

**DRAFT**

**Open Space Commission Meeting Minutes**

OPEN SPACE COMMISSION  
MONDAY  
SEPTEMBER 23, 2024  
4:00 P.M.

HYBRID MEETING  
FLAGSTAFF AQUAPLEX  
AND MICROSOFT TEAMS  
1702 N FOURTH STREET

**1. Call to Order**

Chair Applin called the meeting to order at 4:04 p.m.

**2. Roll Call**

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

**Present:**

Chair Bruce Applin  
Vice Chair Jacqueline Thomas  
Commissioner Mary Norton (P&Z  
Liaison)  
Commissioner Lina Wallen  
Commissioner Nat White

**Absent:**

Commissioner Bruce Fox  
Commissioner Chelita Runbeck  
Councilmember Representative: Deborah  
Harris

**Staff Present:**

Robert Wallace  
Rebecca Sayers  
Sylvia Struss  
Ashlee Fliney

**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 the August 26, 2024 Minutes**

Motion to approve by Commissioner Norton, 2nd by Vice Chair Thomas, 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.

## 6. **Business Items**

### A. **BBB Tax Renewal**

Ms. Sayers presented on the City of Flagstaff BBB Tax Renewal Educational Campaign for the November election. Recently, City Council updated the language in the BBB tax to include Open Space in the Parks & Recreation definition. As a result, this Commission will be responsible for reviewing and approving Open Space's portion of BBB tax funds. Open Space Commissioners are free to educate constituents about the BBB tax renewal, but can only advocate for it in their individual capacities. Ms. Sayers showed 24 flyers, each focusing on a different aspect of the BBB funds, who pays them (68% paid by visitors), and how they are used in the Flagstaff community. The BBB tax affects hotel/motels, campgrounds, short-term rentals, restaurants, and bars. The City is not looking for an increase in tax, just to renew the BBB tax, which expires in 2028. The website has a breakdown of our local sales tax, including the BBB tax. Ms. Sayers also pointed out the BBB logo that is surrounded by the 5 divisions that receive BBB funds: Parks & Recreation (including Open Space), Beautification, Economic Development, Tourism, and Arts & Sciences.

The Commission expressed concern that they had not heard any publicity about this at all. Ms. Sayers indicated the city is doing print ads, social media, email, as well as Harkins and Mountain Line bus ads. Information is available at [BBBrenewalflagstaff.com](http://BBBrenewalflagstaff.com). There was a question about what Arts & Sciences is; it is managed by the City's Beautification team and Commission, with grants, funding Creative Flagstaff, and projects such as the new artwork on the APS electric boxes and murals throughout town. There was a concern that whatever the tax is, restaurants and hotels have passed, and will pass on the cost to patrons. It was pointed out that those restaurants and hotels benefit from the tax, particularly in the advertising campaigns that Tourism does, which then brings them more patrons.

Ms. Sayers will bring an updated PROSE 5-year plan in the next few months, where most of the BBB funding is focused on capital projects.

## B. Project Prioritization and Multi-year Project Planning

Mr. Wallace presented a PowerPoint about potential projects, new amenities, and acquisitions, in order to help Open Space develop and prioritize a 5-year plan and a 10-year plan for using Open Space's portion of the BBB funds, though we will continue to pursue grants as we have in the past. These potential project ideas came from the Open Space Management Plan, and after reviewing the PROSE Mission, and Open Space specific goals. The Open Space Section wants to avoid using BBB funds for ongoing maintenance, in case those funds go away, and rather focus on bigger projects. Mr. Wallace broke down the ideas into Deferred Maintenance, New Amenities, and Acquisitions.

Deferred maintenance ideas included the road to Picture Canyon and parking area, trail rehabilitation on Picture Canyon and McMillan Mesa, restoring the Picture Canyon Rio de Flag Corridor, addressing the bark/chip piles, and repairing wildlife tanks on Observatory Mesa, seeding with native seed along the FUTS and N Izabel St, and planting a tree buffer between the Veterans Home and the FUTS on McMillan Mesa Natural Area.

Ideas for new amenities included Schultz Creek trailhead facilities and parking, a permanent toilet at Picture Canyon trailhead, Picture Canyon sign replacement, sign design and implementation at McMillan Mesa, fencing at Picture Canyon and Observatory Mesa, implementing the Observatory Mesa Trail Plan, and Picture Canyon foot bridge replacement.

Possible acquisitions include regional preserves (including the right to purchase state trust land), connectors (natural corridors that connect the integrated OS system), and complementary Open Space (smaller spaces that provide value to the integrated OS system, such as equitable access, wildlife corridors, and preserving viewsheds)—also known as pocket parks, or neighborwoods. These acquisitions align well with our goal for everyone to have open space within a 10-minute walk of their front door.

Mr. Wallace noted that there are lots of options to partner—with FUTS, with Affordable housing, neighborhoods, Beautification, Coconino County Parks & Recreation, conservation non-profits, and volunteer groups. BBB funds will be useful to leverage or match grant funds.

There was some discussion about how to approach prioritizing projects, such as differentiating between what can be done immediately and quickly vs. long-term projects, making choices based on costs, impact on the community, or future cost savings. Staff noted that we might put a project in the 5-year plan, but it may not happen until year 3 or 4. Ms. Sayers indicated that we don't want to attach costs to projects or approach projects with how much we can get done with x dollars, but rather to prioritize what is most important first. A list of potential projects will be provided to the Commission, and the Commission will work on prioritizing during future meetings. The Parks &

Recreation Commission went through this process, choosing their top 10 priorities as individual Commissioners, and then synthesizing everyone's priorities to make the Commission's priorities.

Deferred maintenance was discussed, including the need to have a schedule for ongoing maintenance, since once we acquire a new property, there will be more maintenance. The idea of establishing a non-profit arm like Friends of Coconino County was raised, so that individuals could make big donations to Open Space for acquisition or maintenance.

Chair Applin said he leaned toward acquisition, since it is always harder and more expensive to acquire property later, rather than polishing up our existing open space. Vice Chair Thomas expressed interest in knowing our maintenance costs each year, to be able to prioritize other projects. There was a question about whether it was easier to qualify for a grant for maintenance than for acquisition; it is easier to get maintenance grants, but they tend to be lower dollar amounts than acquisition grants.

Staff will put together a list (with descriptions) from this presentation, and will estimate ongoing maintenance costs, leading up to the ranking exercise at a future meeting. Commissioners will be given a survey with a list of projects, and asking, on a scale of 1-10, how you would rank the importance of these; staff will then synthesize the results. It was noted that Open Space's 5-year plan will go before City Council as well, so they will have to agree with the Commission's priorities as well.

## **7. Reports and Updates**

### **A. Council Representative Report - Council Representative Deborah Harris**

Council Representative Deborah Harris was not present.

### **B. Planning and Zoning Commission Representative Report, Representative Mary Norton**

Commissioner Norton reported that there are openings on the Planning and Zoning Commission they are trying to fill, so if Commissioners know anyone who might be interested, please apply.

### **C. Open Space Management Report, Robert Wallace and Sylvia Struss**

Ashlee Fliney shared about the Full Moon Hike at Picture Canyon this week, where 30 adults attended. Mr. Wallace said there is progress on the Invasive Plant grant on Observatory Mesa: Treating some of the old bark piles, a 9/11 Service event, seed-bed preparation this fall, with seeding next fall. He also noted that at Picture Canyon, AZ Conservation Corps crews will realign the

Water Bird trail to be further away from the petroglyph boulders, will install stone steps at Petroglyph Overlook, and will do some more trail restoration.

#### **D. PROSE Monthly Newsletter - August 2024**

There was some discussion about the trail counters.

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

It was noted that the Council Candidate Forum was taking place immediately after today's Commission meeting at Coconino Community College. Mr. Wallace reported that 120 people attended the Observatory Mesa Trail Plan public meeting on September 19, 2024, and the online survey is open until October 18, 2024. He also reported that a group wants to rename the Picture Canyon footbridge after Jack Welch; they will present this idea to City Council and this Commission at a future meeting (a plaque and some artwork). Mr. Wallace noted that City Council considered the Hidden Hollow easement adjustment and gave their nod to it; the next step is to present it to AZ State Parks Board, as well as the State Historic Preservation Office, and if approved, it will go back to the City for permit applications and final plans. Ms. Sayers reported there is an Open House about local ballot initiatives (such as the BBB tax renewal, Mountain Line tax renewal, and County expenditure limitation) on Thursday, September 26, 2024 at 5:00 p.m. at the Aquaplex.

#### **9. Potential Future Agenda Items**

- Project Prioritization and Multi-year Project Planning
- Observatory Mesa Trail Plan Update
- Don Weaver Trail Alignment Proposal

#### **10. Adjournment**

Commissioner White motioned to adjourn, Commissioner Norton seconded, and all voted in favor. The meeting adjourned at 6:03 p.m.