

Forest Preserves of Cook County Conservation & Policy Council

SPECIAL MEETING TO REVIEW LAND ACQUISITION AND DISPOSITION (LAAD)

POSITION PAPER

June 29, 2020 ▪ 1:30 pm to 2:45 pm

Minutes

Note: Due to the coronavirus pandemic, the meeting was held via video conference.

Welcome and Call to Order. Wendy Paulson called the meeting to order at 1:30 p.m. The following Council members and others attended:

Advisory Council Members

Wendy Paulson, Chairperson
Mark Templeton, Vice-chairperson
Michael DeSantiago, Secretary
Alan Bell
Emily Harris
Laurel Ross
Maria Pesqueira
Shelley Spencer
Terry Guen

Forest Preserve Staff

Arnold Randall
Eileen Figel

Facilitator

Debby Moskovits

LAAD Committee Members

Bob Megquier, Cathy Geraghty, Chris Adas, Chris Slattery, Dave Kircher, Delio Calzolari

Sylvia Jenkins and Commissioner Stanley Moore were not able to join.

Other meeting participants include Jourdan Sorrell for Commissioner Moore, Justin Pepper of the Bobolink Foundation, Jenn Baader from the Chicago Zoological Society, key steward Jane Balaban, and the following FPCC staff: Carl Vogel, Chip O'Leary, Diana Krug, Garret Wais, Jim Ziembra, John McCabe, Lydia Uhlir, Michelle Uting and Sharon Williams.

Wendy provided the following updates:

- Emily Harris, Shelley Spencer and members of the Council's REDI committee briefed President Preckwinkle and half the commissioners on the Racial Equity position paper. The briefings and the paper have been very well received. The remaining commissioners will be briefed June 30 and the paper will be officially presented to the Board at its July meeting.
- The Op Ed submitted by the Council to area papers was published by the Daily Herald.
- Commissioner Morrison hosted Virtual Outdoors Week featuring native plants and animals throughout the Forest Preserves.

- The minutes from June 10 and June 22 meetings will be reviewed at the next regular Council meeting on September 10.

Public Comments. Because this is a virtual meeting, public comments must be submitted in writing prior to the meeting. No public comments were received.

Review of draft Land Acquisition and Disposition Position Paper. Laurel Ross thanked participants for joining and stated that the paper has been a pleasure to work on AND a challenge. Laurel explained that Mark Templeton co-chaired the working group, and other participants include Alan Bell, Bob Megquier, Cathay Geraghty and other FPCC staff.

Laurel explained three key points related to the paper:

1. The recommendations are aspirational. The paper reaffirms a commitment to the acreage goal in the Next Century plan to expand the Forest Preserve System with 21,000 additional acres. Some of the land would be acquired by the FPCC and some acreage would come through partnerships with others. Laurel explained, "This goal is possible ONLY if we look beyond fee simple purchase by the Forest Preserves. We must work with other partners to share the burden of acquiring, restoring, and managing this land."
2. Restoration is closely tied to acquisition, but it is a big topic that deserves its own position paper.
3. The paper addresses three types of land disposition. The committee recommends a moratorium on formal disposition of land until guiding principles are in place. Functional disposition happens when FPCC retains ownership, but allows the land to be used inappropriately (for parking lots serving adjacent development, soccer fields, etc.) The committee hopes the position paper will help board members and staff say no to requests for these types of uses. Finally, land is also lost to encroachments from adjacent neighbors that mow FPCC land to expand backyards, for example.

Laurel introduced Debby Moskovits, retired VP for Science for the Field Museum, to facilitate the discussion. Debby solicited input for each section of the paper; the following issues were discussed.

Background

- Emily Harris suggests amplifying climate change.

Needs

- Terry Guen suggests emphasizing the importance of ecosystem services; Wendy was worried about broadening too far and losing the paper's focus.

- Dave Kircher observed that a lot of future land acquisitions will look like Orland Grasslands did and restoration will be very important.

Challenges

- Emily wants to better understand the nature of the current challenge. She stated, “It sounds like there is a lot of disposition going on, but my understanding was it is fairly minimal.” Laurel explained that at one point the FPCC had considered selling land as an option to balance its budget; the paper says FPCC will not do this.
- Wendy noted that the Needs and Challenges are presented clearly, and these sections are very helpful in guiding the reader through the paper.

Position Statement

- Council members discussed what it means to halt all disposition until the formal principles are in place. Alan Bell explained that it should be only under very rare circumstances that FPCC property is conveyed, and it is important to hold off on dispositions until clear policies are put in place. He offered two alternatives for moving forward: (a) A full and immediate moratorium, or (b) a “form of moratorium” could be considered. A formal moratorium would require board action, but staff could decide to slow down dispositions for now.
- Mark Templeton indicated that an estimated 1000 acres currently have some form of functional impairment.
- Terry stated that the challenge is not just acquiring land, it is having resources to restore and operate more sites.
- Wendy indicated that she supports the firm statement recommending a moratorium until principles are in place. Shelley, Alan and Emily agreed.
- John McCabe pointed out that some dispositions benefit the FPCC and he would not want to lose the ability to move those forward. He is worried it could take a long time to put the principles in place.
- Shelley Spencer suggested using a matrix like the one used in the Compatible Recreation position paper. Alan responded that the working group has a very detailed list of criteria they are assessing. Mark agreed that there is no need to introduce another tool.

Recommendation 1

- Mike DeSantiago asked if a successful referendum would negate the need to pursue creative methods to acquire land. Mark and Eileen Figel explained that the proposed referendum would not provide enough resources to meet the full land acquisition goal.

Recommendation 2

- Emily asked if the committee is recommending that the FPCC conduct broad advocacy for conservation of sites, even if FPCC is not directly involved, or is the committee asking FPCC

to focus on partnering with others to protect land which is part of the FPCC system. Emily suggests changing Recommendation 2.2 to read “Influence land conservation ~~by~~ with others . . .” Emily explained there is a question about how limited resources are deployed; staff can’t be technical advisors to all conservation agencies. Mark responded that the committee’s intent is to promote a broad approach; Wendy agreed that a broad approach is appropriate. Terry also expressed concerns about limited FPCC resources to achieve this goal. Laurel added that the district may have to hire staff with expertise. Chris Adas stated that FPCC is exploring partnerships with MWRD to acquire land, but this broad approach will require scaling up partnerships, resources and expertise.

Recommendation 3

- Participants agreed to retain the proposed language.

Recommendation 4

- Mike indicated that the FPCC sites are not evenly distributed throughout the County and asked if there is a proposal to bring nature to the city through programs. Emily stated that there are also opportunities to acquire ecologically valuable land in southeast Cook County. In under-served areas where there is not an opportunity to acquire land, Wendy suggests it is important to partner with NeighborSpace and to make access to nature available through transportation programs. She also suggests that the Brookfield Zoo and Chicago Botanic Garden are big magnets. Having more intentional programs to get people out to the preserves may be a better approach than trying to acquire land where there aren’t good opportunities. Wendy feels that the emphasis in this section is a little mismatched. She noted that the founders looked at opportunities to get people out of the city to visit nature. Emily added this approach is emphasized in the REDI paper, and the language in recommendation 4 seems right. Emily added that where there are opportunities to acquire land, equity should be considered. Debby clarified that equity should be among the criteria considered, but not the only criteria considered.
- In light of the events during the past months, Mike asked if there should be more emphasis on racial equity in this paper. He also suggests adding the statement in 4.1 (Coordinate approaches that are in line with the Council’s REDI position paper) to the Compatible Recreation paper.
- Terry suggested that acquiring sites near the Major Taylor Trail and other sites where the land isn’t high ecological quality may be very important for promoting racial equity. She suggests the racial equity criteria be weighted heavily.

Recommendation 5

- Emily suggests that 5.2 (Create a community of support) be referenced in the position statement, not left until the very end of the paper. Wendy thinks the paper flows well and provides clarity, and this is a great ending.

Position Statement (revisited)

- Mike asked if the position statement should read “To ~~conserve~~ add 21,000 more acres by 2040”. Mark responded that the word “conserve” was used to indicate that the FPCC may not own all 21,000 acres. Terry asked for clarification regarding what counts towards the 21,000 acres. She asked if the Millennium Reserve counts. Laurel explained, “We are looking to stretch to get land into the Forest Preserves system.” Wendy added that the paper is directional, and we should not get tripped up over ultimate ownership.

Approval of paper. Wendy Paulson made a motion to approve the Land Acquisition And Disposition paper subject to the revisions discussed during this meeting. The motion was seconded by Terry Guen. The results of the roll call vote are as follows:

Name	Vote
Wendy Paulson	Aye
Mark Templeton	Aye
Michael DeSantiago	Aye
Alan Bell	Aye
Emily Harris	Aye
Maria Pesqueira	Aye
Laurel Ross	Aye
Shelley Spencer	Aye
Terry Guen	Aye

The motion was approved.

Other comments. Wendy read the following statement from the World Wildlife Foundation: “And if we continue to destroy the natural world, outbreaks like COVID-19—which jumped from an animal species to people—will likely become more frequent, widespread, and severe.” Wendy explained that the Council has a sacred trust to protect a legacy started 100 years ago.

Maria Pesqueira agreed and indicated it is an honor to serve on the Council. Maria added that she and her family participated in a solstice celebration for native people at the preserves. She added, “In the spirit of what Wendy said, the Forest Preserves have become the protectors of this land; it is a big responsibility and it is an honor.”

Adjournment. A motion was made by Laurel and seconded by Mark to adjourn the meeting. The results of the roll call vote are as follows:

Name	Vote
Wendy Paulson	Aye
Mark Templeton	Aye
Michael DeSantiago	Aye
Alan Bell	Aye
Emily Harris	Aye
Maria Pesqueira	Aye
Laurel Ross	Aye
Shelley Spencer	Aye
Terry Guen	Aye

The motion was approved and the meeting was adjourned at 2:47 p.m.

Attachment 1: Record of Chat Comments from 6.29.20 Meeting

From Emily Harris to Everyone:

In the background section would be great to amplify the word "climate change"

From Maria Pesquita to Everyone:

I really like the section on Address the uneven and inequitable distribution— specifically mentioning addressing the adverse impact of life in underserved communities.

From Delio Calzolari (FP Cook County) to Me: (Privately)

I had to make you a co-host because I had to restart zoom (this leaving the meeting for a moment) because of a tech issue

From Shelley Spencer to Everyone:

I agree with Wendy's statement

From John McCabe to Everyone:

John McCabe - raising my hand

From Emily Harris to Everyone:

I agree with Wendy too. I wonder if these recommendations make the paper less able to stand up over time, especially the second alternative where we say "should be considered". Is it worth mentioning somewhere that the state law currently doesn't allow disposition (except for smaller parcels) and that we want to reaffirm the importance of that law?

From Shelley Spencer to Everyone:

Would matrixes, similar to what's being used in nature compatible recreation help?

From Emily Harris to Everyone:

I support dropping "social media"!

Small comment - can we make REDI position paper plural - there will be a second paper that addresses other marginalized communities

From Cathy Geraghty to Everyone:

We talked about that idea in the committee and decided outreach would be under programs

From Emily Harris to Everyone:

Great suggestion Emily!

From Maria Pesquita to Everyone:

Sa... Delio Calzolari (FP Cook County) ↗ (Privately)

Type message here...