

**Forest Preserves of Cook County Conservation & Policy Council
Governance Committee Meeting
December 17, 2025**

118 N. Clark Street, 4th Floor – Conference Room B, Chicago, IL

Council Members in Attendance: Mark Templeton, Hank Saunders, Alan Bell, Alaka Wali

Forest Preserves' Staff in Attendance: Lydia Uhler, Michelle Uting, Brian Ozog

MINUTES

Call to Order. Mark Templeton called the meeting to order at 2:00pm, welcomed all and explained the reason for the Governance Committee's meeting.

Land Acknowledgement. Hank Saunders read the Forest Preserves' land acknowledgement.

Public Comments. There were no public comments.

Position Papers. This agenda item was moved up to be discussed first.

Background:

The group discussed the history of the position papers and whether there would be a need for new papers in the future. The position papers were developed by Council members, FPCC staff, and partners in response to questions that arose from the Next Century Conservation Plan. The five position papers each include an implementation plan and serve as reference documents for the Council and the FPCC. The five papers are:

1. Moving Towards Racial Equity in the Forest Preserves of Cook County – July 2020
2. Acquisition and Disposition of Land by the Forest Preserves of Cook County – October 2020
3. Nature-Compatible Recreation in the Forest Preserves of Cook County – January 2021
4. Scaling Up Volunteers in the Forest Preserves of Cook County – February 2021
5. Amplifying Diversity and Inclusion in the Forest Preserves of Cook County - October 2022

Discussion:

The group discussed that the Council's should revisit these position papers and determine if they should write a statement to reaffirm these papers (a paragraph each); acknowledge how the world has changed, or the issue may have evolved and the Council may decide to refresh one or more of the papers.

The group acknowledged that not all Council members have had the opportunity to delve deeply into these position papers. The group also discussed that it would be important to determine what the goal is of revisiting these papers and how much time should be spent on this endeavor.

The Council ordinance states that the Council should make policy recommendations and the group discussed that 2026 meetings should consider focusing on these position papers as it would allow the Council to work together on reviewing and potentially reaffirming the five position papers.

Next steps:

- Add to the January agenda: The Council should decide whether to reaffirm or refresh the five position papers.
- Is there a REDI update regarding the indigenous policy? The Council would like to be involved in the policy.
- MU and LU to draft an agenda for the January Governance Committee meeting and share it with group in early January.

Obligations and Expectations for Council Members. The group discussed what is expected of Council members:

- Attend four Conservation & Policy Council meetings per year located through the Forest Preserves' holdings
- Attend and present at one Forest Preserves' Board of Commissioners meetings per year
- Attend at least one Forest Preserves' event attended by the President and/or Commissioners
- Participate in at least one Committee or Working Group.
 - Governance Committee / Annual report working group (could be folded into governance)
 - Land Use Task Force
 - Volunteer Working Group
 - Accessibility Advisory Group – already exists but could see if a council member could serve on it.
 - Nominating Committee – required by ordinance – and who is on it and who would like to be on it.
 - Orientation Committee (new committee recommendation)
- Complete Open Meetings Act Training (only required to complete once)
- Meet with a commissioner

Annual report timeline and requirements.

The group discussed the history of the annual report, timing and what should be done for the 2025/2026 report. Currently there are multiple documents that the staff produce and the Council reviews and finalizes:

1. 5-year strategic and financial plan (keep? - called out in the ordinance: "Develop and annually update a five-year strategic and financial plan to operationalize the Plan and annually recommend adoption of the updated strategic and financial plan to the President, District Board, and the Superintendent of the District;")
2. Budget recommendation (keep - called out in the ordinance: "Review and make recommendations to the President, District Board, and the Superintendent about the annual budget and its alignment with the strategic and financial plan;")
3. Annual report (keep)

The group- and staff - agree that while this may have made sense in the beginning, things have evolved and we need to change what is produced. The Council needs to determine what they want to report and say to the President and Board of Commissioners. The group discussed the annual report at some length and concluded that the annual report should:

- Include legislative recommendations as well as include 2-3 key metrics on the issues that are important.
- a progress report on the Next Century Conservation Plan
- Be created by a committee
- Revise its timeline: The annual report should be completed in the first quarter of 2026 and submitted to the Board in the second quarter after the April Council meeting and in 2027 the Council would aim to have the report done and approved by the Council in the first quarter.

The group recommended that the budget recommendation should, in the future, be a memo with the presentation that the CFO shares at the Council meeting attached as a PDF rather than having the Council sign off on the entire 120+page budget.

Next steps:

Discuss the annual report at the January Council meeting and invite other Council members to join the Governance Committee to further revise the annual report.

Ordinance conflict of interest.

Both the original language and the change to the ordinance in 2022 which included the Zoo, Garden and Foundation, preclude any organization from contracting with the Forest Preserves of Cook County for any amount if there is a Council Member serving who is employed by that organization.

- Are there waiver provisions?
- Ordinance has become more restrictive over time, which would limit the types of members who could serve.

- Could there be a de-minimis carve out on the contract for employment? Council first needs to determine what the options are.

Next steps:

FPCC staff present (not Legal staff) were asked to research examples of how other bodies have handled this.

Upcoming Governance Committee meeting will be held on 1/16 at 9am at 69 W. Washington – 22nd Floor, Room F (OMA meeting open to the public)