



Forest Preserves of Cook County Conservation & Policy Council Meeting
Meeting Minutes for August 30, 2023
Sagawau Environmental Learning Center, 12545 West 111th St, Lemont, IL 60439

Welcome and Call to Order. Alan Bell called the meeting to order at 9:33 am.

Advisory Council Members

Alan Bell, Chairperson
Daisy Feidt
Henrietta Saunders
Jackie Samuel
Mark Templeton, Vice-chairperson
Ryen Nagle
Laurel Ross
Commissioner Josina Morita

Presenters

Alex Stockdale, Forest Preserves
Arnold Randall, Forest Preserves
Benjamin Cox, Friends of the Forest Preserves
Carl Vogel, Forest Preserves
Damon Howell, Forest Preserves
Debra Walker Johnson, Forest Preserve Foundation
Jennifer Baader, Chicago Zoological Society
Laura Brown, Forest Preserves
Lydia Uhler, Forest Preserves
Michael Konrath, Forest Preserves
Shengyi Guan, Forest Preserves

Megan Bang and Mike DeSantiago did not attend.

Alan thanked Forest Preserves Naturalist Laura Brown for giving Council members a tour of the canyon and nature center grounds. Laura explained that she loves working at Sagawau because there is always something new to see at this beautiful site, and improvements are underway to make it more accessible to everyone.

Alan introduced Jackie Samuel, a new member of the Council. Jackie stated that she is a community psychologist and program director for the Master of Public Administration program at National Louis University. Jackie has a background in the arts which gave her a chance to experience much of Chicago—especially during an initiative to integrate arts with community development and revitalization.

Alan welcomed Nature Center Director Mike Konrath. Mike thanked the Council for their work to help advance the mission of the Forest Preserves. Mike explained that, for many decades, Sagawau focused on teacher workshops to help educators connect students to nature. This continues to be a focus of the center today, but it has also branched out to include a broad range of partnerships and events to engage the community, including an annual hummingbird festival attended by 1700 people this year, and an award-winning cross country ski program which attracts up to 1500 people per weekend. Ryen Nagle added that Moraine Valley Community College brings classes to Sagawau. For many students the experience changes their perspective of where they live, and they carry that experience their whole lives. He added that it is very impactful to see the partnerships between Sagawau and the schools.

Approval of Minutes. A motion to approve the minutes of the 6.21.23 meeting was made by Laurel Ross with a second by Mark Templeton. The minutes were unanimously approved.

Public Comments. There were no public comments.

Chairman's report. Alan provided the following updates:

- **Council Secretary.** The position of secretary remains vacant. Alan asked Eileen Figel to resend the position description. He asked any Council member who is interested in serving in this position to let him know.
- **Council representation at board meetings.** Alan thanked Commissioner Morita and Henrietta Saunders for suggesting that the Council have a representative at each board meeting. Mark, Laurel, Hank and Alan will each attend one of the four remaining board meetings for 2023. A new sign-up sheet for 2024 will be distributed once the board finalizes its 2024 meeting schedule. Commissioner Morita added that this provides an opportunity to share key messages with commissioners and ask them to help amplify these messages. Laurel also suggested Council members connect with the commissioner representing their district. Commissioner Morita and Alan suggest that the Council identify topics each Council member feels passionately about and match them up with commissioners who have these same areas of interest.

General Superintendent's Report. General Superintendent Arnold Randall provided the following updates:

- **ARPA funding.** The Forest Preserves received \$25.3 million in ARPA funding to expand restoration work, support the Conservation Corps, acquire land in SE Cook County, greening district buildings and fleet, and other priority initiatives.
- **Horizon Farms.** Adjacent municipalities and park districts have been notified that the district will remove an old riding track on the site because it is not nature-compatible recreation. We support equestrian trail riding which is aligned with our mission.
- **Pike House.** This is a house that was used by the district as a resident watch house until it became too expensive to maintain. A community effort to rehabilitate the structure and repurpose it for art exhibits and workshops is not in conflict with the district's mission. The district will invest \$50K to stabilize the house while the community seeks funding. Ryen Nagle asked about the farmhouse at Sagawau and Arnold explained that it is the original structure used for teachers workshops and is still being used. Jackie Samuel suggested that the Pike House Foundation reach out to people who use Dan Ryan, such as the many sororities and fraternities who host picnics there, to seek their support. Commissioner Morita asked about the role of the Forest Preserves Foundation. Arnold explained that the District gives the Foundation a list of funding priorities each year.
- **Outside Chicago.** Cook County is launching a tourism campaign which highlights the Forest Preserves and encourages residents to visit spend time in nature at the preserves.
- **New Commissioner Tara Stamps.** Arnold met with the newest commissioner and reported that she is very interested in engaging students at the forest preserves.
- **Stairs at Sagawau.** The District is exploring how to rebuild the stairs to create an accessible entrance to the canyon. Alan asked if Council member Daisy Feidt could be engaged in this process.
- **Illinois Nature Preserves.** Henrietta Saunders reported that she participated in activities related to the 60th anniversary of the Illinois Nature Preserves this past weekend. It is amazing and awesome how these high value ecological areas are cared for. She would like to think more about the economic impact of these. Laurel added that it is a delicate issue because these areas suffer if there are too many visitors. Henrietta agreed that access should be managed. Arnold explained that the Forest Preserves are innovators in connecting people to nature because we are in such a highly populated area. Henrietta added the same is true regarding the District's efforts to engage volunteers.

Land Use Code Reform Update. Alan explained that the focus of the land use task force is to ensure Council policies are codified in order to protect and advance the mission of the preserve. An initial draft of proposed amendments to the District's ordinance was reviewed by the task force this month; there are some additional changes needed to fully align with the Council's recommendations. Eileen will confer with the legal team and send an updated timeline. Benjamin Cox added that we are trying to make it as difficult as possible to use the land in a way that is not aligned with the District's mission. Commissioner Morita suggested that she could assist with this effort. Mark Templeton added that we want an ordinance that is clear and also creates tight controls.

Mark has been very impressed with the openness and collaboration between the Council, partners, and staff. Laurel added it is inspiring to have everyone focus on how we find the language to do what we all want to do. Alan explained that he proposed the ordinance be changed to require the General Superintendent to consult with the Council prior to making a discretionary decision. This proposal was stricken in the most recent draft because the legal team felt there were enough criteria in place to create the safeguards the Council seeks. Alan indicated there are four of five of these issues that require additional discussion. Commissioner Morita suggested the task force prepare a summary of key issues and a report on the legislative intent.

Amplifying Key Messages. Carl Vogel presented an overview of District's communications priorities and strategies. (See Attachment 1.1.) Carl explained that there are a lot of messages and a lot of target audiences, and the District has worked hard to create a set of clear, strategic messages for specific target audiences.

Commissioner Morita suggested engaging commissioners and asking them to use their platforms to engage new audiences and share out information. She has created a list of "asks" for commissioners, including distributing Forest Preserves calendars, attending a workday, etc.

Henrietta thanked Carl for the clear and effective communication about how the District is spending 2023 referendum funds. She also asked the district to consider signs with QR codes for visitors who may be interested in volunteering.

Daisy Feidt asked staff to consider people with disabilities in the messaging. For example, include people with disabilities in the photos used in District brochures and make sure the website is accessible. Carl responded that the district has taken this into account and the website is accessible but can always improve. Commissioner Morita added that QR codes can also be used for translation into multiple languages. She suggested QR codes can also be used at Forest Preserves sites to give people information about what they can do once they get there. The codes can also be used to highlight health benefits.

Alan added that the web map is a great opportunity to engage via phone.

Arnold cautioned that too many signs will detract from people's experience in nature.

Forest Preserve Foundation Update. Foundation President Debra Walker presented an update on Foundation priorities. (See Attachment 1.2.) Alan suggested partnering with the Foundation for a friend-raiser event. Alan also asked that the Council be notified of strategic funding priorities. Daisy suggests that Leadership Chicago or similar entities can help educate leaders on priority projects related to conservation.

Council Priorities. Alan asked Council members to review the priorities listed in the agenda packet and identify priorities for 2024.

- Henrietta suggests Priority #2, scaling up volunteers, is a priority topic and closely linked to priority #7, building on the success of the referendum. She suggests this be discussed at second or third meeting of 2024 to allow more time to discuss issues with partners.
- Mark wants to work on priority #7, building on the success of the referendum, and priority #14, elevating the relationship with the board & amplifying key messages. Mark suggests the Council set some concrete goals on how Council members will engage with commissioners and others.
- Laurel would like an update on Nature-compatible recreation, listed under priority #9 Re-aligning legacy uses. Laurel is also interested in Priority 8, protecting diversity, but not sure what the Council's role is. Cathy Geraghty suggests working with the Foundation to do a campaign on this issue and perhaps a fundraising campaign to help a specific endangered species. Henrietta indicated that this is also related to her earlier point regarding nature preserves.
- Commissioner Morita suggests some of the work can be done between meetings. She offered to put together a proposal to connect Priority #7, building on the success of the referendum, and Priority #14, elevating the relationship with the board.

- Alan suggests that the Council focus on inclusion and accessibility. Staff is doing this; are there ways to strategically push this forward? Alan added that the Council needs to be sensitive to the staff's workload and work with the information that has already been created.
- Ryen suggests that priority #2, scaling up restoration and volunteers, is an important next step. He also asks staff to provide input on how the Council can best help advance their priorities.
- Mark suggests the Council could also benefit from a discussion on mental health and the benefits of nature.
- Benjamin Cox suggests that the Council focus on elevating its relationship with the board.

Alan stated that he will work with Eileen to pull together the Council's input from this discussion and from previous discussions to plan out discussion topics for 2024.

Commissioner Morita left the meeting.

Review of the Proposed 2024 Budget. CFO Damon Howell and Budget Director Shengyi Guan presented the district's proposed 2024 budget.

Benjamin Cox asked if the District was planning to make a large, lump sum payment into the pension fund. Damon explained that this is not proposed; instead the district will allocate the amount based upon actuarial projections to stabilize the pension fund over time.

Hank stated that the Council has established a good process to review the budget.

Daisy was surprised to see that the COLAs are only 2% because inflation has been much higher. Damon explained that there are additional salary adjustments being made. Arnold added that the COLAs are based on collective bargaining with various unions and are largely consistent with the County's COLAs. The bigger challenge has been attraction and retention for jobs which do not have remote work options. In addition, the District struggles to hire seasonal and part-time workers. The District proposes converting many of these positions to full time, year-round positions; this is reflected in the budget proposal. Arnold added that the District is committed to a financially sustainable future.

Review of 2023 Progress Report. Lydia Uhler and Alex Stockdale presented an early concept for the district's on-line dashboard. Staff worked with the County and with the NCCP Steering Committee to identify key performance indicators to tell the story in an easy-to-understand manner to broadly demonstrate to the public progress towards NCCP goals. For each goal, users can click on the metrics and access the full database behind a metric.

Benjamin explained that staff worked hard to take a 60+ page progress report and create a more concise, 10-page report. This year there is an addendum which highlights progress on spending 2023 referendum funds –including how the Zoo and Garden are using referendum funds.

A motion to approve the 2024 budget recommendation was made by Laurel Ross and seconded by Henrietta Saunders. The motion passed unanimously.

A motion to approve the 2023 progress report was made by Mark Templeton and seconded by Laurel Ross. The motion passed unanimously.

Adjournment. Alan thanked the Council and staff. Laurel Ross made a motion to adjourn; the motion was seconded by Henrietta Saunders. The motion passed and the meeting was adjourned at 12:59 pm.

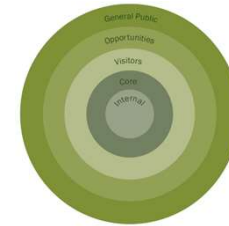
Communications and Marketing

FOREST PRESERVES OF COOK COUNTY



Communications 101

Goal
Audience
Message(s)
Channels



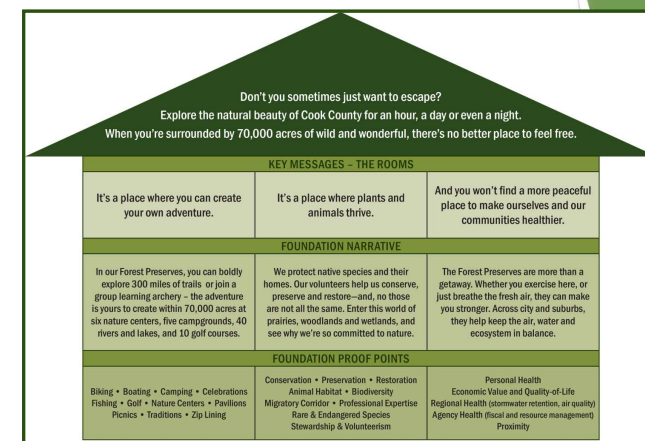
Multi-faceted & Complicated



- Nearly 70,000 acres, NW to SE
- Woodland, prairie, wetlands and savanna
- 1,800+ programs annually
- Volunteer programs
- REDI focus
- 350+ miles of marked trails
- 6 Nature Centers
- 40 managed lakes and ponds
- 8 boating lakes & 3 boat houses
- Nearly 300 picnic groves
- 10 golf courses
- 5 campgrounds
- 3 aquatic centers
- 1 ziplining and ropes course
- 3 off-leash dog areas
- 1 tennis center
- 9 model airplane flying fields
- 4 miles of groomed cross-country ski trails
- 9 sledding hills & 4 snowmobile areas
- Brookfield Zoo and Chicago Botanic Garden



Our Message House





Goal: Our Mission

Protect Natural Places

- Connect people to nature
- Build support for protecting it

Enjoyment of the Public

- Come to the Preserves
- Come to our events





Goal: Awareness and Support

Local and National Surveys

Consistent key messages, including:

- Connect Children with Nature
- Protect Land for the Future
- Clean Water

Messaging: Create Your Own Adventure

Emphasize: Outdoor programs for children

- Connect kids to nature
- Helping make our kids healthier
- Educational opportunities outside the classroom
- Kids safe and off the streets

Emphasize: Become involved with nature

- Deeper than passively enjoyed





Messaging: Where Plants and Animals Thrive

Emphasize: Protect land for the future

- Save natural areas for future generations
- Will cost more or be impossible later

Emphasize: Protect land for wildlife

- Pollinators like bees and monarch butterflies
- Plants and animals endangered or now rare

Emphasize: The natural, local habitats

- Language about "our natural areas," "our natural beauty."
- Special local pride: Midwestern habitats, local heritage.





Messaging: Make Individuals and Communities Healthier

Emphasize: Clean the water

- Protect drinking water by acquiring and improving lands
- Protect the water quality of rivers, lakes, and streams
- Storm water abatement

Emphasize: Nature helps with individual health

- Physically: Exercise, walking, biking, etc.
- Mentally: Universal interest in opportunities to “get away,” “de-stress” and “relax.”
- Emotionally: sense of peace, happier, deepen relationships

Emphasize: Clean the air

- Act as nature filters for the air
- Carbon sequester



Messaging: REDI: The Forest Preserves Are for Everyone

Emphasize: Inviting

- Events and programs targeted to specific populations, culturally relevant
- History of land that speaks to all cultures, races
- Images of visitors that reflect a diverse county
- Perception of safety is important
- Framing: For African Americans nationally, high interest in walk outdoors, low for hiking

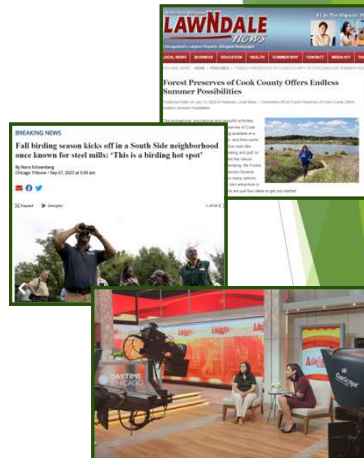
Emphasize: Inclusive

- Gateways: In all parts of the County
- Summer jobs, scholarships, careers
- Supporting all communities, including underserved neighborhoods



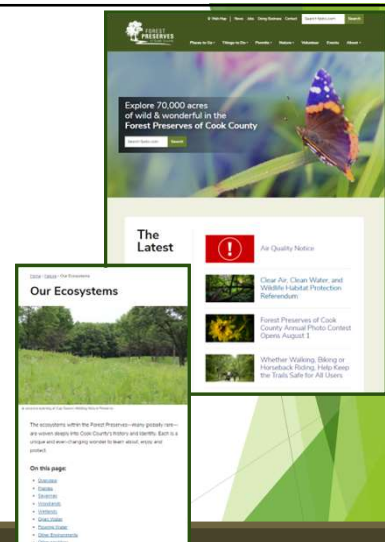
Communication Channels Earned Media

- Press releases
- Press conferences
- Targeted pitches
- Response to requests
- Radio/TV interviews
- Crisis communications



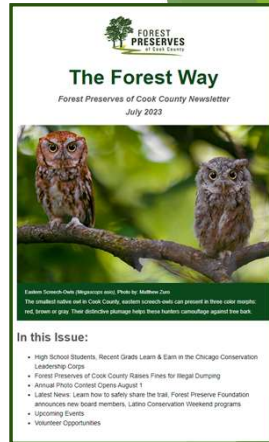
Communication Channels Website

- 1.9 million sessions a year
- Content includes
 - Latest news
 - All upcoming events
 - Every Forest Preserve site
 - Ecosystems/Restoration
 - Permits info
 - Volunteering portal
 - Contact form
 - Web Map



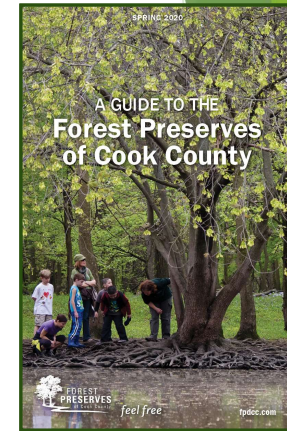
Communication Channels Forest Way

- Monthly e-newsletter
- To sign-up & permits lists
- Content includes
 - New amenities
 - Nature notes
 - Upcoming events
 - Updates
- More than 45,000 sent
- High open rates
 - 41% for sign up
 - 35% for permits



Communication Channels Quarterly Guide

- Focused on each season
- Content includes
 - Every event, by five zones
 - Camping, Hiking, Golf, etc
 - Articles to drive visits
- Distribute 50,000 copies
- More than 300 locations
 - Nature centers, elected officials, libraries, municipalities, etc.
 - 48.5% to EDAs



Communication Channels Social Media

- Facebook (29K followers)
- Twitter or "x" (12K)
- Instagram (7K)
- LinkedIn (1.5K)
- Content
 - Nature facts
 - Events
 - News
 - Campaigns



Communication Channels Advertising

- Your Forest Preserves
 - Natural Fun, Where Wildlife Thrives, and Home for Health
- Three Audience categories
 - Countywide, Geographic, Diversify Audience
- Variety of media
 - Radio, TV, billboards, print and digital
- Hyperlocal outlets
- Expand to \$300K in 2023



Communication Channels Photo Contest/Calendar

- More than 500 entries annually
- Free calendar, very popular!
- Print 30K annually
- Distributed across Cook County
 - Nature Centers
 - Elected official offices
 - Courthouses
 - Zoo and Garden
 - Fishing shows, tabling, etc.



Communication Channels Marketing Collateral

- Flyers
- Maps
- Rack Cards
- Hand Cards



Communication Channels Signs

- Wayfinding
- Directional
- Interpretive
- Temporary



Communication Channels Speakers and Meetings

- Building Community of Support
- Public Meetings
- Invited speaking
 - League of Women Voters
 - City Club
 - Topical Panels
 - Etc.



2023 and Beyond

June Communications Dept Retreat on Next Goals

Priorities

- Engage: visit preserves, amenities, events, volunteering, permits
- Diversity, inclusion and new visitors
- Build love of nature, understanding
- Referendum money well spent

Secondary (but important too)

- "Behave yourself" when visiting
- Feel good about forest preserves
- Feel good about FPCC
- Be sustainable in your life



Please Help!

Leverage our Work

Forest Way Newsletter

- Sign up: fdpcc.com/news
- Encourage others

Website

- Let people know it exists
- Mine for great content

Social Media

- Follow us for the latest info
- Repost

Quarterly Guide

- Suggestions for distribution sites

Press Releases

- We can send all to the Council



Please Help!

Topic of the Month

Packet on Key Issues

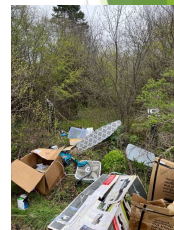
- Flyer
- Social Media Posts
- Photo(s)
- Newsletter Copy

Topics Such as:

- Fly Dumping
- Winter Activities
- Share the Trails
- Black History Month
- Fall Colors
- Volunteer Opportunities



October Suggested Newsletter Story



Thank you!

