



MINUTES

City of Flagstaff Open Spaces Commission

December 7th, 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 Loeth
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 4:05 pm.

2. Roll Call

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

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 Comment.

4. Approval of October 26th, 2020 Meeting Minutes

Commissioner Loseth motioned to approve the October 26th, 2020 minutes. The motion was seconded by Vice Chair Bessler. All voted in favor.

5. Business

A. APS Easement Request (15 minutes) – Robert Wallace & APS Representatives, Requested Action: Informational, Discussion

Mr. Wallace presented the APS Easement Request. Several APS representatives were available to answer questions. Mr. Wallace said APS is interested in revising their easement for access to the Mount Elden substation that is on the McMillan Mesa natural area for regular maintenance and emergencies. This would expand the easement to the west of the switching cabinet. APS would then return some of their easement along the driveway curve. APS has reported that this change is needed to help prevent the relocation of the electrical switching cabinet from the center of their easement. Current access is unusable for emergencies. Moving the switching cabinet would cost \$100,000. If the city is able to work with them to modify their current easement, the Commission needs to make sure it is consistent with Prop 413 by adding a conservation element to their agreement. One solution is allowing the easement but asking that APS work on the restoration of areas around the property. Due to the sensitivity of this property, the city manager's office has recommended that this item go to City Council for review. This issue was brought to the Commission for recommendations. Mr. Wallace has already reached out to four different restoration companies in town about restoring the property identified, but has only heard from one. The estimate totaled approximately \$8,000 for a 2-year restoration process.

Vice Chair Bessler asked for clarification on the three areas highlighted on the map. Mr. Wallace responded that these were three areas identified with APS personnel as areas that could be restored to help further conservation for Prop 413 by maintaining the area.

Chair Wilson asked what was different from the existing easement. Mr. Wallace answered that APS would like to expand their easement to get around their switching cabinet, which was constructed in the middle of their easement, to allow for emergency access near Gemini. APS Project manager Matthew Morgan confirmed APS is asking to shift the easement for more acreage near Gemini Rd. They would be giving back two square feet to Open Spaces.

Chair Wilson asked if the only area in the easement that would change is near Gemini. Mr. Wallace said the easement would be expanded near Gemini, but property along the curve of easement driveway would be returned. APS is considering assisting with the restoration of approximately 0.7 acre in return for the revision to their easement.

Mr. Wallace made mention of stringent guidelines of Prop 413 that the City is required to abide by. The City may be able to revise the APS easement if it furthers the conservation of the property protected by Prop 413.

John Haro, the Northeast director for AZ Public Service said this project is critical and needs to take place sooner rather than later. He said they were using an access road from where the veteran center is now. Since construction on the veteran center

started, it is difficult to enter and exit the substation for planned and emergency work. Crews now have to jump a curb and sidewalk with trucks, which provides an unsafe work environment. They would like to partner with the city to figure out how to alter this easement while respecting Open Space. He reiterated that it would be a two square foot increase surrendered back to the City of Flagstaff and they would restore those areas.

Vice Chair Bessler asked how the easement would be developed. Mr. Haro responded that they would use anything that would be significant enough to hold large trucks in an emergency. It would be a DG of sort that would complement the aesthetics of the area.

Commissioner Loseth asked if the area highlighted to the south of the station is shaped the way it is because of the veterans' home. Mr. Wallace confirmed it follows the fence line for the veterans' home.

Mr. Wallace said the request was to expand the easement from 30ft to 40ft near the switching cabinet. Mr. Haro confirmed saying they were exploring widening the entrance for an easier turn off of Gemini for large trucks but will surrender real estate around the bend.

Commissioner Loseth asked if the new road would be gated by APS, preventing public access. Mr. Haro confirmed the gate will be chained off and locked from pedestrian or vehicle access with the exception of APS and approved vehicles. They are also planning to install signage on restoration areas to discourage which will give more of an opportunity for it to grow and set.

Chair Wilson noted that on the agenda it said this item was for information and discussion. He asked if the commission was able to make a decision tonight without it being on the agenda. Mr. Wallace replied that this was correct and the APS request will be going to City Council for review. He said the Open Space Commission could discuss if they are interested in providing a recommendation. A vote could be on the agenda for the next meeting.

Vice Chair Bessler asked because of the time sensitivity of this issue if there was a timeline for when it will go to council. Mr. Wallace replied that he didn't know if it had been scheduled for the City Council agenda yet, but it could go prior to coming back to the Open Spaces Commission. Vice Chair Bessler noted he would like to see good drainage under the easement to make sure hydrology isn't affected. He is also interested in seeing a cleanup of the area. Mr. Haro assured him they have done studies to mitigate any affecting of water flow in that area.

Rafael Balderrama with APS shared the plan for the area. They did a study in which the area was surveyed, marked, and physically verified. APS is looking to do a shift of their easement which would bring the west border to the switching cabinet, expand the entrance to 45 feet, and then narrow the curve to 30 feet. The existing easement is 17852 square feet. Their adjusted easement would be 17850 square feet. This adjustment would allow for a large vehicle to pull off, unlock the chain, and continue traveling. As far as drainage, they would only be adding DG to the top in order to have a safe driving surface. There is only one section of

road where water naturally drains and they will add a small pipe culvert if necessary. The grade will stay mostly the same.

Chair Wilson asked if there is a slope off Gemini where the access road is and if there are any drainage issues along Gemini. Balderrama responded that there are no anticipated spill or drainage issues at that point but that could change in the study and would require more time from APS.

Chair Wilson asked if this was the final design. Balderrama responded it is close to a final product. Mr. Haro agreed that it was the final design.

Chair Wilson opened up comments to the public. There was no comment.

Chair Wilson asked Mr. Wallace if they could vote to make a recommendation without it being on the agenda. Mr. Wallace answered it would have to wait. If the Commission needs to make a decision before this goes to council, they can call an emergency meeting. Mr. Bertelson said the Commission could have a special meeting based on this topic. Or, if this were to be forwarded to City Council without a recommendation, they could take it forward with noteworthy items from this conversation. Vice Chair Bessler stated that he appreciated the information and will take it under advisement. Mr. Wallace will follow up with an email with options on how to proceed.

B. Open Space Program Update (15 minutes) – Nicole Antonopoulos, Requested Action: Informational, Discussion

Ms. Antonopoulos presented an informational update for the commission on the Open Space Program. She talked about the history of the program. Sustainability took over management in 2010. She celebrated the achievements this program has accomplished so far as well as Mr. Wallace's work. On Jan 2nd, the Open Space Program will return to Parks and Recreation. This move maximizes internal resources and aligns with the growing needs of the program. Ms. Antonopoulos is excited for the trajectory that the Open Space Program is on.

Chair Wilson asked how Open Space will be structured within the Parks and Recreation Department. He noted in the last few years, Open Space has gained a voice and visibility and would not like to lose either of those things. Ms. Antonopoulos responded that she is not worried at all about visibility, and this will only perhaps increase with a collaboration with Parks and Recreation. Open Space will report directly to the Parks and Recreation director. She noted that it would be a lateral shift. During the last budget cycle Open Space was moved into the general fund. Nothing will change for this fiscal year.

Commissioner Nolan wondered if this changed anything in how the commissions are set up. Ms. Antonopoulos responded that this has not been discussed at this point. She is not sure if there will be more alignment down the road. Mr. Bertelsen agreed that in regards to staffing, it is a lateral move. Mr. Wallace will report to the Parks and Recreation director and is in contact with a great parks team who has a preservation perspective as well. There is no plan currently to

change how either commission operates, but they can start to think about types of synergies that they can put in place between both commissions. There are also a lot of opportunities for good discussions. Ms. Antonopoulos mentioned this is an efficiency move to maximize very limited financial resources

Commissioner Burton supported this change, noting that Open Space has struggled with resources and getting needs covered. He said this will hopefully open up a new door to more resources.

Vice Chair Bessler appreciated Ms. Antonopoulos' leadership and the Sustainability Program's support over the years. He noted that the practicality of this change helps with efficiency, but he liked the optics of Open Space being under Sustainability. He said community members understand that Open Space helps with sustainability and he hopes that the City Manager's office keeps this esoteric value in mind during this transition. Ms. Antonopoulos said they did struggle with that thought, but she hopes the lens can be shifted to think of this as an opportunity to expand the reach and value of sustainability systemically through the organization.

Commissioner Nolan remembered combined meetings with the Parks and Recreation Commission. He said good ideas came from those. He looks forward to occasionally revisiting that, saying this could benefit city staff as well. Ms. Antonopoulos took note of this. Mr. Bertelsen thanked Commissioner Nolan for his comments and said they can certainly get all staff members together to see what topics can be discussed. He agrees with Ms. Antonopoulos that they are trying to build the idea of sustainability as a larger culture in the organization and build outward.

Chair Wilson then opened this topic up for public comment. Nat White asked if Open Space is under the parks budget. Mr. Wallace replied it will continue under the general fund and that the budget shouldn't change moving forward.

Ms. Antonopoulos stated this is not a severing of collaboration but an extension and expansion.

Chair Wilson expressed appreciation for the Sustainability Program and everything done to bring Open Space to the forefront of the community. He said he has been looking at the many different cities and how they handle Open Space. A lot of cities have Open Space and Parks and Recreation together. He will look at those cities in a different light now.

Nat White commented that a vision he always had was that Flagstaff is a mountain town built within the forest and not built on top of the forest. He expressed appreciation for the Open Space Program and all the work put into it.

C. Switzer Canyon Water Transmission Main Phase IV at 60% (10 minutes) – Robert Wallace, Requested Action: Informational, Discussion

Mr. Wallace presented on the Switzer Canyon Water Transmission Main. He was given the opportunity to review this project which is at 60% completion. The commission made a recommendation to approve this project with the ability to review the restoration plan when it was completed. He emailed out comments he had and asked for any questions the commission might have. He believes this will come back before the commission once it is complete.

Chair Wilson asked if there a place where those comments are answered. Mr. Wallace responded that he has not received a reply as of yet. He submitted these comments the week before Thanksgiving. He offered to follow up. Chair Wilson noted it would be nice to have the answers in one document.

Mr. Wallace then said the Open Space commission originally stated that they would like to see a restoration plan that is different from the city standard division code to make sure it was appropriate for that location. He noted the city code was referenced without any revisions. One of the comments he made was that they would like the vegetation in the restoration plan to be specific for that area. Chair Wilson agreed that this was a concern.

Mr. Wallace said if the commissioners have additional things to be included in those comments, they can email him. He will include these when he responds to water services.

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

Mr. Wallace presented a copy of the Protocol Draft that the commission has been developing. This document is being developed to ensure all improvements and developments on City open space, regardless of existing easements, are presented to the Open Spaces Commission for an update or a formal review process. Changes were made to the document to assist commissioners in obtaining the necessary information on each project and to standardize the process for reviewing requests.

Mr. Wallace asked for questions, comments, or if the commission would like to run through an example.

Chair Wilson asked if it would be good to put the scoring criteria at the top in addition to having it at the end. Mr. Wallace agreed. Chair Wilson also stated that an earlier version of this document mentioned a fee and asked if this had been removed. Mr. Wallace explained he removed mention of the fee because it would have to be passed via an ordinance through City Council. He said they could still include the fee, but he was looking for the easiest path forward. Chair Wilson agreed but wanted to make sure he didn't miss it.

Mr. Wallace gave the option to either review it during the meeting or have the commissioners review it on their own and provide an email update. Vice Chair Bessler said the document looked really good and was comprehensive.

Chair Wilson said he didn't see anything he immediately wanted to change, but he could use more time to think about it in depth.

Mr. Wallace said they would follow up at their next meeting. In the meantime, he would like the commissioners to send him their comments so he can start to draft any revisions.

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

McMillan Mesa Rezone Application Neighborhood Participation Plan

Mr. Wallace gave an update on the McMillan Mesa Rezone Application. The neighborhood participation meetings will be held on December 14th and January 13th from 5-7pm. The requirements for advertising have been completed. Staff is working on hanging up flyers around town in addition to the email that was sent out. A newsletter was emailed out, there was a press release, and there have been social media posts. Once those meetings are complete, a public hearing will take place for the Planning and Zoning Commission and an ordinance will be sent to City Council for approval. Before that, a land survey and a cultural survey are required. Mr. Wallace is hoping to get contractor on board this week for the land survey and is waiting on a grant agreement to be approved for the cultural survey. Mr. Wallace answered a question from a previous meeting about what would happen if City Council does not approve the rezone. Prop 413 would still stand and the city would still have to maintain the property for passive recreation without development. Rezoning cleans up documentation for McMillan Mesa. Zoning code can only be changed if it is voted for by the public.

Mr. Wallace mentioned that it may be good to have a commissioner in attendance during the Planning and Zoning hearing who can speak about why the Commission supports this rezone application. This may be a good step when it goes to City Council as well to clarify the importance of this rezone application. Vice Chair Bessler said he would be happy to help. Mr. Wallace will keep the Commission up to date.

Observatory Mesa Trail Plan

Mr. Wallace said he worked with the American Conservation Experience to update the Observatory Mesa Trail Plan. Mr. Wallace is working on making sure it is in line with everything the Commission has previously talked about. He would like to share the plan with the Commission during or before their next meeting. The next step after it is reviewed and finalized is to work with stakeholders to review the plan. As one of the stakeholders, Lowell Observatory will be assisting in moving forward with this trail plan.

Open Space City Code Recommendations

Commissioner Wilson has been looking at other programs in regards to their rules, regulations, and terminology associated with codes. He is still in the process of looking at other communities and will come up with a draft of recommendations on how to move forward as a commission. Once there is a draft

of considerations from the commission, it will go to the legal department. After that, it will come back with their revisions for the commission to approve. After a polished document is completed, a work session with City Council will be set up to give an update on the program, explain why the commission has been working on this, and different codes they would like approved in an ordinance. City Council will then have an opportunity to provide feedback. After this, the document will go back to legal and the commission for review and back to City Council again for approval of an ordinance.

Chair Wilson apologized for not making more progress while he was out of town. He is renewing his effort, keeping in mind recent developments in Open Space moving to Parks and Recreation.

Mr. Wallace mentioned Parks and Recreation is also looking at making recommendations regarding code revisions for parks. He said it may be good to present these at the same time. Chair Wilson would like to know where they see holes in their code. He said it would be nice to see what they're working on and working together might be easier. Mr. Wallace said he will look into that and see if Parks and Recreation can provide an update and set up a future work session.

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

Mr. Wallace said there are no changes from last meeting. The two big expenditures will still be from the legal survey and the cultural survey for property.

Chair Wilson asked if there was any change budget-wise from the city's economic disaster plan. Mr. Wallace answered that the city is now back in phase two for reopening, but this should not affect the budget any more than it already has.

6. Reports and Updates

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

Sylvia Struss, Open Space AmeriCorps Vista member, presented on Open Space Management and Outreach. Open Space held Make a Difference day on October 31st. They had 80 volunteers attend. People were separated into groups of 10 or less, mostly within their own Covid bubbles and family units. Volunteers cleaned up over 100 bags of trash, performed some drainage maintenance on the FUTS trail, and cleaned up graffiti and some abandoned camps. They also talked to active campers near the catholic church. Ms. Struss has created some no camping signs that will be posted up in that location. Volunteers have also performed trail maintenance at Picture Canyon, leveling the path while taking into account necessary drainage. Open Space has been working with Willow Bend on an educational self-guided tour of McMillan Mesa using the Tree Grant. Open Space is working on lesson plans for the Indigenous Youth STEM Academy. They are partnering with Lowell to create one on astronomy. They are also

working on another lesson plan about native plants. Lastly, Open Space posted some free holiday gift certificates on the website, good for a hike with the giver in one of Flagstaff's Open Spaces.

Chair Wilson appreciates having all of the projects listed on the monthly report. He asked about the process of accepting donations to support projects and volunteer efforts. Mr. Wallace answered that an account has been set up with the finance office. Donations cannot be made online, it must be cash or a check. People can mail a check written to Open Space to the City of Flagstaff to or leave donations at the City Hall City Clerk's office. Chair Wilson asked if the check would be deposited into account for Open Space specifically. Mr. Wallace confirmed this and added that it is possible to make a subset account for specific projects. Open Space would only be allowed to spend that money for work on that project. They thought about advertising a specific project but have not picked a project at this time. Chair Wilson asked if the account numbers were available so people could ensure it went into the proper account. Mr. Wallace answered that the account number is for internal use only. If the check is written to the City of Flagstaff Open Space Program, it will go into the correct account.

Vice Chair Bessler expressed appreciation for the report. He asked if he could get a copy of a report from ACE that was shown. Mr. Wallace agreed to provide it.

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

Commissioner Burton asked if it was possible to get updated overview map of Open Space locations. Mr. Wallace said he could do that.

8. Future Agenda Items (5 Minutes) - All

- Next meeting: January 25th, 2021
- Priority Based Budgeting. Jack Fitchett, Requested Action: Informational, Discussion.

9. Adjournment

Commissioner Bessler moved to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Burton. All voted in favor. Meeting adjourned at 6:03pm.

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