

Forest Preserves of Cook County Conservation & Policy Council

Meeting Minutes for June 10, 2020

Note: Due to the coronavirus pandemic, the meeting was held via video conference.

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

Advisory Council Members

Wendy Paulson, Chairperson
Mark Templeton, Vice-chairperson
Michael DeSantiago, Secretary
Alan Bell
Commissioner Stanley Moore
Emily Harris
Laurel Ross
Maria Pesqueira
Shelley Spencer
Sylvia Jenkins
Terry Guen

Forest Preserve Staff

Arnold Randall
Cathy Geraghty
Delio Calzolari
Eileen Figel
Steve Hughes

Presenters

Benjamin Cox, Friends of the Forest Preserves

Representatives from Commissioners' offices included Jourdan Sorrell (for Commissioner Moore), Michelle Jordan (for Commissioner Suffredin), Anthony Scalise (for Commissioner Daley), Tara Meyer (for Commissioner Degnen), Yesenia Lopez (for Commissioner Anaya), and Marybeth Hoerner (for Commissioner Silvestri). Representatives from the Chicago Zoological Society, Chicago Botanic Garden, Friends of the Forest Preserves, Openlands, and the Field Museum were also in attendance.

Wendy Paulson acknowledged the efforts of President Preckwinkle, Arnold Randall, Eileen Figel and the Forest Preserves staff to keep the preserves open during the pandemic. Wendy also acknowledged the hard work put in by Council members to develop the position papers. Wendy noted that the papers required a lot of time and evinced a lot of good thought. She asked the Council to take a clear-eyed look at how the papers will be used in the face of the changing situation related to the pandemic and civil unrest.

Wendy stated that the Next Century Conservation Plan is an excellent foundational document. She pointed out that the events of the past couple months have people realize how valuable nature is, and she shared the following excerpt from the Next Century Conservation Plan:

It's time for a renewed vision. In the 20th century, we preserved the land. In the 21st, we must help it thrive and make it welcoming. The ambitious goals and recommendations in this Next Century Conservation Plan may take decades to achieve. We need to commit fully to a program of renewal, restoration and engagement because nature's health is our health. The goals of this plan, fully realized, are essential to our future. Nature in Cook County depends on it, and so do we.

She added that people depend on healthy nature and they are flocking to forest preserves in record numbers.

Approval of Minutes. A motion was made by Laurel Ross and seconded by Mark Templeton to approve the minutes from the meeting of February 5, 2020. The results of the roll call vote are as follows:

Name	Vote
Wendy Paulson	Aye
Mark Templeton	Aye
Michael DeSantiago	Aye
Alan Bell	Aye
Emily Harris	Aye
Laurel Ross	Aye
Maria Pesqueira	Aye
Shelley Spencer	Aye
Sylvia Jenkins	NA
Terry Guen	Aye
Commissioner Stanley Moore	Aye

The minutes were approved.

Public Comments. Public comments were required to be submitted in writing prior to 5 pm on June 5. No comments were received by this deadline and no comments were offered at the meeting.

Discussion with Superintendent Arnold Randall. Arnold provided an update on operational changes at the FPCC to respond to the pandemic and, more recently, the protests. He reported that the FPCC posted a statement to its website last week recommitting to racial equity, justice and systemic change, and explained that the FPCC has been and will continue to work hard to make the necessary changes.

Arnold explained that, beginning in Mid-March, the FPCC shut down all buildings but kept its trails open. Arnold also reported that camps recently re-opened, small group stewardship days have restarted, and other changes have been made as the FPCC transitioned to phase3 during the past week.

The following issue was discussed:

- Can small groups host a native sunrise ceremony at Bullfrog Lake? Arnold explained that only campers with reservations can drive into the camp currently. He added that FPCC staff can work with the group to figure out a way to accommodate the ceremony.

Budget Update. Steve Hughes explained that the FPCC expects to see 2020 revenues decline by \$3 million to \$8 million due to an anticipated drop in property tax collections, the personal property replacement tax (PPRT), and non-tax revenue from permits, events and concessions. FPCC plans to close the projected budget gap by imposing a hiring and a 13% budget cut (on average) for each FPCC

department. In addition, the FPCC will put a temporary freeze on \$2.7M in funding for construction and development.

Legislative Update. Delio Calzolari stated that Frank Aguilar, a former state representative, has been appointed to the Cook County and FPCC boards. Delio also reported that a new pension committee has been created by the FPCC board; Commissioner Gainer will be the committee chair and Commissioner Anaya will be the vice chair. Delio provided an update regarding new state funding for the FPCC and the Zoo. Delio explained the funding will be bonded out based on state revenues from gambling and marijuana.

The following issues related to the budget and legislative updates were discussed:

- Wendy asked who decided the priorities for the new funding from the state. Delio explained that the FPCC submitted a list of priority capital needs, but the elected officials chose which projects would receive state aid.
- Wendy noted that it is important that the state funding dovetail with recommendations in the position papers. For example, can the \$10M for Palos trails be used to fund conservation corps trail work? Delio and Arnold explained that the FPCC is developing a proposal for how the funding can be used. Wendy expressed concern related to any reductions in funding for restoration and conservation corps since these are essential services. She noted that healthy nature will take a huge step backward if we don't keep this work going. Arnold explained that the Resource Management department has one of the larger budgets at FPCC, and the team had to look at the whole organization and decide what could and could not happen as the district faces significant operating deficits. After reviewing all needs, the FPCC decided to fund the conservation corps using money the FPCC will receive from NICOR.
- Wendy noted that the current situation provides an opportunity to decide what is the core business of the forest preserves. It shows that the forest preserves are so essential to the county and it is important to provide not just open space, but also healthy nature.
- Mark Templeton asked how much the hiring freeze will save. Steve estimates the hiring freeze will save \$2 million and the reduction in contractual services will save \$2.1 million.
- Mark indicated that Table 2 shows a reduction of \$2.7M and asked if the funding from NICOR can cover the entire proposed reduction in the RM budget. Steve explained that the NICOR funding is \$2.6M which will allow RM to continue as planned. He added that the hold on the \$2.7 million in C&D funds can be released if the revenue shortfall is less than anticipated, but if at the end of the year there is a shortfall, FPCC may tap reserves. Arnold added that he anticipates the next year to be tough as well and the FPCC is developing a strategy to tap some reserve funds over the next 3 years.
- Terry Guen indicated that the programming and outreach being conducted by the CEP team is important and she was hoping there would be no cut to the CEP budget. Terry explained that, because there are few forest preserves in some of the more urban areas of the county, CEP has been going into these communities to provide nature programming. Terry explained that this is a critical window where we start to engage people who are not so aware of nature.
- Alan Bell stated that it will be important to monitor the timing on state bond deals.

- Delio was asked if there is any federal relief that could help the FPCC. He explained that the last bill that addressed aid to local government did not include special districts like the FPCC. The County and FPCC legislative teams have raised this concern.

REDI position paper. Wendy stated that an incredible amount of thought went into the position papers, and she is thinking differently about the intended audience and how the papers can best be used. She asked whether it is important to have the Board formally approve the papers, or whether the papers are better used to guide the Council's work. Eileen Figel indicated that the Council should only approve the papers if they are comfortable with them. Eileen also noted that there is currently a window of opportunity for these papers—especially the REDI paper—to drive needed change.

The following issues were discussed:

- Laurel Ross asked if the REDI paper recommendations would change due to recent world events.
- Terry suggested a broader vetting of the papers; Wendy cautioned that continual vetting could delay the papers indefinitely.
- Shelley Spencer explained, "The world in which we created this paper is the world that led to a lot of the events that are happening now. We are still standing on the same foundation that led to this. Our paper says we have got to do better and we are going to incorporate the racial equity lens in everything we do." She explained that future work is needed to determine how the recommendations are implemented and how it is paid for, but the FPCC is far ahead of many corporations and organizations which are scrambling to figure out how to respond to the current situation. She added, "So long ago the Forest Preserves said we are going to look at racial equity; we are going to figure out what we can do for our staff and guests and move in that direction. This paper lays out where we need to begin. There may be new opportunities to work with corporate sponsors who might want to help support this kind of thing, but we have said we are going to attack system and institutionalized racism and that is what we will do."
- Emily Harris concurred with Shelley and explained that their committee focused on process rather than final solutions. Emily suggested that there are probably nuances that could be added to a cover letter that goes to the board. For example, the Council might want to amplify the whole question of police in the preserves, but Emily is not sure the Council can get at it in any more substantive way other than saying this is something that must be discussed and the paper already alludes to that. Emily concluded that she is comfortable proceeding.
- Wendy noted that the paper is solid, though she'd like to further discuss some of the details in the background. She asked what is the best way to get the paper in front of commissioners to show that the FPCC has taken this on and has put a lot of horsepower into applying a racial equity lens to everything the FPCC does.
- Mike DeSantiago noted that the pandemic may not be an issue in a year, but the racial equity issue is long-term challenge.

A motion was made by Laurel and seconded by Mike to adopt the REDI paper. The motion was amended as proposed by Alan Bell to adopt the REDI position paper recognizing an implementation plan will be developed to make the principles actionable.

The results of the roll call vote are as follows:

Name	Vote
Wendy Paulson	Aye
Mark Templeton	Aye
Michael DeSantiago	Aye
Alan Bell	Aye
Emily Harris	Aye
Laurel Ross	Aye
Maria Pesqueira	Aye
Shelley Spencer	Aye
Sylvia Jenkins	Aye
Terry Guen	Aye
Commissioner Stanley Moore	NA

The motion passed.

Emily recognized the committee members and thanked them for their partnership and help. Emily also thanked Arnold and Eileen for recognizing the importance of addressing racial equity at the Forest Preserves.

Compatible Recreation Position Paper. Mike DeSantiago explained that the paper addresses the process of changes and offers a new methodology to evaluate existing and proposed programs and facilities. The Council agreed that they would like another discussion to fully understand all the information contained in the paper and the appendices. A follow-up meeting will be scheduled.

Land Acquisition and Scaling Up Volunteers Position Papers. The Council agreed to schedule a special meeting to discuss each of these papers.

Recommendations from NCCP Co-Chairs. Benjamin presented the recommendations presented in Attachments 9 and 10. The Council agreed that it is important to meet with all the commissioners in small group conversations so they clearly understand the papers and are able to discuss any concerns they may have. Briefings with small groups of Commissioners will be scheduled. Eileen added that the May 8 draft memo to the board regarding the FPCC emergency stabilization request needs to be updated to reflect the current situation.

A motion was made by Maria and seconded by Terry to approve the memo subject to a minor update which Eileen will circulate via email.

The results of the roll call vote are as follows:

Name	Vote
Wendy Paulson	Aye
Mark Templeton	Aye
Michael DeSantiago	Aye
Alan Bell	Aye
Emily Harris	Aye
Laurel Ross	Aye
Maria Pesqueira	Aye
Shelley Spencer	Aye
Sylvia Jenkins	Aye
Terry Guen	Aye
Commissioner Stanley Moore	NA

The motion passed.

Adjournment. Wendy informed the Council that the recent op ed submitted to the Tribune and the Sun Times was not published and there is a need to develop stronger relationships with these papers. Mike added that the FPCC police are, by definition, community-related police and the current situation may provide an opportunity to have another conversation with Representative Crespo and others. Shelley noted that, as a record number of people are visiting the preserves and participating in virtual programs, it is important to capture emails so we can remind them to come back out at a future date.

A motion to adjourn was made by Laurel and seconded by Mark.

The results of the roll call vote are as follows:

Name	Vote
Wendy Paulson	Aye
Mark Templeton	Aye
Michael DeSantiago	Aye
Alan Bell	Aye
Emily Harris	Aye
Laurel Ross	Aye
Maria Pesqueira	Aye
Shelley Spencer	Aye

Name	Vote
Sylvia Jenkins	Aye
Terry Guen	Aye
Commissioner Stanley Moore	NA

The motion passed and the meeting was adjourned at 10:33 a.m.