

The Forest Preserves of Cook County
Conservation and Policy Council
Minutes for March 8, 2017

69 W. Washington St. ▪ Chicago, IL 60602

Call to Order. Council chair Wendy Paulson called the meeting to order at 2:00 p.m. The following Council members and others attended:

Advisory Council Members

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

Peter Ellis did not attend.

Forest Preserve Staff

Arnold Randall
Eileen Figel
Chief John Roberts
First Deputy Chief Kelvin Pope
Deputy Director Liz Millan
Regional Superintendent AJ Jackson
Regional Superintendent Alma Arias
Regional Superintendent Joe Lafata

Other Presenters

Benjamin Cox, Friends of the Forest Preserves

Representatives of the Chicago Botanic Garden, Chicago Zoological Society, Openlands, Friends of the Forest Preserves, the Forest Preserve Foundation, the Bobolink Foundation, and other County and FPCC staff representatives were also present.

Welcome. Wendy Paulson called the meeting to order at 2 p.m. Wendy reminded Council members to occasionally review the materials in their resource binder, including the article “To Preserve and Protect” written by Stephen Christy. Wendy added that, one hundred years ago, Jens Jensen developed a strategy to build a community of support for the forest preserves by convening regular outings to get people out to visit the natural areas outside the city. This effort lives on today, led by the Prairie Club. Wendy asked Arnold to provide each council member a copy of the Atlas of Biodiversity. Wendy stated that she believes the forest preserves are “Chicago’s best idea,” and wishes that this notion and this phrase would catch on and be embraced broadly.

Public Comments. There were no comments from the public.

Approval of Minutes. Several clarifications and revisions to the minutes were discussed. A motion was made by Linda Mastandrea and seconded by Falona Joy to approve the minutes of the 1.25.17 meeting with these revisions; the revised minutes were approved unanimously.

Overview of FPCC Police Department. Chief John Roberts and First Deputy Chief Kelvin Pope presented an overview of the Police Department. Key points include:

- Police play an important role in advancing NCCP by making all residents feel welcome and safe. Their dual focus on conservation and public safety is significantly different than the role of the Cook County Sheriff or municipal police.
- Police focus on conservation challenges including poaching, illegal dumping, illegal hunting, after-hour incursions, and illegal trail use.
- The Chief has required that officers get out of their cars and walk around, which gives them a better perspective on what is happening in the preserves and gives them the opportunity to interact with visitors and volunteers.
- Training is heavily emphasized, including conservation training. Volunteers are also trained to watch for poachers and other violations.
- As crime in the forest preserves peaked in 1981 with 12,432 arrests, the district transitioned from park rangers to police, resulting in a substantial decrease in crime over the following years. Today the preserves enjoy a very low crime rate. In the past several years, there have been approximately 100 serious crimes per year.

Council members offered the following questions and comments:

- It is great that the police force focuses on protecting nature.
- How do you change culture, especially if you hire officers from other departments? Chief Roberts explained that FPCC recently has tended to hire young men and women, rather than use lateral transfers from other departments.
- How do you interact with local police forces? Chief Roberts explained that FPCC has strong partnerships and mutual aid agreements with local police forces (though local police are often not sure what to do when they reach the woods).
- Who maintains the ATVs, cars, and special equipment? Arnold Randall explained that FPCC has its own fleet maintenance division.
- Is there a police blotter for the forest preserves? Chief Roberts answered that FPCC is transitioning from paper records to electronic records which will allow crime tracking to support a police blotter.
- Commissioner Steele will provide contact info for a tech company that provides the latest technology to support law enforcement.
- As the number of visitors increases, will you need new strategies and/or more officers? Chief Roberts stated that FPCC did a manpower allocation study in 2015 to ensure staff are deployed as effectively as possible, and this is working. But if the district expands to 90,000 acres as the plan calls for, more resources will eventually be needed to cover more sites.
- The tone set for the police force is very encouraging. Stewards and other volunteers are there because they love the preserves. It is great that the police are looking for stronger connections with these groups. It is also great to see Trail Watch expanding.
- Arnold Randall thanked Chief Roberts and First Deputy Pope for professionalizing the police force and reiterated that, prior to 1981, there were a lot of bad things happening that simply weren't being policed and got out of control. Although the crime rate in the preserves is very low today, the perception that the preserves are unsafe persists. The police force understands this and works hard to make people feel safe. Every few years there is a proposal to eliminate the police force and let the Sheriffs police the forest preserves. But FPCC police do things that the Sheriffs are not trained to do and would not do. FPCC police work very closely with volunteers to make the preserves feel safe. Everything else the district is trying to accomplish will be undermined if people don't feel safe. This is essential, and FPCC has worked hard to establish a professional police force that makes people feel safe.

- Is there a mobile app for Trail Watch to use to report problems and crimes? Chief Roberts answered that we do not have an app, but the volunteers send texts and emails to FPCC and police officers follow up.
- Benjamin Cox asked about the number of tickets given for specific infractions. Chief Roberts will provide recent data. The Chief indicated that most of the serious crimes are related to non-violent property damage or theft.
- When Chicago Park District did away with the park district police, parks became a very low priority and were not well policed.
- Wendy thanked the police and reiterated the important role they are playing.

Overview of FPCC Landscape Maintenance Department. Laurel introduced the Landscape Maintenance department and thanked the team for the important role they play in making the preserves welcoming. Deputy Director Liz Millan presented an overview of the department, including the following key points:

- Staff feel that they are not just employees; they are stewards of the preserves. They provide the front line service when people come to picnics or use a comfort station. All 145 staff participated in developing a mission statement which explains the role of Landscape Maintenance in supporting the district's mission and advancing the NCCP.
- Staff provide a wide range of services. In addition to mowing, garbage removal, snow plowing and cleaning comfort stations, the team also removes fly dumping, maintains roadsides, repairs tables, removes graffiti, sets up for special events, etc. They hand out materials to visitors to give them information about the preserves.
- The department has implemented various initiatives to reduce costs including a reduced mowing pilot program, providing moving services for various departments relocating to new facilities, and performing roadside maintenance formerly done by the Sheriff's SWAP program at a far lower cost per acre. They have recently taken on patching potholes in FPCC parking lots to further reduce costs.
- Staff receive a wide range of training, including training related to native plants and invasive species.
- During summer hours, shifts start at 5 am to make sure 238 picnic groves are clean and ready for visitors.
- During snow storms, shifts begin as early as 4 am to make sure snow is cleared and sites are accessible.

Council members offered the following questions and comments:

- Is FPCC using green equipment? Arnold Randall answered that FPCC is using propane-powered mowers and vehicles. In addition, Landscape Maintenance participates on the FPCC Green Committee.
- The Council has been meeting all over the preserves and the facilities always look great.
- Why are there different staffing levels in the south district? Liz explained that additional staff are directed to venues which have high demand, such as Dan Ryan Woods and Swallow Cliff. The team regularly reviews permits for upcoming events to identify where demand will be high. In addition, staff are redeployed for special needs, such as a heavy snowstorm which hits one area of the county particularly hard.
- In many ways, Landscape Maintenance staff are the front line workers. Are you getting feedback directly from the public? Liz explained that many picnickers do not realize how many other amenities exist throughout the preserves and that the staff use info cards to encourage visitors to try new activities.
- What other resources are needed? Liz explained there is a need for continual training and her department has a strong partnership with the Resource Management team who is helping to train Landscape Maintenance staff.
- Commissioner Steele stated that many Chicago aldermen have no idea what is available in the preserves and he has been educating them and promoting the preserves.

- Do you have a strategy for maintaining trees? Liz answered that Landscape Maintenance staff do receive arborist training, but the trees are primarily managed by the Resource Management team and stewards.
- Can FPCC remove snow from the trails? Liz explained that the snow removal equipment would cause damage to the trails.
- Arnold reiterated how integral Landscape Maintenance is to all aspects of the preserves; they are doing so many things you don't see and they serve as the glue to the entire organization. Lee, Liz and the regional managers have really made an effort to get staff to take pride in their work. They are working hard now and all the departments depend on them; they are our jack-of-all trades. If the preserves don't look like they are well maintained, if they are not clean, people will not come back. Our bathrooms and public spaces are as well maintained as any and may be the best.
- Are there ways volunteers can be integrated into Landscape Maintenance activities? For example, can scouts help with litter clean-up? Kathy Wurster explained that FPCC has two programs that address this—litter obliterations and the adopt-a-site program.
- Commissioner Steele invited the entire council to join Landscape Maintenance's annual barbeque in August to thank the staff and their families.

Due Diligence for Initiatives to Raise Revenues or Reduce Costs. Eileen Figel reminded members of the Council that the Civic Consulting Alliance had done an initial assessment of more than forty initiatives to raise revenues or cut costs. Additional due diligence is needed and is now proceeding. The NCCP Steering Committee is assisting with the effort, and several partner organizations are leading due diligence for specific initiatives. At each meeting, updates will be presented to the Council. Five updates are provided in today's packet—one will be presented by Benjamin Cox, President of Friends of the Forest Preserves (FoFP). Eileen explained that the assigned leads may modify assumptions, update estimates, and/or suggest alternatives. If there is a compelling reason, they may also suggest that an initiative be dropped. Laurel Ross asked what process will be used to confirm whether or not an initiative should be dropped. Eileen explained that the process would be similar to the process used at the previous workshop: Staff will make a recommendation to the Council; the Council will then advise whether the initiative should or should not be dropped.

Benjamin Cox presented an update on the initiative to increase (non-Forest Preserve Foundation) philanthropic support. Key points include:

- 2015 was a record setting year for philanthropy in the US. More than \$373 billion was given; 71% came from individuals. Of this, only 3% is given to causes related to animals and environment; less than 1% is given for conservation.
- There are opportunities to increase philanthropy in Cook County. Chicago Wilderness set the stage to work together, not in competition. Friends of the Forest Preserves grew by working with others to get more funding.
- To grow philanthropy in Cook County, the first step is to celebrate the fact that we have a plan and we are working on it together. We have a strong Council and strong committees. We need to become proactive. We have been responding to opportunities, now we need to be proactive.
- For example, FoFP gets 53% of its funding for Conservation Corps from FPCC and the other half from a mix of foundation and other grants. FoFP is now seeking workforce development funds and will convene a group of partners to explore how they can work together on this.

Council members offered the following questions and comments:

- Resources brought by partners for projects and initiatives which advance NCCP goals do count towards the total resources needed—even if the money does not go to FPCC. Do County Board commissioners understand this? Arnold stated that he thinks most commissioners and staff do understand this. Eileen added that it has been difficult to capture and report total resources being leveraged by partners.

- Is there an opportunity to pool initiatives to make them more attractive to potential funders? Eileen explained that this idea was also raised at the recent Steering Committee meeting and that Justin Pepper and others will be exploring it further.
- Is there an overall strategy to grow philanthropy? For example, how much can be raised from individuals versus foundations? Are we considering a broader campaign? Is the next step a feasibility study? Benjamin Cox explained that we need to explore this further, but it shouldn't make the task bigger than it needs to be. He suggests we begin by looking at what we have available each year.
- Falona Joy suggested looking at a way to package programs that have philanthropic appeal and that are above and beyond what government should do (for example gateways, mobile technology, etc.). Be very clear about specific projects that advance NCCP, then test the appeal of these projects with specific funders (such as Robert Wood Johnson around public health). Could we package something that is meaningful and generates \$10M as a one-time special initiative? Can we develop these packages and put price tags on them? Dr. Jenkins added that Moraine Valley College uses this model to take specific projects out to donors (such as expanding the nursing program). You must talk about the outcome for the purpose of giving.
- Mike DeSantiago expressed concern that people see the County as a government agency and that they feel they are already being taxed. Benjamin responded that this is why FoFP, Audubon, and other partners need to make the ask.

Council members offered the following questions and comments for the remaining initiatives:

- Changes from CCA assumptions and estimates should be tracked.
- It will not be possible for the Council to review over forty initiatives at meetings. Presentations to the Council should focus on the initiatives with the highest potential impact and should include a staff recommendation.
- Updates should include the one page template, but also some additional details.
- Eileen will offer briefing calls in advance of future meetings for Council members who would like a more in-depth discussion of the due diligence updates.
- Do FPCC staff understand the value of public/private partnering and the resources it leverages? Arnold responded that the senior staff do understand this and FPCC grants manager Michelle Uting works closely with partners and staff to support efforts to leverage additional resources.

Update on Trust for Public Land (TPL) study. Eileen Figel reminded Council members that TPL received funding from the Donnelley Foundation to assess the feasibility of a Cook County referendum to provide increased funding for conservation. The initial feasibility study had several positive findings, including:

In the November 2016, there were 87 conservation measures in 21 states and the vast majority (80%) passed.

All the collar counties passed referenda in past 10 years; no measure was defeated since 1992.

TPL estimated the amount of revenue which would be generated under different scenarios and the impact to a typical homeowner in Cook County. They found that an increase of about \$30 per typical homeowner would generate adequate funding to implement most of the goals of the NCCP.

TPL is now conducting the next phase of their study which includes polling to test the potential support for various scenarios in Cook County. They will present their findings to the Council at the May 2 meeting.

- Mark Templeton stated that, if this is going to succeed, we all have to be in. He asked Council members to think about what they can do to help.
- Wendy stated that Laurel Ross recently wrote an article for the Chicago Audubon Compass newsletter. Wendy also suggested that Council members may need to talk to local elected officials and ask them to help get out the word.

- Terry Guen suggested it would be helpful to have a list of tasks and deadlines, and she asked Council members to think about and share what each person can do.

Announcements & Upcoming Meetings. Wendy Paulson explained that the May meeting will return to a 2 hour format with a pre-meeting site visit and will include a presentation by TPL and discussion of the historical partnerships with the Zoo and Garden. The July meeting will then focus on part 2 of the workshop, options for Scenario B. Wendy asked Eileen to send a reminder about the June fieldtrip. Greg Mueller offered to host the meeting at the Chicago Botanic Garden. The following announcements were made:

- Cynthia Moreno announced that three FPCC nature centers made the top ten list for Best Things Illinois: <http://bestthingsil.com/nature-centers/>
- Wendy announced that local birder, Judy Pollock, received a national award from the American Birding Association recognizing her work to bring local residents to the forest preserves through Bird the Preserves and other programs.

Adjourn. A motion to adjourn was made by Mark Templeton and seconded by Linda Mastandrea. The motion passed unanimously and the meeting adjourned at 4:55 p.m.