

Minutes--Open Spaces Commission Meeting 5-13-2024 4-6pm

1. **Call to Order** Chair Bruce Applin called the meeting to order at 4:03pm
2. **Roll Call**
Present: Chair Bruce Applin, Vice Chair Jacqueline Thomas, Commissioner Mary Norton, Commissioner Bruce Fox, Commissioner Lina Wallen, Commissioner Nat White, Representative Deborah Harris
Absent: Commissioner Chelita Runbeck
Staff: Rebecca Sayers, Robert Wallace, Sylvia Struss, Desert Mulford
Others: Mark Loseth, Mike Wilson
3. **Land Acknowledgment** – Chair Applin read the land acknowledgement.
4. **Approval of 4-22-24 Minutes** – Motion to approve the April 22, 2024 Minutes by Commissioner White, seconded by Commissioner Wallen, all voted in favor.
5. **Public Comment** – There was no public comment on any item not on the agenda.
6. **Business Items**
 - A. **Observatory Mesa Trail Plan** – Mark Loseth from Southwest Decision Resources made a presentation summarizing the discussion from the last several meetings. He confirmed that the Commission:
 - preferred a maintenance, enforcement, and funding statement,
 - appreciated the plan balance (between preservation and recreation),
 - agreed to adaptive trails, and
 - preferred multi-use trails.

Remaining to be discussed is trail 3.36 “Hot Pockets” trail, and whether to allow e-bikes.

Regarding 3.36 Hot Pockets trail, there was discussion about the strong desire to not have any single-directional trails or single-use trails. It was noted that the Hot Pockets trail is a well-known trail to mountain bikers and on various social media platforms, so it will take extra effort to rehabilitate the trail, educate folks, and enforce not using it; it will be very difficult to decommission. There was concern that it created a poor precedence to formally adopt an illegally built trail. There was concern, in looking at the AZ State Parks Conservation Easement, that it did not envision a single-use technical mountain bike trail, that the City is required to keep the land in the same condition as when we got the conservation easement, that this is a drainage area and a sensitive ecological area, and that the Hot Pockets trail is not passive recreation.

In response to questions about what the city did to deter the illegal building of Hot Pockets, Mr. Wallace reported that Open Space filed a police report, installed wildlife cameras to attempt to deter further building of the trail, and put up a “this is not a trail” sign. The US Forest Service helped out by blocking sections of the trail with slash. Unfortunately, the illegal trail building continued, with a jacket being put over the cameras. Mr. Loseth mentioned that the first Observatory Mesa (OM) Trail Plan proposed to restore the trail to its natural condition, but

public comment was to formalize the trail. He noted that it does add value to a mountain biking experience on OM, and it was well-built and sustainable. However, there was concern from the Commission that the bottom of the crevice has changed from being oak trees and oak leaf-covered ground to being a bare rocky ravine).

There was discussion about trail 3.37 being a nice trail in the future when it connects to Section 17 (Lowell property), and if connected downward along the pink line on the current map.

Mike Wilson made a public comment, that since this is on City property, why can't the City do something to 3.36 to discourage further degradation of that area, now, as opposed to waiting until the trail plan is formally adopted and approved? Parks, Recreation, Open Space & Events (PROSE) Director Rebecca Sayers thought that because we are the stewards of the land, and since we took action to discourage building 3.36 illegally, we could take steps now.

It was recommended that signage for Hot Pockets trail 3.36 focus on educating people about the restrictions in the conservation easement. There was some discussion about whether there should be a process for people to request to build a new trail on city property, or at least include a contact person in the plan, so that people can reach out to the city.

There was a reminder that after this Commission's recommendation, it goes to City Council, then to Arizona State Parks for approval, and to the State Historic Preservation Office for approval.

The consensus was that there be no single-directional or single-use trails, to adopt 3.10 and 3.37 social trails as formal trails, but not 3.36 Hot Pockets trail.

The Commission expressed being open to revisiting any part of this plan pending Lowell Observatory's trail plans on Section 17, or Forest Service plans on their sections of OM.

Regarding E-bikes, there was discussion about US Forest Service allowing e-bikes on forest service roads, about City Council allowing e-bikes on FUTS trails (which already run through OM). There was discussion that the county appears to be working toward allowing Class 1 and 2 e-bikes on county trails, and if they do, e-bikes would be allowed on the county easement of the Flagstaff Loop Trail from N. Tilley Lane (3.3 on the map), noting that the easement pre-dates the City's conservation easement. There was concern that if the city wanted the county to restrict the remainder of the Flagstaff Loop Trail, the county may want the city to take over the easement and maintenance of that trail.

There was some discussion about 4.41, which connects from the Fort Valley trail system to 5.12, as being an e-bike friendly route in the future. The Commission wanted to make it as clear as possible to the public where e-bikes can and cannot be used.

There was consensus to "limit e-bikes to current roads and FUTS trails, and work to get a consistent direction with the county and understand the County's position on trail 3.3" and that e-bikes mean only Class 1 and 2 e-bikes.

Mr. Loseth and Mr. Wallace indicated that next steps are to make some revisions to the plan and bring a final proposal back to the Commission in June.

7. Reports & Updates

- A. Council Representative Report—Councilmember Harris encouraged people to come to the Saturday water rate analysis meetings.
 - B. Planning & Zoning Commission Representative Report--Commissioner Norton reported continued discussions about land availability plan, and the JW Powell corridor. She noted that on May 8th, the P&Z Commission got an update of the preferred scenario of the Regional Plan which touched on the JW Powell corridor—a “sector plan,” (the ability to identify the resources needed) rather than a specific plan (a guide to the development before it happens). She looks forward to a presentation on the JW Powell plan to this Commission. Ms. Norton said that Arizona state law does not allow the city to require inclusion of open space within a development plan but can require resource protection. She noted there was a first case of a request for a variance of a slope protection, with a possible code revision on that, all of which brings Open Space lower on the priority list.
 - C. Open Space Management Report—Mr. Wallace reported being in a second round of interviews for the Open Space Coordinator/Educator. Ms. Struss distributed a list of upcoming Open Space events for the summer.
8. **Informational Items to & from Commission.** Ms. Sayers updated the Commission on the BBB code change presentation to City Council, and that the council was amenable to it. She noted that the first read of the proposed code change ordinance is June 4, 2024, and the second reading June 18, 2024. Ms. Sayers also directed the Commission to the PROSE April 2024 Newsletter.
9. **Future Agenda items:** Future agenda items include JW Powell Alignment Update, Land Availability & Suitability Study and Code Analysis Project, Observatory Mesa Trail Plan Update, Open Space in the Development Process (Tiffany Antol).
10. **Adjournment.** Commissioner Norton motioned to adjourn, seconded by Commissioner White. The meeting adjourned at 5:37pm.