



## Forest Preserves of Cook County Conservation & Policy Council Meeting Minutes for August 31, 2022

[Rolling Knolls ▪ 11N260 Rohrssen Rd, Elgin, IL 60120](#)

**Welcome and Call to Order.** Chairperson Alan Bell called the meeting to order at 9:35 a.m. The following Council members and others attended:

### Advisory Council Members

Alan Bell, Chairperson  
Emily Harris  
Hank Saunders  
Laurel Ross  
Mark Templeton, Vice-chairperson  
Mike DeSantiago  
Shelley Spencer, Secretary  
Sylvia Jenkins

### Presenters

Arnold Randall, Forest Preserves  
Benjamin Cox, Friends of the Forest Preserves  
Damon Howell, Forest Preserves  
Eileen Figel, Forest Preserves  
Gina Roxas, Trickster National Museum

*Terry Guen, Maria Pesquiera and Commissioner Stanley Moore did not attend.*

Alan Bell called the meeting to order at 9:43 am.

Alan thanked Tim Mondl, Monica Mueller, and Raquel Garcia-Alvarez from the Forest Preserves, and also Gina Roxas from the Trickster Cultural Museum, for leading a wonderful tour of Rolling Knolls.

Alan shared condolences with Benjamin Cox and indicated he and his family are in our thoughts.

Gina Roxas presented a land acknowledgement to remind participants that they are on Native land and Native people stewarded the land for millennia. Gina explained that the Trickster is a Native figure which is both a spiritual and cultural educator and which inspires people to seek the truth.

The [Trickster Museum](#) has been working with the Forest Preserves to connect people to nature at the Rolling Knolls site through native teaching and culture. Gina learned conservation methods from her native culture and also western techniques from school. Gina explained, "To be able to walk in nature and call the plant or water the name it was given years and years ago is a great honor for me. I am hoping we can continue to grow together as we work to heal this land."

Alan thanked Gina and Raquel and the Forest Preserves team for being authentic with engagement and inclusion efforts.

**Approval of Minutes.** A motion to approve the minutes of the 6.21.22 meeting was made by Mike DeSantiago with a second by Mark Templeton. The minutes were approved unanimously.

**Public Comments.** Hank Saunders gave a report as a member of the public stating that she and her husband had a great time camping at Bullfrog this past weekend. Hank also reached out to actor Nick Offerman. He replied, “Thank you very kindly to you and all the gang the forest preserves. I have indeed benefited from your foliage over the years.”

**Chairman’s report.** Alan discussed the following:

- **Priority Topics for 2023.** Alan asked to add item #8: “How do we engage communities about the history of the land and how we learn from that?”
- **Governance Committee Update.** Alan stated that the committee discussed inclusion and representation on the Council, how to continue to refine our roles and responsibilities and build a strong relationship with staff. We have a responsibility to focus on mission and strategic priorities; at the same time, it is important for us to respect staff leadership, their expertise, and their ability to get things done. We need to continue to work on this. Sylvia added that she works with a board and sometimes she has to say thank you board, but no thank you. We are here to advise but not to manage. Mike reminded people of the acronym “RAW” which stands for restore, act and welcome. The accomplishments we’ve seen within those areas is very impressive.
- **Council Resignations.** Alan reported that Emily Harris, Sylvia Jenkins, and Terry Guen will be stepping down from the Council. He added that all three have been involved from the very beginning of the Council and their work has helped to guide our strategic vision. Alan asked Emily and Sylvia to share a reflection and a suggestion.

While at Metropolis Strategies, Emily was asked by President Preckwinkle to work with Openlands to help create a vision for the next century at the Forest Preserves. Emily explained, “We created a commission to guide the effort; Sylvia and Terry were both on that Commission. Cathy Geraghty helped; Benjamin Cox was involved.” Emily explained that at that time the Forest Preserves was not a well-respected organization, though there were always good staff holding down the fort. Emily reflected, “My god; how much this has changed.” Emily also shared that, “Too many plans sit on the shelf. Arnold, Eileen, and the President have really committed to making the plan the north star. And also to update it with the position papers to help us move forward with some of the things we didn’t think about ten years ago, like the REDI lens. It has been an honor.” Emily also shared a personal “lightbulb moment” during a meeting years ago when she was not able to hear and realized she could ask for a microphone and not feel badly about it. Emily’s suggestion is to think about succession beyond appointing new Council members; she urged the Council to also think about how to mentor and help ease the transition of a new member. Emily is personally committed to making sure new members have the help they need and she suggests creating a formal process for this.

Sylvia stated that the purpose of being on the Council is to serve the residents of Cook County and to tell the greater world about the wonderful natural resources we have here in Cook County. She explained, “I try to keep in mind the people I am serving.” She stated that the community colleges across Cook County use the forest preserves as a learning space. Sylvia thanked Arnold and Eileen and added this has been an opportunity for professional and personal development (including her first ever camping trip right here at the forest preserves). Sylvia explained that she has been asked by Governor Pritzker to serve on the Illinois College Board. Her suggestion to the Council is to “Keep

remembering who you are here to serve as you make decisions. It is not about me or any of us; it is about all the people in Cook County who use the forest preserves.”

Alan added that Terry has also been extraordinary and thanked her for all her contributions to the Council—especially her focus on service and her advocacy for engaging the Native American community.

**General Superintendent’s Report.** Arnold explained that Emily was the author of the NCCP and she is as invested in the plan as anyone. Arnold said, “We had a vision to do something much better, but we needed a plan to get there. I appreciate all the work you did then and all the work you’ve done since then.” Arnold thanked Dr. Jenkins and added, “I love your style and how you embrace learning. I thought the session you hosted at your college is a great example. Your leadership is great and you will be missed.” Arnold also thanked Terry for the perspective she brings. “The fact that advocates are willing to respect the progress and support a referendum says it all; they would not have done that ten years ago.” Arnold also gave the following updates:

- **Ambassador Animals Program.** After extensive study, FPCC will be making some changes to the program, including restructuring staff, developing a framework to ensure consistency across sites, and enlarging the coyote enclosure.
- **Pike House.** This former resident watch house at Dan Ryan is listed as a contributing structure to a local historic district. Years ago it became too expensive to maintain and it was boarded up. The estimated cost for emergency rehabilitation and long term improvements is \$1.6 million. The FPCC issued a request for proposals from partners who have a reuse plan and can secure resources needed to rehab the building. Arnold explained that protecting and renovating historic structures is important, but it is not the mission of the FPCC and the district needs to find a solution that doesn’t require the FPCC to spend \$1.6 million.
- **Bond Refinancing.** A recent bond refinancing will save \$13.8M in debt service over 15 years.
- **Blanding’s Turtle.** Arnold thanked the Field Museum for a successful partnership to hatch and release 11 Blanding’s turtles. *Note: The partnership was with the Shedd Aquarium.*
- **Renaming Task Force.** Arnold thanked Maria Pesqueira for co-chairing a task force to review names of FPCC sites.
- **Friends of the Forest Preserves (FOTFP).** Arnold thanked FOTFP for raising \$414,000 to support the Conservation Corps.

Alan thanked Arnold and staff for their leadership in responding to the coyote

**Volunteer Engagement.** Nicole Pierson was unable to attend; this item was deferred to a future meeting.

**Review of Proposed 2023 Budget.** Mark Templeton explained that the Council reviews and provides input to the annual budget process. Mark thanked CFO Steve Hughes, Comptroller Damon Howell, and Deputy Superintendent Eileen Figel for providing information and answering questions. Mark also

thanked Mike DeSantiago and Hank Saunders for joining the small working group to review the budget in detail. Mark explained that, if the referendum does not pass, we will need to develop new budget strategies. He asked this be added to the list of priority topics for 2023. Mark indicated that, if the referendum does pass, an amended budget will be introduced.

Damon Howell presented an overview of the 2023 budget. (See Attachment 1.1) Key points include:

The 2023 budget includes a 7.7% increase in expenditures to cover cost of living adjustments and pay adjustments in a very competitive job market. The district proposes adding 9 FTE positions including a new position to manage the Animal Ambassador program and a new Accessibility Manager to advance the district's accessibility initiatives. The District has had difficulty retaining and attracting officers and is conducting a salary analysis. The proposed budget also reflects higher energy costs and increased costs to operate the camps and pools.

The proposed \$141.8M budget will be allocated as indicated in attachment 1.1, slide 6.

If the referendum is successful, an amended budget will be introduced. The new funding will be allocated as indicated in attachment 1.1, slide 8.

The following issues were discussed:

- The proposed referendum includes increased funding to the Garden and Zoo, in addition to the current public funding they receive. We are currently focused on new funding from the referendum, but in future years that will not be an important distinction; we will simply look at public funding versus other funding.
- Will the ARPA funds be applied to the 2023 budget? The ARPA funding is earmarked for programs that are not part of the operating budget; these funds are included and tracked in the capital budget. Arnold suggests that Michelle Uting, the FPCC grants administrator, brief the Council on all the federal grants and other grant funding the district receives. Chris Slattery explained that there is a 5-year capital improvement plan. It includes restoration, but it does not include land acquisition. Chris Adas will do a separate presentation on our land acquisition budget.
- Mark explained that the draft report includes a recommendation to approve the proposed budget and a second set of recommendations if the referendum passes. Mark asks the Council to consider, "Is there a benefit to some increased reporting by the FPCC, Zoo and Garden? If so, when should this occur?" Mike DeSantiago explained there are a range of options—from the very prescriptive to the less prescriptive. Mike favors the lease prescriptive option for the Zoo and Garden. Beth Dunn added that Jean Franczk concurs.
- Mike explained that the Zoo currently provides a high-level report which is incorporated into the annual budget. Mike added that the Zoo supports the change which allows the Zoo and Garden to share in future inflationary growth in property taxes which is captured by the FPCC.
- Alan suggests viewing the funding for the Zoo and the Garden as a grant with specific requirements on how that funding is used. The FPCC should have the right to audit this funding.
- Sylvia supports Alan's suggestion and added that the brochure states the referendum funds will be used to support capital needs at the Zoo and Garden.
- Emily agrees it is like a grant and option 3 is consistent with how a funder would require an annual report. Emily is very comfortable with option 3.

- Alan agrees option 3 works with additional language indicating there needs to be clarity about how funds will be used.
- Shelley Spencer asked why no additional funding is specified in option 3. Eileen Figel clarified that the FPCC no longer believes a consultant is needed to help develop a reporting framework; the FPCC, Zoo and Garden already have reporting frameworks which can be modified as needed.
- Arnold added he does not want to make decisions about how the Zoo and Garden invest in capital improvements; FPCC does not have that expertise. Mark added that the Zoo and Garden have boards which are doing this, and we don't want to get involved in decisions about what exhibits to expand. But because these buildings are owned by the Forest Preserves, we want to make sure that funding goes to maintain existing facilities—not just to build new facilities. Mike added that, in past years, the Zoo did not designate funding for capital maintenance, but they now have a facility maintenance plan in place and can report on this annually.

Hank Saunders made a motion to adopt Option 3. Laurel Ross seconded the motion.

Mark proposed an amendment to:

- Adopt Recommendation 1 as written,
- Adopt Recommendation 2 with option 3.i., and
- Add a new Recommendation 3 which is the current Option 3.ii and begin it with: “If the referendum is successful . . .”

Shelley seconded the amended motion which passed unanimously.

**Annual Progress Report.** Eileen Figel and Benjamin Cox presented the draft annual progress report. The following issues were discussed:

- Laurel stressed that acquisition can also include other opportunities to protect land beyond purchase. The LAAD paper recommends investigating creative strategies to do this. Laurel indicates that the LAAD working group recommends the land acquisition goal should be left at 90,000 acres to “help us stretch”. Alan agreed.
- Mark added that he is very happy with the streamlined report; it is massive stride forward.
- Hank suggested that working on the process of recruitment and mentorship could be a metric for page 8.
- Alan added that we need to continue a discussion on refining that metric.

Mark Templeton made a motion to approve the annual progress report with incorporation of the following language for page 8:

- The Conservation and Policy Council commits to developing a metric to measure this in the 2023 progress report.

A second was made by Sylvia and the motion was unanimously approved.

**Adjournment.** Mark Templeton made a motion to adjourn; the motion passed and the meeting was adjourned at 11:59 am.

## Attachment 1.1



# FY 2023 Advisory Council Preliminary Budget Overview

*August 31, 2022*

## Overview of FY 2021 Audited Financials

### FY 2021 AUDITED FINANCIALS

Corporate Actuals

#### 2021 Financials:

Property tax and PPRT much higher than expected.

○ Revenue	\$ 76.9M
○ Expenditures	<u>\$ 58.6M</u>
Revenue over Expense	\$ 18.3M

- ▶ Property Taxes \$5.2M above budget
- ▶ Personal Property Replacement Tax (PPRT) \$8.4M over budget
- ▶ Expenditures \$3.7M under budget due to vacancies and high turnover
- ▶ Corporate fund balance increased from \$34.1M to \$36.9M (47% of Corp. budget)



Expenditure Estimate without Referendum Funding

FY 2023 PRELIMINARY "Status Quo" BUDGET

<b>EXPENDITURES</b>	<b>\$70.7M</b>	
<i>Salaries &amp; Wages</i>	<b>+\$3.6M</b>	<b>+12%</b>
<i>Health Care</i>	<b>+\$0.5M</b>	<b>+5%</b>
<i>Non-Personnel</i>	<b>+\$1.0M</b>	<b>+6.8%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>+\$5.1M</b>	<b>+7.7%</b>

- > COLA increase of 2.5% plus increased compensation for L700
- > Adding 9 FTE's (LM, Legal, Finance, Police, OGS) includes converting seasonal to fulltime positions
- > Increase in compensation for Law Enforcement to address high turnover
- > Higher costs for energy & materials
- > Increased costs to operate camps & pools

Revenue Estimate without Referendum Funding

FY 2023 PRELIMINARY "Status Quo" BUDGET

<b>REVENUE</b>	<b>\$70.7M</b>	
<i>Property Tax</i>	<b>+\$2.4M</b>	<b>+4.5%</b>
<i>PPRT</i>	<b>+\$1.7M</b>	<b>+70%</b>
<i>Non-Tax</i>	<b>+\$1.0M</b>	<b>+12.0%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>+\$5.1M</b>	<b>+7.7%</b>

- > Property Taxes increase to capture inflation
- > PPRT collections thru May 2022 equal \$11.6M or 400% of budget. (Note: 2021 actuals were \$8.3M over budget)
- > Return to pre-pandemic usage for higher user fee revenue with no permit, pool or camp fee increases

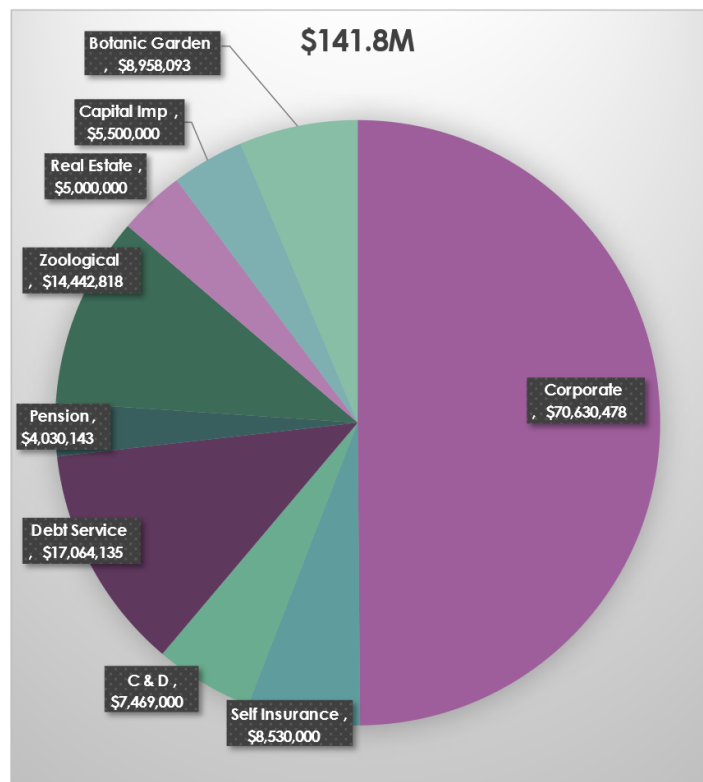
## Planned Use of Corporate Reserves

### Beginning Balance \$36.9M

▪ Corporate Fund	\$1.0M
▪ Self Insurance Fund	\$7.5M
▪ Real Estate Fund	\$2.0M
▪ Capital Fund Capital, Fleet, Demo, Police/IT	\$5.5M
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$16.0M</b>

## FY 2023 Budget by Fund

Corporate	49.8%
Self Insurance	6.0%
C & D	5.3%
Debt Service	12.0%
Pension	2.8%
Zoological	10.2%
Real Estate	3.5%
Botanic Garden	6.3%



# FY 2023 Proposed Budget Schedule

▶ FY2023 Budget to Board	Oct. 6
<b>Election day - Referendum</b>	<b>Nov. 8</b>
▶ Budget Amendments Due	tbd
▶ Approval of Budget by Board	tbd

- The FY 2023 budget will be introduced without referendum funding included

If referendum passes;

- The budget would be amended & increased by \$43.5M with funding earmarked for the following:

Proposed  
Referendum  
Allocation of  
\$43.5M

Proposed Allocation (\$43.5million )

