



OPEN SPACE COMMISSION  
Virtual Meeting – **Join Teams Meeting**

4/26/2021 4:00 p.m.



**Minutes**

**Members Present**

- Commissioner William Wilson (Chair)
- Commissioner Andy Bessler (Vice-chair)
- Commissioner Jim Burton
- Commissioner Mark Loseth

- Commissioner Eric Nolan
- Commissioner Joseph Thomas
- Commissioner Jack Welch

**Councilmember / Liaison to the City Council**

- Vice Mayor Becky Daggett

**Staff and Others Present**

- Andy Bertelsen – Public Works Director
- Jillian Goulet - Sustainability
- Cathy Guetschow – Administrative Specialist
- Martin Ince – Engineering Project Manager
- Rebecca Sayers – Parks & Recreation, and Open Space Director
- Robert Wallace – Open Space Specialist
- Nat - Guest
- Michele James – Guest

1. **CALL TO ORDER**

The meeting was called to order at 4:00 p.m.

2. **ROLL CALL**

Commissioners Bessler, Loseth, Nolan, and Wilson were present for roll call. Commissioners Burton, Thomas, and Welch were absent.

3. **APPROVAL OF THE MARCH 22, 2021 MEETING MINUTES**

A motion was made by Commissioner Loseth to approve the March 22, 2021 minutes as written. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Nolan. Motion passed unanimously with four (4) yeas votes.

4. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

No public comments.

5. **BUSINESS ITEMS**

A. **Climate Neutrality Plan Presentation**

Jillian Goulet from Sustainability presented to the Commissioners the draft Flagstaff Carbon Neutrality Plan and included a brief background on the history of the Climate Action in Flagstaff.

- November 2018, City Council adopted the first Climate Action and Adaptation plan.
- January 2020, well organized community members spoke at City Council, making a case for the climate emergency declaration where they told City Council that Flagstaff needed a bolder action on climate.

- June 2020, City Council declared a climate emergency through citizen petition resolution and was adopted unanimously.

The Climate Emergency Declaration calls for a dramatic increase in ambition and city-wide mobilization that will need full community participation and to also prioritize vulnerable communities. City Council set a goal of carbon neutrality by 2030 that requires a framework for action that is constantly evolving and responding to the changing conditions and opportunities. Climate change in Flagstaff by 2050 can expect to see:

- Hotter temperatures.
- Increased aridity.
- Severe drought.
- Less snowpack with more precipitation as rainfall instead of snowfall.
- Increased wildfire risk.
- Will impact the community from health to housing.

The Carbon Neutrality Plan (CNP) is a framework for action and is a living document that will be continuously evolving to respond to changing conditions and opportunities. It will require bold actions and big shifts to transform the community's systems. The CNP has the following three goals:

- Mitigation – Achieve carbon neutrality by 2030.
- Adaptation – Prepare the city's communities, systems, and resources to be more resilient to climate change impacts.
- Equity – Address climate change in a manner that prioritizes those most impacted, ensuring that costs and benefits of climate adaptation and mitigation are equitably distributed.

To achieve carbon neutrality, neighborhoods will need to be strengthened, consumption managed, clean up energy sources, and uphold the commitment through carbon dioxide removal.

Funding for climate action could come from a variety of sources such as:

- Increase existing city fees on certain activities.
- Propose a new sales tax that would have to be approved by voters.
- Issue bonds.
- Apply for grants.
- Allocate City resources to climate-focused initiatives.

Staff are working to review the draft Carbon Neutrality Plan with community members and Commissions before the City Council meeting on May 18.

#### B. Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Bond Measure Proposal

Robert Wallace, Open Space Specialist explained that the Open Space program was approached regarding the Open Spaces Commission's interest in submitting a proposal for a bond measure and partnership with the Parks and Recreation Commission for the 2022 ballot for City Council to consider during their budget retreat on April 22-23. Mr. Wallace stated that he worked on the Commissions behalf along with staff from Parks and Recreation to submit a shared proposal for the Continental Park southeastern quadrant that the Parks, Recreation, and Open Space (PROS) Committee had identified as a priority focus area for both Parks, Recreation, and Open Space.

Mr. Wallace also gave a presentation showing what the Parks and Recreation and Open Space recommendations were for 2019. He reported that staff have worked on a combined ballot measure that was more succinct, which included a project for Parks and a project for Open Space reducing the

overall cost. Staff focused on the Continental Regional Park area to build a Girls Softball complex (\$16 million) on city owned property that included connecting the park to existing open space and to also provide additional funds (\$10 million) for land in the southeastern portion of Flagstaff that has no current legal access to open space. These funds would provide for the construction of trails, connectivity, and trail access.

Mr. Wallace reported that City Council was interested in a bond ballot measure for the November 2022 election that would include housing, public safety, climate action, facilities, and broadband showing support for housing and climate action due to the current crisis, facilities, and public safety measures showing only a little support for Parks, Recreation, and Open Space. City Council would like to create a bond committee task force that would help generate community involvement. The next step will be to establish the task force.

Rebecca Sayers, Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Director stated that City Council's direction was focused on the housing and climate change emergencies making the possibility of the Parks, Recreation, and Open Space bond measure to not be put on the 2022 ballot, but would hopefully be able to come back with some support for the 2024 election.

#### C. Open Space Integrated System Planning

Mr. Wallace gave a presentation regarding the current conditions of the integrated open space system which included:

- Goals and existing status
- How the categories help achieve an integrated system
- Terminology
  - Regional preserves
  - Connectors
  - Complimentary open space
- The long-term vision of the integrated system
- Considerations for moving forward
  - Strategically assess opportunities
  - Consider community needs and benefits
  - Incorporate existing plans
  - Open space preservation
  - Funding and other considerations
- Parcel review
- Recommendations

Mr. Wallace explained that there was a 2004 bond fund for open space and FUTS acquisitions that was used to purchase Picture Canyon and Observatory Mesa. Some of the funds are still available and are allocated for FUTS acquisitions and easements. It has been proposed that some of the funds could be used towards parcels that are part of the integrated open space system.

Martin Ince, Engineering Project Manager stated that the 2004 bond funds were divided between the acquisition of easements and parcels to support the FUTS system and for its expansion. The other portion of funds were designated for open space. He reported that over the years the FUTS portion of funds has been used for acquisitions and easements. Staff has identified larger parcels which support both open space and, in some cases, protecting and enhancing the FUTS system.

Mr. Wallace reported that some of the bond funds could be used towards an open space acquisition and since the funds are limited there is an opportunity to use some of the funds towards a grant leverage such as the Recreational Trails Program Grant and the Land Water Conservation Fund Grant. The project would consist of reviewing the list of parcels for consideration and recommendation by the Commission which is an overall vision of the Commission.

Mr. Wallace reported that he and Mr. Ince reviewed the parcel list narrowing it down to a few for the Commissioners consideration. Mr. Ince reviewed with the Commissioners on how they came up with the parcel list and their attributes for trail connections and parks. He stated that with the remaining money from the bond that they will continue to allocate with some of the money to be used for high priority FUTS acquisitions along with other smaller parcels. Commissioner Loseth asked if it was anticipated if any of the remaining bond funds would be used as leverage for the grants to receive more money to purchase parcels or if the bond funds were sufficient for the purchase of parcels. Mr. Wallace stated that some of the bond funds could be used for grant leverage but not all the funds. The narrowed down parcel list includes:

- Continental Park – there are five different parcels available that have different values and acreage.
- Foxglenn Rio – there are two different parcels available that have different values and acreage.
- Picture Canyon – there are nine different parcels available that have different values and acreage.
- Fort Tuthill – there are fourteen different parcels available that have different values and acreage.

Mr. Wallace explained that the Open Spaces Commission's strategic plan has a series of conservation criteria considerations for reviewing parcels to determine if it has open space value and it should help in making a recommendation for different properties. The criteria considerations used in the past consisted of:

- Cultural resources
- Scenic value
- Ecological value
- Recreation
- Accessibility/Connectivity
- Buffer
- Educational opportunities
- Open space value
- Vote

Mr. Wallace stated that the considerations is part of a working document and could be re-tooled by the Commission to include important considerations to help prioritize properties.

Commissioner Wilson mentioned that he would like to wait in making his recommendations due to not being able to see the presentation but does not want to hold anyone back.

Mr. Wallace will bring additional information to the next Open Space Commission meeting that would help support this topics discussion that was generated from the Commissioners questions regarding development pressures, defining what properties would impact the most people as far as providing access to open space within a ten minute walking time, if any of the parcels could impact disadvantage categories of the community, and provide a matrix regarding how much each parcel cost versus terms of value.

D. Commission Update for City Council Recap

Mr. Wallace reported that the City Council presentation went well and demonstrated effectively what the Commission has accomplished and is currently working on.

E. FY21 Commission Priorities

1. Greater Observatory Mesa Trail Plan (Including Section 17)

Mr. Wallace reported that staff is currently working on retooling the trail plan for the Observatory Mesa natural area and has expanded the view of the trail plan with the discussion of Lowell Observatory. The plan would contain a two phase project with phase one consisting of a site assessment of the existing conditions and phase two would incorporate the communities and Lowell Observatory's feedback into a trail plan that incorporates Observatory Mesa, the Coconino National Forest, the Neighbors Observatory Mesa, and Lowell Observatory. Staff will continue to attend meetings with Lowell Observatory.

2. McMillan Mesa Rezone Update

Mr. Wallace reported that staff has a copy of the first draft of the legal survey and are in the process of reviewing it. Staff will submit it back for any edits that are needed and will be completed by the end of May. The cultural survey is also scheduled for completion by the end of May.

Commissioner Bessler suggested having a community celebration in November to celebrate the fifth anniversary of Prop 413 that helped create the McMillian Mesa natural area.

3. City Code Review Drafting

Mr. Wallace reported that staff is working on drafting a city code proposal based on the community research that Commissioner Wilson completed.

F. Commission Strategic Plan Updates and FY22 Priorities

Mr. Wallace briefly touched base on the Strategic Plan and what he needs from the Commissioners stating that he had looked over the plan and made some suggested edits to it. He would like the Commissioners to review the goals and strategies for achievement and make recommendations of what they should keep, what has already been completed, and what maybe outside the focus of the Commission for FY22. Mr. Wallace will email the Commissioners a copy of the plan for their review.

G. Schultz Creek Natural Area Update

Mr. Wallace provided an update stating that the program, per the direction of the previous City Council, created concepts of a trail plan for the Schultz Creek natural area and trailhead which consists of a 20-acre parcel near the Schultz "Y" and Mount Elden Road. The direction from City Council was to provide better access to the Shultz Creek area. He stated that one of the plans was moved forward by a presentation to City Council on November 5, 2019. Staff were able to provide to City Council an update of what the concepts could be and provided four different options for their consideration.

- Option A – to not move forward with a parking lot on city property until opportunities to inquire part of a private parcel presented itself.
- Option B – was to provide parking for 30 vehicles on city property and to investigate opportunities to inquire the "Y" for an additional 30 parking spaces at a later date.
- Option C – was to build a 60-vehicle parking lot on the southeastern corner of the parcel which would be only on city open space with no further development planned.
- Option D – look for other options or do nothing.

Mr. Wallace reported that most City Council members were okay with leaving the situation as it was and decided to not make any decisions at that time. Staff is currently working with Parks and Recreation to reassess their options and how they can potentially partner with the Forestry Department in moving forward.

Mr. Ince reported that there were available funds for the purchase of the “Y” and could be kept available while monitoring the situation for any changes.

## 6. REPORTS AND UPDATES

### A. Council Representative Report, Vice Mayor Becky Daggett

- Vice Mayor Daggett had to excuse herself earlier from the meeting and was not available for updates.

### B. Open Space Management Report

- Mr. Wallace reported that Commissioner Wilson was reappointed on April 6 by City Council.
- Staff is currently working on the removal of invasive trees on the McMillan Mesa and have currently removed between 30–60 trees.
- There have been another 100 trees identified for removal along Izabel Street and the McMillan Mesa boundary.
- Current VISTA member Sylvia Strauss reapplied and was selected to continue working with the Open Space program for another year.

### C. Open Space Program Budget Report

- Mr. Wallace reported that there were a few thousand dollars left for fiscal year 2021 and has allocated those funds towards the removal of invasive trees on the McMillan Mesa, the removal of invasive weeds in Picture Canyon, public programming, and trail map printing.
- The American Rescue Act could provide two years of funding up to \$15 million with the intent of this funding to recoup lost revenue due to the loss of BBB funds. There might be a chance that the funds could be used towards the funding of the Master Plan and Westside Park.

## 7. INFORMATIONAL ITEMS TO AND FROM THE COMMISSIONERS AND STAFF

### A. Reschedule Open Spaces Commission June Meeting (6/22/21, 4-6 PM)

- The June meeting has been rescheduled for 6/22/21 due to a conflict with the City Council meeting being held on the same day.

### B. Boards and Commissions Newsletter Content Opportunity

- There is an opportunity for the Commission to submit recommendations for the Boards and Commissions Newsletter. If Commissioners are interested in submitting content, they were instructed to email the information to Mr. Wallace, or they could request to have the item put on an agenda for discussion.

## 8. AGENDA ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETING

Next meetings: May 24, 2021; June 22, 2021, 4-6 PM

- Open Space Easements – Bryce Doty
- Switzer Canyon Water Main Restoration Plan
- Schultz Creek Natural Area Continued Update
- Program Funding
- Continued, FY21 Commission Priorities
  - Observatory Mesa Trail Plan

- McMillian Mesa Rezoning Amendment Application
- City Code Review
- Open Spaces Integrated System Planning
- Proposition 413 fifth anniversary celebration

9. ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Wilson moved to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Nolan. All voted in favor. Meeting adjourned at 6:01 p.m.