

**MARICOPA COUNTY PARKS AND RECREATION DEPARTMENT**  
**PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION MEETING**  
Regular Meeting of May 21, 2024

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**LOCATION:** Queen Creek Library Recreation Annex

**COMMISSION MEMBERS PRESENT:** John Crane, Megha Budruk, Shelby Scharbach, Jack Stapley, Eric Mears, and Isabel Chavez, Dr. Robert Branch **Virtual**

**COMMISSION MEMBERS ABSENT:** None

**STAFF PRESENT:** R.J. Cardin, Director, Jennifer Waller, Deputy Director, Amber Gribler, Recorder, Kara Currie-Gonzales, Finance Manager, Sheri Simmons, Management Analyst, Juanita Armstrong, Natural Resources Specialist, and Betsy Pregulman, Deputy Maricopa County Attorney

The official correspondence and staff recommendations in the Commission folder are entered as supportive material to the official minutes of the May 21, 2024, Parks and Recreation Commission regular meeting.

**PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION REGULAR MEETING**

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

- The regular meeting was called to order at 10:00 a.m.

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

**ITEM #3 – INVOCATION –** None

**ITEM #4 – PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

**ITEM #5 – APPROVAL OF COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES March 20, 2024– John Crane, Chair, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Commission**

- Chairman Crane called for a motion of approval for the March 20, 2024, meeting minutes, moved by Commissioner Mears and seconded by Commissioner Scharbach. All in favor and none opposed. Motion passed.

**ITEM #6 – DIRECTORS SUMMARY OF CURRENT EVENTS– R.J. Cardin, Director, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department**

**Commissioner Chaves joins the meeting at 10:05 a.m.**

- Director Cardin provided a brief overview of the summary report. The Amendment to the Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) with the Board of Regents increased from \$75,000 to \$150,000. This amount has not been increased for 15 years.
- The Use Management Agreement (UMA) with EPR Parks was amended to postpone the construction of an employee parking lot. They approved the IGA with the city of Chandler for shared recreation opportunities and events. Commissioner Scharbach asked for an example of the type of event with Chandler. Deputy Director Waller stated they would be doing inclusive programming with the Rangers at Chandler Parks. But they can come to ours as well. Chair Crane asked what other municipalities we have agreements with. Director Cardin stated Chandler, Surprise, Peoria, Avondale, and the Town of Cave Creek.
- Director Cardin commended the Natural Resources and Desert Defenders Programs for hosting 75 invasive plant removal events, removing over 600,000 plants.

**Commissioner Branch joins the meeting virtually at 10:10 a.m.**

- Director Cardin announced that all volunteer appreciation parties have been completed.

- Director Cardin stated that the Electrical Training Program Workshop with Risk Management has been approved for implementation.
- Director Cardin announced a new Safety Committee with updates coming soon.
- Director Cardin noted that we have a 50% set of plans for Estrella, a 60% set for White Tank, and a 100% set for Vulture Mountain, which will go out for bid in a couple of weeks.
- Director Cardin highlighted some park programs and projects, including the Interpretive Rangers programs at the Desert Outdoor Center, with over 1200 participants combined in March and April. Commissioner Stapley asked if those were high numbers or average. Deputy Director Waller stated that the numbers were good and will continue to rise. The American Diabetes event at Estrella had 700 riders. Hassayampa's exhibit construction is scheduled for completion in mid to late June. One hundred thirty attended Earth Day and the Mesquite Festival at Hassayampa. Lake Pleasant hosted Sharp Entertainment for a taping of the 90 Day Fiancé TV series. The Wind Warning system is in place at Lake Pleasant. Commissioner Chavez acknowledged the value of the Wind Warning System and what it does for public awareness. McDowell's Belgian Waffle gravel bike ride had over 600 participants. McDowell's Cactus Cup hosted over 800 riders. Commissioner Scharbach mentioned the St. Joseph's Worker Hike for Hope. Director Cardin stated that it has become an annual charity event. The Runner's Club is doing maintenance on San Tan trails. The Arizona Department of Forestry and Fire Management is reducing fire fuel on the Usery Pass and the Microwave Tower. Commissioner Scharbach asked if this was a controlled burn, Director Cardin said it was brush removal and did not think there was any burning. Usery has two Eagle Scout projects continuing, rehabbing the archery range and doing trail maintenance. Spur Cross kiosk installed. Commissioner Chavez asked what type of information would be placed in the kiosk. Deputy Director Waller listed park maps and trail etiquette, leave no trace, fire ban information, and "you are here" will be posted in the kiosks. Commissioner Chavez inquired about the lake levels and expectations for the 3-day weekend. Director Cardin noted the water level as high, and we anticipate many people for the 3-day weekend. Commissioner Chavez asked about lake closures and how the public is informed of the event. Director Cardin stated the website and the electronic Roadway signs in several locations that can be updated with the current park information.

**ITEM #7 – PARKS MASTER PLANS – R.J. Cardin, Director, and Sheri Simmons, Management Analyst, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department**

- Director Cardin pointed out that the stakeholder meetings regarding the Parks Master Plans were held on April 17 followed by three public meetings.
- Ms. Simmons stated this is a 3-year project with nine parks receiving master plans, three parks at a time. Director Cardin stated that the surveys will provide information on what the visitors need and expect, including determining what demographics are or are not using the parks. Commissioner Budruk asked for more information on how the stakeholder's meeting went. Ms. Simmons reported that J2 (Master Plan Contractor) used the time to introduce themselves and to update progress and what to expect over the next three years. Director Cardin stated that he attended all meetings and that the turnout for the stakeholders was good, but attendance was higher in the past. Commissioner Chavez asked about the distance for residents and if they were close. Director Cardin stated that most parks have neighborhoods that back up to them. Commissioner Chavez also inquired about the survey questions and if they were asked what parks they visited. Deputy Director Waller stated that the Placer AI would do before and after information. Director Cardin also informed that postcards were being handed out at the contact stations with the website information provided.

**ITEM #8 – NATURAL RESOURCES PLAN – Juanita Armstrong-Ullberg, Natural Resource Specialist, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department**

Ms. Armstrong-Ullberg announced, that after five years, the development of a strategic action plan with goals and objectives is in place. Stinknet's planning team developed a professional management guide. Arizona Cooperative Extension published a residential and a contractor version. Chair Crane inquired about using drones to help find cultural assets at the parks. Ms. Armstrong-Ullberg indicated they could be used to identify cultural assets, but we have not used them for that yet. Deputy Director Waller thanked Ms. Armstrong-Ullberg for all her hard work and time working with many departments. Ms. Armstrong-

Ullberg stated that it is about getting the community involved. Commissioner Scharbach commented on a great presentation and noted the hard work and involvement of the community. Ms. Waller concluded that the Natural Resources Plan is a living, breathing tool moving forward.

**ITEM #9 – MCSO AIDS – Law Enforcement Ambassador Program – Jenn Waller, Deputy Director, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department**

- Deputy Director Waller stated that when the Maricopa County Sheriff's Office (MCSO) absorbed the Park Rangers, there was a public response that they missed the Ranger's presence. After years of discussions with MCSO on how to get better in-person coverage at the parks, the departments have come to a great place and are now fortunate to have Sheriff's Aids. They are not law enforcement but are in marked vehicles and represent the Sheriff's office. There are two to three Aids assigned to the parks, with a minimum of three hours spent on the weekends. We are working on getting them access to our calendar of events. All park supervisors have been contacted, and the Aids just finished training in April. This also gives the Aids experience for advancement to become a deputy with MCSO. Commissioner Scharbach noted what a huge accomplishment this is. Deputy Waller concluded that all aids are active in the parks now.

**ITEM #10 – UPDATE FY2025 BUDGET – Kara Currie-Gonzalez, Finance and Administrative Manager, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department**

- Director Cardin stated that we now have word on the Operating and Capital Improvement Budget, and is happy to report that there has been no significant change from the previous year.
- Ms. Gonzalez reported that \$500,000 was cut from the draft budget submitted, but it was still \$200,000 higher than the previous budgets and that we are still growing revenue-wise. Ms. Gonzalez confirmed that the parks are in a good place, and we are excited to have all capital projects approved and moving forward.

**ITEM #11 – SET AUGUST 2024 PARKS COMMISSION MEETING LOCATION AND START TIME – John Crane, Chairman, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Commission**

- Chair Crane suggested McDowell Mountain for the next commission meeting. Commissioner Branch asked if we are building for glamping and camping at the park. Director Cardin stated that the issue there is electricity, and we have a project with Salt River Project (SRP) to enhance the electrical services, scheduled for construction this fall. Director Cardin stated that we may be able to get Southwest Wildlife to do a presentation. Director Cardin acknowledged that this would need to be an in-person-only meeting due to limited or no WI-FI at the park. Commissioner Chavez made the motion for the next meeting to be at McDowell, and Commissioner Mears seconded the motion, all in favor, and none opposed, the motion passed.

**ITEM #12 – CALL TO THE PUBLIC – John Crane, Chairman, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Commission**

- None

**ITEM #13 – CALL TO THE COMMISSION - John Crane, Chairman, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Commission**

- Commissioner Mears inquired about the possible need for a sub-committee to help with the focus of the vision (Parks Vision 2030) and where we are headed to help position us as a group so we are confidently pushing in the right direction for the community and the parks. Commissioner Stapley agrees. He had concerns with our master plan being 15 years when it should be 50 years. Commissioner Stapley stated we are growing fast, and 15 years is good, but what happens then? Commissioner Chavez suggested the August meeting for further discussions on a sub-committee. Vice Chair Budruk noted more community involvement.

**ITEM #14 – ADJOURNMENT – John Crane, Chair, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Commission**

- Commissioner Mears motioned to adjourn, seconded by Commissioner Scharbach. With all in favor, and none opposed, the meeting was adjourned at 11:51 a.m.