

## MEETING MINUTES

OPEN SPACE COMMISSION  
MONDAY  
JUNE 24, 2024

HYBRID MEETING  
FLAGSTAFF AQUAPLEX  
AND [MICROSOFT TEAMS](#)  
1702 N FOURTH STREET  
4:00 P.M.

1. **Call to Order**

Vice Chair Thomas called the meeting to order at 4:02 p.m.

2. **ROLL CALL**

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

Chair Bruce Applin - A  
Vice Jacqueline Thomas - P  
Commissioner Mary Norton (P&Z  
Liaison) - P  
Commissioner Bruce Fox - P

Commissioner Chelita Runbeck - P  
Commissioner Lina Wallen - P  
Commissioner Nat White - P  
Councilmember Representative: Deborah  
Harris - P

3. **Land Acknowledgment**

The Flagstaff Open Space Commission humbly acknowledges the ancestral homelands of this area's Indigenous nations and original stewards. These lands, still inhabited by Native descendants, border mountains sacred to Indigenous peoples. We honor them, their legacies, their traditions, and their continued contributions. We celebrate their past, present, and future generations who will forever know this place as home.

4. **Approval of Minutes**

- a. Commissioner Norton motioned to approve the May 13, 2024 meeting Minutes, Commissioner Wallen seconded, all voted in favor.

5. **Public Comment**

Vice Chair Thomas called for public comment on items not on the agenda. There were no public comments.

6. **Business Items**

- a. Observatory Mesa Trail Planning.  
Mark Loseth from Southwest Decision Resources led the discussion stating that

the proposed recommendations from the Commission are incorporated into the plan. Specifically, e-bikes are recommended to be limited to use on roads and Flagstaff Urban Trail System (FUTS) trails, and all trails would be multi-use and multi-directional. Trail 3.36 has been taken out of the plan and restored to prior conditions, per the Commission's previous direction. Trails 5.25 and 5.26 would remain open to all users including beginner and moderate mountain bike users. Trail maintenance language has been added to the plan; the appendix discusses what defines maintenance. Also found in the appendix is a section on funding and defines how the plan will utilize the city's approved budget and grants as capacity allows. The Open Space section will continue to rely on its stewards to notify the police and City about enforcement issues. Mr. Loseth discussed access road and fire service lands within the plan. Robert Wallace, Open Space Supervisor, stated that the areas within the plan are cross-jurisdictional and staff met with all partners. The city will obtain special permits from the US Forest Service where needed.

Vice Chair Thomas opened the discussion for public comment.

Truman Shoaff, Program Director for High Country Adaptive Sports shared his support for the plan and stated it will benefit bike riders and those users with disabilities who want to use the trails.

Benjamin Keeler, who uses the trails 4-5 times per week, is disappointed with the plan as it has ignored the majority who want directional downhill trails, particularly Hot Pockets (Trail 3.36) has been maintained for years. The 25% reduction in mileage is a disservice. e-bikes are here, will continue to expand, and help us reduce our carbon dependence.

Shawn Mahoney, a daily user of the trail system and an Open Space Steward, would like to see a map of the trails and is waiting for the trails at Observatory Mesa to be developed. This plan needs to be completed as all the citizens of Flagstaff need these resources, not just those in the immediate area. There is a lack of communication to residents about what is available for recreation on Observatory Mesa. Mr. Mahoney stated he likes the original version of the plan and dislikes doing away with trails that are in good shape. He discussed Hot Pockets trail, having watched the discussions about it, he was interested to hear some people say they'd hiked it many times but now mountain bike users have destroyed it. Shawn would like to see a living trail network and have the plan approved and leave it as a living document for future trails. Mr. Mahoney expressed that Hot Pockets trail going away is a major mistake, since it will impact a large percentage of users on Observatory Mesa, and people will still utilize it.

Ken Lane is a 45-year Flagstaff resident and a mountain bike rider. He noted that there has always been a confusion of formal and social trails on the Mesa. He is disappointed about some items being taken out of the plan at the last minute. Mr. Lane expressed that E-bikes are bikes and are the future of bikes. They allow more people to use bikes and get out into the forest areas. Enforcement of e-bikes is hard as you can't tell if a bike is an e-bike or not; banning them will not

work. We should be more progressive and embrace e-bikes. Hot Pockets trail is one small trail that is very popular and is public land for everyone's enjoyment. Two downhill trails have been added to the US Forest system; signage does not prohibit uses but instead recommends not going uphill—this is a safety issue. One directional trail is a good thing to be added to this system, and it should be kept in.

Joe Hazel is the Trail Coordinator with Flagstaff Biking Organization. The reason given to remove the Hotpockets trail is habitat consideration, and he has asked for relevant documents that show the habitat concerns in this area. The document describes the trail as being in a gulley but is also listed as being sustainable. Habitat should not be a discriminator for removing the trail. Mr. Hazel discussed trail density in urban/wilderness interface areas. He researched several areas outside of Flagstaff and discussed the data he found, such as the number of trails per square mile, and the number of bike-optimized trails such as directional downhill trails. He noted that the original plan was 24 miles of adopted trails plus 6 miles of existing trail (6 miles of trail per square mile), and now it is down to 5 miles of trail per square mile. He asked whether this proposed trail plan going to meet the community's future needs or the future needs of the recreational users on Mesa? He stated that the southern area of Observatory Mesa is the largest growing and the mesa will only see increased recreational pressure. He noted that FBO proposed several downhill trails, and he asks that those be considered in a revision going forward.

Anthony Quintile with Flagstaff Biking Organization asked that the commission be shown the map for Section 13. Additional trails proposed by FBO should be considered. There are not enough trails in this project. We need a robust plan to address growing demand/population. Mr. Quintile read much of the FBO letter, which was attached to the agenda, challenging the assertions that there are habitat concerns, and the assertion that the trails proposed in the previous version contradict the letter and spirit of the guiding documents, including the Conservation Easement. He asked that PROSE and the Commission present a much more recreation-robust plan to Flagstaff City Council.

Lucas Cowan is an 11-year Flagstaff resident, now in Railroad Springs because of the trail access to Observatory Mesa. He races e-bikes professionally and wants e-bike use in the plan. If we lose Hot Pockets, we need more than one directional replacement, such as those proposed by FBO.

Nathan Rupe noted that the vast majority of mountain bikers are using the Mt. Elden/Dry Lakes area and doesn't feel this plan gives mountain bikers a reason to try out other areas of Flagstaff. Being a trail runner, there is an issue with trying to make everything multiuse—it makes trails that are okay for everyone, but nobody is excited about any of them. A benefit to single-use trails are that they provide better experiences to different types of users, and those users would be willing to help build the proposed trails. Mr. Rupe expressed support with keeping Hot Pockets, and adding some other directional downhill trails, and trails catered to runners.

Aaron Ells is a 22-year Flagstaff resident in Coconino Estates and uses the Mesa trails for running and hiking and supports the new trails. They are well designed and incorporate erosion concerns. As a multi-sport user of trails, Mr. Ells would like to see a statement from the Commission on bike bells. Bike users come up on runners and hikers and are not using bells. E-bikes are the future of biking, but he sees the impact on the trails. He appreciated when City Council considered the e-bike classification system for e-bikes on the FUTS trails. He is seeing an increase of e-bikes, and electric motorcycles, and gas-powered Motocross bikes on FUTS trails, and believes there should be very strongly stated restrictions on what is allowed and what is not. Regarding Hot Pockets trail, he would hate to see the trail abandoned. We need trails to meet the needs of particular users. He is looking forward to more trails, more signage, and better engineered trails.

Daniel Dickason has lived in the Boulder Point area for the past 5 years and uses the trails several times a week for walking/running and mountain biking. He does not agree with multiuse/multi-directional nature of every trail. He does not want to be concerned about mountain bikers while he is walking on a trail, and while he's mountain biking, does not want to worry about running into hikers and runners. He noted that the public comment stated that 71% of people were in favor of some single-use directional trails, and that is being ignored. He supports the adaptive access, educational zones, and trail heads, but it needs some specific use trails.

Mike Popejoy sees positive changes with the plan and appreciates the balanced approach. With regard to future trail maintenance, he would like to see some consideration of rehabilitation of newly-made unauthorized user-created trails. He asked for clarification as to whether the US Forest Service sections needed to go through the NEPA process.

Mike Wilson supports the current plan. The plan should not be contingent on making decisions about Forest Service land. The plan needs to be moved forward, completed, and sent to City Council and the public for discussion. He supported this plan being a living document going forward with regular review every one to two years to determine if there is a real need for anything to change. Open Space is managed for passive recreation, and the comments do not seem to be about passive recreation.

An email from Dr. Jim Gibson was read, saying that he believes the trails should be accessible to everyone, via e-bikes; there is no easier area close to downtown. People who ride e-bikes get the same positive benefits, and all trails should be open to e-bikes.

Vice Chair Thomas voiced appreciation for all the public comments and realizes that it is hard to represent, value, and reflect everyone's input into the plan. The Commission is trying to be responsive to all concerns presented. The Commission left out e-bikes because of the inability to enforce the different classifications; but it should probably be a decision for City Council. It is an urban-wildlife interface area. She expressed she is not against directional trails and is not opposed to keeping the Hot Pockets Trail, because she doesn't think

we'll be able to keep people off of it. She supported the plan being a living document.

Mark Loeth clarified that the first version of the draft plan had no directional trails, but public feedback showed a desire for these trails. With this current plan, all trails would be multi-directional.

Commissioner White expressed concerns regarding a strong focus on mountain citing mandates to protect the land and keep it open for all uses under the Conservation Easement. He reiterated his concern about the destruction of the land from the Hot Pockets trail by mountain bike use, and his belief that all trails should be accessible to everyone. He expressed support of the current plan the way it stands.

Commissioner Norton read the Open Space Vision, Mission, and role of the commission. She acknowledged the letter from FBO and the public input. She supported the plan being a living document where the public can suggest changes and supported a statement about bells on bikes. Commissioner Norton is in favor of the plan the way it is and is not opposed to adding one trail at the suggestion of FBO.

Council Liaison Deborah Harris asked for clarification about directional trails, signage, and enforcement, which were addressed by Mr. Wallace and Vice Chair Thomas.

Commissioners White and Fox agreed that the plan should be approved at this time.

Commissioner Runbeck inquired about whether biological assessment has been done with the plan and how impacts to the area will be tracked, which was addressed by Mr. Wallace.

Commissioner Wallen understands that e-bike and mountain bikes are helpful to people and the commission needs to consider what types of bikes are to be on the plan. She proposed to move forward with current plan.

Vice Chair Thomas inquired about the public giving future input on the plan. Mr. Wallace stated that this can be done through the commission by adding items to the agenda. He also clarified that if City Council approves the plan, any changes to it would need to also be approved by City Council, the Forest Service, Arizona State Parks, and SHPO (State Historic Preservation Office). He also clarified that the Commission-approved plan would be shared with the public and recommended to City Council.

Commissioner Wallen motioned to move the plan forward as it is. Commissioner White seconded the motion. Vice Chair Thomas requested that an addendum to review Hotpockets be added. There was no discussion or support from the Commission for the request. The vote was all in favor and one opposed to the

motion. Vice Chair Thomas was opposed.

- b. John Wesley Powell (JWP) Project Update  
Moved to the July 22, 2024 Commission Meeting
- c. Land Availability and Suitability Study and Code Analysis Project (LASS+CAP)  
Project Update and Discussion  
Moved to the July 22, 2024 Commission meeting

## 7. Reports and Updates

- a. **Council Representative Report, Council Representative Deborah Harris**  
Councilmember Deborah Harris did not have updates for this meeting.
- b. Planning and Zoning Commission Representative Report, Representative Mary Norton  
Commissioner Norton noted that there is a vacancy/opening in the Planning and Zoning Commission.
- c. Open Space Management Report, Robert Wallace and Sylvia Struss
- d. PROSE May 2024 Newsletter

**8. Informational Items To and From Commissioners and Staff**

Commissioner White expressed his concern that the FUTS trails should have speed limits posted especially on the neighborhood trails. He suggested that e-bikes should be registered as a way to educate the public on regulations.

**9. Potential Future Agenda Items**

John Wesley Powell (JWP) Project Update

Land Availability and Suitability Study and Code Analysis Project (LASS + CAP)

Project Update and Discussion

**10. Adjournment**

Commissioner White motioned to adjourn; Commissioner Runbeck seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 6:16 pm.