

## **MBCA BOARD MEETING **APPROVED** MINUTES**

Thursday, April 14, 2022 / 5:00 – 7:00 pm Via Zoom

***Black Bold Italics = Board vote***    *Blue Italics = action commitment*

### **Regular Meeting Called to Order at 5:05 P.M.**

<u>_x_</u> Steve Bardwell	<u>_x_</u> Brian Hammer	<u>_x_</u> Gary Stiler
<u>_x_</u> Stacy Doolittle	<u>_x_</u> Janet Johnston	<u>_x_</u> Laraine Turk
<u>_x_</u> David Fick	<u>_x_</u> Sarah Kennington	<u>_x_</u> Cathy Zarakov
<u>_x_</u> Pat Flanagan	<u>_x_</u> Arch McCulloch	

### **Introduction of Guests and Board Directors**

Steve welcomed repeat visitor Helen Jeong, Eric Hamburg of Wonder Valley who is concerned about the Wonder Inn proposed there, and repeat visitor Blanca Villalobos.

### **Agenda approval**

With a few additions and changes noted below, the agenda was approved by consensus.

### **Minutes from March 10, 2021 BOD meeting**

After a correction of language about the FOI issue related to housing, ***Steve moved to approve the March 2022 minutes as amended. Sarah seconded and all were in favor. (11-0)***

### **Treasurer's Report**

Cathy emailed the March financial reports to us earlier today. Registrations for the Tour have been steadily coming in, plus memberships and some donations. Cathy reported a positive response to our request for an increase in water district donations to the Desert-Wise Living Series. While Golden State is still considering an increase, the others all increased their donation. This will defray some of the added Tour expenses related to videography. We didn't solicit an increase from MWA because it's a grant process and we have received \$5000 in the most recent grant.

Pat asked about membership numbers. Laraine reported that while the lack of events during the past two years have reduced our numbers significantly from a past high of about 140. We should see an increase via current Tour registrations, perhaps close to 100 total. We accepted the Treasurer's report by consensus.

### **Capacity Building & Organizational Issues**

1) Social Media and Website updates– Aimee / Stacy / Laraine

Stacy reported we had more than 1000 visitors to the website in March and there were 75 clicks on our Facebook ad for the Tour. The monthly numbers vary significantly over the year depending on issues and events, but 1000 is quite high for one month.

(Added) *Non-profit Lobbying and advocacy - LT*

Laraine briefly reviewed information from a webinar by Bolder Advocacy about how the IRS measures lobbying by 501(c)(3) non-profits. It would be to our advantage to elect 501(h) status, through which any measurement of lobbying has definite spending limits and does not count non-paid (i.e. volunteer) activities. *Pat and Laraine will review this and create a recommendation for the Board at the May meeting. Laraine will also ask Meg Foley to help with the review.*

2) Events Committee reports:

### *2022 landscape tour – DWL committee*

Steve summarized the status of Tour preparation and went over some last minute details. Laraine reported 59 registrations so far, and guesses there will be 80-90 by Tour date, plus on-site registrations on Tour Day.

### *Fall DWL event*

Steve noted we haven't done a fall event since 2019, and have no specific topic or event planned yet.

### 3) Educational support

#### *Scholarships – LT, JJ, SK, SB*

Sarah reported that the Committee received 3 applications and carefully evaluated them based on a protocol that Karin Messaros, donor of one of the scholarships, created. The scores were very close but 2 students were chosen for the 2 available scholarships. The 3<sup>rd</sup> was also very compelling and very close in scoring. Because the student was more focused on “artistic” development of environmental issues (literary), Janet suggested we use any recent donations made to MBCA in honor of artist Steve Rieman for an additional “Rieman Spark Award.” Meg is a member of the committee and made a donation toward that goal. Details and announcements are yet to be worked out, but the *[scholarships will be given at the Yucca Valley High School scholarship event in May.](#)*

### *Field trips CSA 20- JJ*

Janet will talk with Tammy at JTCC after the Easter event. In a serendipitous conversation with Mrs. Becky Yakimow, a teacher at La Contenta, Janet mentioned the Field Trip plans and Becky offered her “leadership kids” as guinea pigs. It's uncertain if that can happen this year, but it's a possibility.

### 4) Utilize 'Google Workspace for non-profits'- GS

This is a tool for managing information and shared documents across a group. Arch expressed concern at the last meeting around editing protocols in this program. Gary looked into it and agreed, but said there's good value in that everything typed in is saved. Stacy is familiar with the platform and registered us. They're verifying our organization and Stacy will receive notification. *[When we're authorized, Stacy and Gary will set up a demonstration for the Board.](#)*

### 5) (Added) The Victoria Fuller Award

An award was set up by the Alliance for Responsible Recreation (focused on off-road issues) in honor of local activist Victoria Fuller (who died in 2017). The characteristics the award is based on include “leadership, tenacity, and vision.” Another activist from that group, Phil Klasky, recently passed. Pat received the award in 2015, the last time it was awarded. Pat suggests that MBCA “resurrect” the award and add Phil's name to it, making it the Victoria Fuller and Phil Klasky award. There was total support for doing this. *[A committee of Steve, Pat, and Sarah will work on details.](#)* Eric spoke of Phil's role in his life as a relative and lifetime best friend and all the great things he did.

## **Conservation Issues**

### 1) JT listing - SB, JJ, DF

The State's Department of Fish and Wildlife completed its review of whether to permanently list the Western Joshua tree as threatened in California and recommended *against* doing so. CBD staff member/local resident Brendan Cummings will be providing information and advice about public comments to the decision-makers (the Fish and Game Commission) to reject that recommendation. *[Steve said that MBCA will again create a letter in support of the](#)*

*listing*. Arch noted the science is not settled about whether there are two separate species rather than varieties and suggested *this issue might be part of the decision and he will continue to look into it*.

2) Air Quality Monitoring –AM, SK, SB

Steve & Sarah are close to installing their Purple Air monitor.

3) Light Trespass Ordinance, SB, LT

No updates.

4) 30x30 Carbon sequestration in the desert. – PF, AM, GS

We signed onto [a letter to California Air Resources Board](#) urging them to consider carefully and completely the value of carbon sequestration in the desert in climate change planning. Pat and Gary as part of an inland desert working group met with Amanda Harris of CNRA. The map CNRA designates as Inland Deserts Region does not include Death Valley, Anza Borrego, and other desert areas around the Tehachapi mountains, so the regional designation doesn't match the real desert area. Robin Kobaly, Susy Boyd, Cameron Barrows and Michael Allen made presentations. Amanda asked "what are you looking for us to do?" She also said that the origin of the regions might be a source of "philanthropic activities" but there was no clarification about that cryptic statement. Pat read their definition of the regional area, which inferred the classic inaccurate attitude that "there's nothing there." Brian noted from a cartographic view there are many better definitions and boundaries of California's desert available. *The group plans to meet again next week to create detailed questions for CNRA.*

5) Save California Solar NEM 3.0 –SB

There's been no action from the Governor or CPUC (which has been "cagey" about it). We'll continue to follow the issue.

6) HR 5355 Desert Community Lands Act - BH, SB, PF

Nothing new.

7) Cellular Tower in Morongo Valley – GS

Our comments were submitted to BLM. Gary felt positive about the March 17 online meeting and is in contact with Meg Foley to learn any outcomes or results.

8) HipCamp – SB

HipCamp manages camping in Alternative Dwelling Units (ADUs) on private land in a similar manner to Air B&B. Steve recently participated in a call about the issue with Supervisor Rowe and 5 Joshua Tree residents. Afterward, Steve received an email to MBCA (which he emailed to us earlier) from the Director of Government Relations for HipCamp, trying to explain the advantages of their program as they see it. The others in the phone call group suggested not engaging and are totally against such sites without regulation. Earlier this year the County opened protocols for Special Use Permits that would have permitted such ADUs without public input. The County later pulled back the option. HipCamp works under whatever rules are in place for the jurisdiction of the property, offering no company guidance or oversight.

Gary commented that HipCamp did a pilot where they gave their clients information about plant and animal life in the area to alert them to environmental issues. Gary suggests we take a look at what they did and see if it's serious or not. We could offer suggestions to

improve their effort. Janet added that she has had trailers on her site, and the HipCamp model in part meets the need for low-income housing if it's small scale and well regulated.

David reported that there's a 218-acre 60-unit glamping project proposal near Indian Cove and the Park. These are often unapproved use of residential zoned land. Human waste disposal is a real problem; there should be onsite sewage treatment systems. Steve thinks a lot of problems could be abated if the County would require pre-construction inspection.

9) IPCC [report](#) – BH  
Nothing new.

10) (Added) Water issues - BH

Brian summarized 3 major California water projects that are in trouble. 1) The Colorado River is in real trouble; they recently stopped a planned water release in order to retain enough water to power turbines. 2) The Central Valley Project this year has a zero allocation to farmers so they'll have to pump more groundwater, contributing to the already significant subsidence in the Valley. 3) The State Water Project allocation was at 15% but has been cut back to 5%. The last drought of this magnitude was 1200 years ago.

Laraine recently attended part of an online Salton Sea Summit and noted that water battles in the Imperial Valley are still contributing to the Salton Sea problems. She also learned that the proposed large expansion of lithium mining around the Sea can supposedly be done with only one-tenth the water use of such mining in South America and China. Gary explained that the proposed process cycles water used for processing back into the aquifer.

### **Outreach & Communications**

1) Cannabis cultivation environmental impacts work with Better World Group?–BH, AM, PF  
Marina West told Steve that virtually all the cannabis cultivation sites in BDVWA's service area have been abated and some put on the market. Guest Eric Hamburg reported a similar situation on a huge pot farm in Wonder Valley. Kudos to Superintendent Rowe and others. Arch has been attending the CNPS ad hoc committee on cannabis. They are involved in reviewing legislation related to water pollution including SB 1426 and SB 1404. Arch hasn't heard from the Better World Group in a while, perhaps because things are better.

2) Short Term Rentals and SBCO Housing Element– JJ, SB

Janet provided a summary of the latest STR and rental housing issues. On March 3 the Planning Commission heard proposed STR revisions from staff but passed it without changes. On March 17 the planned Housing Element (HE) hearing was postponed. When Janet inquired about the delay, they said they were "working on the draft housing element to the state." Yet they had actually sent a draft HE back in December and haven't acknowledged [the state's 13-page letter in response](#), pointing to problems with their report.

The recent [Desert Sun article](#) addressed some of the housing questions, though the writer didn't interview any County officials. The [New York Times article](#) described one rental housing situation. Recently, Janet and Breanna met with Supervisor Rowe for an hour with mixed results. While Dawn seemed unclear on her stance during the meeting, afterwards she said she is in support of a pause of new permits and an eviction ban. She may set up a meeting with the other 4 supervisors to help them understand these situations, that don't occur in their districts. The STR ordinance may go to the Supervisors in May. Janet hopes we can develop a short video to illustrate the human toll from the lack of rental housing (more on this later).

Janet also was part of a call with Steve and a lawyer/campaigner from CBD to address CEQA issues since the County is ignoring EIRs and not addressing inconsistencies with the Housing Element. This could evolve into a formal letter to the County outlining the need for changes and the possibility of litigation. We're uncertain if there will be costs for this.

The County seems to be squelching any discussion of placing a pause on new STR permits. They wouldn't allow public discussion at the Planning Commission and supposedly that means they can't do so either when the issue goes to the Supervisors. *Janet plans to address this with County Counsel.*

Stacy described the proposal for a short video from videographer Bonnie Hawthorne, a documentarian with stellar credentials. Laraine expressed approval but also concern that the tone be appropriate for the Supervisors and not overly dramatic, which might turn them off. Janet said a focus is to portray the work that schools' liaison Wayne Hamilton has been doing to help those losing their rental homes and trying to focus Supervisors' attention on the resulting homelessness, displacement, and effects on business community and community culture. Stacy will be sure that Janet's approval will be required for the final version. After additional discussion, **Steve moved that MBCA fund the proposal for a video of 4-5 minutes about the home rental issues for \$3100. Gary seconded the motion and all were in favor. (11-0)**

#### 7) Wonder Inn – PF, Eric Hamburg

Eric reported that the rumors of this development started several years ago but recently poles and flags marking outlines appeared. Developers have applied for a Conditional Use Permit as most of the development would be on land currently zoned residential living. The LUS planner is Azar Khan. The proposal is for a 106-room hotel, a 24/7 restaurant, spa, pool, 205 parking spaces, 180,000 gallon water usage, septic tanks, etc. Neighbors are concerned about excessive light, dangerous highway conditions and traffic, dust, groundwater levels, wastewater, etc. and have created [Stopwonderinn.org](http://Stopwonderinn.org) for awareness and planning for public comments. A meeting is scheduled with the developer on May 1 at 1 pm at the Wonder Valley Community Center. MBCA will gladly create more awareness of their website and mailing list through our communications. Eric is also looking for legal resources. The local fire station was closed in part due to water quality, so how can that not be a problem for the development? While not unanimous, there is overwhelming sentiment against the development in the Wonder Valley area. Janet suggested they contact the Marine Base, as they have become involved in some other development situations.

#### 3) Cadiz, DF, SB

Steve participated in a Zoom call with several people including Chris Clarke of NPCA about the Three Valleys Municipal Water District which funded the flawed study that concluded there would be no problems with the water quality from the proposed Cadiz project. Cadiz stock continues to sink.

#### 4) Earth Day at 29 – LT

Laraine outlined the need for volunteers to staff a table with MBCA displays and handouts on Saturday May 30 between 9AM and 1 PM at Knott's Sky Park for this event. *Pat, Cathy, and Laraine volunteered and Laraine will ask former Board member Deb Bollinger if she might be available to help.*

#### 5) MBCA in Desert Moon Pictorial, & JT Voice – SD

Nothing new.



6) Flamingo 640 – SB

Steve said we would submit a comment (due next Thursday) on this resort camping proposal proposed amidst a Joshua tree forest near Hwy. 247. Chris Clarke of NPCA is working on it. The County has given it a mitigated negative declaration.

8) Sienna Solar – BH, PF

Brian and Pat reported on this project in the Lucerne Valley area. Pat described it as a project that moved from one bad place to another bad place and increased in size, in contradiction to the RECE 4.10 policy that prohibits industrial scale Renewable Energy developments within RL zoned land and areas included within existing community plans. Chuck Bell of LVEDA is also working on this. Inquiries have been made to the Planning Commission, with no answer yet. *Brian will do some follow-up and work on maps.*

8) Recap Desert Symposium– PF

Pat reported it was a great event and suggests others attend in future years. Proceedings will be available online (they weren't as of this writing).

10) Development of MBCA strategy/elevator statement – SD  
Schedule this for next meeting.

***Adjournment was at 7:15 PM.***

**Letters created / signed onto :**

Letter to Nevada resources re: Amargosa; Letter to CARB re: desert inorganic carbon in climate modeling.

**Next Regular Meeting:** Thursday, May 12, 2022

5:00 – 7:00 PM - in person & Zoom ???