

**Forest Preserves of Cook County
Conservation & Policy Council**

April 5, 2018

9:30 am to 12:15 pm: Meeting will be held General Headquarters ▪ 536 N. Harlem Ave,
Museum Room, River Forest, IL

A G E N D A

9:25 am Photograph of Council

9:30 am 1) Welcome & Overview (Wendy Paulson, Chair)

9:35 am 2) Public Comment

3) Story (Mose Rickey, Palos Park District)

- The Palos Park District partners with FPCC on a range of programs and events and hosts events at the forest preserves.

4) Approval of minutes from 1.8.17 meeting

9:45 am 5) Building a Community of Support Update (Benjamin Cox, Bob Megquier)

- Reports from Council members
- Reports from NCCP Committee Chairs

10:15 am 6) Golf Master Plan (Terry Guen, Karen Vaughan)

10:45 am 7) Analysis of Aquatic Centers (Rob Castaneda, Cynthia Moreno, Chris Adas)

11:15 am Break

11:30 am 8) Analysis of Legislative/Referendum Options (Laurel Ross, Delio Calzolari)

12:00 pm 9) Next Steps/Upcoming Meetings (Eileen Figel)

12:15 pm 10) Adjourn

**The Forest Preserves of Cook County
Conservation and Policy Council
Meeting Minutes for January 8, 2018**

69 W. Washington Street, Chicago, IL 60602 ▪ 22nd Floor – Conference Room A

Call to Order. Council chair Wendy Paulson called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. The following Council members and others attended:

Advisory Council Members

Wendy Paulson, Chair
Mark Templeton, Secretary
Robert Castaneda
Michael DeSantiago
Terry Guen
Emily Harris
Sylvia Jenkins
Stanley Moore
Laurel Ross

Forest Preserve Staff

Arnold Randall
Eileen Figel

Falona Joy is on sabbatical and Peter Ellis did not attend.

Welcome & Overview. Wendy Paulson announced that Arnold Randall received the Civic Federation's Excellence in Public Service award in December. Wendy noted the importance of the public recognition represented by this award and the growing support for the Forest Preserves in recent years. Due in part to the extensive work by staff and partners to ensure efficient management of current resources, several Commissioners are now voicing public support for a referendum. Wendy noted, however, that there are longstanding historical prejudices and perceptions that we must continue to overcome and that the Trust for Public Lands study showed residents support the concept of having a robust forest preserve system, but voters are not yet ready to pass a property tax hike to fund this work.

Wendy provided an update on the Council's membership, including:

- Linda Mastrandrea resigned in 2017 to accept a new position in Washington, D.C.
- Wendy Paulson, Mark Templeton, and Laurel Ross have been reappointed for another term.
- Cook County Commissioner Stanley Moore was appointed to the Council on December 10, 2017.
- The President's appointment of Emily Harris to the Council will be reviewed by the Board on January 9, 2018.

Wendy presented a recap of the Council's 2017 meetings and topics discussed.

Public Comments. There were no comments from the public.

Approval of Minutes. A motion was made by Wendy Paulson and seconded by Mark Templeton to approve the minutes of the 10.12.17 meeting; the minutes were approved unanimously.

Story. Ryan Chew of Chicago River Canoe and Kayak offered an inspirational story regarding the evolution of his company's partnership with the Forest Preserves. Chicago River Canoe and Kayak began exclusively on the North Branch of the Chicago River in 2001 and gradually expanded to several Forest Preserve sites including Busse Reservoir (Elk Grove Village), Skokie Lagoons (Winnetka), and Maple Lake (Palos). Chicago River Canoe and Kayak serves approximately 50,000 participants annually at Forest Preserve locations, and has expanded to 40 staff in 2017, 25 of which are American Canoe Association certified.

"We see ourselves as a nature company," Ryan explained. Ryan and his employees teach students and other visitors that "everything on the river belongs to the river."

Council members asked several questions and offered the following comments:

- Q: How do you advertise and are there opportunities to expand your presence in the Forest Preserves?
- A: Chicago River Canoe and Kayak has an email list of over 19,000 people and publishes a quarterly newsletter. The company has advertised in athletic magazines in the past, but did not see significant results. Ryan is open to future opportunities to expand. In the meantime, they are reviewing their seasonal hiring practices and ensuring their internal processes are as efficient as possible for their existing sites.

The Council commented that kayaking programs such as those provided by Chicago River Canoe and Kayak are an example of compatible economic development, and serve as an entry-point to understanding nature.

Building a Community of Support. Bob Megquier, Chief Operating Officer of Openlands, and Benjamin Cox, President of Friends of the Forest Preserves, presented a framework developed by the Leadership Committee to build a community of support in order to advance the goals of the Next Century Conservation Plan. Key points include:

- Support will be built through three initiatives: (1) identifying user groups that are not in support, (2) connecting with those who can impact legislation and policy, and (3) working with advocates to advance messages necessary to build a community of support composed of partners, the Forest Preserve Foundation, the Council, and the Forest Preserves themselves.
- The framework sets a specific goal of achieving support from 65-70% of County residents for a referendum. The Trust for Public Lands report indicated that public support in 2017 was in the ~40% range.
- Benjamin Cox added that elevating the profile of the preserves to the same level as the region's other cultural attractions is key to success. Benjamin stated that a range of positive facts and statistics can be used to promote the preserves, including local biodiversity, the preserves' combined size relative to the city, and the fact that the preserves are one of the oldest and largest conservation districts in the country.
- Each Committee Chair will reach out to an assigned Council member to discuss what role each Council member would like to play. An introductory powerpoint for the Forest Preserves has been prepared and will be circulated for feedback.

Council members asked several questions and offered the following comments:

- Q: WYCC has been eliminated and is no longer airing the Forest Preserve documentary. How can the documentary continue to be used as a promotional tool?
- A: [Chicago's True Nature: The Forest Preserves of Cook County](http://fpdcc.com/chicagos-true-nature-forest-preserves-cook-) is now streaming on the Forest Preserve website. Footage from the documentary is also being incorporated into other presentations. The full documentary can be viewed here: <http://fpdcc.com/chicagos-true-nature-forest-preserves-cook->

[county/](#)

- Q: Wendy Paulson suggested using a catchy tagline to help promote the Preserves, such as “Nature’s Metropolis” or “Cook County’s Best Idea”.
- A: Arnold Randall responded that 2018 is the year to scale up outreach with staff presentations to various audiences. Arnold also emphasizes the importance of having ambassadors and non-governmental voices speaking on the behalf of the Preserves. Each Council member can help by reaching out to his/her unique circles of influence.

Deferred Maintenance and Capital Improvement Plans. Michael DeSantiago explained that deferred maintenance is the “practice of postponing maintenance activities in order to save costs, meet funding levels, or realign available budget monies”. He emphasized that on-going maintenance saves money by avoiding costly breakdowns. Operating to failure results in an exponential increase in cost, which has the potential to impact the entire organization’s budget.

Chris Slattery presented an overview of the capital needs at the Forest Preserves, including:

- The Forest Preserves developed and maintains a 5-year capital improvement plan which is based on an analysis of FPCC facilities conducted by the Public Building Commission. The plan is updated annually to address deferred maintenance and aspirational goals (i.e. additional visitor centers, camps, and regional trail segments). The Capital Improvement Plan can be viewed here: <http://fpdcc.com/cip/>
- The average age of construction for Forest Preserve buildings is 1965. Additionally, the building stock is varied, which makes maintenance difficult as there is no architectural or material standard used districtwide. The current plan focuses on maintenance; there is no new construction projected in 2018.
- The 5-Year Capital Improvement Plan projects a \$122 million capital funding need for 2018-2022 including roughly \$22 million for largescale ecological restoration. This also includes roughly \$9 million for urgent deferred maintenance, to cover some urgent deferred maintenance needs in 2018 and 2019. However, total deferred maintenance needs over the next 5 years are estimated at over \$50 million. Of the 166 buildings surveyed by the Public Building Commission, 58% had deferred maintenance of 3-5 years. Current deferred maintenance needs are categorized as follows:
 - 1) Roofs & HVAC – \$4.6 million
 - 2) Exterior walls and doors – \$7.1 million
 - 3) Windows – \$12.2 million
 - 4) Picnic shelter roofs -- \$500,000
 - 5) Parking lots and access drives -- \$16.2 million*
 - 6) Regular maintenance for paved trails -- \$7.4 million (\$840,000 per year or \$4.2 million over 5 years plus an estimated \$3.2 million for unpaved trail and bridge repairs over 5 years)
 - 7) Dams and shorelines -- \$3.8 million

*52 of 300 parking lots are currently classified as being in poor condition, and in immediate need of repair.

We have already narrowed priorities for some categories, especially parking lot repaving, but are still projecting urgent basic deferred and regular maintenance needs of roughly \$24 million over the next 5 years.

- Even with a modest bond issue in 2019, we are still projecting a \$15 million gap in the budget for basic needs in 2020-2022. If these needs are not addressed, this could result in potential closures and a perception of neglect amongst the public.
- In the interim, the Forest Preserves will be addressing the funding gap through 1) increased preventative maintenance, 2) prioritization, 3) maintenance training for field staff, 4) shrinking the pavement footprint, and 5) increasing reliance on partners to maintain shared structures. In many cases, the focus will be on extending the useful life of the existing infrastructure, even if it is not that preferred or most cost effective

course of action over the long term. There is simply not enough funding to outright replace structures, rather than repair them.

Council members asked several questions and offered the following comments:

- Q: Are golf courses included in the 250 buildings listed in the Capital Improvement Plan? Are paths at golf courses included in the 155 miles of paved trails listed in the plan?
- A: Yes. This figure also includes buildings managed by concessionaires which, per their agreements, have an investment cap which is often insufficient to cover overall maintenance needs for the buildings they are occupying. The numbers do not include the Chicago Botanic Garden or the Chicago Zoological Society, which each have their own capital improvement plans. As for the trails, only multi-use bike trails are included. Paths at golf courses and sidewalks are not included.
- Q: Have all life safety improvements been completed?
- A: No. The Salt Creek Resource Management facility is the one remaining building with significant life safety concerns. The condition and age of the building calls for complete replacement, rather than repair. Several other buildings are exempt from various regulations because they were built prior to the adoption of various codes.
- Q: Where does the American Disabilities Act plan fit in with regards to the capital improvement budget?
- A: ADA accessibility is prioritized along with life safety and shelter improvements. The consultants who provided the initial structural assessments for the Capital Improvement Plan listed minor deficiencies which we have addressed as we invest at a given site. Additionally, the ADA transition plan calls for an external advisory group to help prioritize additional investments in ADA accessible infrastructure.
- Q: What is being done to collaborate with other organizations that are invested in infrastructure funding? Is there an opportunity to involve Conservation Corps-type groups with construction and job creation firms?
- A: Arnold Randall responded that all public facing buildings have now been made accessible. Progress has been made and other options for continued maintenance will be explored. Other Council members raised the question of whether all structures need to be maintained, or if it is more cost effective to remove them.

Stuart Strahl presented an overview of the capital needs at the Zoo, including:

- The Forest Preserves of Cook County is responsible for levying the taxes needed for maintenance and operation of the zoological park. Additionally, the FPCC legally owns all buildings and structures on zoo grounds, but the Chicago Zoological Society is responsible for operating and maintaining them. Eighty buildings on Zoo grounds have a historic designation, which significantly impacts the cost of repairs.
- The Chicago Zoological Society currently has a backlog of \$112 million in deferred maintenance, and accrues an additional \$7 million in routine annual maintenance. Approximately \$3.5 million of this cost is rolled over annually. These figures do not include a \$400-500 million capital improvement plan over the next ten (10) years.
- The tax levy received has been relatively even historically. Approximately 80% of the Chicago Zoological Society's funds are leveraged from partners and other outside funding sources.
- Loss of capital funding will result in the deterioration or closure of exhibits. In addition, there will be impacts to visitation, a decline of local conservation and community programming, and jobs.

- Capital improvements between 2003-2015 supported 1,220 jobs, added \$89 million in household spending to the local economy, and contributed \$8.1 million in state and local tax revenue.

Jean Franczyk presented an overview of the capital needs of the Chicago Botanic Garden as follows:

- The Chicago Botanic Garden hosted 1.1 million visitors in 2017. The Garden has seen a 60% increase in visitorship since 2006. This creates additional demands on the existing infrastructure.
- A Request for Proposals to complete a comprehensive needs assessment for deferred and preventative maintenance was issued, but never completed due to cost.
- The Chicago Botanic Garden has an operating budget of \$37 million, which includes earned and raised revenue from parking, ticket sales, and retail operations. The Forest Preserves of Cook County's \$9.4 million contribution is essential for operations.
- Recent remediation for a zebra mussel infestation caused the need for expensive repairs to plumbing for irrigation and building climate control.
- There is an expanding backlog of capital needs which includes the replacement of aging vehicles and footpaths.
- Attempts have been made to launch capital fundraising campaigns by attaching donor names to high profile projects. However, the Garden has had limited success raising funds for projects that are less glamorous and not public-facing.
- Addressing future capital needs assumes a balance of private fundraising and an influx of public funding.

The Council agreed that all three organizations need additional resources to maintain capital facilities and they should work together to seek solutions that address these needs. To do so, the organizations must have a working knowledge of existing needs and the ability to actively inventory and track capital needs. Council members had experience working with several programs and suggested the following software:

- Facilities Dude (This program tracks capital needs by inventorying every facet of facilities. It includes real-time tracking via handheld devices.)
- ISES Facilities Management (This consultant-driven database with a conditions/need index is able to track progress based on investment.)

Other suggestions include:

- Establish more "Friends of..." advocacy groups for specific locations such as nature centers.
- Create a dashboard with a multiplier that demonstrates cost savings if there is immediate investment versus the compounding costs of deferring maintenance needs.
- Research the viability of contracting with energy services companies offering architecture and energy audit plans to reduce energy usage. These plans often identify maintenance issues, and the companies who complete the audit generally guarantee energy savings.

Terry Guen stated that a recent study indicates that investments in cultural and environmental preservation generate a high return. Terry Guen will provide this report to Eileen Figel.

Council members asked several additional questions and offered the following comments:

- Q: Work has been done to figure out the most efficient way to talk about ecological restoration. Is there a more concise way to make the same points for deferred maintenance?
- A: Arnold Randall responded that there is already general support from the Board of Commissioners about this issue, and they understand why the Forest Preserves need additional revenue.

- Q: The Zoo and the Garden have developed an independent fundraising apparatus, whereas the Forest Preserves do not have the benefit of public-private partnerships. How much responsibility does the FPCC have for pulling in funding for other affiliate organizations based solely on a historical connection?
- A: There are two scenarios to consider: referendum versus no new resources. A referendum is a potential solution that would address the needs of all three organizations. From a political perspective, a combined solution benefitting all three organizations holds broader appeal for the public, which the Forest Preserves may not receive independently.

Eileen Figel added that the Zoo and the Garden each reach a broad audience and can help build awareness and support. Council members agreed and suggested that both partners emphasize the fact that the Zoo and Garden are part of the Forest Preserves.

Next Steps/Upcoming Meetings. Eileen Figel reviewed the proposed topics for future Council meetings. There will be continued discussion of how to build a community of support, as well as more in-depth review of the high impact initiatives identified in 2017. Each Council member has been suggested as a potential liaison for these issues. Council members should inform Eileen if there is a topic they are more interested in pursuing.

Adjourn. A motion to adjourn was made by Wendy Paulson, seconded by Sylvia Jenkins, and the meeting was adjourned at 11:55 a.m.