



Forest Preserves of Cook County Conservation & Policy Council Meeting Minutes for June 21, 2022

Crabtree Nature Center, 3 Stover Rd, Barrington Hills, IL

Welcome and Call to Order. Chairperson Alan Bell called the meeting to order at 9:35 a.m. The following Council members and others attended:

Advisory Council Members

Alan Bell, Chairperson
Hank Saunders
Laurel Ross
Mark Templeton, Vice-chairperson
Shelley Spencer, Secretary
Commissioner Stanley Moore
Terry Guen

Presenters

Arnold Randall, Forest Preserves
Ben Helphand, NeighborSpace
Benjamin Cox, Friends of the Forest Preserves
Bob Megquier, Openlands
Commissioner Kevin Morrison
Kris DaPra, Forest Preserves
Nicole Pierson, Forest Preserves
Raquel Garcia-Alvarez, Forest Preserves
Wendy Paulson, Bobolink Foundation

Emily Harris, Sylvia Jenkins, Maria Pesquiera, and Commissioner Moore did not attend.

Other meeting participants included representatives from the Chicago Zoological Society and the League of Women Voters.

Alan acknowledged Wendy Paulson and thanked her for starting the Council and her commitment to the FPCC.

Commissioner Kevin Morrison welcomed the participants to the 15th District and the Crabtree Nature Center. He recognized the Council and thanked them for developing the position papers and implementing the Next Century Conservation Plan.

Approval of Minutes. A motion to approve the minutes of the 4.22.22 meeting was made by Mark Templeton and second by Laurel Ross. The minutes were approved.

Chairman's report. Alan acknowledged the work of Bob Megquier who will retire this month after a long career focused on protecting public lands and advancing conservation.

General Superintendent's Report. Arnold Randall and Jacqui Ulrich provided the following updates:

- The Forest Preserves experienced significant damage during the recent storm, mostly in the western suburbs. District staff and contractors have been working hard to remove downed trees and have made a lot of progress.
- An avian influenza breakout killed more than 1200 birds at Bakers Lake.
- The District is conducting a review of its animal ambassador program. Staff have been consulting with animal care experts and will present a report and recommendations to the board in July. A briefing will be offered for Council members.
- The Conservation and Experiential Programs (CEP) team is doing a strategic plan to explore the best types of nature-compatible recreation to get people out to the preserves and connected to nature. Terry Guen thanked Jacqui for her leadership and vision.

Workshop 1: Scaling Up Volunteers. Nicole Pierson and Kris DaPra presented an overview of efforts to recruit more volunteer leaders to assist with ecological stewardship. See Attachment 1.1 for the full presentation. Key points include:

- In 2022, we have 128 active volunteers, staff and partners serving as key stewards. We need to develop far more leaders.
- This is a lengthy process (1 to 3 years) involving training, mentoring, field observations, and testing.
- In 2014, we were developing two site leaders per year; the goal in the paper was to develop 100 site leaders per year. This is not feasible.
- In addition, the focus has to expand beyond site leaders to focus on the broad range of leaders needed for restoration such as leaders who collect seeds, manage brush pile burns, etc.
- By building teams and empowering volunteers, we will eventually scale up the number of key stewards.

Figure 1: Building Volunteer Leadership



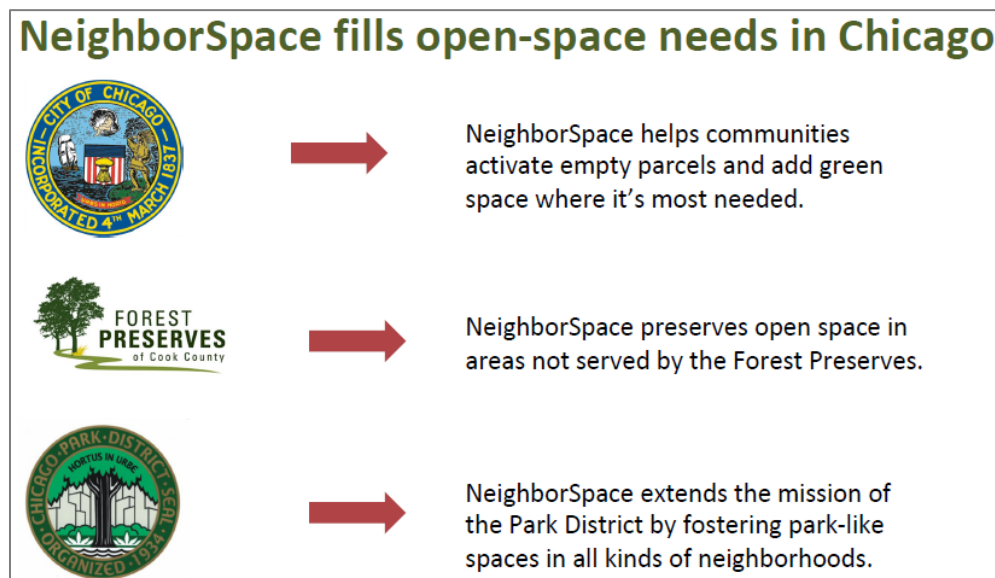
- During COVID, the VR team shifted to a more supportive strategy for volunteer leadership. We have seen a 200% increase in enrollments in training classes. We have also seen an increase in class completions. For example, from 2019 to 2022, we saw class completions for burn boss certifications from 19% to 73%.

The following issues were discussed:

- Laurel Ross explained how volunteering adds richness to her life. It is about being with people, learning, getting exercise, and contributing.
- This is one piece of a larger puzzle: How are we going to get the land restored? And how do we apply a REDI lens to remove barriers, etc.?
- How much flexibility is there in the training and certifications? There are some people with years of experience in seed collection, for example, who don't want to take weeks or months of training. → The program was developed by staff and volunteers; everyone goes down the same path. The District can't do something different for one person. But, if someone takes the class on-line, the rest of the certification is on-site observation and experienced seed collectors could become certified quickly.
- Much more happens than the numbers reflect; lots of people who are not certified are out there volunteering and contributing.

Workshop 2A: Connecting Residents to Nature via NeighborSpace. Ben Helphand explained that NeighborSpace was invented to provide open space throughout Chicago neighborhoods. It is a partnership between the City of Chicago, the Chicago Park District, and the Forest Preserves. Today it offers 131 gardens throughout the city, and one garden site in Robbins.

Figure 2: NeighborSpace



See Attachment 1.2 for the full presentation. Key points include:

- Eight sites have nature play.
- Several sites focus on native habitat. One site focuses on prairie restoration and monarch habitat.

- Behind every garden are community leaders and neighbors. These people change over time; NeighborSpace must be nimble.
- NeighborSpace is developing Forest Patches. The first opportunity is a small woodlands at 121 W 125th Street. The community see this as a buffer to keep people out; the challenge is to turn it into something people want to walk through.

The following issues were discussed:

- Cathy Geraghty added that the FPCC has been involved with NeighborSpace since the beginning and asked what more can be done to promote the Forest Preserves' mission where it overlaps with the mission of NeighborSpace. Could we add more milkweed to help monarch populations? How can we elevate our connection?
- What will the signage look like? Will it acknowledge the government partners? Does the Forest Preserves get credit?
- Nature-compatible programming fits perfectly here and you don't have the transportation challenges because the participants are already there. Mighty Acorns, Birds in the Neighborhood could use these places for off-site programming.
- Could the NeighborSpace sites serve as transportation hubs to bring people to the preserves?
- I see the connection for the forest patches, but I am not sure I see it for the whole NeighborSpace program. → Many of the gardens do have pollinator gardens. Fifty to sixty sites have interest in initiatives aligned with the Forest Preserves.
- Is there a way to think about a list of offerings we can put in front of the leaders such as Nature Express Bus, kayaking, etc.? → We used to send the FPCC calendar of events to all garden leaders.
- This is also a good talking point for commissioners who do not have forest preserves in their districts.
- If you can't bring the person to the forest; bring the forest to the person.
- Is there any collaboration with the Zoo? → We have worked with the Zoo staff. We play matchmaker all the time.
- Do you ever gather all community leaders? Could FPCC do a workshop on how to incorporate nature in your garden? → Leaders gather annually at the Center for Neighborhood Technology (CNT) for a workshop and tool giveaway. There is also an annual community gardens gathering. But we have had better success with regional gatherings.
- You have built trust in neighborhoods. How did you get people to want to work with you? → We let them take the lead every step of the way—even at the cost of efficiency. If we incorporate them at every step and make sure they are listened to, there is so much buy in.
- How are you developing a restoration/management plan for the forest patch sites? → We don't have a plan for this. This is a good opportunity for a partnership with the Forest Preserves.
- We should also look at small Forest Preserves sites that are surplus; what are the lessons from NeighborSpace about how to activate these spaces?
- Could there be more partnerships for the preserves along the lines of the NeighborSpace model?
- I appreciate your focus on empowerment and buy-in.

Workshop 2B: Applying a REDI Lens to Community Outreach. Raquel Garcia-Alvarez demonstrated how the REDI lens was used to evaluate the distribution and reach of the FPCC quarterly calendar of events. Raquel presented 7 steps as follows. See Attachment 1.3 for the full presentation.

Raquel asked how this lens could be applied to the Council. Could the REDI lens be used for Council recruitment?

The following issues were discussed:

- This needs to be about values. How do we elevate diverse voices?
- I like that you made the phone calls and created a dialog. As we think about dialog and conversations, we need to think about geography and ages. For example, should we have presentations about the Forest Preserves at senior centers?
- Alan added that the Governance Committee is discussing how to apply a REDI lens to the work of the Council. The committee will discuss this with the full Council at a future meeting.

Figure 3: Seven Steps to Applying a REDI Lens

1. Think about the Desired Result
2. Engage Internal & External Stakeholders
3. Gather Data
4. Determine Who Benefits and/or Who is Burdened?
5. Diminish Harm & Develop Opportunities
6. Evaluate and be Accountable
7. Communicate

Mike DeSantiago left the meeting.

Referendum Update. Wendy Paulson and Benjamin Cox provided the following updates:

The campaign has raised nearly \$2 million and has hired digital, print, and tv consultants.

- 157 organizations have joined the coalition.
- Alan, Sylvia and Mike and Henrietta are all participating, as private citizens, in cultivating support for the campaign. Leadership from partner organizations (Openlands, TPL, TNC and others) has been great.
- The campaign has launched a website and is about to enter the public phase.
- Volunteers and advocates need a brochure which can be distributed. Eileen Figel will provide factual information to Benjamin; the campaign will create the brochure.
- The campaign is also training ambassadors to speak and get people to sign a pledge saying they will vote for the referendum.

Workshop 3A: Governance. Alan Bell presented three proposed changes to the ordinance which establishes and governs the Conservation and Policy Council:

1. Remove the requirement for the Nominating Committee to include a representative of a not-for-profit organization that has as its primary focus government finance and public policy.
2. Clarify the obligation of a Council member to report a potential conflict of interest; make the language consistent with the recently updated FPCC ethics ordinance.

3. Add “communications” and “REDI” to the key areas of expertise we want represented on the Council.

Shelley Spencer asked that Sustainability be added to section 1-18-3 as an additional qualification for Council members.

Mark Templeton moved to recommend to the board the proposed changes, with the additional change recommended by Shelley to add Sustainability to qualifications of members. The motion was seconded by Terry Guen. The motion was approved unanimously.

Workshop 3B: Leadership. Mark Templeton began by describing the purpose of the Council as defined by ordinance as follows:

C. Purpose. The purpose of the Conservation and Policy Council is to safeguard, expand and bring additional resources to the District by providing public recommendations to the President, District Board, and the Superintendent regarding conservation and other related areas, based on the Council's knowledge, skill, leadership and expertise. The Council shall review and evaluate the implementation of the Plan.

D. Declaration. The District Board hereby establishes the Forest Preserve District of Cook County Conservation and Policy Council ("Council"). The District Board hereby finds and declares that the Council shall do, but not be limited to, the following:

1. Develop and annually update a five-year strategic and financial plan to operationalize the Plan and annually recommend adoption of the updated strategic and financial plan to the President, District Board, and the Superintendent of the District;
2. Review and make recommendations to the President, District Board, and the Superintendent about the annual budget and its alignment with the strategic and financial plan;
3. Review and make recommendations to the President, District Board, and the Superintendent about conservation policies and practices;
4. Review and make recommendations to the President, District Board, and the Superintendent about opportunities to maximize public and private financial resources to accomplish conservation goals and initiatives; and
5. Provide public recommendations, as needed, to improve the District's operations and conservation leadership.

Mark added that this is the Conservation *and Policy* Council; its mandate is broader than conservation.

Bob Megquier continued the conversation started at the 4.22.22 Council meeting regarding how to better integrate the work of the Council, the NCCP committees, and the position paper working groups. A big role of the Council and partners is to provide enduring conservation leadership. Bob explained that this workshop will continue the conversation by asking how the Council and its partners can best add value to safeguard the district, expand the district, and bring resources to the district.

Participants shared their thoughts as follows; additional input provided in writing is included in Attachment 1.4.

Hank Saunders. I think of the FPCC as a political entity that requires the support of people to continue and flourish. The job of the Council is to develop a strong base of citizens educated about the FPCC and who can serve as a base of support. We speak for the public, we can and should focus on policies, metrics and goals that highlight ways people are engaged and educated.

Shelley Spencer. I believe the Council must continue to create stronger connections with the commissioners and other individuals needed to promote the preserves. As a practical matter, we need to assess and define the boundaries of what is our responsibility as opposed to what is the staff's responsibilities. We need to keep that clean. The Council can play a role in supporting advocacy efforts; maybe we can help prioritize these. We can provide greater insight into performance measures. We can push for more sustainability.

Laurel Ross. We should not be a pain and a drain on staff resources. We take a lot of people's time; we need staff support, but we need to be careful about that. We should safeguard the preserves against being chipped away by a thousand cuts, against politicizing. We should encourage the staff and board to dream and think big and wide. Forest patches are a good example of this. We don't use our connections enough. We should support the referendum with all our heart.

Terry Guen. Chicago has a giant industrial legacy; we are not thought of as a nature destination. Why aren't we known as the camping capital of the Midwest? What is the guidance the Council can bring to create that sense of Chicago as a nature?

Mark Templeton. We are a stand-in for the public, trying to share the perspectives of the public. Some elements of guidance and leadership that could be done by the board, we have as part of our responsibilities as well. We are connectors, educators, strategic partners. We educate the public about the preserves and the staff about the public. And we educate the board. We help set goals and metrics; we have a role in helping to evaluate if these are good metrics and whether progress is being made. Our job is to help be visionary. What do we see for the next hundred years? We have amazing leadership now; I worry about the day when we don't.

Emily Harris (shared by Alan). One of the insights of the Next Century Conservation Plan was that “... *the Forest Preserves needs the advice and active participation of skilled conservation leaders who have a singular focus on the long-term ecological and financial health of the forest preserves.*” The Council's charge to safeguard the district comes from the recognition that the Forest Preserves elected Board of Commissioners and President have major other responsibilities as Cook County Board Commissioners, and are elected based on a myriad of issues. In order to safeguard the Preserves, the Council must

- Steep itself in the plan's goals and values in order to continually examine how the current policies, operations and budgets of the Preserves do or do not adhere to the vision of the Plan.
- Familiarize itself with the organizations providing conservation leadership in the region and provide support to the issues and policies these professionals and volunteers identify as critical to the long-term health of the preserves.
- Build trusting relationships with Commissioners, the President, and the Superintendent of the Preserves, and as needed provide constructive criticism
- Advocate for hiring and retention of a staff of conservation experts and excellent financial stewards, and support them in doing their jobs – avoiding micromanagement while offering strategic direction.

Alan Bell. How do we ensure we are creating an institution that is enduring? We should focus on policies that are mission-driven. We have amazing leaders now, but the future may be different. How do we make sure the policies we are advocating for now are made a core part of the preserves and difficult to change?

Benjamin Cox. There were times when it was much darker. The leadership didn't care; they focused on keeping the preserves out of the press. You have to prepare for that now, when things are good. You must position yourself as a direct resource to elected officials, as the people with knowledge. You have to talk to commissioners regularly. Focus on key indicators which show whether or not we are making progress on the plan; do not get down in the weeds.

Beth Dunn and Jenn Baader (summarized by Bob): Our board members are our biggest advocates and ambassadors, and we rely on them to cultivate and make value-added connections to elected officials and fundraisers. As we implement the Next Century Conservation Plan, the Council can continue to add value to the district through similar actions.

Bob Megquier. Keep an eye on the short term while shaping long term events and policies. Increase the visibility of the Council. Build relationships with the commercial and media sectors; we will need them in the worst of times. Speak at every board meeting. Have regular meetings with the commissioners. Be willing to meet and pursue work with little reliance on FPCC staff. Make time for in-depth conversations. Make sure funds are well managed and being used to advance the mission. Be the FPCC's strongest advocates. If there are ideas to pursue, we should pursue them. Hobart, Indiana became a conservation community. There are communities here that want to do the same; we should help them figure out how. Develop a stronger relationship with the Chicago Park District. A lot of people rely on the Park District to get outside. Recapture leased sites that do not conform with the district's mission. What if we thought about equity and ecology equally as we acquire sites? Expand the number of partners (Audubon, Sierra Club, many more). Work with partners to seek funding.

The following issues were discussed:

- Arnold stated that things are very different now compared to 12 years ago. There is a much more robust Inspector General function. We have a court-mandated hiring plan we did not have before. There was no Conservation and Policy Council. There will be a new administration at some point, but the Council will be here. We are better situated than we were, but we need to be vigilant.
- Bob asked, "How does the Council advance important work without being totally reliant on FPCC staff?" He added it is possible, but we haven't done it that well to date.
- Several participants suggest that the Council should interact more with the County board. Commissioner Morrison indicated that the commissioners prefer the Council to meet with board members in small group or one-on-one.
- Commissioners liked the small briefings for the position papers and for the referendum.
- Some of these issues should be on the record and are appropriate to present at board meetings. They are the FPCC board; they should be engaged with these issues.

Wrap-up and Next Steps. Shelley Spencer asked participants to share something from the day's discussions that was particularly impactful. Participants provided the following input:

- I was really blown away by the amount of work that goes into the training for volunteers and the long-term commitment they make to work in the forest preserves.
- The second thing was from NeighborSpace -- the idea of allowing the voice of the community to drive whatever was happening and to be patient and supportive while they figure out what their needs are.
- I'm reeling a little bit because I'm more confused because of our last discussion.
- I have known Bob a long time; I wish you safe travels and hope you enjoy being with your family.

- I enjoyed Raquel's presentation. I really love that she didn't just share the theory, but walked us through applying a REDI lens in this particular context, which is super helpful for understanding. I am so glad to be back in person with people. It still leaves me craving more time for discussion.
- I still would love to hear more from people because I felt like this last conversation was great and we got a lot of good comments. That's the reason we went long--because it is more to share and engage on. There is no magic answer to this and I'm totally sympathetic to our agenda organizers and staff. It is great. It is just a great group. I like to hear more from folks. That's all.
- For me, this has been the best council meeting I have been at since I have been on the Council. Absolutely. I think up until this point it has really been about us working on policies and strategic mission and figuring out who we are, what we are doing, and why we are here. Today is really about how are we doing the work. How are we elevating the work. It felt more about advancing our work as opposed to planning how to advance our work. It is very exciting that we are now talking about real impact going forward. That's what struck me.
- I think we did get a little deeper in some discussions where we often fail to do that because we have so much on the agenda and there is not enough time. We have so many things to talk about. I'm excited about the possibility of little forest patches and building this model that expands the forest preserves. But I'm also thinking about how we are going to dive deeper into some other topics as well. Emily said she would like us all to steep ourselves in the Next Century Conservation Plan and take a look at the forest preserve's budget and operations and policies, and think about how we do or don't align with the concepts in the plan. I think that would be an interesting project, too.
- I am glad to be with you folks in person. I do enjoy longer, deeper conversations. I did want to highlight something that is so important to the success of NeighborSpace--that is that NeighborSpace is really easy to work with. They just make it easy. No matter how complicated -- I mean I can't tell you how complicated the work around Beaubien Woods is. Benjamin enters the scene and it is just like . . . it happens! It is just so easy. We should all carry that ethic. Make it simple. Make it happen. That was a real powerful part of all the presentations today.

Shelley concluded, "That's an excellent phrase to move forward on. Keep it simple. Make it happen." Participants agreed to convene a small group to continue a deeper discussion about impact and next steps.

Next Meeting. The Council discussed whether to meet in person or via Zoom, if allowed. Mark Templeton prefers to meet in person, unless the COVID numbers surge again. Hank Saunders suggested exploring a meeting at a NeighborSpace location which has a building. Eileen will check with the Chief Attorney to determine whether the group has an option to meet virtually.

Adjournment. The meeting was adjourned at 2:30 p.m.

Attachment 1.1

Attachment 1.2

Attachment 1.3

Attachment 1.4: Input for Workshop 3 - Leadership & Governance

If the Council's role, as defined by ordinance, is to safeguard, expand and bring additional resources to the District, how can the Council and partners best add value to. . .

- Safeguard the district?
- Expand the district?
- Bring additional resources to the district?

Emily Harris responses

How can the Council

1. Safeguard the district

One of the insights of the Next Century Conservation Plan was that “... *the Forest Preserves needs the advice and active participation of skilled conservation leaders who have a singular focus on the long-term ecological and financial health of the forest preserves.*”

The Council's charge to safeguard the district comes from the recognition that the Forest Preserves elected Board of Commissioners and President have major other responsibilities as Cook County Board Commissioners, and are elected based on a myriad of issues. In order to safeguard the Preserves, the Council must

- Steep itself in the plan's goals and values in order to continually examine how the current policies, operations and budgets of the Preserves do or do not adhere to the vision of the Plan.
- Familiarize itself with the organizations providing conservation leadership in the region and provide support to the issues and policies these professionals and volunteers identify as critical to the long-term health of the preserves.
- Build trusting relationships with Commissioners, the President, and the Superintendent of the Preserves, and as needed provide constructive criticism
- Advocate for hiring and retention of a staff of conservation experts and excellent financial stewards, and support them in doing their jobs – avoiding micromanagement while offering strategic direction.

Mike DeSantiago

Safeguard

One of the most surprising things I have heard in a survey within the past few years was that many people didn't feel safe in the District. As a very frequent user of the FPCC, I feel very secure. There have been very few instances of violence or unruly behavior. Nevertheless, there seems to be a legitimate safety concern on the part of a good% of visitors.

One initial observation is that the FPCC police do seem to be stretched out. The ratio of police to land area appears to be quite low, judging from visibility of police. There may be folks who do not want high visibility of police. Forests are a way to “get away from the city”. High police visibility might run counter to that. Would it be possible to use term “ranger” instead of “police” with, perhaps, a more “ranger-like” uniform?

One recognized safety issue is the shared use of trails. The “bike trails” are also used for running, walking, etc. Perhaps the Council could help identify this issue as a priority for staff.

Expand

I think that development of an Expansion plan is the area in which the Council can be of greatest value. As demonstrated in the Councils earlier work (pre-pandemic), the Council facilitated discussions and helped develop strategies to evaluate the Mission-alignment of various aspects of the District, such as golf, etc. I believe the Council can continue to serve this useful purpose.

Another important role of the Council is to ensure diversity is a cornerstone of expansion. This is not to imply, for example, that all expansion should be in or near under-served communities. But it does mean that serving previously under-served communities must be an expansion priority that the Council will help keep front-and-center. Participation of Native American individuals/tribes is of special importance with respect to expansion. Others, including Terry are doing great work on this.

Add Resources

.....In progress

Terry Guen response

Help Build Chicagoland's national identity as a (new) Outdoor Recreation - Nature Lifestyle destination via Forest Preserve leadership, programs, stewardship. Here are some ideas:

Promotional Campaign (conservation ethic context)

- Update History e k-12 local curriculum if needed
 - Urbs in Horto, 1837
 - UC Henry Cowles Ecological Studies 1898
 - Forest Preserves and Birth of Midwest Conservation 1904, 1914 (Dwight Perkins, Jens Jensen)
 - (Aldo Leopold Sand County Almanac, 1937,1949; Rachel Carson Silent Spring 1962)
 - Camp Saginaw Ecological Restoration 1965
 - Regional leader in Nature Access and Equity (NCCP 2014)

Publish/video case studies on conservation innovation and financing, building volunteers, etc.

- FPDCC Role in Nationally recognized Chicago Wilderness Conservation Effort
 - Oldest preserve system in the United States
 - Connections to Transnational Trails System
 - Borders Lake Michigan, Lakefront Trail, Flyway
 - Public Heath benefits

Publicize improved public health metrics from interagency open space partnerships/collaborations, investment and finance

- Publish Cook County's Plan for improved public health through environmental climate mitigation, nature recreation, land conservation
- Collaborators
 - MWRDGC "We believe environmental leadership is our responsibility, so we are looking for solutions that can change the world and keep it safe and secure for future generations."
 - Chicago Park District / City of Chicago/ Neighborspace 1996
 - Openlands
 - Chicago Wilderness
 - Hackmatack
 - Etc?

Input from Bob Megquier (Openlands)

THESE ARE ALL THINGS THAT THE COUNCIL AND PARTNERS CAN DO TO...

Safeguard the district	Expand the district	Bring additional resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Keep an eye on near-term activities while shaping and advancing long-term strategies and policies ▪ Increase the visibility of the Council with the public ▪ Build relationships with the commercial and media sectors ▪ Speak at every forest preserve commissioner meeting ▪ Have regular meetups with commissioners ▪ Be willing to identify, lead, and advance Council work with minimal reliance on forest preserve staff ▪ Make time for in-depth conversations ▪ Ensure that funds are well-managed and used to advance the mission ▪ Be the forest preserve's biggest advocates and ambassadors with elected officials and public 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Expand the number of partner organizations that regularly support the Council's and District's work ▪ Research and bring forward innovative conservation approaches such as conservation communities. Research other communities such as Hobart, IN. ▪ Find ways to fund, build support for, and advance non-traditional acquisition opportunities such as the Chicago River and USX site ▪ Frame acquisitions under a simplified "umbrella" criteria of Ecology and Equity ▪ Support the District in its efforts to recapture as many leased sites that are non-conforming with its mission as possible and restore them ▪ Develop a stronger relationship with the Chicago Park District 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Support all things to ensure that the Referendum passes ▪ Seek funding opportunities in addition to the Referendum by cultivation donors and working with the Foundation ▪ Seek funding for innovative ideas that partners and the Council could advance

Input from Jenn Baader (Chicago Zoological Society) and Beth Dunn (Chicago Botanic Garden)

As individual members of a successful public-private-partnership, the Forest Preserves of Cook County, Chicago Botanic Garden and Chicago Zoological Society work collectively to provide opportunities for residents to connect to nature, inspiring conservation leadership and an appreciation for the plants, wildlife and natural habitats that sustain our world. Involved since its inception, the Zoo and Garden remain enthusiastic and invested implementation partners on the Next Century Conservation Plan. We embrace the goals of the plan, including its effort to increase outreach to underserved communities and expand educational and recreational opportunities for all county residents.

As this group considers how the Council and partners can best add value to safeguard, expand, and bring additional resources to the district, we can reflect on the role of our own boards, which work individually to ensure our continued success. At the Zoo and the Garden, our boards are tasked with approving our

annual goals and ensuring such goals and policies align with our mission and strategic plan. They monitor progress towards the approved goals at a high level, while staff undertakes the detailed operational planning. Our board members are our biggest advocates and ambassadors, and we rely on them to cultivate and make value-added connections to elected officials and fundraisers. As we implement the Next Century Conservation Plan, the Council can continue to add value to the district through similar actions.