

Open Spaces Commission Strategic Plan 2023

Preface

In order to provide an overview of the Open Spaces Commission Strategic Plan and also present the detail and supporting thought, this document is divided into two sections, this overview and the appendices respectively.

Vision of the Open Spaces Commission

A connected system of open lands that supports passive recreation, protects the natural environment and ecosystem, enhancing Flagstaff's quality of life.

Mission

To advise and advocate in support of the expansion and maintenance of the Flagstaff Open Space system.

Role of Open Spaces Commission

The Open Spaces Commission was established by the City of Flagstaff in 2003 to advise the City Council on acquisition, management, use, restoration, enhancement, protection, and conservation of open space properties.¹

Background

The Flagstaff Open Space system is a network of minimally developed public lands that feature the natural environment, wildlife corridors and habitat, trails, unique geological features, views, and greenway corridor connections throughout the city.

The regional plans and Vision 2020 have consistently demonstrated for over three decades strong community interest in preserving open space within and outside the city limits. These spaces promote community health, both physical and mental. Open space is an asset that many cities have lost but continue to be part of the Flagstaff quality of life. The Open Spaces Commission holds the perspective that land is a living resource for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations.

The Open Spaces Commission supports Flagstaff Open Space section by assessing available lands, developing an inventory of existing and potential open space, following a strategic plan, contributing to a master plan, collaborating with related city departments, and advocating for maintenance and land acquisition funds. Each fiscal year the Commission will review progress and update this Strategic Plan to ensure goals, strategies, action items and priorities are relevant. Through its advisory capacity, the commission will share opportunities, concerns, and ideas that further the Vision and Mission of the Flagstaff Open Space system.

Goals and Strategies

Goal 1: Assist in bringing about an expanded, integrated Open Space system through acquisitions, and by recognizing and capitalizing on opportunities that become available, while continuing to protect current open space properties.

¹ Management Policies for Legally-Designated Open Space Properties – Page 9, and **Flagstaff City Code Title 2-20-001-0003 – Duties**

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Strategy 1.1 - Create an Open Space Master Plan.

Action Items:

1. Determine where regional preserves, connectors, and complementary open space is needed to continue the development of the community's open space system.
2. Identify city-owned and state-owned property which may be available to become open space and evaluate the open space value of identified properties.
3. Identify and prioritize other properties valuable to the open space system, such as:
 - a. Parcels south of I-40 that provide open space opportunities in the John Wesley Powell development area (mid-term)
 - b. Walnut Canyon State Land sections (Sections 22 and 28 T21N R08E) (mid-term);
 - c. Center parcel (USFS section 7) of Observatory Mesa
 - d. Parcels that contribute to the preservation of viewsheds
 - e. Parcels that contribute to a greenway along the Rio de Flag and its major tributaries
 - f. Parcels that provide an open space buffer for Flagstaff Urban Trails System segments
 - g. Parcels that bring extra value to and provide connection between existing parks, Flagstaff Open Spaces, and FUTS segments.
4. Update the prioritized land and trail acquisition list.
5. Identify gaps in Flagstaff's trail network in collaboration with Flagstaff Trails Initiative and FUTS and rank priority.
 - a. Ensure trails provide circulation to Open Space throughout the City.
6. Prioritize land and trail acquisition and conservation.
7. Make recommendations about infrastructure investments (maintenance, conservation, restoration) so that lands are managed on an ongoing basis.

Performance Measure:

Completion of written recommendations for open space master plan.

Strategy 1.2 – Actively collaborate with key partners on a regular basis.

Action Items:

1. Work to stay apprised of and give input on proposed developments.
2. Cultivate new partners and communication links with developers and large landowners and work together to create more open space and/or connections to FUTS and Flagstaff open space properties as part of imminent and future developments.
3. Establish lines of communication with the Planning & Zoning Commission, Parks & Recreation Commission, and the Housing Commission, resulting in exchanges of information regarding potential open space properties.
4. Invite key partners (Coconino National Forest, County Open Space program, Open Space Working Group, Rio de Flag Group, Friends of Flagstaff's Future, etc.) to present relevant information to the Commission, and share relevant information with these groups.
5. Participate in the Observatory Mesa Trail Plan process.
6. Ensure that the Open Spaces Commission's Strategic Plan aligns with other relevant efforts that key partners are engaged in, such as: (ongoing)
 - a. Open Spaces section (staff's) Strategic Plan
 - b. Parks, Recreation, Open Space & Events (PROSE) Master Plan
 - c. Flagstaff Regional Plan
 - d. Flagstaff Urban Trail System (FUTS)
 - e. Flagstaff Trails Initiative (FTI)
 - f. US Forest Service

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Performance Measures:

Maintain partnerships through presentations and collaboration with key partners, review accomplishments annually.

Strategy 1.3 Develop a standardized process for reviewing projects and proposals that affect open space properties to ensure compliance with land conservation and management policies.

Action Items:

1. Review, simplify, and update a previously drafted Development Review Protocol.
2. Review and update a previously drafted Development Review Protocol application for proponents to complete when they propose a new or different use of open space properties.
3. Make recommendations about such proposals.
4. In the event an open space property is lost due to an imperative use for a different purpose, propose an alternative city property to replace the functionality and/or acreage of the lost open space.

Performance Measures:

A completed Development Review Protocol and application.

Strategy 1.4 – Update Flagstaff City Code to clarify and strengthen the protection of Flagstaff’s open space properties.

Action Items:

1. Research existing Flagstaff City Code as it relates to Open Space.
2. Present the results of this research to the Commission.
3. Make recommendations on changes to City Code to clarify and strengthen the protection of open space.

Performance Measures:

Written recommendations on how Flagstaff City Code should change to better protect open space.

Goal 2: Realize sustainable long-term funding for the Flagstaff Open Spaces system.

Strategy 2.1 – Explore and articulate funding recommendations to key partners to obtain sustainable long-term funding.

Action Items:

1. Identify and learn how other Open Space/Green Space programs are funded.
2. Generate ideas for sustainable and permanent funding.
3. Make recommendations for appropriate sustainable Open Space funding strategies.
4. Write letters of support for Open Space section’s grant applications as appropriate.

Performance Measures:

Total actions taken in support of financial sustainability of Flagstaff Open Space.

6/26/2023 Motion to Approve Strategic Plan, including Appendices, by Lina Wallen, 2nd Bruce Fox, all in favor, 0 opposed.