



Forest Preserves of Cook County Conservation & Policy Council Meeting

Meeting Minutes for April 19, 2023

Swallow Cliff Woods Pavilion, [IL Route 83 & U.S. 45, Palos Park, IL 60464](#)

Welcome and Call to Order. Mark Templeton called the meeting to order at 10:05 am. Jacqui Ulrich acknowledged that the meeting is taking place on the lands of the Council of Three Fires—the Ojibwa, Ottawa and Potawatomi—as well as the Miami, Ho-Chunk, Menominee, Sauk and Meskwaki peoples. The following Council members and others attended:

Advisory Council Members

Alan Bell, Chairperson
Daisy Feidt
Henrietta Saunders
Mark Templeton, Vice-chairperson
Megan Bang
Ryen Nagel
Laurel Ross

Presenters

Arnold Randall, Forest Preserves
Beth Dunn, Chicago Botanic Garden
Eileen Figel, Forest Preserves
John McCabe, Forest Preserves
Iza Redlinski, Forest Preserves

Commissioner Josina Morita, Mike DeSantiago, and Shelley Spencer did not attend.

Approval of Minutes. A motion to approve the minutes of the 2.9.23 meeting was made by Laurel Ross with a second by Mark Templeton. The minutes were approved unanimously.

Public Comments. There were no public comments.

Chairman's report. Alan Bell acknowledged that April is Earth Month and encouraged all participants to explore the preserves and celebrate nature. Alan asked the Council to think about how to build upon the strong network developed to support the referendum and how Council members can continue to work with commissioners, volunteers, advocates and others. How can Council members continue to be ambassadors for nature for groups serving various communities (healthcare, disability community, etc.)? Daisy Feidt and Megan Bang volunteered to work on this. Megan added that the Illinois Senate passed a bill to establish standards for educating public school students about Native Americans and she believes the Forest Preserves could be central to re-orienting people's relationships to land. Laurel added that simply reading the Land Acknowledgement statement at the beginning of every workday has made a huge difference. Henrietta Saunders stated that Steve Packard shared some of the history of Native Americans being removed from the land and it resonated broadly. Henrietta also thanked Benjamin Cox for his work leading the referendum effort. Alan stated that it is not always easy to communicate to diverse communities regarding conservation; the term means different things to different people, and we need to understand what resonates with different communities.

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

- Arnold has briefed new board commissioners Quesada, Trevor, Gordon, and Morita. They are all interested in the Forest Preserves and eager to engage.
- Commissioner Johnson is moving on to become Mayor of Chicago.
- The expanded coyote enclosure at River Trail Nature Center is nearing completion. The new enclosure will be eight times larger. (Note: An update from staff at the 6.21.23 Council meeting indicates the enclosure will actually be 12 times larger than the previous enclosure.)
- A group has asked to rename the Hal Tyrell Nature Center (named after a former County Commissioner who helped save the facility). The group is asking to remove Hal Tyrell's name and rename the facility for Virginia Moe, a long-time director of the facility. The Naming Committee did not approve the removal of Hal Tyrell's name.
- FPCC recently purchased several large parcels in southeast Cook County.
- Arnold serves on the board of the National Recreation and Parks Association. The association is very focused on racial equity, diversity and inclusion (REDI). FPCC is sharing our REDI work with the association which provides training for local park agencies across the country.
- The FPCC, Zoo and Garden will receive additional ARPA funding for capital needs. (\$10M for FPCC, \$10M for Zoo, and \$5M for Garden.)
- The Chicago Botanic Garden and FPCC participated in a listening session with Native Americans at the Garden last week.

Land Use Policy Reform – Part 1. Cathy Geraghty explained that the FPCC routinely gets requests for the use of land. It was not always clear when staff could or could not say no. The LAAD paper provided guidance, but there were several issues that required further discussion. A land use task force consisting of Council members, staff, and partners was convened to address and resolve these issues. Mark added that all participants had a deep commitment to protect the preserves, even if there were strong differences of opinions. Alan explained that it was difficult to navigate the appropriate role of the Council in some of these discussions. Chris Slattery stated that it has been helpful to have the Council help fend off requests for inappropriate land uses, and to help staff clarify current codes and laws. Benjamin Cox explained that FOTFP was founded to prevent bad land deals, land swaps, etc. He believes that cleaning up the law will be an important achievement. Arnold explained that the FPCC had a dysfunctional relationship with partners and advocates years ago. The strong relationships today are resulting in better policy and support when FPCC needs it.

Eileen provided an update on the seven issues the land use task force seeks to resolve. These are:

1. What constitutes "rare and extreme instances" where future conveyance or use of land may be considered?
2. Non-mission related uses are authorized by the enabling legislation and District Code. Should these be modified?
3. What criteria do we use to ensure that non-mission uses results in an "overall net benefit"?
4. Do we need new criteria or restrictions to limit (a) sale of surplus parcels, and (b) conveyance of land to govt. agencies?
5. There should be no net loss of land over time.
6. Should we offer amnesty for encroaching businesses?
7. Should we permit long-term lease of historic properties?

The following issues were discussed:

- How are we defining mission-related uses v. non-mission-related uses? Alan stated that the Nature-Compatible Recreation position paper provides guidance on this.
- How many surplus parcels are there? Is there a process to transform these parcels by inviting communities to participate (to start a garden, for example?) Chris Adas explained that there are less than ten potential surplus parcels. We are trying to take into consideration all the factors that can determine whether a parcel should be conveyed.

Scaling Up Restoration. Resource Management Director John McCabe and Deputy Director Iza Redlinski presented an update on efforts to scale up restoration. Key points include:

- The RM budget went from \$10M in 2022 to \$17M in 2023, in large part due to the referendum.
- After the Next Century Conservation Plan called for the restoration of 30,000 acres, the Forest Preserves developed the Natural and Cultural Resources Master Plan to prioritize the restoration work.
- Volunteers will play a key role in maintaining restored areas. The Forest Preserves' Volunteer Resource staff is focusing on building a team of volunteer leaders to support restoration at sites throughout the preserves.

The following issues were discussed:

- How is climate change impacting the restoration work? John explained that stormwater is a huge issue; more water is coming into the forest preserves as adjacent land is developed. FPCC is looking at creating a stormwater policy; the Council may want to participate in this.

Partner Updates. The following update was presented:

- Garden. Beth Dunn invited Council members to a walk through the woodlands at the Chicago Botanic Garden next Thursday and Friday 4/27 and 4/28 at 11 am.

Adjournment. Mark Templeton made a motion to adjourn; the motion was seconded by Laurel Ross. The motion passed and the meeting was adjourned at 12:07 pm.