

SUMMARY MEETING MINUTES

**PARKS AND RECREATION COMMITTEE
PHOENIX SONORAN PRESERVES AND MOUNTAIN
PARKS/PRESERVES COMMITTEE**

**March 18, 2024 6:00 p.m.
In person and via Webex**

<u>Committee Members:</u>	<u>City of Phoenix Staff:</u>	<u>Others Present:</u>
Tice Supplee	Jarod Rogers	
Trevor Harwood	Sallie Seibert	
Bill Fallon	Claire Miller	
Scott Covey	Josh Parnell	
	Jana Benson	
	Donald Domann	
	Mike Faustich	
	Justin Olson	
	David Olson	
	Emmett Boyd	
	Will Wright	

1. CALL TO ORDER

Committee Vice Chairperson Supplee called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

2. CONSENT ITEMS

No formal presentation on this item. Consent and request for approval only.

3a. Approval January 22, 2024, Meeting Minutes

Committee Vice Chairperson Supplee called for an approval of the January 22, 2024, minutes. Committee Member Harwood made a motion to approve consent item 3a. Committee Member Fallon seconded the motion which passed unanimously, 4-0. All Committee members eligible to vote and present approved: Scott Covey, Trevor Harwood, Tice Supplee and Bill Fallon.

Committee Member Hardwood requested a correction to the minutes from the January 22, 2024, Phoenix Sonoran Preserve and Mountain Parks/Preserves meeting.

3. CALL TO THE PUBLIC

No members of the public requested to speak.

4. ADOT LAND SWAP (Information and Discussion)

Parks Supervisor Donald Domann discussed the South Mountain Freeway land swap. He explained the City Charter requirements regulating the selling and trading of City of Phoenix Mountains Preserve land. Negotiations between the Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT) and the City of Phoenix for the current land exchange began in 2015. An agreement was reached and in 2019 ADOT provided a 19.12-acre replacement parcel to the City in exchange for the 40.35 acres acquired by ADOT from the City for the construction of the South Mountain Freeway. Based on the land values of the parcels, the City of Phoenix received a payment of \$516,070 for the difference in the estimated values of the exchanged lands. This money went into the 3PI Preserve account.

A remnant parcel of 8.52 acres located west of the freeway was omitted from the environmental impact study and not considered in the land swap. This parcel remains part of South Mountain Park and Preserve, but currently lacks reasonable access.

Committee Chairperson Supplee asked whether there is a way to repatriate this parcel. Deputy Director Rogers responded according to Chapter 26 of the City Charter, preserve lands may only be disposed of through a public vote or a condemnation proceeding.

Committee Member Harwood requested the value of the land. Parks Supervisor Domann responded he was not aware, as the parcel was not included in the original survey.

Committee Member Harwood questioned if the land presents an opportunity for a partnership with the Gila River Indian Community. Parks Supervisor Domann stated the area is important for wildlife access into the preserve, as Arizona Game and Fish Department created a wildlife water catchment in the preserve opposite the freeway from the parcel. ADOT monitors the wildlife corridor under the freeway and has reported numerous species use the underpass. He stressed the importance of protecting this parcel to safeguard the area for wildlife and provide access to the water catchment.

Committee Member Fallon inquired about the Natural Resource Division responsibilities in the area. Deputy Director Jarod Rogers mentioned discussions reference installation of edge protection to clearly define this land as part of South Mountain Park/Preserve. He also confirmed the remnant parcel could facilitate growing relationships with local tribes.

Committee Member Covey asked about the two structures west of the remnant parcel on the displayed map. Parks Supervisor Domann responded they are

believed to be water tanks that service the Gila River Casino. Committee Member Covey inquired if a service exists to access the water tanks and if there are concerns about individuals driving vehicles into the preserve through this land. He stressed the importance of edge protection in the area. Parks Supervisor Domann confirmed there are currently routes to the parcel. He echoed Deputy Director Roger's comments on the plans to create edge protection and post signage advising "You are now entering South Mountain Park/Preserve" to deter unauthorized access.

Committee Member Supplee stated the underpass accesses are designated as wildlife corridors and provide the Gila River Indian Community access into the area. She suggested working with the tribe to create barriers to vehicle traffic as this land is sacred to them.

5. PIESTEWA ROADWAY IMPROVEMENTS (Information and Discussion)

Parks Supervisor Josh Parnell presented an update on the roadway improvement project in the Phoenix Mountains Preserve (PMP) at Piestewa Peak. New developments include replacement of asphalt on the roadway, relocation of the entrance gate, two new pedestrian bridges, additional parking spaces, and a connecting trail. The entrance gate will be moved about 200 yards southeast from its current location down Piestewa Peak Drive, just inside the monument signage at the entrance to the park. This allows the creation of new parallel parking spaces along the roadside within the gate. Plans include a turnaround area for drivers outside of the new gate, which will be automatic and, on a timer, freeing up staff who were required to open and close the gate daily. There will be a sensor inside the park to open the gate for vehicles exiting the park. A digital sign has already been installed which presents messaging about hours of operation, rescues, and heat closures. Design of the gate will match existing architecture in the preserve.

Parks Supervisor Parnell explained a new connecting trail will begin at the entrance gate and run along the north side of the road. The trail will cross Piestewa Peak Drive after the Cholla ramada area and turn south into the preserve, eventually connecting all trailhead parking lots within the park. A bridge will be installed to connect the trail to the Ocotillo ramada area. Parks Supervisor Parnell noted many hikers walk along the road to access their desired trailhead, which is a safety issue. This connecting trail will remedy this potential problem. The trail will be completely built by the park ranger team and part of the trail near the Ocotillo ramada will be completed with a local boy scout working on his Eagle Scout project.

An ADA accessible bridge will be installed across the wash by the Ocotillo ramada. The bridge will provide views of the downtown City of Phoenix through the canyon and is expected to be popular with park users who cannot access

other viewpoints on the trails. Like the entrance gate, the bridge will match current architectural designs in the preserve.

Committee Member Harwood expressed his pleasure with the designs. He asked if the monument signage at the entrance will be covered when the gate is open during operating hours. Deputy Director Rogers replied the plan is for the gate to slide behind the monument, not blocking its visibility.

Committee Member Harwood asked how the digital sign is expected to hold up to the harsh desert elements. Parks Supervisor Parnell explained a recent mountain rescue at Piestewa Peak last where staff was able to quickly update the sign at the Fire Department's request. He added that we have not had a hot summer since the installation of the digital sign.

Committee Member Harwood inquired about opportunities to route the connector trail away from the road. Parks Supervisor Parnell responded the goal of the trail is to keep individuals safely off the road, but also provide quick access to the trailheads within the park. He noted many of the areas surrounding the road are not suitable for trails and the selected path was deemed the best opportunity to balance these interests.

Committee Member Covey expressed his pleasure that the ongoing construction projects at Phoenix Mountains Preserve are approaching completion. He applauded the connectivity with the surrounding neighborhood. Committee Member Covey questioned how to prevent people from entering the park after hours when the gate opens to let vehicles exit and remarked that treadles have presented many problems recently. Parks Supervisor Parnell thanked Committee Member Covey for his comments and confirmed he will keep these concerns in mind moving forward with the improvements.

Committee Member Supplee asked about visibility on the road where the connector trail will cross. Parks Supervisor Parnell responded there will be speed bumps and signs in either direction at the crossing. Committee Member Supplee inquired if the trail is dual purpose for hikers and bikers, and Parks Supervisor Parnell responded affirmatively.

Committee Member Covey questioned the neighborhood's reaction to relocating the gate closer to the homes, specifically referencing traffic and after-hours noise. He asked if neighbors were aware of the changes to come. Parks Supervisor Parnell replied there has been no formal notification to date, but that process will happen soon.

6. EDGE PROTECTION UPDATE (Information and Discussion)

Parks Supervisor Claire Miller gave an update on the on-going preserve edge protection efforts. She established the importance of the project, explaining how defining physical boundaries protects the City's investment by discouraging vehicle traffic and the dumping of trash or landscaping debris on preserve property. Each year, \$750,000 in funding is allocated for this protection of preserve areas.

Parks Supervisor Miller noted early edge protection efforts focused on the northern Phoenix Sonoran Preserve while subsequent efforts have moved to other areas of the City including Mesquite Flats, Deem Hills, and South Mountain Park/Preserve (specifically the southwest side by Chandler Boulevard and the South Mountain Freeway). She displayed a map demonstrating the location and length of existing edge protection, estimating 25 to 40 miles have been completed to date. She noted the price of steel greatly influences how many miles of edge protection can be constructed on any given year. New priority areas are selected through identification of preserve lands that border future development and residential communities. Moving forward, the priority areas are at South Mountain Park/Preserve and the new Sonoran Preserve land in the north.

Committee Member Harwood spoke to the issues that arise when neighborhoods abut preserve land. He asked about the type of edge protection installed at Mesquite Flats, noting their different design. Parks Supervisor Miller confirmed the edge protection in this area is unique, cable fencing which was installed early on by a landscaping company. She noted while the cable fencing does serve its purpose temporarily, plans are moving toward a pipe rail design, which is more effective at keeping out vehicles and blends nicely with existing architecture at the trail heads in the area. Committee Member Harwood inquired about the most reliable edge protection and Parks Supervisor Miller replied it is the pipe rail design.

Committee Member Harwood asked for clarification on where in the Sonoran Preserve land future efforts will focus, and Parks Supervisor Miller responded this is a topic for a future meeting.

Committee Member Harwood noted the uptick in off-road vehicles in the preserves and stressed the importance of this project. Parks Supervisor Miller echoed his sentiments and explained that edge protection does keep full sized vehicles out. She stated they are also working towards solutions to address motor bikes entering these areas.

Committee Chairperson Supplee inquired if edge protection along the South Mountain freeway will include the remnant parcel of land. Deputy Director Rogers showed that the edge protection area is just north of the underpass and water catchment in the remnant parcel. Committee Chairperson Supplee asked if there is a need for edge protection in the area. Deputy Director Rogers replied the

surrounding terrain discourages vehicle traffic and there is only one subdivision nearby, which is gated, thereby reducing potential motor vehicle activity.

7. Chairperson's report – Comments by the Chair on issues related to the Committee (Information only)

Committee Chairperson Supplee highlighted the Audubon Center and Rio Salado Habitat Restoration Area efforts to reinvigorate pollinator gardens. A large planting is scheduled for the upcoming weekend, and of the plant material will be sources from Borderlands Nursery and Seed in southeast Arizona. She thanked the City of Phoenix Parks and Recreation Department for agreeing to help with the maintenance of the irrigation in the area.

8. Committee Comments/Requests/Future Agenda Items – The Chairperson will entertain Committee member comments or requests related to the Committee without Committee discussion. (Information Only)

Committee Chairperson Supplee inquired where the \$516,000 from ADOT will be spent. She also asked to discuss the frequency of the Phoenix Sonoran Preserves and Mountain Park/Preserve Committee meetings.

Committee Member Harwood requested a vote on the installation of the Carsonite signage presented by Parks Supervisor Miller and offered the area where he resides as a test site to obtain community feedback and examine the aesthetics.

Committee Member Fallon expressed great pleasure with the progress at the Phoenix Mountains Preserve construction. He requested to keep the committee informed with regular updates on the priorities, issues, and status of the project.

Committee Member Covey thanked the Natural Resources Division for the design ideas and progress at the Phoenix Mountains Preserve.

Committee Chairperson Supplee announced the Phoenix Mountains Preservation Council will be having a field day at the Phoenix Mountains Preserve on Saturday, April 6 at 9:00am as part of a continued effort to increase visibility as an advocate for the preserve system. She is proud to work with the Save Our Mountains Foundation and the North Mountain Visitor Center to highlight the work of the non-profit organizations assisting with the visitor center re-opening.

Committee Member Harwood requested an update on the park steward program.

9. Deputy Director's Briefing – (Information Only)

Deputy Director Jarod Rogers mentioned the upcoming Piestewa Fallen Heroes Memorial to be held on March 23 from 6:30am to 9:30am. He noted the projects in the preserves are funded primarily by the Phoenix Parks and Preserve Initiative Program (3PI). The money is earmarked only for preserve projects like the PMP updates and edge protection, and the public must vote on and approve the use of funds.

Deputy Director Rogers highlighted the second annual “Hike with a Firefighter and Hear from a Park Ranger” program which kicked off black history month celebrations. The event had good turnout, served to educate the public about local and national black history, and acted as a recruitment for Park Rangers and the Fire Department.

Deputy Director Rogers explained a new in partnership with the Parks’ Public Information Officer. “Hike Right Phoenix” is a series of free, once-a-month, all-ability levels hike hosted in various locations around Phoenix. The first hike was held at North Mountain Park, led by Parks Supervisor Claire Miller, and drew over 30 participants.

Deputy Director Rogers gave an update on the North Mountain Park master plan, which was approved by the Parks Board at the end of 2023. The design consultant’s proposal is expected to be complete the last week in March. Currently, the playground is closed for safety issues and signage was installed to inform the public that a new playground is coming. Construction is expected to start in one year, and last 12 to 18 months.

Deputy Director Rogers noted the South Mountain Park/Preserve road project will begin in July with the new fiscal year. Improvements will increase safety on the roadway during inclement weather and encourage safe driving from park visitors.

He concluded by acknowledging there has been discussion of changing committee meetings from bi-monthly to quarterly. He stated the committee rules do allow this if there is interest, and this can be discussed at a future meeting.

10. Adjournment

Committee Vice Chairperson Supplee adjourned the meeting at 6:58 p.m.