Vice Chair Bessler also suggested adding in an option for “revision advised” after Commission review of an application.

Vice Chair Bessler asked about the timeline to approve and implement this protocol. Mr. Wallace explained that he would like the Commission to test this protocol out, and that the revisions will have to be approved by Legal. There will be a dry run of the protocol at the next Commission meeting.

Nat White, private citizen, asked whether this protocol would apply to other development beyond Open Space. Mr. Wallace elaborated that for now, the protocol would be followed solely for Open Space management purposes.

E. FY21 Commission Priorities (20 minutes) – All, Requested Action: Discussion

McMillan Mesa Rezone Application Neighborhood Participation Plan

The project manager recommended changing the public meeting dates from Friday evenings. The Commission generally agreed to change the dates to December 11th and January 15th. These will both be Zoom meetings, and the

presentation and questions for the public have already been drafted as a part of the application. Help from Commissioners will be needed to monitor the chat box, help troubleshoot any technical difficulties, and run the meetings with Mr. Wallace. Vice Chair Bessler asked if there was any chance the meetings could be changed to an in-person format if COVID-19 numbers improve. Mr. Wallace explained that he was asked specifically to not provide that option.

Commissioner Nolan asked whether this process is separate from the community engagement process for Priority Based Budgeting (PBB) as many of the questions are similar between the two processes. The two processes are separate, and the questions are primarily intended to spark discussion, though could potentially inform the PBB process as well.

Chair Wilson volunteered to help with these meetings.

Observatory Mesa Trail Plan

The internal review is still in progress, and revisions should be submitted back to American Conservation Experience in November.

Open Space City Code Recommendations

Chair Wilson has been researching the Open Space city codes of many different cities in the region. The next step is to draft a code recommendation for Flagstaff based on that research.

F. Open Space Program Budget Update (5 minutes) – Robert Wallace, Requested Action: Informational

Mr. Wallace sent the Commission a chart that is being used for budget tracking. The highlights of the budget are as follows:

- About \$3000 have been spent for the McMillan Mesa rezone application
- \$2000-5000 have been allotted for the actual rezone process
- They are still working on the cultural survey as they are waiting to hear about potential grant funding

Mr. Wallace also mentioned that the National Park Service requested that Open Space put up a directional sign to Picture Canyon coming from Walnut Canyon National Monument as many people were diverted there while the Monument was closed.

Vice Chair Bessler asked whether there was a grant application for a trails foundation of some kind. Mr. Wallace explained that he had applied for the Invasive Plant Grant at Picture Canyon but it was not awarded to he will need to find other funding sources.

G. Future Commission Meetings (10 minutes) – All, Requested Action: Discussion

Because of the holidays, the November and December Commission meetings are frequently combined into one meeting. As the items currently planned for the next

two months could all be accomplished during one meeting, there was general agreement from the Commission to combine the meetings. Mr. Wallace will be sending out a poll to schedule the date.

6. Reports and Updates

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

The Open Space Program is primarily focusing on the McMillan Mesa rezone application. There is also an upcoming event: Make a Difference Day. Make a Difference Day will be taking place on October 31 from 8 am-12 pm. The work will be focused on McMillan Mesa and will involve the cleanup and restoration of abandoned unauthorized camps, putting up signage, cleaning up trash, and working on the FUTS trail to improve drainage. Volunteers are needed, but the hope is to get the Sunnyside community involved specifically. Vice Chair Bessler and Commissioner Nolan are planning on attending, and Commissioner Loseth may join.

Vice Chair Bessler commented on the mountain lion sighting at McMillan Mesa and mentioned that he was glad to see wildlife are using it, even though it's not a typical area for mountain lions to be found.

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

NONE

8. Future Agenda Items (5 Minutes) - All

- Next meeting: TBD
- Planning session for the virtual meetings for the McMillan Mesa Rezone Neighborhood Participation Plan (requested by Commissioner Loseth)
 - To be completed by subcommittee

9. Adjournment

Commissioner Loseth moved to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Nolan. All voted in favor. Meeting adjourned at 5:41pm.

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 _____, 2020.



Robert Wallace, Staff Liaison