

Parks and Recreation Board
Meeting/Public Hearing Minutes

The Parks and Recreation Board of the City of Mesa held a public hearing at Red Mountain Ranch Elementary School, 6650 East Rafriver Road, Mesa, on January 8, 2003.

Members Present:	Staff Present:	Others Present:	Others Present
LeRoy Brady	Tim Barnard	Mary Anderson	(continued):
Robert Brinton	Lisa Blyler	Laurel Arndt	Dan Ott
John Dyer	Jerry Dillehay	Kristina Arnold	Bill Puffer
Bud Page	Diane Eft	Barbara Carpenter	Harry Rabidou
David Peterson	Joe Holmwood	Tom Culp	Carol Spangler
John Storment	Terri Palmberg	Pete Fioravanti	Diana Wenner
Don Thompson	Bill Way	Annette Jansen	Art Wirtz
Robin White	Bob White	Tom Jacobson	Others
		Bill Jaffa	
Members Absent:	Councilmember Present:	Monica Kopp	
Joseph Fu, unexcused	Rex Griswold	Bill Lanphear	
Fernando Guerrero, Jr., excused		John Meisterheim	
Dina Lopez, excused		Gary Milcheck	

Welcome/Introductions

The meeting/public hearing was called to order at 6:04 p.m. by Robin White, Chair. She welcomed and thanked everyone for coming to the public hearing regarding the proposed Hawes Loop Connector Trail relocation. She also introduced and welcomed Councilmember Rex Griswold.

Explanation of the Public Hearing Process

White explained the public hearing process, including completion of a speaker request card, three-minute time limit per speaker; no reiteration of views expressed previously, and stating of name and address when speaking to the Board. She also advised that if attendees did not wish to speak before the Board but wanted their comments known, a comment card should be completed and their comments would be noted.

Proposed Hawes Loop Connector Trail

Tim Barnard reported that the Hawes Loop Trail is a network of loop trails which provide access into the Tonto National Forest in northeast Mesa. The trail begins at the end of the paved portion of Hawes Road, approximately one-quarter mile north of the Thomas Road alignment. From the end of the paved portion, the traditional trail use has been along what would be the Hawes Road alignment due north of the end of the pavement, approximately one mile, to where the Hawes Road alignment then connects to the Tonto National Forest. The trail exits the Tonto National Forest at Power Road, north of McKellips Road, to complete the loop.

Hawes Road has provided access to the Tonto National Forest for many years as well as access for the City of Mesa to its water storage tank located in this area. With the development of the adjacent Las Sendas subdivision over the past several years, the terminus of Hawes Road was gated to keep public traffic from entering the private gated subdivision. This did not eliminate access to the trail,

however, trail users began to express concerns over continued access. These concerns resulted in discussions between District 5 Councilmember Rex Griswold and members of the Mountain Bike Association of Arizona and the Desert Uplands preservation group to secure continued access to the trail. Additional new development in this area of the Diamond Point subdivision will eliminate the current trail access from the terminus of Hawes Road north along the traditional Hawes Road alignment into the national forest. With the pending new development, the user groups are concerned that the traditional trail will need to be relocated to maintain use and access and they have approached the City of Mesa to help address their concerns.

The issue was brought before the City Council at their November 27, 2002 Study Session meeting for discussion. Council directed staff to research the feasibility of the City taking on the responsibility, along with interested groups, to design, relocate, build, and manage this new one-mile connector trail. In addition, staff research was to include what impact the trail would have on the City's existing trail master plan as well as the impact on the immediate neighbors. Part of the research was to include resident input in the form of a public meeting to allow residents, neighborhood organizations, land owners, and interested user groups within a two-mile radius of the trail to voice their thoughts and concerns on the possible trail relocation. Staff is also gathering data on trail design standards, construction methods and costs, ongoing maintenance and monitoring costs, and liability.

Public Hearing

White announced that the public hearing would commence.

Tom Culp, 2601 East McKellips, Mesa, representing the Mountain Bike Association of Arizona, said this a great trail which gives people the opportunity to test their skills. The relocation will allow users to continue to access the trail, which they have been using since the late 1980's. He hopes that all involved can move forward on the relocation of the trail.

Bill Puffer, 8330 East Thomas Road, Mesa, a member of the Spook Hill Neighborhood Action Association, said he lives one-half mile south of where the new trail would begin. The Association wants to maintain the desert character of the area and does not see a trail like this as being a conflict. It would be low visibility and would provide access for many people who have property in the area. The trail would be on private property and the homeowners should feel comfortable with this; the trail is at least 500 feet away from the private lots. It is a win-win situation for everybody involved.

Laurel Arndt, 2638 East Silverwood Drive, Phoenix, representing the Maricopa County Trail Commission, said this trail does not connect to a Maricopa County trail but may in the future. She said she applauds the opening of conversation about preserving this trail and thanked the Board for moving forward on this project.

Dan Ott, 7327 East Sierra Morena Circle, Mesa, said he is a homeowner, avid mountain biker, and member of the Mesa Fire Department. He is concerned about the trail access and building near the microwave tower. This is a great opportunity to add a loop trail. The Fire Department opinion on this is also positive because the relocation will provide uninhibited and quick access to the top of the trail. He thanked everyone for their foresight.

Barbara Carpenter, 7130 East Saddleback, Mesa, said she is really pleased that all the parties have come together on this and come up with a good solution. It is also great to know that the interested parties will maintain the trail. She expressed appreciation to Puffer for the effort he has put into this project. She supports the proposed plan.

White read comments from several audience members who did not wish to address the Board. The comments were positive and supported the proposed relocation.

Councilmember Griswold thanked everyone for attending the meeting. He also thanked Puffer for researching the issue and recommending a workable alternative design, Culp for volunteering his organization to build and maintain the trail, Bill Jaffa for working on this project previously, and the Parks Board for scheduling a timely meeting. He believes this will be a great amenity for Mesa. He said there was opposition concerning items such as liability, but mountain bikers expect to get hurt, so liability should not be a concern. However, City Council will take that into consideration when they discuss and take action on this issue.

A member of the audience asked about the legal way to access the trail.

Culp replied that the trail access currently is muddled. There has been no official effort to stop people from using it.

Don Thompson asked about the expected completion date.

Barnard replied that this item will be on the agenda for the February 13 Parks and Recreation Board meeting. A summary of the issue and comments received tonight will be presented to the Board. The Board's recommendation will be forwarded to City Council for action.

Bud Page asked the audience for a show of hands for support for this project. The majority of attendees raised their hands. When asked for a show of hands for opposition to the project, no hands were raised.

An audience member said he was undecided until the trail was completed. He hopes that users still have access to the old trail even after the new one is open.

Councilmember Griswold said this issue needs to move forward as soon as possible. Since homes are being built near the current trail access, the trail should be completed as soon as possible to avoid conflict with the homeowners. The window of opportunity is about six months. The Forest Service will design the trail within 4-10 days and many people and organizations have expressed willingness to build and maintain the trail.

John Dyer asked about maintenance of the trail and if bike groups are agreeable to others using the trail.

Puffer said his understanding is that with Forest Service assistance, it would be designed and built in a way that maintenance would be minimal.

Culp said his organization does trail maintenance consistently with the Forest Service and City and County Parks. It is done as a precautionary step to future erosion.

Puffer said only non-motorized vehicles would be allowed. No trailhead or parking area would be preferable.

Councilmember Griswold said one of the fears is that if there is a trailhead, it would be a "beer parking lot."

Tom Jacobson, 1430 North Roadrunner, Higley, said the public meeting has been a pleasant surprise. The trail is good for beginners because it is easy. He would like to see a challenging section of trail but does not want it to be exclusive; the trail should be enjoyed by all. He expressed his thanks for the opportunity to speak to the Board and looks forward to the next step of the process.

Gary Milcheck, 13601 North 44th Street, Phoenix, said he has used the Hawes Loop for the past five years and believes the relocation is a great solution. He is, however, concerned with the parking and believes it would be advantageous to have a parking area.

Pete Fioravanti, 8976 East Ludlow Drive, Scottsdale, said he supports this effort; it is a great opportunity. He asked about plans to connect with another trail system.

Art Wirtz, representing the U.S. Forest Service, said there are plans to connect this trail to other trails in the future. The Forest Service supports and encourages this effort. It is a major link to a trail system used in the past and will be in great use in the future. The Forest Service is very much in support of the proposed relocation.

Dyer asked if Las Sendas residents could access the old trailhead after completion of the new one.

Wirst replied in the positive and said it would be an access only for Las Sendas property owners. The residents could maintain the access under an agreement.

Harry Rabidou, 5350 East Des Moines, a member of the Dreamland Villa Hiking Club, said he has been using the trail for many years. He was there yesterday and was told that it would be closed. He would hate to see it closed.

Close Public Hearing

At this point, White declared the public meeting closed.

Closing Remarks

John Storment said he was concerned with the question raised of keeping the old access open after the new one is completed.

The audience member who raised the question said he was concerned about closing access to people who have used it for a long time. He believes the area should be able to be enjoyed by everyone.

Storment asked about parking.

Councilmember Griswold said that there is a jeep trail up to the water tanks. The trail right now goes to the water tower and then goes diagonal. Residents are concerned that it not be a parking spot.

Bill Lanphear, 6624 East Sugarloaf Street, Mesa, said he is a biker and jogger and has done many of the trails in the area. The mountain bikers have been courteous and there is no litter on the trails. For Mesa, this is a unique opportunity. This area contains spectacular scenery and industry can be encouraged to come into the area.

White restated that this item will be on the agenda for the Parks and Recreation Board meeting of February 13, 2003. The public is invited to attend that meeting. She thanked the public in attendance, Councilmember Griswold, and City staff for attending the meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 7:07 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Joseph H. Holmwood
Assistant Community Services Manager