

DRAFT

OPEN SPACE COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES

OPEN SPACE COMMISSION
MONDAY
AUGUST 26, 2024

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

1. Call to Order

Chair Applin called the meeting to order at 4:03pm.

2. Roll Call

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

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

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

Staff and Others Present

Robert Wallace, Open Space Supervisor
Sylvia Struss, Open Space Coordinator
Michele McNulty, Community Development/Planning
David Pederson, Community Development/Planning
Martin Ince, Transportaion Planner
David Howe, Assistant Real Estate Manager
Carmen Pryer, Real Estate Specialist

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 June 24, 2024 Minutes

Commissioner Thomas motioned to approve June 24, 2024 Minutes, Commissioner Wallen seconded, all voted in favor.

5. Public Comment

At this time, any member of the public may address the Commission on any subject that is not scheduled before the Commission on this day. The Arizona Open Meeting Law prohibits the Commission from discussing or taking action on an item which is not listed on the prepared agenda. Commission members may, however, respond to criticism made by those addressing the Commission, ask staff to review a matter, or ask that a matter be placed on a future agenda. To address the Commission on an item that is on the agenda, please wait for the Chair to call for Public Comment at the time the item is heard.

Chair Applin opened it up to public comment on topics not on the agenda, and there were no comments.

6. Business Items

A. John Wesley Powell (JWP) Project Update

Michelle McNulty and David Peterson from the City's Development/Planning presented the John Wesley Powell area update. She showed the current proposed alignment of the road connecting JW Powell Blvd with Fourth Street. The road goes through several private property parcels, and the engineers for those parcel owners are working with city engineers to move it into design. Staff are working on this JW Powell-specific plan, focusing on activities, wildlife, trail connections, public facilities such as a school or fire station. Land use is being considered through the regional plan update, and they will bring PROSE/Open Space into those conversations. Mr. Peterson noted they talked with AZ Game & Fish about wildlife crossings and the desired infrastructure for that. There was a walk-through of this alignment with designers, engineers, property owners. Staff are excited to have Open Space involved to try to get a greenway corridor. Vice Chair Thomas noted that the Open Spaces Commission identified this Hoffman Tank area a long time ago as an area where Open Space is needed, and that it is in the Commission's Strategic Plan. She also noted the need to rebalance this area for wildlife and for stormwater/drainage. There was some discussion about what the road would look like: it would be similar to JW Powell Blvd with one lane in each direction, a greenway in the middle for future expansion, with a 5-to-6-foot sidewalk on the west/north side, and a FUTS on the east/south side. Water and sewer will be under the road. There was discussion about re-routing the Arizona Trail, and that the FUTS would access the national forest to the south of all the properties and to the AZ Loop Trail. There was discussion about potentially using remaining 2004 bond funds to get some open space here, not just a greenway next to the road.

There was some discussion about whether this was a strategic plan, a specific plan (which would encompass everything we want to see in this area), a “specific plan light,” or a sector plan (which is more of a development guide). Ms. McNulty said that a specific plan was funded 4 years ago, but there was a lack of activity because of staffing levels and Covid, and then the City was getting closer to the Regional Plan update. She noted this will still function like a specific plan, but may not have all the things like transportation and land use—those are part of the regional plan and will be integrated into this specific plan. It is a “specific plan light” regarding the topics being covered, but not light in the process—they are still getting everyone’s input, going through the Planning & Zoning and City Council processes.

There was discussion about the current regional plan and zoning codes being the guiding documents for Symmetry’s 126 acres, where development has already moved forward. It was noted that Symmetry has the rights to purchase the additional 405 acres (AZ State Trust Land) by 2027. There are 2,186 acres altogether in this area, but because of slopes, the developable portions are far less than that.

Commissioner White commented that it was wise to consider trails and open space as activity centers, because they’re all connected—we want trails radiating from the activity centers. There should be a plan for trails and open space as part of the specific plan, rather than fighting for single trails. He noted that Open Space benefits everyone in the long run: developers, residents, and future generations.

Chair Applin asked if any members of the public had questions, and there were none.

B. Land Availability and Suitability Study and Code Analysis Project (LASS+CAP) Project Update and Discussion

Michelle McNulty presented the PowerPoint attached to the Commission’s materials. She explained that this is a multi-prong initiative to address critical long-term planning & resilience: Planning, Housing, Sustainability, Mountain Line, Engineering & Transportation, and PROSE. It was a study of what land is available, what are development potential and barriers, an in-depth development code and process analysis – to address housing & climate change goals – and an analysis of what’s working and what’s not.

The inventory focused on vacant and underutilized sites, and from that, identified “opportunity sites”—readiness from a zoning standpoint, and whether infrastructure is in place. Conclusions were that there are 8,125 vacant acres, spread across 2242 parcels, 6,735 of those acres are residentially zoned. There were 5,399 acres of underutilized land, spread across 1822 parcels. Thirteen percent of vacant land is environmentally constrained by stream corridors, wetlands, steep slopes, floodplain, or floodways. Tree resources could reduce buildable land by up to 50 percent.

There are 7,062 acres of buildable land. Most of these acres are in rural residential areas (especially acres that are currently Arizona State Trust Land), which is limited to 1 unit per acre; to yield more housing, zoning will need to change. The study identified fifty opportunity sites for closer study.

The Regional Plan called for new housing to be prioritized to meet climate and housing goals. Ms. McNulty noted that redevelopment must be balanced with new development, to help slow down gentrification and displacement. This study will inform the regional plan updates, and the CAP (code analysis) by informing recommended zoning code/development review, and parking strategies. Regarding the CAP, they will look at all codes that affect development, to see where the barriers to housing and climate change goals are. It will also look at procedures, affordable housing/sustainable building incentives, resource protection (and how it is applied to developments, so it is meeting environmental goals), minimum parking requirements, and HOH (High Occupancy Housing). Then they will examine zone-specific issues (such as low-density restrictions and whether they are inconsistent with housing and climate goals), higher density allowance (allow smaller, more affordable units), and commercial zoning (parking & HOH regulations severely limit potential).

There was discussion that Flagstaff is an attractive place to live (though not necessarily to work), and that increasing housing doesn't cure that problem; if a lot of high-density housing is developed, that causes lower-density housing prices to increase. There was discussion about larger parcels, such as state trust land, and want to ensure the city has some influence on higher-density housing to be built, rather than single-home estates. It was noted that the city could strategize state trust land for both housing and open space—those goals do not need to be in conflict.

Mr. Wallace noted that this plan is important for the Commission to learn about, because it interacts with the Open Spaces Commission map of desired OS properties. It is important for PROSE to stay involved as things progress. Ms. McNulty confirmed she was aware of Open Space's goal to have everyone have open space within a 10-minute walk of their door.

There was also concern about how the resource protection overlays will be used in the future, and how we can preserve trees and neighborhoods. It was noted there will be future meetings about resource protection, and tree resources. The goal is to keep the character of Flagstaff while also meeting housing and climate goals.

C. Schultz Creek Open Space Access and Trailhead Planning

Mr. Wallace provided some history about Schultz Creek Open Space and the detention basins. Aside from the detention basins, it is being used as access to US Forest Service trails. The private property on the west portion of this

property is identified as an important location for the open space system and is listed as a potential acquisition in the 2004 bond fund ordinance. Open Space and Real Estate propose to trade acreage on the northwest corner of open space for acreage along the bottom portion of the private land. The private property owner has been very tolerant in letting people cross that bottom portion of his land and has not taken action to prohibit parking on it. There was discussion about a user-created trail along the east side of the proposed trade (west side of the drainage area). Mr. Ince discussed the planning of the trail across the detention basins with the US Forest Service, where that social trail was rejected; we gave the US Forest Service some autonomy in making that decision, because it leads to their trails. Several Commissioners expressed that the trail across the detention basins feels dangerous and unsustainable, and wanted Open Space to revisit the social trail idea with the US Forest Service.

7. Reports and Updates

A. Council Representative Report

Councilmember Harris was absent.

B. Planning and Zoning Commission Representative Report

Commissioner Norton did not have anything to report.

C. Open Space Management Report

Ms. Struss noted upcoming Open Space events. Mr. Wallace reported on the amendment to the BBB tax wording passing at City Council and noted that the BBB tax renewal will be on the November 2024 ballot. PROSE Director Rebecca Sayers will present on that at the next meeting. Mr. Wallace noted that the Hidden Hollow Right of Way/Easement amendment will be on the City Council agenda for September 17, 2024. He also noted that regarding the Observatory Mesa Trail Plan, the third public meeting on the final draft plan is September 19, 2024 from 5-7pm at the downtown Flagstaff Public Library, and that there is an online community survey. Commissioner Thomas suggested bringing the plan back to the Commission one more time.

D. PROSE Monthly Newsletter - July 2024

8. Informational Items To and From Commissioners and Staff

Commissioner White shared that several Council members said the Open Space Commission did a really good job on the Hidden Hollow Right of Way/Easement amendment issue.

9. Potential Future Agenda Items

- BBB tax renewal on the November ballot, as well as project and multi-year planning of BBB funds.
- Observatory Mesa Trail Plan – it was noted that if we receive a lot of feedback from the public meeting and community survey, we will bring it back to the Commission to be sure to iron out as many issues as we can before presenting it to City Council. There was discussion about outreach for the plan, and it was confirmed that we are sending out 4,300 postcards to neighboring properties to Observatory Mesa, sending out emails to individuals and HOAs, putting up posters and flyers, and posting it on social media and community calendars.
- Flagstaff Regional Plan 2025 will come to the Commission in October 2024.

10. Adjournment

Commissioner White motioned to adjourn, Commissioner Thomas seconded; the meeting was adjourned at 5:56pm.