

Forest Preserves of Cook County Conservation & Policy Council
SPECIAL MEETING TO REVIEW COMPATIBLE RECREATION POSITION PAPER

June 22, 2020 ▪ 11 a.m. to 12:15 pm

Minutes

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

Welcome and Call to Order. Committee chairperson Terry Guen called the meeting to order at 11 a.m. The following Council members and others attended:

Advisory Council Members

Wendy Paulson, Chairperson
Mark Templeton, Vice-chairperson
Michael DeSantiago, Secretary
Alan Bell
Emily Harris
Laurel Ross
Shelley Spencer
Terry Guen

Forest Preserve Staff

Arnold Randall
Carl Vogel
Cathy Geraghty
Delio Calzolari
Eileen Figel

Compatible Recreation Committee Members

Benjamin Cox, Friends of the Forest Preserves
Jacqui Ulrich, FPCC
Kristin Pink, FPCC
Karen Vaughan, FPCC

Maria Pesqueira, Sylvia Jenkins and Commissioner Stanley Moore were not able to join.

Other meeting participants include Jenn Baader from the Chicago Zoological Society, key steward Jane Balaban, and Michelle Uting, Lydia Uhlir and Sharon Williams from the FPCC.

Approval of Minutes. A motion was made by Laurel to defer review and approval of the minutes to the next regular Council meeting scheduled for September 10. The motion was seconded by Mark Templeton. 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
Shelley Spencer	Aye
Terry Guen	Aye

The motion was approved.

Public Comments. There were no public comments.

Review of draft Compatible Recreation Position Paper. Terry explained that the committee was initially asked to assess golf courses and swimming pools, but decided a broader review of recreation in the preserves was needed. Benjamin Cox added that picnic groves and trails are fairly evenly distributed throughout the preserves, but also noted that the preserves themselves are not evenly distributed, though most people are within 15 minutes of a forest preserve. Terry explained that the committee used the Next Century Conservation Plan (NCCP) to define “compatible recreation”. This is a paradigm shift; it is not the forest preserves of 1959; we are looking to align with the NCCP for the next 50 years. Mike DeSantiago led the team through the paper, beginning with the definition of compatible recreation. Mike also suggested the Council should decide how they wish to state the mission in the paper. Wendy agreed the committee did an excellent job framing the issue.

The following issues were discussed:

- When the preserves were developed, there were no park district pools and not many other options for outdoor recreation. Because this active recreation is now provided by towns, does it make sense to focus on passive recreation in the definition of compatible recreation? Benjamin Cox explained that this is something the committee struggled with. Benjamin suggests hiking and birding are very clearly aligned with the Forest Preserves’ mission. He suggests the focus should not be on whether an activity is passive versus active, the focus should be about how and if a visitor is interacting with nature. (See page 1 of revised draft.)
- Is “recreation” to be defined as “active play”? Does it include “passive recreation” (hiking, botanizing, photography, birding, astronomy, etc)? Would those activities be considered “nature-compatible recreation”, a term used in the paper? The emphasis in the paper is on active rather than passive recreation, though both should be considered forms of recreation. It seems that examples of the latter might at least be mentioned rather than left to interpretation. (See page 1 of revised draft.)
- The paper addresses racial inequity, but other equity issues and marginalized communities will be addressed in future position papers and all the papers should reference this broader approach to equity. Eileen Figel and Carl Vogel will review the draft paper and incorporate this longer-term view. (See pages 1,4,6 and 3-3 of revised draft.)
- Consider removing the second sentence in Recommendation 3.2 which reads, “For example, paved runways for model airplanes may be patched or repaired, but should not be expanded or rebuilt.” While it’s important to build good relationships and establish good communication with various user groups, this example is problematic and the committee has established a good guideline in the first sentence. The principle is well defined and we don’t need to get into specific implementation steps in the paper; this is addressed in the appendix. Raquel Garcia Alvarez explained that the evaluation tool includes criteria to consider if an asset is highly valued by the community. She also noted that it is important to ensure engagement extends beyond current users, and the final decision should not be driven by the loudest voice in the room. The Council agreed to change “users” in first sentence to “stakeholders” to indicate that broad engagement is needed. Benjamin added that transitioning existing non-compatible uses should not be framed as “FPCC recommitting to its mission” versus “FPCC taking something away”. The committee believes it is important to affirm that there should not be divestment in a community. If FPCC is going to close a golf course, for example, the district will invest in the site to transition it to a new use. (See page 5 of revised draft.)
- A lot of participants in the stakeholders’ roundtable felt surveilled. Recommendation 1.2 should state that there will be multiple approaches to make sure people feel safe in the preserves (such as signs, etc.) In light of recent national events, should there be more emphasis on Trail Watch? Arnold explained that Trail Watch

helps FPCC monitor more sites and is very helpful to the police. He added that Trail Watch volunteers are ambassadors, but they can't replace law enforcement functions. The Council asks that the paper refer to the process of change underway and explore creative ways to implement public safety. (See page 4 of revised draft.)

- Recommendation 3.3 (Continue to develop strategies to shrink and maintain parking lots and service roads) is well stated. Should mowed areas also be addressed here? Does the COVID experience offers a special opportunity to shrink too-large parking lots? (See page 6 of revised draft.)
- What's the difference between "pavilion" and "picnic grove"? Is the structure at Poplar Creek a pavilion or a picnic grove? Arnold explained that pavilions refer to indoor facilities which can be rented for events. Pavilions are located at Dan Ryan, Swallow Cliff, Rolling Knolls and Thatcher.
- The "Programs and Community Outreach" map seems incomplete. There are several outreach programs led by partners which are not reflected on the map. Should there be a reassessment of existing programs, ones begun and operated by partners, to supplement programs run by the FPCC? We are not properly accounting for the many programs conducted by partners and we need more emphasis on those in the appendices. Eileen Figel explained that the FPCC does not have a good way to identify and document many of the partner-led programs. Eileen suggests adding a text box to acknowledge partners' efforts to engage people. (See page 1-7 of revised draft.)
- The paper should include definitions for sustainable and exclusive use. (See page 2 of revised draft.)
- The Council agreed to change "Compatible Recreation" to "Nature Compatible Recreation" to send a strong message to the Board that nature is what the Forest Preserves are about.
- Wendy was glad to see the inclusion of the South Holland Nature Campus as a case study. She was surprised during the Council retreat at Camp Sullivan last year that there was no visible trail system and little signage. It seems that the whole trail/signage issue is low-hanging fruit – and fits it with the paper's emphasis on extending a welcome to all.
- In appendix item 3.6, "new signage" might be better identified as "clear signage" or perhaps both should be used. In so many preserves there is no signage or the little signage that does exist is not clear. (See page 3-2 of revised draft.)

The Council asked Eileen and Carl to incorporate the changes suggested using track changes and to circulate an updated paper for approval at the July meeting.

Recommendations from NCCP co-chairs. The Council agreed to schedule a future conversation to discuss the co-chairs' recommendations and other governance issues. Benjamin asked to participate in this conversation. Eileen will distribute the Council's current guidelines and ordinance with specific changes recommended.

Adjournment. A motion to adjourn was made by Terry and seconded by Wendy. The results of the roll call vote are as follows:

Name	Vote
Wendy Paulson	Aye
Mark Templeton	Aye
Michael DeSantiago	Aye

Name	Vote
Alan Bell	Aye
Emily Harris	Aye
Laurel Ross	Aye
Shelley Spencer	Aye
Terry Guen	Aye

The motion passed and the meeting was adjourned at 12:17 pm.