



Forest Preserves of Cook County Conservation & Policy Council Meeting April 19, 2024

Camp Reinberg, 1801 N. Quentin Rd, Palatine, IL 60074

Minutes

Welcome and Call to Order. Chairperson Alan Bell called the meeting to order at 10:00 am.

Advisory Council Members

Alan Bell, Chairperson
Megan Bang
Henrietta Saunders
Jackie Samuel
Mark Templeton, Vice-chairperson
Michael DeSantiago
Ryen Nagle
Laurel Ross

Presenters

Eileen Figel, Forest Preserves
Becky Collings, Forest Preserves
Kris DaPra
Emily Russel
Linda Masters
Michelle Uting
Jennifer Baader, Chicago Zoological Society
Beth Dunn

Absent: Commissioner Morita and Daisy Feist

Welcome. Alan Bell, Chairperson called the meeting to order at 10:00 am

Nature Spotlight. Becky Collings Becky explained how important the forest preserves are for the survival of migratory Birds

- Cook County is along Mississippi Flyway. More than 5 million birds fly through every year.
- Chicago is the most -deadly city for birds – glass windows and light pollution major contributing factor.
- Oak trees important for food supply. Healthy habitats that support oaks in turn support migratory birds.

Approval of Minutes. Henrietta added a correction to a future meeting location. The minutes were approved subject to this correction.

Public Comments. There were no public comments.

Chairman's Report.

- Alan thanked Council members for their representation at 2024 Board meetings. Important to keep it up and to continue outside conversations with commissioners as well. Mark Templeton added that it is important to build relationships with board members when not in a moment of stress or need.

- Megan Bang provided an update on partnerships with Native Americans and a summit planned for May 29th to build out a partner framework. Alan thanked Megan for taking the lead.
- The Council agreed to review and vote on a recommendation from the Nominating Committee at the June 20 meeting.
- Henrietta Saunders asked about the functions of the Steering Committee – she asked if this the space for conservation practitioners to have their voices heard?
- Daisy has agreed to serve as secretary; the Council will vote on her nomination at the June 20 meeting.
- Alan is stepping down as chair but plans to remain on the Council. He asked other Council members to consider the position.

Discussion with the Interim General Superintendent. Eileen Figel reported on significant progress towards key NCCP goals:

- Restoration work at Red Gate Woods has begun; this is the district's largest restoration to date.
- Resource Management is hiring another restoration crew because of referendum funds.
- Three more properties were acquired in Southeast Cook.
- The district dedicated additional acres to nature preserves for a total of more than 11,000 acres.
- This district is adding an accessible canoe landing along the Des Plaines River.

Engaging volunteers. Henrietta Saunders, Linda Masters, Kris DaPra, and Emily Russell provided the following updates:

- Henrietta explained that stewardship volunteers are existential to the volunteer program – she has huge respect for them and the very important role they have.
- Kirs and Emily presented an overview of the volunteer engagement strategy. There are nine different programs to plug into, providing opportunities to a variety of interests.
- Kirs highlighted the Community Science Monitors program. Monitoring is done on dozens and dozens of species.
- Tools for engagement are embedded into REDI goals. Volunteers are receiving racial equity training. Free transportation is offered to schools and community groups. Ensure that a variety of programs are accessible.
- Volunteers engage other Volunteers through tabling, science, poetry, social media, community talks and walks.
- Developed a Team approach to stewardship. Stewardship leadership certifications. Training program is on demand and super diverse and easy to access.
- Linda Masters suggested a deep dive on the ecological volunteer program, adding that it is the best in the country.

Protecting Biodiversity. Laurel Ross and Iza Redlinski provided the following updates:

- Laurel shared that it's counterintuitive to think that any diversity of significance exists in a metropolitan area. She asked Council members to tell her what is needed for them to be a good advocate for nature?
- Iza expressed that without nature other goals don't matter. First thing is to protect the land, then protect species from extinction by maintaining and restoring our habitats.

- What is biodiversity? There are many aspects to it including, genetic diversity, species diversity, functional diversity, habitat diversity the whole system works to support plants, birds, mammals, fish, reptiles, amphibians, insects etc.
- Restoration Efforts improve ecological health and biodiversity.
- Remnant sites are our treasures.

Henrietta suggested a deeper dive to help Council members understand what is required to restore land to a healthy state.

Update on Referendum and ARPA Spending. Michelle Uting, Beth Dunne, and Jen Baader provided the following updates:

- Michelle presented FPCC work on spending referendum funds. Staff dedicated time to determine ways to spend money effectively and efficiently. Hiring 57 new colleagues.
- Jen stated that the Zoo is spending referendum dollars on capital projects. Lots of work is happening behind the scenes on the kinds of things that are difficult to get private funding for. ARPA funds are being leveraged for additional private support.
- Beth shared that the Botanic Garden is using funding for capital improvements and can now plan for these improvements which they couldn't do before.

Updates from Strategic Partners. Alan invited partners to share updates.

Adjourn. The meeting adjourned at 12:05 pm.