

MARICOPA COUNTY PARKS AND RECREATION DEPARTMENT
PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION MEETING
Regular Meeting of November 17, 2020

LOCATION: Virtual Meeting via *GoToMeeting* (live feed and telephone). Maricopa County Parks Headquarters, 41835 N. Castle Hot Springs Road, Morristown, AZ 85342

COMMISSION MEMBERS PRESENT: Thomas Rhoades, Jack Stapley, Robert Branch, Megha Budruk, Shelby Scharbach, and Eric Mears

COMMISSION MEMBERS ABSENT: Isabel Chavez

STAFF PRESENT: RJ Cardin, Director; Donna Southard, Recorder; Ken Vonderscher, Planning and Development Manager; Dawna Taylor, Public Information Officer; Jennifer Waller, Operations Manager; Aimee Upton, Administrator; and Betsy Pregulman, Deputy Maricopa County Attorney

The official correspondence and staff recommendations contained in this Commission folder are hereby entered as supportive material to the official minutes of the November 17, 2020, Parks and Recreation Commission regular meeting.

PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION REGULAR MEETING

ITEM #1 – CALL TO ORDER – Robert Branch, Chair, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Commission

- The regular meeting was called to order at 10:02 a.m.

ITEM #2 – ROLL CALL – Roll Call taken - a quorum was present

ITEM #3 – DIRECTOR’S SUMMARY OF CURRENT EVENTS – R.J. Cardin, Director, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department

- Director Cardin provided a brief overview of the Director’s Summary Report including: a new Eco-Blitz natural resource program has been developed; Tres Rios Golf Course is under new management; The Arizona Model Pilots Association’s management agreement comes to term in January 2021 and a new Expression for Interest (LOI) was issued with a response date of December 3, 2020; the 2020 *100 Miles in 100 Days Challenge* has kicked off; the Maricopa Trail and Park Foundation received the Coalition for Recreational Trails award for their *Maricopa Trail Volunteer Stewardship Program*; the department is in the process of installing a new point of sale and campground reservation system; safety training hours are ahead of last year’s numbers; volunteer service hours are similar to last year despite COVID-19 concerns; website visits continue to increase; a new trail is in the planning stage from Lake Pleasant to Vulture Mountain and on to White Tank Park; and the park visitation number show a 41% increase from the same period last year.
- Commissioner Eric inquired if there is a new Safety Manager. Director Cardin confirmed that the County has hired a new Safety Manager.

ITEM #4 – APPROVAL OF COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES: SEPTEMBER 15, 2020 REGULAR MEETING – Robert Branch, Chair, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Commission

- Chair Branch called for a motion to approve the September 15, 2020, regular meeting minutes as presented. Commissioner Sharbach motioned, seconded by Commissioner Budruk. With all in favor, none opposed, the motion passed.

ITEM #5 – APPROVE 2021 PARKS COMMISSION MEETING SCHEDULE – Robert Branch, Chair, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Commission

- Chair Branch called for a motion to approve the 2021 Parks Commission meeting schedule. Commissioner Mears motioned, seconded by Commissioner Scharbach. With all in favor, none opposed, the motion passed.

ITEM #6 – APPOINT SUBCOMMITTEE TO NOMINATE CHAIR AND VICE-CHAIR FOR 2021 – Robert Branch, Chair, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Commission

- Director Cardin informed the Commission the By-laws state the previous Chair (Tom Rhoades) and one other member would be needed for the sub-committee; Director Cardin recommends Megha Budruk as the second subcommittee member. Chair Branch asked for a motion for Commissioner Rhoades and Budruk to serve on the nominating subcommittee. Commissioner Scharbach motioned, seconded by Commissioner Mears. With all in favor, none opposed, the motion passed.

ITEM #7 – 2019 MARICOPA COUNTY PARKS AND RECREATION ECONOMIC IMPACT STUDY RESULTS – Deepak Chhabra, Ph.D., School of Community Resources and Development, Arizona State University

- Director Cardin informed the Commission that the 2009 Strategic Master plan had a recommendation to better understand the regional economic impacts of the County Park system. In 2013, the first economic impact study was conducted. The ASU visitor data collected for the 2018-2019 Visitor's Study Report, and previously presented to the Commission by Megha Budruk, was used to develop an updated economic impact report of County parks that can be used in the Parks Vision 2030 System Master Plan Update.
- Ms. Chhabra listed the three objects of the study: to assess the economic impact of visitors to eight regional parks, to ascertain the economic impacts of operating costs and concessionaire revenues of the listed parks in addition to Adobe Dam Regional Park, and to determine the dollars generated for local residents for every dollar invested by the department in the annual operating expenses. The eight parks received 1.67 million visitors during the study period with 69.4% categorized as local and 30.6% as non-locals (outside the study area and out of state). Of the local visitors, 78% were retained or reoccurring visitors. Non-local visitors consisted of 89.8% day-trippers. A total of \$82.74M in direct expenditures were generated by park visitors. The study found that for every dollar invested in the operating budget by the County, local residents receive an average economic benefit of \$4.85 (1:4.85). The direct Concessionaire revenue generated by private sector recreation operators was \$25.11M; this is in addition to the parks leverage ratio dollars. Study recommendations included expanding county strategies to increase park visitation and develop additional external collaborative partnerships with ancillary sectors.
- Director Cardin stated that the data of this survey will feed into the Parks' Vision 2030 System Master Plan update. The department's approach has been to cover the operating expenses through fees and concession revenues while looking at the Board of Supervisors to help with funding long-term improvements that will generate economic impacts and add to the quality of life for residents and visitors.

ITEM #8 – PARKS VISION 2030 SYSTEM MASTER PLAN UPDATE – R.J. Cardin, Director, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department

- Director Cardin updated the Commissioners on the status of the master plan update process after tabling it for several months due to COVID. In September, staff began moving forward with initiating the public participation process. The first regional parks system plan was approved by the Board of Supervisors in December 1965. The update will look focus on the next 10 years with a 50-year horizon. In addition, the plan will look to address development pressures, identify growth through existing and new parklands, identify opportunities for greater visitor access, plan for economic impacts, and address regional conservation measures. Anticipated outcomes include growing the regional park system ahead of development, partnerships with city and government agencies, provide natural landscapes to underserved communities, economic strategies to support the larger regional vision, and conservation management efforts designed for regional sustainability.
- Commissioner Stapley expressed to the Commission and to staff how important it is to always look forward 50 years for growth and conservation planning of the park system for our citizens as did our predecessors. Commissioner Budruk pointed out that not only planning for population growth is important,

but that as an essential service, parks provide physical and mental health opportunities in times such as the current pandemic. Recent studies are showing that local travel to local parks is growing significantly which potentially provides an opportunity to introduce regional parks to the surrounding communities.

ITEM #9 – FY21 CIP TIMELINE UPDATE – Ken Vonderscher, Planning and Development Manager, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department

- Mr. Vonderscher provided a brief capital project timeline review. New funding for FY21 was not received from the County's general fund; available funds from the department's budget and roll-over monies are being used toward the highest priority projects. The 100% Engineering and Development Plans for Vulture Mountain are complete. When funding becomes available, the plans are ready to submit for permits.

Chairman Branch left the meeting at 11:45 am.

ITEM #10 – PROPOSAL FOR DESIGNATED PRIMITIVE AND SHORELINE CAMPSITES AT LAKE PLEASANT REGIONAL PARK – David Jordan, Lake Pleasant Park Supervisor, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department

- Mr. Jordan informed the Commission that primitive camping has been available at Lake Pleasant in the past. Due to Covid-19, primitive camping was discontinued to maintain social distancing efforts. This allowed staff to reevaluate the current process and address issues associated with primitive camping. Key issues include fluctuating water levels, management of 125 miles of shoreline, resource degradation, excessive litter/trash, lack of accountability, law enforcement calls, and fire dangers. Maricopa County Sheriff's Office has seen approximately a 75% decrease in calls at Lake Pleasant primarily due to the shutdown of primitive camping.

Mitigation efforts include the installation of automatic gates at the north and main entries to prevent access to visitors coming in during the late nighttime hours. Staff is proposing a plan to establish designated primitive camping areas both through the main entrance focused on the 10-lane area and one area through the north entrance. Designated areas will include tent-only areas, boat-in camping/angler night fishing (implemented June 2020), and RV trailer/tent areas. As with the developed and semi-developed sites, contact information will be collected from the user which provides more accountability of site care and cleanliness. There are five phases to the plan; phase one has been completed, phase two-three will be completed by the end of December 2020, and phases four and five will be rolled out in July and September 2021. The plan will allow for a total of 126 designated primitive campsites upon completion. CARES funding will be utilized to cover the setup expenses (campsite markers, barriers, signage).

- Commissioner Scharbach supports the plan and stated that the plan adds organization to potential chaos.
- Commissioner Mears inquired if this was a temporary plan in response to Covid-19 or a permanent plan. Mr. Jordan informed the Commission that this is a long-term plan aimed at protecting the resources through visitor management and accountability. Commissioner Mears expressed concern about the safety of campers in the spill-way areas in the event of a flood. Mr. Jordan informed the Commission that campers previously used the spill-way area for camping and that staff continually monitors water levels and storm events. Additional gates will be installed in the future to prevent entry in this area during high water levels. Director Cardin stated that staff can add a hazard mitigation section to this plan much like the one used at Adobe Dam.

ITEM #11 – SCORPION BAY MARINA AMENDMENT #2 UPDATE – Emily Miller, Parks Contract Administrator, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department

- Ms. Miller provided a brief review of the marina agreements and improvements. Amendment #2 will increase concession fees, on-shore & off-shore lodging, adding property for dry storage relocation, and utilities/mechanical maintenance changes. Off-shore lodging (cabins) will be located at Dock E. Phase one will include two units and if economically feasible, increase up to six cabins. Phase II, if there is customer demand and is economically feasible, will add up to another 14 cabins at Dock A. Movement of the existing dry storage area would open up the current site for possible higher and better uses such as a potential resort, a dining facility or other entertainment venues.

ITEM #12 – CALL TO THE PUBLIC

- None submitted via email or via the live virtual session.

ITEM #13 – CALL TO THE COMMISSION

- None

ITEM #14 – ADJOURNMENT

- There being no further business, Commissioner Mears motioned and Commissioner Rhoades seconded to adjourn the meeting. With all in favor, the meeting was adjourned at 12:26 pm.