

**MARICOPA COUNTY PARKS AND RECREATION DEPARTMENT  
PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION MEETING**  
Special Meeting of April 21, 2020

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**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, Megha Budruk, Jack Stapley, Robert Branch, Eric Mears, Isabel Chavez, and Shelby Scharbach

**COMMISSION MEMBERS ABSENT:** none

**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

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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 April 21, 2020, Parks and Recreation Commission special 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 10:00 a.m.

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

**ITEM #3 – PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION APPOINTMENT – R.J. Cardin, Director, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department**

- Director Cardin introduced Shelby Scharbach representing District 1. Ms. Scharbach was appointed by the Board of Supervisors on February 26, 2020.

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

- Director Cardin asked the Commission if there were any questions regarding the January/February report. Chair Branch inquired if the department has been archiving the actions and notifications being taken during the COVID-19 pandemic. Director Cardin informed the Commission that a running spreadsheet has been developed and will be maintained.

**ITEM #5 – APPROVAL OF PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES – Robert Branch, Chair Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Commission**

- Commissioner Mears motioned and Commissioner Rhoades seconded to approve the regular meeting minutes from November 13, 2018; January 15, 2019; March 19, 2019; May 21, 2019; August 20, 2019; and September 17, 2019.
- Commissioner Scharbach abstained from the vote. With all in favor, none opposed, the motion passed.

**ITEM #6 – COVID-19 Status Update – R.J. Cardin, Director, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department**

- Director Cardin provided an overview starting in early March and a current status. The first notification came from County leadership on March 3<sup>rd</sup> of COVID-19 awareness. On March 17<sup>th</sup>, all park nature centers were closed; all park programs, events, special use permits, and picnic ramada reservations were canceled; and youth and group campgrounds were closed. All cancellation fees were waived, allowing reservations to receive a full refund or reschedule for the future. The Parks Department recommended

the Concessionaires follow similar protocols. On March 18, the County's Emergency Operations Plan was activated. The weekend of March 22-24, Parks saw a spike in attendance of over 26%. On March 25, all park playgrounds were closed. Discussions with the County's Public Health Department were held to review operations to maintain safety to staff, volunteers and visitors; updates were done to cash handling and restroom cleaning procedures. On March 26, the following were implemented: park hours were reduced; limited day-use capacity (approximately 50% of parking capacity) to promote social distancing; closed popular areas such as White Tank Water Fall Trail, Goldmine trailhead at San Tan, and the north entrance at Lake Pleasant; camping reservations were limited to online or phone reservations; closed restrooms in the closed areas, and; moved to a primarily cashless system by accepting only debit/credit cards or annual passes; if cash is the only means of payment, the visitor puts the cash in an envelope and it is counted several days later. Coordination with the Department of Transportation is occurring with reader boards alerting visitors to closed areas. Regular press releases and notices to staff and Commission continue as changes occur. On April 7, Hassayampa River Preserved was closed an additional day to have staff provide assistance at other high volume parks.

- Director Cardin praised the 79 Park employees that continue to diligently work in the field on a daily basis.
- Several of the Concessionaires are completely closed.
- Commissioner Mears inquired if Concessionaires have requested variances to their contracted payments. Director Cardin informed the Commission that some requests have been received. The Board of Supervisors are meeting to look at a County-wide plan. Staff is researching other counties' actions and may review each request on a case-by-case basis as each concession is occurring different impacts.
- Commissioner Budruk inquired how the volunteers have been impacted. Director Cardin informed that hosts with underlying health conditions were reassigned to duties that did not include public contact. Some hosts decided to leave early to ensure they were able to return to their home state/country. The initial changes put a strain on staff, but the department is currently handling it well.
- Chairman Branch inquired if the parks have seen an increase in disturbances such as vandalism and how has the Sheriff's office responded. Director Cardin praised the Sheriff's office for their support. They are issuing tickets when needed but also providing a lot of education to the public. Parks has seen some vandalism. There are frequent reports that the soap and toilet paper are being stolen out of restrooms. Ms. Waller, Operations Manager, informed that the Deputies arrived at the park near closing time to assist in the getting the message out to visitors.
- Commissioner Stapley inquired how staff handled visitors coming to the park to make reservations in person if they had a credit/debit card. Director Cardin informed the Commission that the campgrounds remained relatively full during this period. If a customer was at the window to make a reservation, staff could check if there even was any availability, but then the visitor was directed to call the reservation center and provided the correct number.
- Commissioner Scharbach was impressed with the department staff for their continued messaging. Director Cardin complimented Parks PIO, Dawna Taylor, for her constant updates on the website, and through social media and press releases. The Interpretive Rangers are also able to update their parks' Facebook page and are starting to create some of their programs online such a virtual hike.

**ITEM #7 – PARKS VISION 2030 SYSTEM MASTER PLAN UPDATE – R.J. Cardin, Director, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department**

- Director Cardin stated the Executive Committee, which included Commissioners Branch and Rhoades, had made a lot of progress with identifying opportunities and threats that the department could address over the next 10 years. With the COVID-19 pandemic, recommendations and strategies that may be very different than pre-COVID-19. Therefore he recommended that the System Master Plan be put on hold to approximately July 1<sup>st</sup> to reassess the situation at that time.

**ITEM #8 – FY2020 CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS STATUS AND FY2021 STATUS – Ken Vonderscher, Planning and Development Manager, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department**

- Mr. Vonderscher commended Project Manager, Brad Reed, on managing the projects throughout the parks. He provided a brief overview of the FY20 status.
- Commissioner Mears inquired who is the department's certified water operator. Mr. Vonderscher explained that currently there is a third party contractor taking water tests.

- Currently, the Department has several designs in place on current projects. The Department had requested \$11.65M (\$6.9M for Vulture Mountain) in the FY2021 budget process. However, staff has been notified that the department will not be receiving any funding in FY21 due to the COVID-19 situation. Parks can continue to use some of the carry-over monies to continue some current projects.
- Chairman Branch inquired if any FY20 projects will be delayed due to the lack of funding. Mr. Vonderscher explained that the San Tan Goldmine Trailhead was scheduled. Staff will finish the design. Discussions are being held on options to create a temporary larger parking lot to move the parked cars off the roadway.

**ITEM #9 – FY2021 PROPOSED OPERATING BUDGET UPDATES – Aimee Upton, Administrator, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department**

- Ms. Upton provided a brief overview of the FY21 budget development process and the submittal. Due to the COVID-19 situation, the general fund has seen a 2% reduction to date from the originally submitted request. Commissioner Scharbach asked if additional cuts are expected and a plan developed if needed; Ms. Upton is hopeful that there will not be any further reduction requests in the General Fund, but that is dependent on the County's funding as a whole. Risk Management charges significantly increased due to a change in how they calculate costs. Commissioner Mears inquired how Risk costs were calculated and if claim history will be maintained. Ms. Upton explained that previously costs were charged directly back to the claiming department. Now the costs are divided by the amount of acreage. Claim history continues to factor into the amount charged. Revenues from our Concessionaires are approximately 12% of our total revenues. With the COVID-19 situation, that may be affected due to their closures and reduced revenues. Staff will continue to develop revised revenue projections and adjust expenditures as needed. The Department has been notified there will not be any FY21 employee raises.
- Commissioner Mears suggested partnering with the Arizona Mining Association in the closing of mine openings located within Spur Cross Conservation Area.

**ITEM #10 – CALL TO THE PUBLIC**

- None submitted via email

**ITEM #11 – CALL TO THE COMMISSION**

- Commissioner Chavez thanked staff in their work during this pandemic and thanked Mr. Vonderscher for speaking at the recent HECHO (Hispanics Enjoying Camping, Hunting, and the Outdoors) event.
- Commissioner Stapley congratulated Director Cardin and staff for their tremendous work in these unprecedented and taxing times. The press coverage of opportunities on how to utilize County parks has been expansive and well received.
- Chairman Branch requested Director Cardin to speak on the health and moral of Park staff and volunteers and if there is anything that the Commission can take back to the Board of Supervisors. Director Cardin informed the Commission that staff and volunteers are working hard in these stressful times. The County continues to provide resources to staff for mental and physical health. Daily attendance reports (teleworking, sick, etc.) are submitted to the County Manager's office; currently, Parks' sick leave usage is significantly down showing a dedication of employees to their jobs. Director Cardin will continue to monitor staff/volunteer morale and work to increase our efforts to maintain a positive morale among them.
- Commissioner Budruk echoes the appreciation of the hard work from staff. She stated that she is in lockdown halfway around the world and the first thing that was locked down was access to parks. This situation emphasizes the important part parks play in the mental and physical well-being of people in general times and even more during times such as we are experiencing now.
- Chairman Branch expressed the importance of archiving procedures and processes that are being utilized now for future reference and advisement if similar situations occur again in the future.
- Commissioner Scharbach reiterated the work of staff and leadership of Director Cardin. Through the Maricopa County Industrial Development Authority's donation to the Arizona Community Foundation, there are grants available to eligible local non-profits affected by the COVID-19 situation.

**ITEM #12 – ADJOURNMENT**

- There being no further business, Commissioner Mears motioned and Commissioner Scharbach seconded to adjourn the meeting. With all in favor, the meeting was adjourned at 11:47 am.