

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

**February 19, 2025
Civic Arts Plaza Board Room
2100 East Thousand Oaks Boulevard**

SUMMARY MINUTES

1. CALL TO ORDER AND FLAG SALUTE:

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

2. ROLL CALL:

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

Also present were: CRPD General Manager Friedl, Assistant Attorney Brick, CRPD Park Superintendent Kouba, COSCA Administrator Stark, COSCA Analyst Huber, Senior Recording Secretary Goor, and via Zoom was Office Supervisor Luxenberger.

3. PRESENTATIONS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS:

A. Commendation for Matt Kouba in honor of his retirement.

COSCA Administrator Stark announced that CRPD Park Superintendent Kouba, who has been with CRPD since 1997, will be retiring before the next Board meeting. He recapped Superintendent Kouba's service as a COSCA Ranger, CRPD recreation leader, and CRPD Park Superintendent who has dedicated his career to accumulating and disseminating vital information about the natural world and inspiring generations to appreciate and protect nature. His recent successes include re-establishing the Supervising Ranger position, expanding ranger staffing resources, finding a new COSCA Rangers facility, and increasing technology use to achieve COSCA goals.

Director Nickles commented on the legacy Superintendent Kouba is leaving behind in the Park District and COSCA, highlighting the extensive trails and park facilities throughout the City. He expressed hope that Superintendent Kouba will continue to be available for volunteer opportunities in the future.

Director Newman stated that although COSCA has Conservation in its name, Superintendent Kouba has extended and enhanced these lands, enriching the lives of the City's citizens and visitors alike.

Director Sullivan stated Superintendent Kouba is an integral part of the City's open space, and has always enjoyed his presentations and photos. She noted he was instrumental in developing creative recreation space at the Sapwi Bike Park, and thanked him for his many years of work.

Director Huffer thanked Superintendent Kouba for everything he has done for open space, the staff that he has trained and managed, and for making our open space facilities truly world-class.

CRPD General Manager Friedl noted CRPD will host a party to celebrate Superintendent Kouba, and thanked him for unwavering presence during emergencies, fires, and floods, handling complaints and solving problems.

Speakers: Shelly Mason, via Zoom, congratulated Superintendent Kouba and thanked him for the 17 years that they worked together, all that taught her, his creative solutions, and for his kindness; Elayne Haggan, Thousand Oaks, stated the entire Conejo Open Space Foundation (COSF) Board wishes Superintendent Kouba well, and will do so in person at a future event, and expressed their gratitude for his immense help with their group over the years; and Nick Ferrari, Park Ranger, thanked Superintendent Kouba for bringing him on as a Ranger and changing his life. Other Rangers were present in the audience to show their support as well.

Vice Chair Huffer read the Commendation highlighting Superintendent Kouba's extensive outdoor experience. His CRPD tenure began with five years as a COSCA Ranger and is ending with 18 years as Park Superintendent overseeing 50 parks and special facilities, 150 miles of trails, and thousands of acres of open space. He developed capable staff, and has been the main point of contact for field operations and emergencies. As a passionate open space advocate, he is a true conservation and recreation leader.

Superintendent Kouba stated the work that COSCA, the Rangers, and Park District staff does creates lasting memories for many people far into the future.

4. PUBLIC COMMENTS:

Emery Yuhasz, Newbury Park, Deer Ridge neighborhood, requested that a conversation begin about taking brush clearance to 200 feet for fire prevention in areas adjacent to open space. He stated many homeowners are willing to do more to make that happen.

Bill Matlock, Newbury Park, Deer Ridge neighborhood, concurred with Mr. Yuhasz's comments adding that beyond 100 feet, the brush is dense, and they would like to see what is possible with regard to mitigating and avoiding fires.

5. **CONSENT CALENDAR:**

B. Approval of Minutes of November 20, 2024 Meeting.

Motion by Director Sullivan to approve the Minutes of the November 20, 2024 meeting and carried 4 – 0 by the following vote: Ayes – Directors Newman, Nickles, Sullivan, and Vice Chair Huffer; Noes – None; Abstain – None; Absent – Chair Engler.

6. **ACTION ITEMS:**

A. Annual Board Organization

- i. Find that this action is not a project as defined under the California Environmental Quality Act.
- ii. Discussion and election of Board Chair.
- iii. Discussion and election of Vice Chair.
- iv. Discussion and appointment of Board Secretary.

COSCA Administrator Stark discussed the annual Board organization procedure.

Speaker/Written Statement Cards: None.

Vice Chair Huffer opened nominations for Chair of COSCA.

Motion by Director Newman to find that this action is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), and nominate Vice Chair Huffer as Chair of the COSCA Board of Directors for 2025; carried 4 – 0 by the following vote: Ayes – Directors Newman, Nickles, Sullivan, and Vice Chair Huffer; Noes – None; Absent – Chair Engler.

Chair Huffer opened nominations for Vice Chair of COSCA

Motion by Director Nickles to find that this action is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), and nominate Director Newman as Vice Chair of the COSCA Board of Directors for 2025; carried 4 – 0 by the following vote: Ayes – Directors Newman, Nickles, Sullivan, and Chair Huffer; Noes – None; Absent – Director Engler.

Chair Huffer opened nominations for Secretary of COSCA.

Motion by Director Sullivan to find that this action is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), and nominate Brian Stark as Secretary of the COSCA Board of Directors for 2025; carried 4 – 0 by the following vote: Ayes – Directors Nickles, and Sullivan, Vice Chair Newman, and Chair Huffer; Noes – None; Absent – Director Engler.

B. Annual Financial Report for Fiscal Year 2023-2024

- i. Find that this action is not a project as defined under the California Environmental Quality Act.
- ii. Receive and file COSCA's Annual Financial Report for Fiscal Year 2023-2024.

COSCA Administrator Stark provided a summary of the report. COSCA's net position increased \$21.8 million over last fiscal year reaching \$119.1 million at fiscal year-end. Capital assets increased \$21.5 million for an ending balance \$108.7 million. The increase is related to land additions of \$21.6 million related to land transfers to COSCA from the City of approximately 150 properties, many of which were developer dedications as part of developers' conditions.

Program revenues increased by \$14.4 million compared to prior fiscal year, primarily due to capital grants and contributions in the form of land and \$0.4 million in operating grants and contributions for maintenance and restoration of open space, those being grants from Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy for emergency access road repairs at Lang Ranch and additional fuel modification projects in the Arroyo Conejo.

Program expenses decreased by \$0.3 million primarily due to overall decreases in open space maintenance and restoration costs.

COSCA ended the fiscal year with \$10.3 million in cash and investments held for future open space acquisitions and maintenance, an increase of \$0.4 million over last fiscal year. A portion of the increase is from the Southern California Edison Woolsey Fire settlement proceeds, some of which were held back for a period of time for potential post-lawsuit costs and were subsequently released to COSCA.

COSCA Administrator Stark responded to Director Nickles that the COSCA private citizen Boardmember does not need to be a City resident, but must be a resident in COSCA's jurisdictional area, and that could be corrected on Page 4 of the Auditors report.

Speaker/Written Statement Cards: None.

Motion by Director Newman to find that this action is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), and receive and file COSCA's Annual Financial Report for Fiscal Year 2023-2024; carried 4 – 0 by the following vote: Ayes – Directors Newman, Nickles, Sullivan, and Chair Huffer; Noes – None; Absent – Director Engler.

- C. Authorization to Accept 10' Wide Trail Easement at 702 Erbes Road
- i. Find that this action is categorically exempt under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to California Code of Regulations Title 14, sections 15061, 15304, and 15317.
 - ii. Adopt a resolution authorizing acceptance of a 10-foot-wide multi-purpose trail easement at 702 Erbes Road (Lots 15 and 16 of Block 35 of the Thousand Oaks Tract, APN 670-0-130-200 [portion] and APN 670-0-130-080 [portion]) from Limitless Church, and authorize the Co-Chief Administrative Officer, or designee, to accept the easement and to execute any documents necessary effectuate acceptance of the easement.

COSCA Administrator Stark presented the report noting that COSCA's Trail Master Plan envisions a community-wide trail system including trails on private properties, some of which are donated, some are granted as land use entitlement conditions of approval by the City. The conditions for church expansion at 750 Erbes Road (SUP 69-83 Major Mod. 5, Resolution No. 5-2002 PC) included establishing a multi-purpose trail easement on this property. The trail will be part of a formal route from Erbes Road to Glider Hill, which has existed informally for years. Staff has secured three of the five easements necessary for this western approach to Glider Hill; this approval will bring the total to four. COSCA will maintain the easement area, focusing on trail fencing and tread maintenance with no vegetation modification needed to use the trail. This trail segment is important to equestrians and to the broader trail network in the Conejo Oaks area, and will help preserve the historical western access route from Erbes Road.

COSCA Analyst Huber responded to Director questions stating that the easement at the east side of Lone Oak was completed. If this request is approved, one trail segment will remain to be secured at 611 Lone Oak to complete the route. COSCA Administrator Stark noted they will be reaching out to the new landowner.

Speaker/Written Statement Cards: None.

Motion by Director Sullivan to find that this action is categorically exempt under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to California Code of Regulations Title 14, sections 15061, 15304, and 15317), and approve staff recommendation (to adopt a resolution authorizing acceptance of a 10-foot-wide multi-purpose trail easement at 702 Erbes Road (Lots 15 and 16 of Block 35 of the Thousand Oaks Tract, APN 670-0-130-200 [portion] and APN 670-0-130-080 [portion]) from Limitless Church, and authorize the Co-Chief Administrative Officer, or designee, to accept the easement and to execute any documents necessary effectuate acceptance of the easement; carried 4 – 0 by the following vote: Ayes – Directors Newman, Nickles, Sullivan, and Chair Huffer; Noes – None; Absent – Director Engler.

7. 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 November through December, Trail Watch had 28 reports and 44.5 hours donated for an annual total of 270 reports and 367 hours; Adopt-A-Trail had 77 reports and 136 hours donated for an annual total of 521 reports and 926 hours. For January, Trail Watch had 10 reports and 12.5 hours donated; Adopt-A-Trail had 40 reports and 56 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.

The verbal report was received with CRPD Park Superintendent Kouba presenting a PowerPoint. He discussed Ranger activities and protocols during red flag warnings, arson activity, wind and rain events, rescues, and other situations as they relate to trail closures. Superintendent Kouba shared video of 15'-deep rushing water in a barranca during recent rains and subsequent trail cleanup and blowout bridge replacements. He showcased Eagle Scout projects including signs from Hill Canyon to Paradise Falls and bridge painting. A Ranger project - remodeling a restroom on the Whole Access Trail, was also reviewed. There was contact related to electric motorcycles and the devastating damage they cause to sports fields and trails. Superintendent Kouba discussed the Wheels on the Bus event at Borchard Park for Preschool and Pre-K kids. He displayed slides of weekly homeless encampment cleanups. He responded to Director Sullivan regarding future signage and to Director Nickles regarding the regulation of barbeques during high-wind events. He added that briquettes are allowed during ordinary conditions, but they encourage the use of propane; wood burning is prohibited.

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

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

CRPD General Manager Friedl expressed his appreciation for Park Superintendent Matt Kouba.

9. BOARDMEMBER COMMENTS:

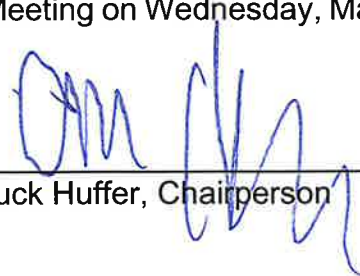
Director Newman noted that the City will be requesting funds for palm removal at the annual lobbying trip to Washington, D.C. in an effort to build resiliency, as palms contributed to the destruction of at least one home, likely more, during the fires.

Director Sullivan thanked COSCA staff for the many trail openings and closings that were posted on social media and the website.

Director Nickles inquired regarding tracking which grants to apply for and which ones we have given the numerous executive orders. COSCA Administrator Stark responded that COSCA tracks State and Federal agencies' grant availability, but COSCA does not rely on Federal funding. However, the Federal government offers larger grants, such as the one that could potentially be used for palm and Arundo removal. COSCA staff remains concerned for their partners who rely on Federal funding and staffing. Director Newman clarified that this inquiry is about available funding, and it also relates to strengthening public safety, and to insurance concerns.

10. CLOSED SESSION: None.

11. ADJOURNMENT: The meeting was adjourned at 7:05 p.m. in memory of Ed Jones, Former COSCA Director, Former Ventura County Board of Supervisors Member, Former CRPD Director, and Former Mayor of the City of Thousand Oaks. The meeting adjourned to the next Regular Meeting on Wednesday, May 21, 2025.



Chuck Huffer, Chairperson

Minutes Approved: May 14, 2025