

Forest Preserves of Cook County Conservation & Policy Council

Meeting Minutes for September 9, 2020

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

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

Advisory Council Members

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

Presenters

Arnold Randall, Forest Preserves
Benjamin Cox, Friends of the Forest Preserves
Bob Megquier, Openlands
Carl Vogel, Forest Preserves
Chris Adas, Forest Preserves
Delio Calzolari, Forest Preserves
Eileen Figel, Forest Preserves
Jacqui Ulrich, Forest Preserves
Jane Balaban, Key Steward
John McCabe, Forest Preserves
Steve Hughes, Forest Preserves

Mike DeSantiago did not attend.

Other meeting participants include Jenn Baader from the Chicago Zoological Society, Jim Boudreau from the Chicago Botanic Garden, and Mark Bouman from the Field Museum.

Wendy Paulson called the meeting to order at 9 a.m.

Approval of Minutes. A motion was made by Mark Templeton to approve the minutes of the June 22, June 29 and July 10 meetings. The motion was seconded by Maria Pesqueira. The results of the roll call vote are as follows:

Name	Vote
Wendy Paulson	Aye
Mark Templeton	Aye
Alan Bell	Aye
Emily Harris	Aye
Maria Pesqueira	Aye

Name	Vote
Laurel Ross	Aye
Shelley Spencer	Aye
Sylvia Jenkins	Aye
Terry Guen	Aye
Commissioner Moore	Aye

The minutes were approved.

Public comments. Shelley Davis submitted a request to address the Council; however live public comments were not scheduled in the virtual meeting. Arnold Randall agreed to acknowledge Shelley and cede a few minutes of his time to her during agenda item 6. No other comments from the public were received.

Review of Annual Report. Eileen Figel and Benjamin Cox presented an overview of the annual report and the steering committee's evaluation of organizational reforms. Key points include:

- The Council has gained the knowledge, done the work, and earned the respect to continue the legacy of the founders in protecting and promoting the forest preserves. Through its position papers, the Council has tackled on-going challenges that have beset the preserves for decades. Through its advocacy, the Council is playing a critical role in building awareness and support. (Added to page 19 of report.)
- Staff and partners have worked hard to advance NCCP goals and have achieved significant success during the first phase of plan implementation.
- Eileen stated that she has never worked with a leadership team that is as strong and collaborative as the FPCC senior team is today. This was critical to the FPCC's ability to keep the preserves open throughout the pandemic even as state parks, the lakefront, the 606 and other public open spaces were closed. In addition, staff from every department stepped forward to help FPCC police monitor busy sites and direct officers to problem areas.
- Benjamin emphasized that culture change at the district has been highly successful. He also acknowledged the Council's efforts to meet with board members and other elected officials.

The following issues were discussed:

- Sylvia Jenkins noted that the steering committee indicates things can still fall apart if President Preckwinkle leaves. She asked, "Do we not have strong support beyond the President?" Benjamin explained a new president could dismantle the Council, and this is why it is important to have strong relationships with board members. Wendy added that this is the greatest value the Council adds—relationships with board members and others and the role as advocates. Wendy noted that the papers have given the Council a great entre, and the more the Council meets with board members and the more the board sees that the Council is deeply thoughtful and engaged, the more the board will value the Council. This helps ensure continuity. Emily Harris suggested this section be re-worded to better explain what continuity is, to discuss the value of leadership and expanding relationships. (See page 19 of report.)
- Wendy noted that the Scaling Up Volunteers committee feels there is still a lot of work to be done in terms of scaling up volunteers; the "A" grade seems to address scaling up work with partners. Benjamin clarified that this grade refers to scaling up during pandemic. The district quickly pivoted to virtual programming, successfully welcomed record numbers of people, etc. Eileen will add more explanation here to indicate that there is additional potential for scaling up in other dimensions of FPCC's work. (See page 18 of report.)
- Alan Bell added that continuity is not just about leadership; it is also about continuity of policies. (See page 20 of report.)
- Maria Pesquiera thanked the entire team for keeping the forest preserves open at a moment in time when we need green space the most. She added that the Council members are the trusted keepers of these lands. Maria also thanked Jacqui Ulrich for facilitating a summer equinox celebration co-hosted with the American Indian Center. Maria explained, "All these other places were closed; this is a reminder of the work the FPCC team is making happen." Maria also noted that she saw some couches dumped in the preserves the other day and it took less than an hour to get cleaned up.
- Mark Templeton thanked Arnold, Eileen, and everyone at the meeting. Mark stated, "I have had great conversations with every FP employee I see here. I have seen the value; we have had disagreements and challenging conversations, but I really appreciate that we have had these conversations. We have an incredibly solid base upon which to build. Partners have also been incredible."
- Mark added that the REDI efforts are critical for our work going forward, and this needs to be more in the forefront. (See page 1 of cover letter and page 2 of report.)

- Emily thanked Openlands and Friends of the Forest Preserves, adding, “ We absolutely would not be where we are today without your hard work.” (See page 1 of cover letter.)
- Emily also suggested we highlight the fact that there are now 15,000 acres under restoration. (See page 1 of cover letter and page 4 of report.)

Position Papers update. Laurel Ross reported that the LAAD team met with President Preckwinkle yesterday. The President noted she would not be in the position forever and acknowledged the importance of the position papers. President Preckwinkle also made it clear that she understood the Council is working hard on this and she takes it seriously. She also underscored her appreciation of the REDI paper and the fact that racial equity is being incorporated into the other papers. Laurel indicated the committee will brief commissioners next and present the paper to the board in October. Mark added that he brought up the need to stabilize FPCC finances and the President responded that this is a difficult time to get traction at the state legislature, but she is committed to keep working on this. Laurel explained to the other committees that the President asked them, “What in this paper am I not going to like?” Laurel added that the other committees might want to think about what they need to bring to the President’s attention during future briefings.

Alan stated that there have been questions about how “moratorium” will be defined. For example, we need some clarity with respect to licenses related to COVID . . . is this an exception to the moratorium? Alan indicated that a small working group is discussing these concerns.

The Nature-Compatible Recreation paper is scheduled to go to the board in November and the Scaling Up Volunteers paper will go in December.

Discussion with General Superintendent Arnold Randall. Arnold invited Shelley Davis to share her announcement. Shelley informed the Council that she will be leaving the FP Foundation to become the CEO of the Coleman Foundation. Arnold provided the following updates:

- Arnold stated that administrations change over time, but the advocates remain. As advocates and watchdogs, Openlands, FOTFP, and others helped shape where the FPCC is today.
- Senator Durbin introduced a bill for a 21st century civilian conservation corps. There is real movement to fund conservation and put people back to work; this is very exciting news.
- COVID update. When the pandemic hit in March, FPCC police, landscape maintenance, resource management and other field staff were out there dealing with all of this. But it was even a bigger team effort. The transition to working from home went really well; FPCC’s small IT team made that happen. We will be in phase four for some time, and we expect to continue operating as we are now. We are doing outdoor programming at nature centers. Our ultimate goal is to keep the preserves open during the pandemic.
- We are working with our REDI team to advance racial equity. In light of what is going on in the world, we are also looking at law enforcement and how we can incorporate best practices for community policing.

Council members discussed the following issues:

- Shelley Spencer suggested that the FPCC put out a message now, while people are visiting the preserves. She added, “They are reading everything. Can we put out signs to build their support? Can we capture the contact information of these people? Ask people to text us? We can use this to build our list of supporters.”
- Wendy added that we need to capitalize on this opportunity to communicate compelling stories to build and broaden support.

2021 Budget Proposal. Mark reported that the district is doing the best it can within this difficult environment. FPCC is tapping the reserves to plug some gaps. Mark is pleasantly surprised that, despite cuts, things are generally stable during these trying times. Steve provided an overview of the 2021 budget proposal. The following issues were discussed.

- Steve thanked all department heads for chipping in to shore up the budget during a difficult time. He indicated that an overall goal was to avoid layoffs. FPCC will capture inflationary growth in property taxes, but also assumes some property owners will not pay their taxes. The big hit to the 2021 budget is in non-tax revenue from camps, pools, and permits. Steve explained that the district is not planning to open pools in 2021.
- FPCC is recommending a hiring freeze for the first and possibly the second quarter of 2021. There will be an exception for law enforcement which is very short-handed at this time.
- Non-personnel cuts for each department range from 10% to 13%. Landscape Maintenance is an exception due to cost increases for garbage collection and port-a-lets.
- 75% of the operating budget is personnel and healthcare.
- FPCC proposes no change to support for the Zoo and the Garden.
- The County Department of Transportation and Highways is directing some funds to the FPCC for paving work. FPCC is assessing opportunities to shrink pavement on a case by case basis. FPCC's in-house crew has been very successful in making repairs to address safety concerns. The in-house crew can make these repairs quickly and in a cost-effective manner.
- Wendy asked the FPCC to give serious attention to opportunities to decommission roads and shrink lots. Arnold explained this is a mandate to FPCC's department of planning.
- Chris Slattery added that the FPCC is applying for green infrastructure grants to shrink lots. The other big buckets of infrastructure needs include dams and lakes. FPCC has a projected \$2M cost for dam repairs and urgent trail repairs that aren't eligible for motor fuel tax funds. Chris cautioned that these needs are not funded and the current level of capital funding is nowhere near adequate to address these and other long-term needs.
- FPCC is proposing a significant draw on the reserve fund to help fill the gap in the operating budget, to shore up the self-insurance fund, to supplement the land acquisition fund, and to fund priority demolitions and vehicle needs.
- Mark has been the Council's point person for the budget review; he suggested it would be helpful to have one or more other Council members participate in these conversations going forward.
- Alan asked if the FPCC has fully used its bond capacity and if it has considered going to the state to get some relief. Steve explained that the FPCC has reached its debt limit. Arnold added that the FPCC is working with Springfield to an increase to the debt limit. He cautioned that it is unlikely to be considered in the upcoming session, but the FPCC will continue to push it in future sessions. Wendy expressed concerns about the state dictating how future capital funding is used; she believes the FPCC should make these decisions based upon priority needs.
- Terry Guen asked if the FPCC intends to draw down reserves over the next few years. Arnold indicated that the FPCC is exploring this, but he wants to plan out what this looks like over multiple years. Arnold added that the intent is to spend down some, but not all reserves.
- Asked what impact the new labor negotiations will have on the budget, Arnold indicated he anticipates a small % increase for cost of living adjustments over several years. Steve added that the Local 700 union got an annual increase of about 2% over the past 3 years and the FPCC police got an annual increase of 2¼%

(because they are underpaid compared to peers). Steve anticipates about 2% per year going forward.

A motion was made by Sylvia Jenkins to approve the annual report and budget recommendation subject to final edits by the officers of the Council. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Moore. The results of the roll call vote are as follows:

Name	Vote
Wendy Paulson	Aye
Mark Templeton	Aye
Alan Bell	Aye
Emily Harris	Aye
Maria Pesqueira	Aye

Name	Vote
Laurel Ross	Aye
Shelley Spencer	Aye
Sylvia Jenkins	Aye
Terry Guen	Aye
Commissioner Moore	--

The motion passed.

Trail guides. For the next phase of implementation, Bob Megquier explained that the Steering Committee proposes to develop “trail guides” for each NCCP goal. Bob explained that the first phase of implementation focused on learning and analysis. He stated that the second phase must focus on securing the resource needed to address on-going budget challenges and to scale up the work to achieve the ambitious NCCP goals. Bob suggested that the third phase (2026 to 2030) will focus on stewardship, the fourth phase (2031 to 2035) will focus on expansion, and the fifth phase (2036 to 2040) will be the time to plan for the next 25 years. Bob added, “These themes may or may not hold up over time, but they provide a strategy to rally around so we are not just wandering around. If we want to focus on securing public resources over the next five years, we will need a trail guide to get there. We will use the plan and develop tactics to secure public resources that are permanent, lasting and stable. We went back to the plan and said, stick to the goals, priorities and actions listed in the plan.” The Steering Committee is developing the tactics which will be used to advance each goal. Bob added that this is a work in progress; the committee needs to work more on the tactics to ensure actions are clear and compelling and to explore what does or does not fit with the theme of phase 2. Steering committee members then presented the draft trail guides for Nature, People, Economy and Leadership as follows.

Nature. Jane Balaban explained that we need to invest in restoration and stewardship. And we need more volunteers to maintain restored sites. The leadership component is critical. The Scaling Up Volunteers paper focuses on the need to scale up volunteers and develop leaders. The Nature Committee will focus on this during the next five years. Jane estimates we will need at least 60 new volunteer leaders to restore and steward an additional 5000 acres. She added, “We also need to be mindful that many leaders have been around for decades and will need to be replaced over coming decades.” John McCabe thanked Jane and her husband, John, for their hard work at Harms Woods. John added that FPCC must also invest in our VR team and continue partnerships. John noted that we have achieved a permanent conservation corps, but we need to expand it. He also noted that the committee will push hard to engage with new visitors and others by addressing the benefits to climate change. John summarized key accomplishments of the past five years as follows:

- ✓ 15,000 acres are now under restoration
- ✓ 7 Illinois nature preserves have been dedicated
- ✓ The Conservation Corps completed 9000+ weeks of work
- ✓ Volunteers contributed 11,000 weeks of work
- ✓ FPCC expanded training for stewards and other volunteers. John noted, “Other agencies have copied

our programs.”

People. Jacqui Ulrich explained that the People committee has focused on big ideas that will generate more support for and more knowledge of nature. The committee will connect the priorities of the draft trail guide to several action items outlined in the position papers. The committee will focus on Conservation@home, education strategies for nature and the outdoors, and community engagement to encourage activism around the preserves. Jacqui highlighted key achievements of recent years as follows:

- ✓ Completed 17 of 23 initiatives under the People goal
- ✓ Institutionalized 11 priority actions and made them part of FPCC’s work
- ✓ Reorganized the Conservation and Experiential Programs (CEP) department into a zone model with teams assigned to each region of the County
- ✓ Trained community leaders through camping and paddling programs

Economy. Carl Vogel explained that the committee determined that a specific focus on economic benefits is too narrow because there is so much more the preserves provide. Instead, the committee will build the case for the Forest Preserves more broadly over the next five years, and the draft trail guide reflects broadened priorities to make the case that:

- The preserves are a place where you can create your own adventure,
- The preserves are a place where plants and animals thrive in the wild,
- You won’t find a more peaceful place to make ourselves and our communities healthier.

Carl explained that working with the Zoo and Garden to promote the preserves has been great, but tying into tourism opportunities has not worked well. Chris Adas summarized key achievements of the committee as follows:

- ✓ Ecosystem analysis completed by CMAP documents value of preservers
- ✓ Economic impact analysis completed by Camoin documented \$1.5B impact on the regional economy from 2003 to 2015
- ✓ Staff and partners met with 87 village boards and civic organizations to share this info
- ✓ Grew partnerships with Zoo and Garden to increase promotion of the preserves

Chris noted that the committee had trouble finding partners to lead business recruitment, and this initiative has not advanced.

Leadership. Delio Calzolari explained that the committee will:

- Continue to advance transparency by moving contracts and other info to the Cook County data portal.
- Ensure continuity by building a deep bench of professionals at the FPCC and building stronger relationships between staff, the Council, and elected officials so that, over time, everyone is rowing in the same direction.

Bob Megquier summarized key achievements of the committee to date as follows:

- ✓ Achieved important progress in building a community of support (TPL polling shows a 70% likelihood that a referendum would pass.)
- ✓ Hitting our stride; we are stronger together
- ✓ Developing the position papers was hugely important

Council members discussed the following issues:

- Terry indicated that she really likes the trail guide approach. It reflects how to deliver opportunities and provide access to natural places our constituents are seeking.
- Mark added that these are very helpful first steps and encouraged some additional connection between the trail guides and the position papers. Mark also asked if any of the trail guides suggest the need for additional position papers.
- Wendy added that she liked the changes in the economy goal.
- Emily stated that we should sustain the spirit of the original plan, but should also be flexible with actions as we move forward so the plan continues to evolve.

Adjournment. Wendy thanked everyone—staff, partners and council members—for their work. She noted that the Council’s recent op ed published in the Herald and the response to the proposed ballfield at the Zoo are important roles for the Council and she suggested the Council should do more of this. Wendy announced she will be stepping down as chair after fulfilling two terms in the role.

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

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

The motion passed and the meeting was adjourned at 11:30 am.

Attachment 1: Record of Chat Discussion

09:40:03 From Nina Baki : Maybe if she is calling in with phone, her phone is muted?

09:49:52 From Laurel Ross : CONGRATULATIONS SHELLEY!! AND THANK YOU

09:50:31 From jboudreau : Congrats Shelley. We are grateful for all your help. Coleman is a wonderful organization. e

09:50:54 From Sylvia Jenkins MVCC : Thank you Shelley

09:52:04 From Terry Guen : From the start of the Next Century Conservation Plan the current increased level of Forest Preserves usage by more and more Cook County residents was aspirational. We now see nature benefits and the beauty of the preserves recognized by a greater population. Regarding Continuity, we need to focus on QUALITY OF LIFE, public health, environment, and economic benefits. This is a positive platform for all future leaders and social justice rights for residents. I look forward to seeing a strong communication strategy reporting 2020 increases in use and benefits.

09:52:47 From Shelley A. Davis : Thank you everyone. I will continue to be in touch.

09:53:09 From Emily Harris : Congratulations Shelley!

09:59:05 From Shelley A. Davis : The Foundation has seen an uptick in tribute gifts because of people walking in the Preserves and seeing the dedicated benches

10:15:45 From Benjamin Cox : Is daily COVID screening for staff or the public or?

10:31:23 From Terry Guen : can you briefly explain what are the corporate reserves? Is the intent to draw this down in the next 2-3 years?

10:53:54 From Benjamin Cox : Like Jane (and her husband John) for 4!! decades.

10:54:28 From wendypau : BIG KUDOS!!

11:01:25 From Laurel Ross : FANTASTIC! THANKS JANE AND JOHN

11:03:02 From Benjamin Cox : We should also acknowledge Laurel's long service to the preserves as a steward!

11:03:46 From jane : Thanks! It has been and continues to be an incredible privilege to be part of this!

11:05:31 From wendypau : We need to get Commissioners out to workdays to see firsthand how Cook

County constituents become so meaningfully involved in the stewardship of preserves

11:05:53 From jane : YES!!

11:17:46 From Laurel Ross : Very important but for some commissioners it is difficult. If they won't come out maybe we can send them photos on a regular basis.

11:21:44 From Terry Guen : 2021-2025 Trail Guide: I REALLY like how this is worded. Reflects how to deliver opportunities and provide access to nature places our constituents are seeking.

11:21:48 From Mark Templeton (he/him) : I think that these are very helpful first steps. I would encourage some additional connection between these trail guides and the position papers. Also, do any of these trail guides suggest the need for additional position papers?

11:23:04 From jboudreau : It might be good to pen an editorial for Arnold on success of last 5 years - 15k acres restored; popularity of FPs during Covid; momentum for next 5 years.

11:23:40 From Benjamin Cox : Again, rough drafts needing refinement and better alignment.

11:24:02 From Emily Harris : I like the point about market research underlying decision making. In the context of the scaling up volunteers paper do we feel we have done adequate market research to know that our model of volunteering is sustainable and these goals are attainable?

11:24:38 From jane : Re Mark's question, there have been several suggestions on a stand along paper on Restoration. Could be an effective tool for education.

11:29:13 From Maria Pesqueira : Thank you for your leadership Wendy!

11:29:55 From Emily Harris : Yes Wendy your leadership has been amazing and you have all of our gratitude!

11:29:55 From Sylvia Jenkins MVCC : Thank you Wendy! You are a fantastic leader.

11:29:57 From shelley spencer : Yes! Thank you Wendy!

11:30:14 From Anthony : Thank you for your leadership Wendy.

11:30:29 From Maria Pesqueira : Thank you for the hike trail list!

11:30:40 From Terry Guen : We will move on... but Wendy will miss your wonderful insightful leadership!

11:30:49 From Shelley A. Davis : Thank you Wendy for your leadership!