

## The Forest Preserves of Cook County

### Conservation & Policy Council

Minutes for May 18, 2016 ▪ Camp Reinberg, 1801 N Quentin Rd, Palatine, IL

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**Call to Order.** Council chair Wendy Paulson called the meeting to order at 10:01 a.m. The following Council members and others attended:

#### **Advisory Council Members**

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Wendy Paulson, Chair  
Falona Joy, Vice Chair  
Mark Templeton, Secretary  
Laurel Ross  
Michael De Santiago  
Rob Castaneda  
Sylvia Jenkins  
Linda Mastandrea  
Commissioner Robert Steele

*Peter Ellis and Terry Guen did not attend.*

#### **Forest Preserve Staff**

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Arnold Randall  
Eileen Figel  
Cathy Geraghty

#### **Presenters**

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Troy Alim, FPCC  
Shelley Davis, Forest Preserve Foundation of Cook County  
Ty Kovach, Lake County Forest Preserves  
Kindy Kruller, FPCC  
Lambrini Lukidis, FPCC  
Chris Slattery, FPCC  
Karen Vaughan, FPCC

Representatives of the Chicago Botanic Garden, Brookfield Zoo, Audubon Chicago, Openlands, Friends of the Forest Preserves, the Field Museum and other partners and FPCC staff also attended.

**Public Comments.** There were no comments from the public.

**Approval of Minutes.** A motion was made by Laurel Ross and seconded by Michael DeSantiago to approve the minutes of the 3.27.16 meeting; the minutes were approved unanimously.

**Discussion Topic 1: Building a Community of Support.** Dr. Sylvia Jenkins explained that the first discussion topic would focus on two NCCP goals: (i) Marketing the preserves as an iconic element of metro area, and (ii) Building the economic case for nature. Staff and partners discussed the following opportunities and challenges related these goals.

- **Challenges.** Dr. Jenkins indicated there are several key challenges related to these goals. First, how do we define success and how do we know if we are achieving it? We want to achieve a broad understanding across the region that the preserves are an important asset to our quality of life. For example, Austin is surrounded by protected natural areas and they are promoted as regional assets by Austin's chamber of commerce, city government, board of realtors, university, etc. This is not the case in Cook County; how do we get there? Secondly, how do we handle initiatives that FPCC does not have the expertise or capacity to lead?
- **Market research.** Kindy Kruller presented key findings from surveys and other market research conducted by FPCC and its partners between 2013 and 2015. This includes research conducted by Openlands consultant Carol White, Latino roundtables facilitated by FPCC consultant Miguel Palacio, and surveys conducted in conjunction with FPCC's Natural & Cultural Resources Master Plan, Trail Master Plan, and Recreation Master Plan. Kindy highlighted the following findings which recurred across these studies:
  1. More information is needed including on-site messaging and external marketing.
  2. Residents have a general understanding about the Forest Preserves, but limited knowledge about specific sites and services including natural resources, facilities and programs.
  3. People that regularly visit the preserves really enjoy and care about the preserves.

- **Marketing Strategy.** Lambrini Lukidis described a number of collaborative efforts already underway to reach like-minded audiences through the Brookfield Zoo, Chicago Botanic Garden, and others. For example, the Garden is promoting FPCC programs and events in *Keep Growing*, a magazine distributed to 55,000 households, and the Zoo is promoting FPCC programs and events via direct mail to 105,000 membership households. In addition, FPCC has developed a marketing plan to promote:
  1. PROGRAMS as the best way to increase awareness of the Preserves and market to the general consumer.
  2. CONSERVATION as the primary focus of FPCC and as a way to increase volunteerism and stewardship.
  3. RENEWED CONFIDENCE in FPCC's policies and practices related to good governance.

The [NextCenturyConservationPlan.org](http://NextCenturyConservationPlan.org) site was revamped to provide on-going progress reports related to plan implementation, and the ForestForward newsletter was launched to grow support and awareness.

Chicago's True Nature, a documentary on the Forest Preserves produced by WYCC, was recently released and will be shown at Navy Pier and throughout the county, as well as on WYCC.

- **Busse Woods Pilot.** Kindy Kruller discussed the NCCP goal to promote nature-related business development near the preserves. The Economics Committee explored this goal at Busse Woods, collecting information about number of visitors, available amenities, etc. However, FPCC does not have the expertise nor the capacity to proactively recruit small businesses (such as ice cream shops or bike rentals) to sites available in nearby business districts. No partner has stepped up to lead this initiative.

The Council discussed the following issues related to building a community of support.

Commissioner Steele asked how FPCC will track who is visiting which sites. He suggested adding SKU codes at sites to allow visitors to scan a code and easily access information about what is happening at a site. Lambrini responded that FPCC is currently focused on getting people to visit the preserves and making the FPCC website mobile-friendly.

Wendy Paulson asked how FPCC can tap the many residents who love and regularly visit the preserves. Can we use them to write descriptions of sites and amenities such as trails? Wendy also suggested plugging into small, local newspapers. Lambrini explained that FPCC sends a monthly media kit to local news sources, but it can be challenging to get the information published. Eileen Figel added that FPCC has partnered with [REI's Hiking Project](#), a mobile app designed to promote local trails by enabling users to rate and write descriptions of the trails. [Deer Grove](#) is the first FPCC site to be uploaded; other site will follow.

Mark Templeton suggested that FPCC provide the platform to tee things up for new business development (rather than playing the role of business recruiter.) Eileen Figel agreed this is a role FPCC can play and staff has already begun to assemble information which can be made available to local chambers of commerce or other business associations.

Rich Gamble explained the need for strategic priority setting. There are competing needs—to redesign the website, to better utilize social media, etc. All of this takes time and resources and FPCC must set priorities and map out activities to be undertaken. Wendy Paulson stated it all comes back to two primary needs: (i) restore the preserves, and (ii) make them welcoming. Justin Pepper suggested that crowd-sourced promotions, such as Trip Advisor, are trusted because the content is generated by actual users. Rich Gamble suggested we need both a point person at FPCC to build relationships with the media and get information to key influencers AND independent crowd sourcing. Lambrini added that FPCC is interested in working with YELP, but needs a staff person who can respond to all inquiries.

Falona Joy suggested that the Zoo and Garden can be a great help in getting more people to visit the preserves. Could there be a program which provides discounts to Zoo and Garden members for FPCC rentals and fees in order to drive more people to the preserves? Rich responded that the Economics Committee is exploring this as part of the Busse Woods pilot. He added that the Zoo and Garden are also exploring "adopting" a nearby preserve to connect Zoo and Garden visitors with nearby FPCC activities.

Linda Mastandrea stated that, each time she stays at a hotel, she receives an email asking her to post a review to TripAdvisor. Linda suggested that FPCC send an email to visitors who do provide contact info (for fishing permits, etc.)

and ask them to post reviews. Linda also confirmed the need to think about staffing and how to manage the flow of information to ensure that people submitting comments or questions are not ignored. Michael DeSantiago suggested FPCC also survey dog park users.

Rob Castaneda stated that, in order to measure the success of the Busse Woods pilot, FPCC must measure who is returning for future visits. Lambrini agreed that this is important but also noted it is difficult to fully capture this data.

Mark Templeton asked for information on the marketing budgets of FPCC, the Zoo and the Garden. Rich Gamble responded that the Zoo's marketing budget is approximately \$1.7M (including staff); Jim Boudreau indicated that the Garden's marketing budget is about \$200K (not including staff); Lambrini indicated that FPCC's marketing budget is also about \$200K (not including staff). Mark asked Eileen Figel to confirm the marketing budgets, including staff.

Wendy Paulson asked if FPCC should be the primary instigator of economic development. Wendy added that this is not FPCC's expertise; FPCC should focus on making the preserves healthy and get economic development agencies to understand and value the preserves as an important regional asset.

**Discussion Topic 2: Efficient & Effective Use of Resources.** Falona Joy explained that FPCC is looking at two approaches to improve efficiency: (i) Cost savings (such as outsourcing operation of aquatic centers, reducing the size of the fleet, etc.), and (ii) Increasing non-tax revenues. She indicated that the discussion with the Council will focus primarily on the second approach, raising revenues.

Falona explained that FPCC does not have the resources needed to fully implement NCCP, and the current political/fiscal environment limits options for new tax revenues. Therefore, FPCC is focusing first on non-tax revenues such as growing concessions and selling naming rights. Falona reminded the Council that these non-tax revenues represent a very small portion of FPCC's budget. She asked Troy Alim, FPCC's budget director, to give an overview of FPCC's current revenue sources. Troy reported that FPCC expects to collect \$57.5 million in 2016. Of this, \$6.3M, or 11% of total revenues, comes from non-tax sources (such as permit fees, golf and concessions). The remaining 89% of revenue is generated from taxes.

Falona explained that, even if FPCC is very successful with initiatives to raise new revenue and reduce costs, it is highly unlikely these initiatives will raise the estimated three billion dollars needed to successfully implement the Next Century Conservation Plan. Staff presented overviews of several initiatives designed to raise revenues or decrease costs.

- **Increasing Earned Revenue.** Karen Vaughan presented an overview of current concessions, permits and memberships. She explained that FPCC is working with a consultant to explore opportunities for growing revenue from these sources.
- **Cost/Benefit Analysis.** Karen described on-going efforts to analyze the cost and benefits of various FPCC programs and services. Staff are also developing criteria for the level of subsidies which may be provided. Under the proposed criteria, programs which are completely aligned with FPCC's mission and which serve the public broadly may be fully subsidized. This would include, for example, free entry to FPCC nature centers. Programs which do not further FPCC's mission and offer limited or individual benefits only would receive no subsidy and should generate revenue to support other FPCC programs or services. (See attachment.)
- **Asset Marketing.** FPCC is working with an asset marketing specialist, Superlative, to attract corporate sponsors for campgrounds, pools, nature centers, dog parks, and trails. The initial assessment indicates these assets may attract approximately \$700,000 in corporate sponsorships per year.
- **Forest Preserve Foundation.** Shelley Davis reported that the Forest Preserve Foundation granted \$255,000 to FPCC and its partners in 2015. The Foundation's new strategic plan focuses on increasing the foundation's visibility and brand, increasing investment in programs, increasing resources, and strengthening leadership.
- **Creative Financing Strategies.** Chris Slattery reported that FPCC has retained the Trust for Public Lands (TPL) to study peer agencies across the country and identify best practices for funding conservation.
- **Lake County Forest Preserves (LCFP).** Ty Kovach explained that the LCFP strategic plan establishes key conservation goals, including: (i) Conserve nature at a landscape-scale by creating three 10,000-acre complexes of diverse natural communities, (ii) Prevent species loss, (iii) Utilize data for better-informed decision making, and (iv) Eradicate buckthorn on District lands. In recent years, the district experienced an increase in expenditures

and a decrease in operating revenue. To ensure sustainability, the district refocused on its core mission—restoring nature—and restructured its staff and budget to match the strategic plan.

The Council discussed the following issues related to effective and efficient use of resources.

Arnold Randall described challenges related to FPCC's pension deficit, the need for additional resources to implement NCCP, the need to rebuild trust in FPCC's ability to govern and use resources wisely, and the need to continue building a broad community of support.

Ty Kovach described efforts to build trust in LCFP and to tell a clear and compelling story about why the work should continue. For LCFP, the answer to this question is, "To ensure no more species are lost." LCFP cut \$24M from its budget—mostly through reduced spending on capital improvements. The district is creating an endowment for each preserve.

Commissioner Robert Steele stated that financial brokers are a large group of potential donors that should be tapped.

Wendy Paulson asked if Lake County has gotten traction with its vision. Ty explained how LCFP is using initiatives, such as eradicating buckthorn, to build wider awareness, but they still have a ways to go. LCFP is also looking at how investments in conservation impact property value and ecological value and how much more people will give if they understand these benefits. LCFP combined its foundation and public affairs functions so there is a clear and consistent message about where LCFP is going and how donors can help get there. The goal is to use the endowment to fund key positions related to restoration management and wildlife biology. These positions will serve not just LCFP sites, but all natural areas throughout Lake County.

Wendy Paulson stated that we must ensure that land which has been restored is maintained, and we may have to ask tough questions. For example, does it make sense to divest in pools?

Arnold Randall replied that we can't take back previous capital investments, but everything is up for discussion going forward.

Michael DeSantiago stated that we must raise private funds. He asked how much private funding LCFP raises per year. Rebekah Snyder replied that LCFP raised \$2M over the past two years and is moving aggressively to build an endowment. Arnold agreed this is important, but cautioned that philanthropy will not raise the level of resources needed to implement NCCP. Arnold stated that, per capita, we do not fund the preserves like we should.

Commissioner Steele suggested establishing a FPCC tourism center in each region where residents can purchase gear, find out what is happening in nearby forest preserves, and have opportunities to comment on plans and proposals.

Cathy Geraghty asked if LCFP has considered a capital campaign, similar to the National Parks *Every Kid in a Park* initiative. Cathy suggested a similar campaign could help align FPCC, its Foundation, the Conservation and Policy Council, and others.

Ty Kovach suggested FPCC start a planned giving program. This is a 20 year strategy and should be started as soon as possible.

Wend Paulson added that there are other important avenues for philanthropic contributions, such as volunteerism. Volunteers give time and expertise and they become important advocates for the forest preserves.

**Adjournment.** Prior to adjourning, Mark Templeton suggested that the Council consider extending meetings to half day sessions or convening a day-long retreat. Falona asked if some meetings should be held downtown to make it easier for people to attend. Laurel Ross made a motion to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Rob Castaneda and the meeting was adjourned at 12:04 pm.

# Attachment 1: Forest Preserves of Cook County Subsidy and Revenue Generating Plan



## Objective:

Implementing the ambitious goals of the Forest Preserves of Cook County's (FPCC), Next Century Conservation Plan requires additional resources. A commitment to increasing non-tax revenues from various sources is one of several strategies that the FPCC is applying to generate additional funds. The FPCC recognizes the need for guidelines to determine how and when to charge for services, programs and projects as a way to generate revenue and cover costs. The FPCC's goal is to determine what services, programs and projects most closely meet our mission and determine potential subsidy levels accordingly.

These subsidy levels assume that the FPCC will subsidize programs and projects with budgeted general operating funds (e.g., program staffing, supplies, maintenance, etc.). It is not the goal of these levels to subsidize a percentage of non-direct costs (e.g., Legal, HR, Utilities, etc.).

## Subsidy Chart:

100 % Subsidy	Over 50% Subsidy	Under 50% Subsidy	0% Subsidy (Break Even)	Revenue Generating
1) Activity, program or project furthers the Forest Preserves of Cook County's mission and is open and free for the general public 2) Activity, program or project is initiated by the FPCC or an FPCC partner 3) Activity, program or project is aligned with FPCC/NCCP goals 4) Would be difficult to capture fees or determine per person costs	1) Activity, program or project furthers FPCC mission 2) Activity, program or project is for limited number of people or for a specific group 3) Possible to charge fees and determine a per person cost 4) Fees would not deter Cook County residents from participating in the activity, program or project 5) Fees could be discounted for underserved communities	1) Activity, program or project mostly furthers FPCC mission 2) Activity, program or project includes instruction and is for a limited number of people or for a specific group 3) If not led by FPCC; led by a partner group that is charging an admission fee or is fundraising for a specific goal 4) Possible to charge fees and determine a per person cost	1) Activity, program or project is connected with the FPCC mission 2) Activity, program or project is for an exclusive group of people and is not open to the public. 3) Activity, program or project is a service that FPCC wants to offer to its patrons but has a significant cost for the FPCC to provide 4) Activity, program or project has a for profit goal 5) County residents would expect to pay a fee for the activity, program or project	1) Activity, program or project has little or no connection to FPCC mission 2) Activity, program or project has a for-profit goal 3) Activity, program or project is not led by FPCC 4) Activity, program or project has implications that may damage FPCC land but permit holder will assume cost of any damages incurred by activity, program or project.

## Subsidy Goals

DRAFT

