

**Forest Preserves of Cook County
Conservation & Policy Council
Meeting Minutes
April 5, 2018**

Call to Order. Council chair Wendy Paulson called the meeting to order at 9:30 am. The following Council members and others were in attendance.

Advisory Council Members

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

Not in Attendance

Peter Ellis
Falona Joy (Sabbatical)

Forest Preserve Staff

Eileen Figel
Cathy Geraghty

Presenters

Benjamin Cox
Bob Megquier
Delio Calzolari
Karen Vaughan
Cynthia Moreno
Chris Adas
Richard Singer (by phone)

Welcome. Council Chair Wendy Paulson, called the meeting to order at 9:30 am.

Public Comment. Bill Murray and Pete Saunders from the Mayor's Office of Calumet City asked to be included in future discussions regarding Forest Preserve assets serving Calumet City.

Mark Templeton updated the council on the lawsuit against U.S. Steel related to the company's dumping of chromium in Lake Michigan. Mark reported that his team is reviewing a proposed settlement which would require US Steel to pay several hundreds of thousands of dollars for remediation.

Terry Guen stated that NIU recently completed a study on restoration which was the subject of an article in the Chicago Tribune.

Approval of minutes. A motion was made by Wendy Paulson and seconded by Michael DeSantiago, to approve minutes from the January 8 meeting. The minutes will be corrected to reflect that the appointment of Emily Harris to the Council was officially approved by the board on January 9, 2018.

Building a Community of Support. Benjamin Cox and Bob Megquier reviewed progress on seven operational priorities outlined in the 5-year strategic plan. They noted that two priorities—raising new resources and ensuring continuity—were rated as “needs improvement”. Bob suggested these two priorities should be the focus of the Council's efforts going forward. Benjamin suggested that the best method to raise new resources is to break down goals into

achievable mileposts and focus separately on land acquisition which is the major cost driver of the Next Century Conservation Plan. Bob invited members of the Council to provide updates on their outreach efforts.

Reports from Council Members

Wendy Paulson suggested that Council members can be helpful by reaching out to their own community leaders to get to know what their interests are and how they feel about the forest preserves. Building these relationships is key.

Michael DeSantiago suggested that new members of the board should be introduced to the plan and the work of the Council. Commissioner Moore explained that all commissioners want to see the Forest Preserves flourish, but there are significant financial challenges at this time.

Dr. Sylvia Jenkins stated that Moraine Valley Community College (MVCC) is hosting a summit for the seven community colleges in Cook County to share the work MVCC does with the Forest Preserves and to encourage other colleges to replicate this work. One example they will share is the MVCC community learning day during which faculty and students participate in a restoration work day at the Forest Preserves. This summit will take place in this summer.

Mike DeSantiago suggested working with Boys and Girls Clubs to encourage more visits to the Forest Preserves.

Eileen Figel indicated that FPCC has documentation regarding the number of residents from each district utilizing the preserves for picnics, etc. Stuart Strahl added that it is also important to note the combined economic impact—including number of jobs created—by the Forest Preserves, the Zoo and the Garden.

Reports from NCCP Committee Chairs

Rich Gamble reported that the Economics Committee has:

- Worked with FPCC to create a message house and tagline now being promoted on bill boards and radio programs throughout Cook County.
- Helped prepare a PowerPoint presentation to be used at community meetings.
- Helped develop responses to “tough questions” which may be asked of partners and staff.

John McCabe reported that the Nature Committee is challenging each member to do a community presentation. John also reported that:

- FPCC’s Wildlife Management team is delivering two presentations per month, and
- FPCC’s Fishery team is also delivering presentations.

Cynthia Moreno reported that the People Committee has been conducting small meetings with community based organizations and is developing a broad range of new partnerships. In addition:

- Three groups will give presentations at Brookfield Zoo and the Field Museum.
- The mayor of Elgin will participate in a walking event at Rolling Knolls.
- More than 4,000 people attended a recent event in Edgars Grove, and more than 5,000 people attended the annual Maple Syrup event at River Trail Nature Center.

Tim Hicks reported that the Leadership Committee is monitoring all the outreach events to leverage efforts to build a community of support.

Wendy Paulson suggested that volunteer outreach is also an important contribution and it is important to focus on various measures of value, not just economic impact. For example, we want children to have access to a healthy environment.

Golf Master Plan. Terry Guen, Karen Vaughan, and Richard Singer preliminary analysis for the Golf Master Plan.

Terry Guen explained that the Forest Preserves is not presenting final recommendations related to the golf courses, but rather is continuing with its due diligence to explore options to increase revenues or decrease costs. Terry then provided an overview of cost recovery goals based upon (a) alignment with FPCC's mission, and (b) how broadly the benefit is shared by the public. Guidelines include:

- Admittance to all FPCC nature centers is free; these are fully subsidized.
- Paddling, archery, and outdoor recreation programs may be subsidized over 50%.
- Nature center camps, night programs at nature centers, and picnics should be subsidized less than 50%.
- Live animal programs, off dog areas, and golf should break even.
- Commercial filming in the Forest Preserves should generate revenue to support other FPCC programs and services.

The golf course analysis addresses three options:

1. Keep the status quo
2. Reinvest and reinvent
3. Closures

Karen Vaughan stated that all 11 golf facilities owned by the Forest Preserves are older than 35 years, and several are older than 80 years. The average number of rounds per year is 32,000.

Prior to 2002, the Forest Preserves managed the Golf Courses, after which an agreement was established with Billy Casper Golf. Their contract was extended from 2007 to 2021. Billy Casper pays a based fee of \$450,000, provides a 10-50% revenue share, and provides 20% gross on alcohol sales.

Golf course operations, overall, are generating revenue for the Forest Preserves. However, this does not account for capital needs. Deferred maintenance is a problem across all golf courses. Preliminary recommendations include:

- Reimagine south side Golf Courses
 - Invest heavily in Joe Louis
 - Repurpose Burnham Woods
 - Convert River Oaks into a Training Center
- Upgrade Chick Evans
- Explore a Banquet facility at George Dunne

Terry Guen stated that the contract with Billy Casper is solid, but the golf courses are old and updates are needed.

Laurel Ross asked if FPCC is considering ecological improvements to the golf courses. Richard Singer explained that ecological golf courses have the most impact in the west coast region where the cost of water is high. Ecological changes will not generate substantial savings in Cook County.

Emily Harris asked to incorporate investments needed to make the Golf courses accessible for people with disabilities.

Robert Castaneda urged FPCC to carefully consider social equity concerns and to balance investments and impacts fairly across the County.

Commissioner Moore added that the southside golf courses have historically received less investment which resulted in fewer visitors. Commissioner Moore agreed with Rob that any recommendations must carefully address historical and future issues related to social equity.

Analysis of Aquatic Centers. Rob Castaneda provided an overview of the aquatic centers, including the following:

- Prior to 2016, the Forest Preserves staffed and managed all three aquatic centers. In 2016, Swim Chicago Southland was retained to manage these centers.
- Swim Chicago has added programs and services, including new cabanas, birthday parties, and swimming lessons.

Cynthia Moreno described four options included in the current analysis:

1. Keep the status quo
2. Change the fee and management structure
3. Consider the long-term lease of one or more aquatic centers
4. Close one or more aquatic centers.

Currently, the goal is to pursue option 2 with the hopes that operations of the aquatic centers will break even.

Analysis of Legislative/Referendum Options. Laurel Ross and Delio Calzolari presented an overview of options for obtaining new resources. FPCC's current tax levy is \$92 million. Budget challenges include the pension deficit, deferred maintenance, and the need to scale up to meet NCCP goals. There are two ways to acquire new public revenue: via referenda or via legislation. Specific options include:

- *Binding Referendum.* Options include an increase to the tax levy, a new special purpose levy, and a capital bond which could be used for deferred maintenance and land acquisition, but could not be used for restoration or demolition.
- *Advisory Referendum.* This option allows citizens to vote on a non-binding question of public policy. The outcome of the ballot question does not result in a new, changed, or rejected law, but it can assess public opinion and raise awareness.
- *Legislative Options.* Legislative action could address the pension deficit and/or other funding needs. Both the County and the Pension Board are currently exploring legislation to address the pension deficit.

Delio Calzolari explained that, in order to place an advisory referendum on the November 2018 ballot, a decision must be made by the board by May 21.

Commissioner Moore explained that a commissioner or the president would need to sponsor the advisory referendum, then the entire board would vote on whether or not to place the advisory referendum on the ballot.

Council members expressed concern about the need to make a decision quickly and indicated more information is needed before they can support an advisory referendum.

The Council directed Eileen Figel to convene the officers to meet with the referendum/legislation working group to further explore this option. If the officers decide not to proceed, no further action is needed. If the officers want to proceed with this option, a special meeting of the full Council will be convened so everyone can weigh in.

Mark Templeton submitted a motion to allow the officers to further explore this option with staff and the working group. Laurel Ross seconded the motion. Emily Harris stated that the advisory referendum is premature. Rob Castaneda clarified that the decision would be returned to the full Council if the officers wish to proceed. The motion passed with Emily Harris voting no and all others voting yes.

Next Meeting. The next meeting will be an outing and retreat at Camp Reinberg on July 17th and 18th. Families are invited.

Adjournment. The meeting was adjourned at 12:15 pm.