

Open Spaces Commission Minutes

OPEN SPACES COMMISSION
MONDAY
JANUARY 27, 2025

HYBRID MEETING
FLAGSTAFF AQUAPLEX
AND MICROSOFT TEAMS
1702 N FOURTH STREET
4:00 P.M.

1. Call to Order

Commissioner Thomas started the meeting at 4:02 PM.

2. Roll Call

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

Chair - Vacant	Commissioner Molly Joyce
Vice Chair Jacqueline Thomas	Commissioner Lina Wallen
Commissioner Mary Norton (P&Z Liaison)	Commissioner Nat White
Commissioner Bruce Fox	Councilmember Representative: David Spence

Others present: Robert Wallace, Sylvia Struss, Ashlee Fliney, Rebecca Sayers, Mark Loeth, Michael Wilson, Joe Hazel, Ryan Randazzo, Jeremy Morse, Bill Case, Gisela Kluwin, Rob Lockey, Forest Service Matt McGrath & Pat McGervey, and Annie Ridgell

Present on Teams: Steve Stawisky, Jessica Archibald, Anthony Quintile, Carmen Pryer, Georganna Staskey, Jessica Archibald, Scott Saville, Michele James, Martin Ince, Jen Blue, Rick Moore, David Zimmerman, Sara Holditch, Presley Hoover, Danielle, and Lori

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 December 9, 2024 Meeting Minutes

Commissioner Thomas motioned to approve the minutes of the December 9, 2024 meeting as written. Commissioner Norton seconded the motion. The motion was passed unanimously.

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.

There were no public comments.

6. Business Items

A. Council Liaison and Open Spaces Commission Introductions

Molly Joyce was introduced as a Commission Member and David Spence was introduced as the City Council liaison. Both are looking forward to working with us and bringing their skills on board. The Commission members and staff introduced themselves.

B. Chair/Vice Chair Seat Selection

Commissioner Thomas expressed interest in being Chair, and Commissioner Fox expressed interest in being Co-Chair. Commissioner White nominated and motioned for Commissioner Thomas as Chair and Bruce Fox as Co-Chair. Commissioner Norton seconded, and all voted in favor.

C. Greater Observatory Mesa Area Trail Plan: Public Comment Synthesis Review & Recommendation

Mark Loseth from Southwest Decision Resources (SDR) presented on the Public Engagement Process. This is the third public engagement phase of the Greater Observatory Mesa Area (GOMA) trail plan. He provided an overview of the public process and plan development. This was followed by reviewing the public feedback for the following survey questions.

- Design a trail plan for GOMA based on community feedback and input, guiding policy, and best practices of sustainable trail design
- Reduce the impacts of motorized use in the GOMA, and work toward a non-motorized trail system
- Address unsustainable and unauthorized trails to improve environmental conditions in GOMA
- Increase local access to the formal trail system to advance the "10 minutes walking distance to open space" goal of the City of Flagstaff
- Design a sustainable trail system that addresses impacts of unauthorized recreation and balances allowed user experiences with open space conservation
- Provide a variety of experiences to accommodate the desires of the community
- Improve safety and wayfinding with increased signage and information for the formal trail system
- How well does the trail plan meet your desired recreation experience?

Information on the survey results as it pertains to the question categories: Achieves, Mostly achieves, but could do better, and Does not achieve, were shared and discussed.

Public Engagement Takeaways:

- There is a fundamental difference in how the public thinks that the Observatory Mesa Natural Area should be used; varying from primarily a place for preservation for a quiet refuge and natural experience to an interest in a denser trail system that provides more outdoor recreational experiences
- Continued concern for environmental and wildlife impact
- Overall, the public feels the current draft is a better balance than previous drafts
- Single-track trails are more desired than roadbeds in the third round of comments, which varies from what staff heard in the second round of public engagement
- The current plan does not provide enough diversity and trail experiences for different types of users, primarily winter and bike use
- Hiking trails could be improved, especially moderate lengths that allow loops
- Adaptive mountain biking connections and offerings could be improved
- Maintenance of existing roads and trails should be a priority
- Additional mountain biking experiences are desired, including additional bike-optimized alignments and the adoption of alignment 3.36 (Hot Pockets)

Robert Wallace spoke next and shared additional details on what was heard in the public feedback. He provided new information from land manager partners, offered the Open Space Section management perspectives, and reviewed options for the Open Spaces Commission to consider.

Forest Service representatives Matt McGrath and Pat McGervey shared information on the Forest

Service's perspective.

- They reminded the Commission that the Flagstaff Trail Initiative conducted public outreach in 2020, which led to the development of the Flagstaff Regional Trail Strategy. This document identified the need for a trail system in this location.
- The GOMA Trail Plan supports the Forest Plan for the project area Flagstaff Neighborhoods Management Area.
- No additional public scoping is anticipated for issuing a special use permit to the city of Flagstaff. The Forest Service plans to utilize the City's public participation to analyze public scoping.

Trail 3.36 / Hot pockets

- A summary of the public feedback was given. Link for [public input synthesis](#)
- New information
 - Arizona Game and Fish Department currently does not have any concerns with the trail plan or Hot Pockets alignment.
 - Arizona State Parks and Trails. Has no concerns about Hot Pockets. They commented that adopting this trail would count towards the 20 acres that can be developed as specified in the Deed of Conservation Easement contract. Hot Pockets increased the total number of developed acreages by 0.1 acre. The current density is 11.44 miles/sq mile; this would increase to 11.86 miles/sq mile if adopted
- Open Space Section Management Perspective
 - Staff were concerned with adopting a trail that's not just user-created from traffic but purposely built with no public process, as it may send a message that illegally built trails are likely to be adopted.
 - It may also be more difficult to maintain than other alignments due to steep terrain.
 - This trail received substantial support from the mountain biking community and will likely be difficult to close permanently due to its popularity.
 - Though this trail may require more maintenance over time due to steeper terrain, volunteer trail maintenance with the mountain biking community could be a successful solution.
 - Adopting this alignment where there is terrain can provide an intentional mountain biking experience that would help meet the need for places to ride close to the community without substantially increasing disturbance to the landscape.
 - When the trail condition was assessed, it was found that it's not badly constructed, but adjustments should be considered to limit watershed impacts and make it more sustainable.
 - Overall, it's our perspective that support for keeping the alignment outweighs restoration and that our land manager partners have no concerns with adoption.
- Options:
 - Options for consideration: 1. Keep the plan unchanged with the current restoration designation for the Hot Pockets alignment; or 2. To revise the plan to adopt the Hot Pockets alignment.

Mountain Bike-optimized Trails

- A summary of the public feedback was given. Link for [public input synthesis](#)
- New information
 - The Open Space Section met with partners at the Flagstaff Biking Organization. They reconfirmed that considering the additional mountain-bike optimized alignments is important to meet the community's needs.
 - Arizona State Parks reviewed the additional alignments in section 13 and shared that they are not in conflict with the Deed of the Conservation Easement. The AZ State Parks and Trails defer to the Forest Service since they are the property managers for this area.
- Open Space Section Management Perspective
 - The GOMA trail plan current draft has two existing bike-optimized alignments 5.25: It creates a loop with 5.2 along the south slope of the Mesa and is 1.25 miles. And 5.26 creates a short loop with 3.10 and FUTS Mars Hill at 0.5 miles.
 - Based on community feedback, two additional potential trails were mapped between 5.7

and 5.8. The western alignment totals 0.65 miles, and the eastern alignment is 0.85 miles. Instead of adding a route that would parallel the existing trail 5.7, this concept is updated so that 5.7 now loses elevation more quickly, thus extending the flow type experience without adding an additional alignment.

- The new mileage in Section 13 would total 6.46 miles. These two bike alignments increase the density from 4.96 trail miles/sq mile to 6.36 trail miles/sq mile in Section 13.
- These additional alignments could help create an inclusive trail system that meets the needs of different user groups. They may also help alleviate concerns about user conflicts on the entire proposed system. These bike-optimized trails will likely appeal more to bikers and could reduce bike travel on other trail locations, thus reducing user conflicts.
- Options:
 - The options for consideration: 1. Keep the plan unchanged and not include additional mountain bike-optimized trail alignments in the final version for City Council review, or 2. recommend that the GOMA trail plan be updated to include these two additional mountain bike-optimized trail alignments.

Clarification on trail density was provided which included the following details.

- Low Density: 1 to 3 miles of trail per square mile
- Moderate Density: from 4 to 10 miles of trail per square mile
- High Density: can exceed 10 miles of trail per square mile

The way density is defined was used as a reference point for overall trail density considerations.

- Current plan trail density = 6.7 miles / square mile.
- Total road/trail length= 53.19 miles
- Proposed Changes trail density = 6.86 trail miles / square mile
- Total road/trail length= 61.78 miles

Public Comments:

Anthony Quintile expressed that the people voting don't understand what they are voting on, that the current plan was not ideal for mountain bike users. He said that the new plan had plenty of multi-use trails and encouraged voting in favor of the new plan.

Rick Moore was concerned that the word "natural" kept getting dropped out. 80-90% of folks agree that the current plan was workable, and he does not want the plan to be modified since the new plan was too heavy mountain bike use. He agreed with the historical aspect of the plan.

Steve Stawisky did not understand the numbers presented and was concerned that 2/3 of public said we were not succeeding. He likes the current draft.

Joe Hazel liked the new revision of the plan that it has good stuff for all uses. He indicated that Flagstaff Biking Organization would be happy to help with implementation going forward.

Jeremy Morse lives in Railroad Springs and uses Observatory Mesa there with his family for mountain biking. Although he was new to the plan, he feels that the plan didn't feel ready and so should not be sent to City Council.

Michael Wilson provided written comments: This plan is a culmination of a lot of hard work over several years, having been a part of the Commission for much of that time. I believe this third version of the plan strikes a balance for all users and not to modify the plan.

Jen Blue provided written comments: She fears that the latest version of the plan was an attempt to take away quiet spaces and was too focused on recreation. She is not for it.

Commission Discussion:

The Commission had a lengthy discussion about the information presented. Concerns were raised

about the timing of the availability of new information including guidance from partner agencies and the map showing additional alignments; continued concern about the founding documents and baseline conditions establishing Observatory Mesa Natural Area; and concern around ensuring that the public's comments from the last round of engagement are listened to, including plan modification to address them.

Staff provided information that if the Commission continues to request the closure of Trail 3.36, or "Hot Pockets," it will be extremely difficult to close and restore, as we have experience in other areas that closed trails continue to be used, creating a difficult cycle for staff resources. This is a well known and well used trail, partner agencies have provided letters stating they have no concerns with the trail, and public comment was clear in the latest round of engagement that the trail is highly valued.

Ultimately the Commission decided to take a vote to determine the path forward.

Commissioner Norton motioned to recommend to City Council the adoption of the current Observatory Mesa Trail Plan without the added trails, and Commissioner Wallen seconded the motion. The vote was a tie 3-3, and so the motion failed. The "no" votes included Commissioner Joyce and Co-Chair Fox, and Chair Thomas.

Co-Chair Fox motioned to recommend to City Council the updated January 27 Greater Observatory Mesa Area Trail Plan, and Commissioner Joyce seconded the motion. The vote was 4-2 in favor, and the motion passed. The "no" votes included Commissioners Norton and Wallen.

D. Beautification Grant Application Commission Letter of Support

Decision Item: This item will be managed by staff due to upcoming deadlines.

Due to the extended length of the meeting, the rest of the agenda was suspended until March.

E. Project Prioritization and Multi-year Project Planning Update

Information and discussion Item. Moved to the March 24, 2025 meeting.

Due to the extended length of the meeting, the rest of the agenda was suspended until March.

7. Reports and Updates

A. Council Representative Report, Councilmember David Spence

Due to the extended length of the meeting, the rest of the agenda was suspended until March.

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

Due to the extended length of the meeting, the rest of the agenda was suspended until March.

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

Due to the extended length of the meeting, the rest of the agenda was suspended until March.

D. PROSE December 2024 Newsletter

Due to the extended length of the meeting, the rest of the agenda was suspended until March.

8. Informational Items To and From Commissioners and Staff

Due to the extended length of the meeting, the rest of the agenda was suspended until March.

9. Potential Future Agenda Items

Due to the extended length of the meeting, the rest of the agenda was suspended until March.

10. **Adjournment**

The meeting adjourned at 7:24 PM.