

MINUTES

**OPEN SPACE COMMISSION
MONDAY
December 11, 2023**

**HYBRID MEETING
FLAGSTAFF AQUAPLEX
AND MICROSOFT TEAMS
1702 N FOURTH STREET
4:00 P.M.**

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 4:03 pm.

2. ROLL CALL

NOTE: One or more Commissioner may be in attendance through other technological means.

PRESENT

Chair William Wilson
Vice Chair Bruce Applin
Commissioner Mary Norton (P&Z Liaison)
Commissioner Bruce Fox
Commissioner Nat White

NOT PRESENT

Commissioner Jacqueline Thomas
Commissioner Lina Wallen

Councilmember Representative: Deborah Harris - joined virutally later in the meeting

STAFF AND OTHERS

Koren Brown - Admin Specialist
Robert Wallace - Open Space Supervisor
Sylvia Struss - Open Space Coordinator
Sarah Holditch - Open Space Coordinator
Rebecca Sayers - PROSE Director
Kevin Fincel - City Deputy Attorney
Members of the public (attached)

Kim Ward
Dan Campbell
Jayne Clark
Rick Lopez
Brian Cass
Kathy Flaccus
David Actor
Joan Martini
Charlie Silver
Joe Hazard
Joel M on Hidden Hollow Dr
Pat McGervey
Randy Schaal
Bill Schmelzer
Karl Meyer
Anthony Quintile
Aisela Kluwin
Lisa Hutchinson
Lawrence Richardson
Tod Lewis
Mark Gunlo
Clare Stielstra
Mike Popejoy

Bill Kluwin
Mark Loseth
Martos Hoffman
Mike Yeatts
David Cooney
Dave Cheney
Alexa Stack
Online:
Mogollon
sw10374
Greg
Michele James Martin Ince
Alec Wilcox
Guillermo Cortes
Neil Chapman
Megan R. Dales
Ellen Anderson
Shannon Anderson
Cheryle Hartman
Jelisa Vick
Rick
Mary Williams
T Prichard
B and J
Jessica Louise Archibald
Jen

3. Land Acknowledgment

4. Approval of Minutes

Commissioner White motioned to approve the October meeting minutes; Commissioner Applin seconded. The minutes were approved by everyone.

5. Public Comment

There was a public comment by resident Duffie Westheimer requesting that the city and commission be mindful of and adhere to their public input process for the Greater Observatory Mesa Trail Plan.

6. Hidden Hollow Road Access Consideration through Observatory Mesa Natural Area

This request involves 7 privately owned parcels ranging in size from 6.36 acres to one 40-acre parcel, totaling 114 acres. The parcels related to the amendment request are oriented in the north/eastern quadrant of Section 6 on Observatory Mesa. The Right-of-Way (ROW) easement passed from the Arizona State Land Department to the City of Flagstaff upon acquisition. The ROW easement is currently a primitive dirt road 10-15 ft wide that provides legal access to the private parcels. For the property owners to move ahead with development, they must have access to their property that meets city fire access code standards. They are requesting an amendment to the easement that would allow them to improve the road to meet these standards. The road improvements would require codified width and grading that deviates from some parts of the existing road and the ROW easement.

The proposed road surface is an aggregate base, course, unpaved surface. The expense

of approximately \$200,000 would be covered by the property owners.

If the ROW easement is amended as proposed, current fire access standards would permit up to 30 dwelling units for development.

The Commission's discussion involved thoughts on access to the private property and how it may affect the Observatory Mesa Natural Area, especially as it relates to the intent of the voters and guiding documents for managing the Natural Area. Numerous questions and requests for additional information were presented. In summary, these included, but weren't limited to, whether the parcels could be subdivided or combined and what the property owners' development plans were, other access options that were considered, whether Hidden Hollow Rd was adequate to host more traffic, and how impacts on wildlife and recreation could be mitigated during the development process.

The following members of the public made comments in favor of adjusting the easement, saying that other access options were not considered viable due to terrain or other neighborhoods refusing access, the road surface would be ABS rather than paving, that the requesting private property owners only wanted what current residents have (a quiet place to build their family's home), the road would be private (maintained by the private property owners) but still allow hiking and biking access, and that the adjustment of the easement would be better for the preservation of the Natural Area than using the current legal access rights since it would require less infrastructure, unused acreage would be returned to the city, and they would restore disturbed areas:

- Cody Routson
- Mike Popejoy
- Rick Lopez (for the Northern AZ Association of Realtors)
- Alexis Stack
- Clare Stielstra

The following members of the public made comments against the proposed adjustment of the easement, concerned about the intentions of the investment companies that own the bigger parcels, increased traffic and trash on Hidden Hollow Rd and Rt 180, light pollution, the impact on the natural area and wildlife corridors, what happens if utility easements are requested in the future, is secondary access required, further study as to what can be done as other alternatives.

- Mike Furr
- Dave Cooney
- Charlie Silver
- Dave Cheney
- Martos Hoffman
- Jack Moody
- Dr. Diane Hope
- Paul Delaney

Next steps may include an additional review by the Open Space Commission that could lead to a prepared recommendation for City Council consideration, Arizona Game and Fish Department review and input, City Council review and decision, Arizona State Parks and Trails review and decision, and State Historic Preservation Office review and decision.. The commission would like to explore the logistics further and will invite involved City Planning and engineers to speak at a future meeting.

7. Observatory Mesa Trail Planning

The commissioners spoke on their top thoughts and concerns related to the Greater Observatory Mesa Trail Plan. They have strong concerns over granting e-bike access. There are some opposing viewpoints on the topic of directional and single-use designated trails. Other topics of discussion included multi-use trails preferred for mountain biking, including a formal statement about a monitoring and maintenance plan in the proposal, and implementing a fixed date for revisiting the plan to evaluate what is working and to allow for reconsideration of plan direction.

Ultimately, the commission concurred that they need to review the guiding documents to ensure that the trail plan abides by the directing management policies. Documents requested for review include AZ State Parks Deed of Conservation Easement, the 2004 bond initiative, and the Legally Designated Open Space Management Plan.

The following members of the public made comments against the proposed plan, wanting to keep Observatory Mesa Natural Area natural for peaceful enjoyment, not a recreational area. Several speakers noted a reduction in the amount of wildlife with the current use. The Open Space Management Plan does not mention recreation. The proposed plan/trails are too complicated with too many new trails, and we should stick to conserving plants, wildlife, scenery and historical resources, and that e-bikes should not be allowed. There was also a concern that single-use plan excludes people, and all Flagstaff residents voted to purchase this land for conservation. Observatory Mesa is getting plenty of use as it is, and more trails and access will create more problems, especially on private roads. Concerned about Hot Pockets downhill trail causing serious erosion, and the need for enforcement:

- Rose Houk
- Barb Philips
- Joan Martini
- Lisa Leap
- Alyson Gitlin
- Rick Moore

The following members of the public made comments supporting the proposed plan. The main points stated were: having a plan means we can maintain it, and this is a good compromise. Some were concerned about a broad interpretation of “preservation;” doesn’t it mean keeping the land from being developed, supporting directional bike trails particularly where they’re close to the urban area, that well-built trails are sustainable and maintainable. Even among supporters, there were different opinions about e-bikes: If we prohibit e-bikes, people will do it anyway; if we specify type 1 and 2, we’ll get community buy-in for that. On the other hand, they go too fast, and the Forest Service doesn’t allow them; we don’t want to make Observatory Mesa another Dry Lake Hills, and the AZ State Parks Conservation Easement does not allow motorized vehicles. If we take out Section 17, the plan is not that complex.

- Anthony with Flagstaff Biking Organization
- Martos Hoffman
- Joe Hazel, also Flagstaff Biking Organization
- Mike Popejoy
- Shawn Mahoney

8. Joint Meeting Date Selection (Parks and Recreation Commission and Open Space Commission)

The commission prefers a February joint meeting with the Parks and Recreation Commission. The staff recommended action was to further address Hidden Hollow Access and the Greater Observatory Mesa Trail Plan in January.

9. Reports and Updates

A. Council Representative Report - Councilmember Deborah Harris

There was no report from Councilmember Deborah Harris.

B. Planning and Zoning Commission Representative Report - Commissioner Mary Norton

The zoning code amendment did proceed and passed December 5th. The term "Open Space" is now reserved to refer to open space land usage, while "Community Space" will refer to residential development. The request to include Open Space was deemed not appropriate for inclusion.

C. Open Space Management Report - City Staff, Robert Wallace and Sylvia Struss

10. Informational Items To and From Commissioners and Staff

11. Potential Future Agenda Items

- The Commission requested to review docs for the Greater Observatory Mesa Trail Plan ahead of the next meeting to discuss and recommend next steps.
- Hidden Hollow Access discussion with planners/engineers.

12. Adjournment

Commissioner White motioned to adjourn; Commission Norton seconded; the meeting adjourned at 7:33 pm.