

**MARICOPA COUNTY PARKS AND RECREATION DEPARTMENT**  
**PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION MEETING**  
Regular Meeting of May 18, 2021

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**LOCATION:** Maricopa County Forensic Science Center, Large Conference Room, 701 W Jefferson Street, Phoenix, AZ 85007 with public access virtually via *GoToMeeting* (live feed and telephone).

**COMMISSION MEMBERS PRESENT:** Jack Stapley, Eric Mears, Robert Branch, Megha Budruk, John Crane, and Shelby Scharbach

**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, Operation Manager; and Betsy Pregulman, Deputy Maricopa County Attorney

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The official correspondence and staff recommendations contained in this Commission folder are hereby entered as supportive material to the official minutes of the May 18, 2021, Parks and Recreation Commission regular meeting.

**PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION REGULAR MEETING**

**ITEM #1 – CALL TO ORDER – Jack Stapley, Chair, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Commission**

- The regular meeting was called to order at 9:57 a.m.

**ITEM #2 – PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

**ITEM #3 – ROLL CALL – Roll Call taken - a quorum was present**

**ITEM #4 – DIRECTOR’S SUMMARY OF CURRENT EVENTS – R.J. Cardin, Director, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department**

- With a long agenda, Director Cardin asked if the Commission had any questions regarding the summary report. There were none.

**ITEM #5 – APPROVAL OF COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES: MARCH 16, 2021, REGULAR MEETING – Jack Stapley, Chair, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Commission**

- Chair Stapley called for a motion to approve the March 16, 2021, regular meeting minutes as presented. Commissioner Mears motioned, seconded by Commissioner Crane. Commissioner Scharbach abstained. With all in favor, none opposed, the motion passed.

**ITEM #6 – PLANNING AMENDMENT POLICY – Ken Vonderscher, Planning and Development Manager, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department**

- Mr. Vonderscher informed the Commission that the Department developed and approved a Park Planning Amendment Policy. The purpose of the policy is to guide staff in the process of requests to amend the department’s planning documents. The three key types of amendments are Administrative Changes, Minor Amendments, and Major Amendments. The three types of requests were explained, and examples were provided. A Plan Amendment Request Form was developed to document and track requests.
- Commissioner Scharbach inquired how the park master plans can be accessed. Director Cardin informed them that they are available on the Park’s website.
- Chairman Stapley inquired how requests were handled before the new policy and how the policy will change the process. Director Cardin and Mr. Vonderscher let the Commission know that staff generally followed this process in the past. The new policy documents the steps and provides guidance for new staff. In addition, the policy formalizes the process and adds to the transparency for the public.

- Commissioner Mears suggested that the policy be referenced in upcoming updated master plans.
- Commissioner Scharbach asked for clarification on what the Board of Supervisors approve. Director Cardin stated that all original plans and major plan amendments are presented to the Board of Supervisors for approval.

**ITEM #7 – USERY MOUNTAIN REGIONAL PARK CONNECTOR TRAIL – Ken Vonderscher, Planning and Development Manager, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department and Tom Stapley, Hawes Trail Alliance**

- Mr. Vonderscher explained that Hawes Trail Alliance (HTA) has submitted a request to the Department to build a new connector trail within Usery Mountain Regional Park.
- Mr. Tom Stapley provided a brief overview of the Alliance and their projects completed to date. The Alliance is proposing a new 1.5-mile trail to connect the north border of Usery Park to the parking lot at the Nature Center. This trail would connect to a trail located within the Tonto National Forest, which has been approved and the archeological studies have been completed. The primary user request received through the Alliance’s social media campaigns and two public meetings conducted by the Tonto National Forest is the need for an additional trail connecting the Hawes trail system to the Usery trail system according to Mr. Stapley. Usage of the current trail system has more than doubled since 2019 according to the Trailforks app. The additional trail could spread users out and may increase the overall safety of trail users. The HTA is willing to construct the trail, pay for any shortfall in Park’s funding for all studies (archeologic and environmental) that may be needed before construction, and work with Parks to identify a final route.
- Commissioner Scharbach inquired what type of trail would be constructed and how maintenance of the trail would be coordinated. Director Cardin confirmed that it would be a multi-use, non-motorized trail. Construction and maintenance would follow the standards provided in the Parks Department’s Trail Management Manual. These standards are also required with other partnerships and maintenance crews utilized to maintain Parks’ trails.
- Commissioner Branch asked for clarification on e-bike usage on Park trails. Director Cardin confirmed that per Arizona state statutes, Class I & II e-bikes are allowed.
- Commissioner Crane asked what the next steps are to move this request forward and what funding is available in the FY22 budget. Director Cardin explained that this request would run through the steps of a major amendment outlined in the policy with some of the steps running concurrently to move the process forward in a timely manner. Parks would look to the HTA for funding of the archeologic study as monies for this project were not budgeted. Staff would need to verify with the Bureau of Land Management, but an environmental study may not be needed for this trail. Mr. Stapley informed the Commission that the archeologic study has already been completed on the section outside the park’s north boundary.
- Commissioner Budruk asked how this trail fits into the current master plan for Usery Park. Director Cardin explained that due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Usery Mountain Regional Master Plan update has been pushed back to early 2022 and usually takes 14-18 months to complete. Staff has identified some concerns with the proposed trail, primarily already crowded parking at the Bulldog lot and crowding of the Nature Center parking lot. Mr. Stapley responded that HTA, through their user feedback surveys, identified most users would be from the surrounding neighborhoods and should not require additional parking. He also envisions that by connecting the trail to the parking lot located, some of that congestion might be eliminated as users can access the Hawes Trails from the north boundary.
- Chair Stapley commented that this area of the Valley continues to grow. With additional users, an auxiliary trail will be needed. He recommends that HTA and Parks begin to jointly work together on a major master plan amendment process to potentially add a trail with the approved alignment based primarily on maintaining the park’s resource protection standards followed by visitor demand through the public involvement process in line with other Park improvement projects of this scope. He requests an update on the public involvement and progress at the next regular Commission meeting. The consensus of the Commission agreed.

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

- Director Cardin informed the Commission that the 2009 System Master Plan focused primarily on an internal view of the Parks' current lands, facilities, policies, and programs. The purpose of the 1965 Plan was very forward-looking and resembles our system today with large unspoiled preserve areas removed from the urban area; "passive" in character; open and protected; supports unique topography, plant, and animal life; maintains historical resources and archaeological artifacts; offers individual isolation; and establishes a buffer zone against encroachment on the park's perimeters. The 2030 Plan will "Continue the Legacy" by focusing on a larger regional system with a 10 to 50-year horizon. The importance of a park system master plan will protect and conserve high-quality natural desert places, promote transparency, engagement and partnerships and connect people with nature. Great park systems provide value to communities by celebrating natural and cultural heritage, provide quality recreational benefits and opportunities, provide economic development opportunities through tourism, and supports the mission, management strategies, and alignment with the vision and direction of the region. The County's Comprehensive Vision 2030 Plan outlines five elements that align very well with the Parks System Master Plan. Outreach efforts to date include the 2018-2019 Park Visitor Survey, park staff and volunteer SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis workshops, six region-wide stakeholder focus group meetings, executive team meetings and feedback forms, and Park and Recreation Commission meeting updates. Upcoming meetings will include a public outreach video and feedback form, fall public outreach meetings, a Parks and Recreation Commission Hearing, and a Board of Supervisors Public Hearing.
- Commission comments included: adding a "value" statement along with the mission and vision statements; consider and include smaller park footprints to allow urban dweller access to parks; the importance of a 50-year or longer plan; establish a position and a committee to continually plan 50-years into the future; the importance of placing future parks and wildlife corridors on the map to guide future land development; continue to foster additional collaboration with other agencies, and; give names to potential future parks on planning maps.

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

- Mr. Vonderscher provided a brief overview of the FY21 projects and their current status. The RV dump station renovation at Lake Pleasant Regional Park was a joint project with Maricopa County's Facilities Management Department. Funding assistance was received from the Town of Queen Creek for the paving, curb blocks, and fencing and Maricopa County's Department of Transportation (MCDOT) completed the lot grading at the San Tan Mountain Regional Park's Goldmine interim trailhead parking lot. Work continues with MCDOT to finish the roadway design and with APS for installation of power and power-poles along 7.5 miles of Vulture Mine Road to the front of the park.

**ITEM #10 – 500 CLUB AGREEMENT EXTENSION – Emily Miller, Contract Administrator, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department**

- Ms. Miller explained that The 500 Club is located at the Adobe Dam Regional Park and has been a Concessionaire since 1989. The 500 Club is requesting an amendment to their agreement to build an event center, an extension to the original agreement, and to implement a temporary reduction in fees only for the new event center.
- After discussion, the Commission's reaction to The 500 Club's amended agreement was positive.

**ITEM #11 – TRES RIOS GOLF COURSE ASSIGNMENT – Emily Miller, Contract Administrator, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department**

- Ms. Miller explained that the new management company at Tres Rios Golf Course, Southwest Golf Management, has increased visitation to the park and has been a strong manager of the facility during the past nine months. To date, they have invested over \$200,000 in Phase I general improvements at the facility. Phase II improvements included the construction of the Junior National Foundation (JNF) training facility. Southwest Golf has requested to have the current agreement assigned to the Junior National Foundation, a 501c(3) organization.

- Commissioner Mears inquired about JNF's management experience and business model. Director Cardin stated that Southwest Golf Management will continue to run the day-to-day golf management of the course. This will be a non-profit and a for-profit business model.
- Commissioner Branch inquired how the reserve fund will be handled. Director Cardin replied that will be transferred to JNF.
- Director Cardin informed the Commission that expansion of the golf course can only be done through a non-profit organization as this area is on BLM (Bureau of Land Management) land. Discussions and tentative approval have been received from BLM regarding this expansion. Based on Commissioner Mears' comments, staff will continue discussions with both JNF and Southwest Golf to verify the minimum amount of payments to be received by Maricopa County Parks and what percentage of donated rounds will be given to the non-profit.

**ITEM #12 – PARK HOURS – Jennifer Waller, Operation Manager, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department**

- Ms. Waller informed the Commission that staff has been analyzing the data of entry times for the park visitors throughout the last couple of years. Based on visitor demand, the new schedule has been set: Winter hours (November 1 – April 30) will be 6:00 am to 8:00 pm; Summer hours (May 1 – October 31) will be 5:00 am – 9:00 pm.

**ITEM #13 – 100 MILES IN 100 DAYS CHALLENGE RESULTS – Dawna Taylor, Public Information Officer, and Dove Carpenter, White Tank Mountain Park Supervisor, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department**

- Ms. Carpenter and Ms. Taylor provided an overview of the 2020-2021 Challenge. Highlights included the deactivation of the paper logs due to Covid interaction restrictions; increase in the social media virtual activities; 1,368 registrants (down 834 from the previous year); 653 participants completed the program (up by 14 from last season); 428 of the participants were annual pass holders; 98,247 total miles trekked (up by 8,560 miles) by those completing the challenge and; the most trekked trails were on the Maricopa Trail and within Usery and San Tan Parks.

**ITEM #14 – CALL TO THE PUBLIC**

- None

**ITEM #15 – CALL TO THE COMMISSION**

- None

**ITEM #16 – CONSULTATION FOR LEGAL ADVICE REGARDING VOLUNTEER POLICY. THE COMMISSION MAY VOTE TO CONVENE IN EXECUTIVE SESSION TO DISCUSS THIS MATTER PURSUANT TO A.R.S. §38-431.03(A)(3).**

- Commissioner Branch motioned, seconded by Commissioner Scharbach, to convene into an Executive Session. With all in favor, none opposed, the motion passed.

**ITEM #17 – ADJOURNMENT**

- The Commission meeting was reconvened. There being no further business, Commissioner Scharbach motioned to adjourn. Seconded by Commissioner Crane. With all in favor, none opposed, the meeting adjourned at 1:20 pm.