

**MARICOPA COUNTY PARKS AND RECREATION DEPARTMENT
PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION MEETING**
Regular Meeting of March 15, 2022

LOCATION: Estrella Mountain Regional Park, Nature Center Classroom, 14805 W. Vineyard Avenue, Goodyear, AZ 85338 with a virtual option available via GoToMeeting (live feed and telephone).

COMMISSION MEMBERS PRESENT: Eric Mears, Jack Stapley, Megha Budruk, John Crane, Robert Branch, and Isabel Chavez.

COMMISSION MEMBERS ABSENT: Shelby Scharbach

STAFF PRESENT: RJ Cardin, Director; Donna Southard, Recorder; Dawna Taylor, Public Information Officer; Jennifer Waller, Operations Manager; 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 15, 2022, Parks and Recreation Commission regular meeting.

PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION REGULAR MEETING

ITEM #1 – CALL TO ORDER – Eric Mears, Chair, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Commission

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

ITEM #2 – INVOCATION – Veronica Chavez

ITEM #3 – PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE – led by Veronica Chavez

ITEM #4 – ROLL CALL – Roll Call taken - a quorum was present

ITEM #5 – DIRECTOR’S SUMMARY OF CURRENT EVENTS – R.J. Cardin, Director, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department

- Director Cardin informed the Commission that an amendment to House Bill 2130, Section 33-1551, is currently being discussed in the Arizona State Senate and would strengthen the “Recreation Immunity Law” extending it to easement holders, lessees, tenant managers, or occupants of private or public lands. The amendment is supported by the Arizona State Land Department.
- The Department has received a Notice of Completeness (administrative) from the Arizona Department of Water Resources (ADWR) to sever and transfer Spur Cross Water Rights. ADWR now has 390 days to conduct a substantive review of the application.
- Lake Pleasant’s water level is currently 77% full and continues to rise. The state’s Stage 1 Drought Restrictions will have a limited impact on the lake’s level as it is fed from the Colorado River and will top around 95% full.
- Director Cardin highlighted various other items in the report.
- Commissioner Branch inquired if the Prickly Pedal Race will be held again after being canceled for the past 2+ years. Director Cardin explained that race is sponsored by the Maricopa Trail and Park Foundation (MT+PF) as a fundraiser event for their organization. MT+PF is hoping to host and expand the race to include possible fun rides and equestrian-type events in the future. Commissioner Branch expressed his support of this event.
- Chair Mears inquired on the start date of FY23 and the source of revenue for the Enhancement Fund. Director Cardin informed the Commission the FY23 begins on July 1, 2022. Typically, the Department conservatively budgets revenues and the forecasted expenditures as the same amount. The Enhancement Fund or the fund balance account is revenues received over expenditures from the

previous fiscal year and is used for items such as vehicle or computer replacements. The General Fund is monies received from the County to cover specific expenditures. Chair Mears inquired if the Department is expected to be self-funding. Director Cardin stated that in 2009, the Department was directed to become more or less self-sustaining. One of the recommendations in the Parks Vision 2030 System Master Plan will be to request additional County general fund monies for a natural resource conservation program to support the long-term health of our park system.

ITEM #6 – APPROVE COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES: JANUARY 18, 2022, MEETING – Eric Mears, Chair, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Commission

- Commissioner Branch motioned to approve the January 18, 2022, meeting minutes as presented, seconded by Commissioner Crane. With all in favor, none opposed, the motion passed.

ITEM #7 – EMPLOYEE SERVICE AWARDS – R.J. Cardin, Director, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department

- Director Cardin presented Blake Spanier and Nikki Bunnell with their 5-year employee service pins.

ITEM #8 – PARKS VISION 2030 SYSTEM MASTER PLAN UPDATE – R.J. Cardin, Director, and Eileen Baden, Park and Open Space Planner, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department and Jay Hicks, Consultant, Principal Partner, Dig Studio

- Ms. Baden reviewed the public outreach open-ended feedback data received from the online survey form.
- Mr. Hicks provided an overview of the Parks and Open Space chapter. After analyzing GIS data and other cities' master plans, they have identified opportunities within the current and future regional park system; jurisdictional opportunities as related to the System Master Plan Update (SSMP); identified regional opportunities and system gaps; and opportunities for partnerships with other federal, state and city agencies. Preliminary findings and recommendations include providing community health and well-being opportunities; leadership in conservation and preservation; reinvesting, protecting, and continual improvement of our existing regional parks; and, acquiring and managing new regional parks, river corridors, and open spaces. Acquiring new parklands will primarily be in partnership with Tonto National Forest and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) but will be needed at the state and local levels as well for buffers and connectivity. There is a need to plan ahead of development to protect sustainable ecosystems and wildlife corridors. Major river corridors present a unique opportunity to provide connected open spaces to underserved communities.
- Director Cardin stated that the number one priority over the next 5-7 years is to continue to build out the existing master plans in the current regional parks. Westside priorities include the expansion of Buckeye Hills Regional Park and beginning the Recreation and Public Purposes (R&PP) application with BLM for the Saddle Mountain and Big Horn Regional Parks. Eastside priorities include the Seven Springs area and other recreation areas.
- Commissioners discussed the importance and challenges of using river corridors to bring parkland into the urban areas and starting the process to utilize available lands for buffer zones and expansion.
- Chair Mears expressed the need to think big and supported the planning efforts to date.

ITEM #9 – WHITE TANK MOUNTAIN REGIONAL PARK, PARK ENTRANCE ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT – Eileen Baden, Park and Open Space Planner, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department

- Ms. Baden reviewed the recent incidents at the White Tank Regional Park entrance that initiated the *Candidate Assessment Report*. The preferred alternative is the raised median at the entrance to help offset incoming traffic. Park staff designed a temporary pre-fab entry station which is currently at White Tank Park. After the permanent entry station has been completed, the temporary facility will be moved to other sites as needed.
- Director Cardin thanked the Maricopa County Department of Transportation (MCDOT) for their continued support over the past four to five years on park road analysis and studies.
- Commissioner Branch stated that he believes the two incidents were intentional acts and not a result of any poor designs. The new plans will help mitigate any future incidents.
- Chair Mears inquired if this type of study needs to be done at any other park. Director Cardin stated that White Tank is unique in that it has a very long straight road leading into the entrance.

- Commissioner Budruk inquired about signage leading up to the entrance station. Director Cardin stated that MCDOT includes additional signage and speed humps in their designs.

ITEM #10 – ESTRELLA TRAIL ACCESS – Jennifer Waller, Operations Manager, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department

- Ms. Waller informed the Commission that with the continued population growth and development, Parks continues to work with the West Valley Trail Alliance to identify additional trails and trail access connections. These recommendations will then go through an internal evaluation process for approval/denial. Some of the plans are already identified in the approved master plan and funding is available in the FY23 budget. Ms. Waller stated that the West Valley Trail Alliance has provided a significant amount of volunteer hours at Estrella Park over the years and is a great group to work with.
- Commissioner Chavez inquired if PIR (Phoenix International Raceway) is working with Parks to address the large influx of campers over their race weekends and if the Park sees continued long-term stays after the race weekends. Ms. Waller and Director Cardin stated that FY23 CIP includes the design of additional camping sites at Estrella and briefly reviewed the PIR agreement for park usage leading up to races.

ITEM #11 – PARKS FY23 ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGES – R.J. Cardin, Director, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department

- Director Cardin explained that with the vacancy of the Planning and Development Manager's position, the Department has now been reorganized into two divisions: Administration and Operations. The Operations Division has added a new position, Development Superintendent, that will oversee the Trades Crew, Trails, and Project Manager positions. The temporary assignment of the Trades Crew under the Operations Manager significantly improved the coordination at each of the parks.
- Chair Mears inquired if a Planning Manager position would be beneficial. Director Cardin expressed that plans to expand both the planning and the natural resource groups would be in alignment with the System Master Plan update.

ITEM #12 – CALL TO THE PUBLIC

- None

ITEM #13 – CALL TO THE COMMISSION

- Chair Mears invited all attendees to join the walking tour of Estrella Park improvements.

ITEM #14 – ADJOURNMENT

- There being no further business, Chair Mears called for a motion to adjourn. Commissioner Chavez motioned to adjourn the meeting at 11:53 am, seconded by Commissioner Branch. With all in favor, none opposed, the motion passed.