

MARICOPA COUNTY PARKS AND RECREATION DEPARTMENT
PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION MEETING
Regular Meeting of March 16, 2021

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: Jack Stapley, Eric Mears, Robert Branch, Megha Budruk, Isabel Chavez, and John Crane

COMMISSION MEMBERS ABSENT: Shelby Scharbach

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 March 16, 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 10:04 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

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

ITEM #4 – APPROVAL OF COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES: JANUARY 19, 2021, REGULAR MEETING – Jack Stapley, Chair, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Commission

- Chair Stapley called for a motion to approve the January 19, 2021, regular meeting minutes as presented. Commissioner Chavez motioned, seconded by Commissioner Crane. With all in favor, none opposed, the motion passed.

ITEM #5 – MARICOPA COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION AND MARICOPA COUNTY PARKS AND RECREATION JOINT PROJECTS – Ken Vonderscher, Planning and Development Manager, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department and Lynndsay O’Neill, Senior Transportation Planner, Maricopa County Department of Transportation

- Mr. Vonderscher expressed the importance of collaboration, communication, and coordination between departments. Maricopa County Department of Transportation (MCDOT) is vital in planning, designing, constructing, and maintaining the County park road system. Mr. Vonderscher provided a brief historical history of partnership activities. Ms. O’Neill listed the various types of planning studies and projects completed together. Future coordination on projects include master plan updates, circulation plans, emergency access studies, candidate assessment reports, scoping and design projects, and equestrian planning.
- Commissioner Mears inquired how the funding/cost distribution is handled on joint projects. Mr. Vonderscher explained that roadway-type projects would be funded through MCDOT, whereas parking lot construction/repairs would be the cost of Parks. Director Cardin stressed the importance of the

partnership and the importance of MCDOT's planning the parks' roadway system so that construction and maintenance can be funded through MCDOT's Highway User Revenue Funds (HURF).

ITEM #6 – PARKS VISION 2030 SYSTEM MASTER PLAN UPDATE – R.J. Cardin, Director, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department

- Director Cardin provided an update of the system master plan process. During the past several weeks, the Core Team has been conducting focus group meetings by region to get a better sense of their planning efforts and needs with the agencies we work with and how we can tie that into a regional park system plan versus a county park system plan. The strategic plan will focus on the next 10 years with a 50-year horizon. The focus group meetings yielded emerging themes.
- Eileen Baden, Park Planner, shared the five major themes: existing regional park access, connectivity, and edge pressures; population and visitation increasing the need for future park expansion and acquisition; improving regional connectivity for wildlife and people; pressing needs; and the need for communication, collaboration, and coordination. The project schedule includes public meetings to be held in late July with final approval by the Board of Supervisors in December 2021.
- Commissioner Mears inquired if the parks within the County system are 100% owned by the County. Director Cardin informed the Commission that they are 100% operated by the County, but ownership varies between leaseholders, patents, management agreements, and County-owned property. Commissioner Mears asked how would possible future parkland with multiple property owners be handled and added to the County system. Director Cardin explained that land within other jurisdictions would be lead by that entity with the County operating in a support role through joint agreements. Director Cardin explained that the department would identify critical areas and then see how a partnership would work to preserve, protect and enhance the area.

ITEM #7 – PARK CAMPING RESERVATIONS FOR RESIDENT/NON-RESIDENTS – R.J. Cardin, Director, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department

- Director Cardin reminded the Commission that at the January meeting, a public comment had been received regarding the opportunity for easier access for County residents to the Parks' campgrounds. Director Cardin provided data from the department's previous Point of Sale Reservation System (POS). Approximately 57% of the camping customers are Arizona residents. The busiest camping months are January, February, and March with occupancy rates ranging from 93%-99% full, and December and April ranging from 58%-84% full. Previously, the reservation system allowed reservations to be made six months in advance and allowed a customer to reserve up to six consecutive weeks in a row at different campsites. Local customers tend to book long weekends, leaving open blocks of time mid-week. The new POS reservation system will open up at 8:00 am MST six months in advance on a rolling window, allowing a customer to book up to 14 nights (per department policy). Additional reservations can be made 6 months in advance on the next rolling date. Staff recommends that the new system be utilized for one year and the data analyzed before making additional changes.
- Discussion included various ideas including resident/non-resident fee structure, preferential incentives, and the philosophical approach of local governments encouraging the economic benefits. The consensus of the Commission is to collect data from the new POS for one year.

ITEM #8 – PARKS BUDGET UPDATE – Aimee Upton, Administrator, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department

- Ms. Upton provided an update on the FY21 Forecast, the FY22 Operating budget submittal, and the FY22 CIP project list. The pandemic impacted the FY21 budget (DOC closure, concession closures, increased attendance, CARES funding, staff vacancies, and Performance Pay); however, the budget remains structurally balanced. Commissioner Crane inquired if the vacancy rate was an indication of an issue, specialized positions, or employees leaving for different employers. Ms. Upton explained that there are several reasons, including the location of the parks, promotions, and some specialty positions.
- The FY22 Operating Budget request was submitted on January 28th. Noteworthy items included the significant increase in the Risk Management charges, the temporary closure of the Roadrunner campground area for an electrical upgrade project, reopening of the Desert Outdoor Center, and benefit

and medical increases. Board of Supervisor briefings and tentative adoption are scheduled for May with final adoption on June 21, 2021.

- The FY22 CIP budget request includes rolling five projects into next fiscal year for a total of \$2.3M. New funding requests consist of \$13.6M for the Maricopa Trail, Vulture Mountain infrastructure, Estrella Ramadas, Lake entry, parking lots, McDowell Camping, and Goldmine Trailhead projects.
- Commissioner Mears inquired why the Risk Management charges keep rising and what do the charges cover. Director Cardin explained that the County is self-insured and that a recent analysis of the Risk-Trust-Pool would not cover worse-case scenarios. Rebalancing of the fund is occurring across all budgets.

ITEM #9 – JUNIOR RANGER PROGRAM – Cassidy Solper and Cody Contner, Interpretive Rangers, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department

- Operations Manager, Jennifer Waller, explained that the Interpretive Rangers have continued developing new programs despite Covid-19 restrictions. Mr. Contner and Ms. Solper introduced the Junior Ranger Program and provided a brief overview. The goal of the program was to develop an official program that could be used in all the County Parks. The collaborative program includes some of the unique and diverse characteristics of the parks while covering a wide range of age and skill levels of young visitors. The guidebook will be available online and in hard copy at each of the parks. Long-term goals are to develop guidebooks specific to each park and to implement a “passport” type program to encourage visitation at all the Maricopa County Parks.
- Commissioner Chavez provided her support for the program and encouraged outreach efforts into the schools. Commissioner Budruk encouraged translation into Spanish to open the program up for many more visitors. Chairman Stapley was impressed with engagement at all age levels in the program and the long-term goals.

ITEM #10 – SIX FLAGS HURRICANE HARBOR COVID RESTRICTIONS REOPENING – Emily Miller, Contract Administrator, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department

- Ms. Miller informed the Commission that Six Flags closed in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Six Flags and Director Cardin worked extensively with the Planning and Health Departments to comply with all the health directives for reopening in 2021. Currently, the park will open at 25% capacity through an online reservation system. Other measures include an online food ordering system, thermal imaging temperature system, use of metal detectors vs physical searching of bags, a cash-to-credit card as no cash will be accepted in the park, additional sanitizing stations, safety signage, and social distancing of the lounge chairs. Hurricane Harbor re-opened on March 13. The park is currently constructing a multi-million dollar expansion of a water activity pool that includes water volleyball and water basketball areas.

ITEM #11 – PARKS EDUCATIONAL VIDEO SERIES – Jennifer Waller, Operations Manager, and Natalie Harper, Park Supervisor, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department

- Ms. Waller and Ms. Harper introduced the Desert Outdoor Center (DOC) Educational video series as a means to stay connected to the schools that previously utilized the DOC while it is closed due to the pandemic. The project was funded with CARES monies. Using existing interpretive ranger programs, six thirty-minute videos, along with short trailers, were produced. Introductory emails were sent to approximately 250 educators with links to the private webpage containing the trailers and videos. Each video also includes activity handouts for students to complete. Eventually, public access will be given to the web pages and used as promotional videos to reach new and returning reservations.

ITEM #12 – CALL TO THE PUBLIC

- None

ITEM #13 – CALL TO THE COMMISSION

- None

ITEM #14 – ADJOURNMENT

- There being no further business, Chairman Stapley adjourned the meeting at 12:40 pm.