

**CONEJO OPEN SPACE CONSERVATION AGENCY  
BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING**

**May 15, 2024**

**Civic Arts Plaza Board Room  
2100 East Thousand Oaks Boulevard**

**SUMMARY MINUTES**

**1. CALL TO ORDER AND FLAG SALUTE:**

Chair Engler called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. and led the Flag Salute.

**2. ROLL CALL:**

Director Huffer, Director Newman, Director Sullivan, Vice Chair Nickles, and Engler were present.

Also present were: CRPD General Manager Friedl, City Human Resources Director Giles, Assistant Attorney Doran, CRPD Park Superintendent Kouba, COSCA Administrator Stark, COSCA Analyst Huber, Senior Recording Secretary Goor, and via Zoom were Senior Administrative Specialist Perez, and Administrative Specialist Stein.

**3. PUBLIC COMMENTS:**

Elayne Haggan, Thousand Oaks, Conejo Open Space Foundation (COSF) Board member and Trail Education Days Coordinator, reviewed 2024 Trail Education Days activities noting all 17 CVUSD public elementary schools participated including 1,053 students. She reported there were 109 groups, 29 hike leaders, 11 participants in the Trails Safety & Courtesy Workshops, 16 Nature Center managers/coordinators, four Mountains Recreation Conservation Authority and four National Park Rangers, all COSCA Rangers, and more. Ms. Haggan estimates there were 350 volunteer hours, and with the inclusion of planning, execution, and follow-up, that total is 500 hours. She stated the follow-up writing contest winners will be announced soon.

**4. CONSENT CALENDAR:**

A. Approval of Minutes of February 21, 2024 Meeting.

Motion by Director Newman to approve the Minutes of the February 21, 2024 meeting and carried 5 – 0 by the following vote: Ayes – Directors Huffer, Newman, Nickles, Sullivan, and Chair Engler; Noes – None; Abstain – None; Absent – None.

5. **ACTION ITEMS:**

- A. 2024 Conejo Open Space Trails Action Committee (COSTAC) Appointments
- i. Find that this action is not a project as defined under the California Environmental Quality Act.
  - ii. Discussion and action regarding appointment of new members and alternates to COSTAC.

COSCA Analyst Huber discussed the recruitment process for three COSTAC vacancies including City Clerk posting, press release, postings on City and COSCA social media platforms, publication in the City Scene newsletter, and email to existing members, ETI Corral, and the Ride-On Rancho Potrero Equestrian Center. Seven applications were received, six were interviewed, three were nominated as members, two were nominated as alternates, and COSCA Analyst Huber reviewed the attributes of each nominee.

Speaker/Written Statement Cards: None.

Motion by Director Huffer to approve staff recommendation (to find that this action is not a project as defined under the California Environmental Quality Act, and to approve the Nomination Subcommittee's recommendations for new COSTAC Members [Tom Becker, David Filgas, and Norman Lee Hodge], and Alternates [Heather Hoyt, Matt Kohler]); carried 5 – 0 by the following vote: Ayes – Directors Huffer, Newman, Nickles, Sullivan, and Chair Engler; Noes – None; Absent – None.

- B. First Amendment to Weed Abatement Contract (Contract No. 12670-2021) with The Standard Construction dba SoCal Brush
- i. Find that this action is not a project as defined under the California Environmental Quality Act.
  - ii. Approve the First Amendment to Weed Abatement Contract with The Standard Construction dba SoCal Brush.

COSCA Administrator Stark reviewed the Weed Abatement Contract which satisfies the annual Ventura County Fire Department Fire Hazard Reduction Program (FHRP) requirements and stated the contract is a joint effort between COSCA, the City, and CRPD. He reported that heavy 2023 rains caused a significant amount of regrowth. Additional funds are needed to help offset operational costs via a contract amendment which was approved by City Council on April 9<sup>th</sup> and by CRPD Board of Directors on April 18<sup>th</sup>.

No additional funds need appropriation by COSCA this year; future costs will be incorporated into next year's fiscal year budget.

Staff responded to Director questions regarding whether other agencies are facing similar increases; and reasons utilizing volunteers would be inefficient for this work due to the scope and timeline.

Speaker/Written Statement Cards: None.

Motion by Director Newman for staff recommendation (to find that this action is not a project as defined under the California Environmental Quality Act, and to approve the First Amendment to Weed Abatement Contract with The Standard Construction dba SoCal Brush); carried 5 – 0 by the following vote: Ayes – Directors Huffer, Newman, Nickles, Sullivan, and Chair Engler; Noes – None; Abstain – None; Absent – None.

- C. License Agreement with Safe Passage Youth Foundation for Restoration Project at the Los Robles Open Space
- i. Find that this action is Categorically Exempt under Section 15304 of the California Environmental Quality Act, Minor Alterations to Land.
  - ii. Approve the draft License Agreement and authorize the COSCA Executive Officer to finalize and execute a three-year license agreement with Safe Passage Youth Foundation to permit the Conejo Youth Conservation Corps to undertake habitat restoration activities on a 1.5-acre site in the Los Robles Open Space.

COSCA Administrator Stark stated the Conejo Youth Conservation Corps (CYCC), a project of the Safe Passage Youth Foundation, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, has requested to plant native vegetation within Los Robles Open Space; they will provide the plants and seeds. He discussed planting strategy. The organization promotes youth safety, health, literacy, and community engagement. The license agreement would provide CYCC access to the site for three years.

Staff responded to Director questions regarding the area chosen for re-planting, possible plans beyond the three-year license agreement, and estimated hours to complete the project.

Speaker: Tim Hagel, Thousand Oaks, Safe Passage Founder, pro, discussed the program mission, activities, reasons the site was chosen, and the Ventura County Community Foundation grant. He noted the program is vocational training – the youth are paid/the adults are not, and no tax dollars are used. He asked the many CYCC volunteers in attendance to introduce themselves, including students from Sequoia Middle School, Thousand

Oaks High School, and other area schools, as well as CYCC representatives. Mr. Hagel responded to Director questions regarding the program and the possibility of youth recognition for the project.

Written Statement Cards: None.

Motion by Director Sullivan for staff recommendation (to find that this action is Categorically Exempt under Section 15304 of the California Environmental Quality Act, Minor Alterations to Land, and to approve the draft License Agreement and authorize the COSCA Executive Officer to finalize and execute a three-year license agreement with Safe Passage Youth Foundation to permit the Conejo Youth Conservation Corps to undertake habitat restoration activities on a 1.5-acre site in the Los Robles Open Space); carried 5 – 0 by the following vote: Ayes – Directors Huffer, Newman, Nickles, Sullivan, and Chair Engler; Noes – None; Absent – None.

- D. Easement to the City of Thousand Oaks for the Westlake Boulevard. Flood Mitigation Project (North Ranch Open Space)
- i. Find that this action is not a project as defined under the California Environmental Quality Act.
  - ii. Approve the draft Easement Deed and authorize the COSCA Executive Officer to finalize and execute the Easement Deed to the City of Thousand Oaks granting an easement over a portion of the North Ranch Open Space to permit the installation of flood mitigation infrastructure adjacent to Westlake Blvd.

COSCA Administrator Stark reported the City received Hazard Mitigation Grant Program HMGP funding from FEMA after the 2018 Fire season and associated Disaster Declaration (DR 4407). He described the Westlake Boulevard Flood Mitigation Project, which will improve public safety, and noted reasons why the infrastructure must be placed on COSCA property, and why the City has requested an easement over the project site.

Speaker/Written Statement Cards: None.

Staff responded to Director questions regarding whether this safety feature is primarily due to fire damage, the easement deed language, wall height, amount of soil to be moved, and v-ditch design.

Motion by Director Huffer approve staff recommendation (to find that this action is Categorically Exempt under Section 15304 of the California Environmental Quality Act, Minor Alterations to Land, and to approve the draft Easement Deed and authorize the COSCA Executive Officer to finalize and execute the Easement Deed to the City of Thousand Oaks granting an easement over a portion of the North Ranch Open Space to permit the installation of flood mitigation infrastructure adjacent to Westlake Boulevard); carried 5 – 0 by the following vote: Ayes – Directors Huffer, Newman, Nickles, Sullivan, and Chair Engler; Noes – None; Absent – None.

E. Contract for Arroyo Conejo Trash Removal

- i. Find that this action is Categorically Exempt under Section 15304 of the California Environmental Quality Act, Minor Alterations to Land.
- ii. Approve contract with Woods Maintenance Services, Inc. in an amount not-to-exceed \$109,000 and authorize the COSCA Co-Chief Administrative Officer to execute the agreement.
- iii. Authorize an additional appropriation of \$24,000 from the Woolsey Fire Recovery Fund (Land Management) to complete funding for the Arroyo Conejo Trash Removal Project.

COSCA Administrator Stark stated that trash that had been carried through the urban storm drain system to the Arroyo Conejo open space needs removal. The proposed contract would utilize \$50,000 that COSCA appropriated from the Woolsey Fire Recovery Fund on September 13, 2023 for this purpose as well as funds committed by the City of Thousand Oaks, and Conejo Open Space Foundation. He noted five proposals were received during the RFP/Q process, and staff has selected Woods Maintenance Services, Inc. as the contractor.

He responded to Director questions noting following invasive species removal, trash in the Arroyo Conejo was revealed. He answered questions regarding unhoused persons encampments, future use of volunteers for maintenance, and whether other agencies could partner, whether grants are available, and whether any contractors can perform both invasive species and trash removal.

Speaker/Written Statement Cards: None.

Motion by Director Sullivan to approve staff recommendation (to find that this action is Categorically Exempt under Section 15304 of the California Environmental Quality Act, Minor Alterations to Land, and to approve the contract with Woods Maintenance Services, Inc. in an amount not-to-exceed \$109,000 and authorize the COSCA Co-Chief Administrative Officer to execute the agreement, and authorize an additional appropriation of \$24,000 from the Woolsey Fire Recovery Fund [Land Management] to complete funding for the Arroyo Conejo Trash Removal Project); carried 5 – 0 by the following vote: Ayes – Directors Huffer, Newman, Nickles, Sullivan, and Chair Engler; Noes – None; Absent – None.

- F. Contract with Ventura Regional Fire Safe Council for Community Wildfire Safety Services
- i. Find that this action is not a project as defined under the California Environmental Quality Act.
  - ii. Approve contract with the Ventura Regional Fire Safe Council (VRFSC) in an amount not-to-exceed \$141,600 and authorize the COSCA Co-Chief Administrative Officer to execute the agreement.
  - iii. Authorize an appropriation of \$141,600 from the Woolsey Fire Recovery Fund allocation to community fire safety programs and services in COSCA's sphere of influence.
  - iv. Authorize use of a single source acquisition for contract services based on the finding that the contractor has singular performance capabilities.

COSCA Administrator Stark stated COSCA contracted with the Ventura Regional Fire Safe Council (VRFSC), in 2020 and in 2022 to provide community workshops on fire safety, direct mailers, home hardening inspections, free chipper days, and low-income seniors assistance in implementing home hardening practices. The Woolsey Fire Recovery Fund account will be used for the proposed 2024 contract which focuses on reaching and assisting communities through collective actions at the neighborhood level, notably those neighborhoods abutting COSCA open space. The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) has a framework for organizing efforts through Firewise USA® communities; the approach will be to establish them in areas adjacent to COSCA open space with three-year plans, seed them with project funding and provide modest incentive support, and document implementation procedures.

Speaker/Written Statement Cards: None.

Staff responded to Director questions regarding concentrating on communities adjacent to open space; groups organizing through HOAs, but noted the program is not limited to those.

Motion by Director Newman to approve staff recommendation (to find that this action is Categorical Exempt under Section 15304 of the California Environmental Quality Act, Minor Alterations to Land, and to approve contract with the Ventura Regional Fire Safe Council [VRFSC] in an amount not-to-exceed \$141,600 and authorize the COSCA Co-Chief Administrative Officer to execute the agreement; authorize an appropriation of \$200,600 from the Woolsey Fire Recovery Fund allocation to community fire safety programs and services in COSCA's sphere of influence; and authorize use of a single source acquisition for contract services based on the finding that the contractor has singular performance capabilities); carried 5 – 0 by the following vote: Ayes – Directors Huffer, Newman, Nickles, Sullivan, and Chair Engler; Noes – None; Absent – None.

**6. INFORMATION ITEMS:**

**A. COSCA Volunteer Corps Activity**

- i. Find that this action is not a project as defined under the California Environmental Quality Act.
- ii. Receive and file COSCA Volunteer Corps Activity report.

The written report was received and filed and indicates that from February through April, Trail Watch had 61 reports and 91.5 hours donated; Adopt-A-Trail had 131 reports and 187 hours donated.

**B. Ranger Operations and Maintenance Activities verbal report**

- i. Find that this action is not a project as defined under the California Environmental Quality Act.
- ii. Receive verbal report.

CRPD Park Superintendent Kouba presented a PowerPoint including slides of Lake Eleanor, wildlife including a doe with fawns and a horned lizard, and mustard and poison oak that Rangers cleared from a 1.5 mile section of trail from Lizard Rock to Eagle Point. Mr. Kouba noted an unhoused persons encampment involving efforts to remove biohazards, structures, bike parts, shopping carts, refuse, and interactions with subject individuals, one of whom threatened Rangers with a tire iron. He reported the first citation of an illegal e-bike user who caused a great deal of trail damage; there are many more difficult-to-catch illegal e-bike riders out there. He responded to Director inquiries stating restitution is being considered along with the current fine.

7. **COSCA UPDATES** (CRPD General Manager and/or City Manager):

A. Follow-up items, announcements, and upcoming issues:

CRPD General Manager Friedl stated that the CRPD Board will attend the California Association of Recreation & Park Districts Conference and noted that Director Nickles is President of the Association.

8. **BOARDMEMBER COMMENTS:**

Director Huffer commented that on Monday, CRPD Board recognized Joe Edmiston at the Gratitude Circle, and on Tuesday, the Conejo Canyons Bridge ceremony took place.

Chair Engler noted the new Conejo Canyons Bridge was a good collaboration, opens the area for recreation, and provides a secondary exit from Hill Canyon.

9. **CLOSED SESSION:** None.

10. **ADJOURNMENT:** The meeting was adjourned at 7:27 p.m. to the next Regular Meeting on Wednesday, September 18, 2024.



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Robert Engler, Chairperson

Minutes Approved: September 18, 2024