

MBCA BOARD MEETING **APPROVED MINUTES**

Thursday, February 9, 2023 / 5:00 – 7:00 pm Via Zoom

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

Regular Meeting Called to Order at 5:06 PM

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Steve Bardwell	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Brian Hammer	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Arch McCulloch
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Stacy Doolittle	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Janet Johnston	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Laraine Turk
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> David Fick	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Sarah Kennington	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Cathy Zarakov
<input type="checkbox"/> Pat Flanagan		

- **Introduction of Guests and Board Directors**

Steve thanked guests for attending. They included: Kerrie Aley and Allan Songer (Pipes Canyon); Eric Hamburg (Wonder Valley); Caroline Partamian (Flamingo Heights); Katie Joy Blanksma (Twentynine Palms); and Helen Jeong (Lake Elsinore). Axel Cramer joined around 6:15 PM.

- **Agenda approval**

Laraine moved to approve the agenda as submitted. Steve seconded and all were in favor. (9-0)

- **Minutes from January 12, 2023, BOD meeting**

Steve noted a few typos that Laraine will fix, then moved to approve the January minutes. Sarah seconded and all were in favor. (9-0)

- **Treasurer's Report**

Cathy reported on new and renewal memberships and donations. Expenditures in January for the annual meeting totaled \$2427.95, with a few payment requests still to complete. Our checking account holds \$21,717.87 and \$60,000 resides in our CD at Pacific Western. The Treasurer's report was accepted by consensus.

Outreach & Communications

1) Wonder Inn – SB

Guest Eric Hamburg thanked us for the opportunity to speak about the Wonder Inn issue but started with some background and an update on OHV issues. He noted MCBA's connection in the past with [Community ORV Watch \(COW\)](#). While the group has been inactive for several years after the death of several leaders, Eric keeps the website open to respond to requests for information. He has learned of a funding possibility to work on OHV issues related to the National Park and hopes to publish specific OHV information for the Morongo Basin in consultation with the Sheriff's office and BLM. *Laraine will list COW on the [Recommended Websites](#) page on our website.*

Eric expressed his appreciation for the help of MBCA Directors Pat and Brian with the Stop Wonder Inn campaign. Eric reviewed the history of the issue, which can be found on the [Stop Wonder Inn](#) website. Eric also noted:

- At the "pink building" that used to be an Edison maintenance facility there may be cyanide in the ground from gold processing and possible fiberglass septic tanks.

- There are zoning issues: the pink building parcel is zoned commercial; the rest of the land the developers acquired in 2020 is rural living.
- On January 13 the County gave the project a mitigated negative declaration, with 90 pages of initial study and close to 900 pages of appendices with consultant studies etc., giving only 21 days for comments. After complaints about the short time, the County set a new deadline of February 22, 2023.
- As they review and plan comments, the working group is finding a lot of errors and things not considered, particularly because such development is contrary to both the Countywide Plan and the Community Plan for Wonder Valley.
- The developers requested 25 acres surrounding the pink building be rezoned and they have purchased some other non-adjacent parcels.

The County will receive and prepare a staff report following the comment period. There may publish an amended initial study, then it will go to the Planning Commission (PC) where the Stop Wonder Inn group plans to encourage and facilitate extensive public comments.

Guest Kerrie Aley had additional comments on the project. She did a deep dive about zoning on the pink building and there seems to be conflict between the developer and LUS about the zoning. The Negative Declaration claims it's a commercial building, but the building was converted to a residential/agricultural status, so it may not actually be zoned commercial. There's also some confusion about "service commercial" and "commercial" labels. Kerrie noted that after 180 days of abandonment the property should have converted to residential living zoning.

Another issue is whether the development is a *hotel* (the word used in travel analysis) or a *resort*, which has different traffic and other impacts. SB County has no zoning for resorts, only hotels. The property owner is proposing "spot zoning." She's heard some discussions about updating zoning descriptions.

2) Flamingo 640 Glamping – SB

Guest Caroline Partamian noted there are many parallels between the Wonder Inn and Flamingo 640 projects. The group fighting Flamingo 640 started a [petition](#) against the project in May 2020 and they have about 5500 signatures. The project is expected to go to the Planning Commission this month, with the expected 21 days for comments. Chris Clarke of National Parks Conservation Association has been involved and helpful. Issues include environmental hazards, tortoises, burrowing owls, Pipes Canyon wash ecosystem, old Joshua trees and yuccas, and the septic leach field into Pipes Wash. Also, traffic nearby on Highway 247 is already problematic. The developer refuses to perform an environmental or traffic study. The plan is for 75 campsites of about 1000-2000 SF, with a lot of other location amenities, so it's another instance of it really being a *resort*. The County's definition of a campground is vague. None of the amenities will be open to the public so there's no service to the community.

Strongest talking points against the project are traffic safety, environmental impact, and that it should require a focused Environmental Impact report. After being granted a MND, there was a meeting at HVCC with developers and a large community presence of reasonable but passionate people. The developers didn't seem to care. For both this and the Wonder Valley Inn project, there is fear that they'll get building permission

then sell it, which adds more uncertainty. Steve noted that the Countywide Plan predicted little or no growth, but both projects signify otherwise.

Steve asked Janet to add her thoughts; she noted that lawyers don't win cases on inconsistencies but on CEQA and requiring an EIR. If it's approved by the PC, there will be only a very short time to appeal, so plans for that should be underway now. Steve said the project was pulled from today's PC agenda. But any revised plan will only be known when the PC agenda is sent out. Janet commented that it seems planning commissioners usually just review the documents the day of the meeting, so it seems impossible they are really doing serious evaluation. Caroline noted that in response to the sentiment against the project at the HVCC meeting, Supervisor Rowe asked, "Where do you want to put all the people who are coming to Joshua Tree?" That's not the issue of most concern; we need affordable housing for residents, not more campgrounds for visitors.

Developers say the Flamingo 640 Project will provide relief for overflow camping in the National Park. Brian commented there are 2 separate markets; not just the resort itself but if built it then requires affordable housing for its workers. David thinks it will end up as CEQA litigation. He and Sarah spoke of the traffic problems near the "Bubble Hotel." They're putting the entrance driveway where it's a worse traffic hazard than it should have been.

Sarah said the Wonder Inn plan estimates 604 daily trips in the traffic study – but it doesn't seem to include impact from any special events. The dirt roads in the area could be badly affected. Steve stated it would become the largest hotel in the Morongo Basin. Kerrie noted that planning assumptions about traffic only relate to national Park travel, and don't consider the growing number of music festivals and other special events. They need to analyze Visitor Miles Traveled instead of Level of Service. The County is supposed to put resorts where there are already services, but instead its "analysis" seems to be "anything anywhere" with no serious consideration of local input and impact.

3) Selection of new head of LUS – JJ, DF, SB

Steve emailed the position description brochure to Directors. It gives no sense of the unique desert conditions related to planning in our part of the County. Steve suggested we send the kind of questions we would like to ask, and [he'll forward them to the consultant and Supervisor Rowe](#). Laraine suggested that the problem is in the job description, which ignores any desert issues, and we should point out that omission. David noted that our 3rd district Commissioner is a realtor in Highland, again emphasizing how little desert knowledge is present among decision-makers. Eric said that in a previous Supervisors' agenda they were approving a salary for Michael Stoffel as staff assistant to the 2nd district supervisor. Legal counsel says it's not conflict of interest.

Kerrie has been looking at the regional transportation model and sees growth and planning centers in cities of influence and urban centers; commissioners have no knowledge of our very different world.

Steve welcomed just-arrived online guest Axel Cramer of Silverlake who owns property in JT.

Eric thanked everyone for the shared information and help.

4) Housing

SBCO Housing Trust JJ - and Homeless PIT count- JJ

Janet commented on the success of our Annual Meeting, with about 100 people and lots of good information shared. We really helped the service providers get their messages out, and many who attended were part of the Point in Time Homeless Count. Janet did two days of the PIT Count. There are discussions and meetings working toward having a Morongo Basin Housing Action Committee. Astrid Johnson of [Morongo Basin ARCH](#) will be working on some grants. *MBCA should push the County to get the Action Committee going, to get a date and agenda set before too much time passes, emphasizing their obligation about Program 4.* Other locals will be focusing on programs and solutions and a regional housing plan, which is two years into an 8 year cycle. Janet noted that Copper Hills Sage Estates in Yucca Valley was approved about 8 years ago, but is only about 1/3 built out with many empty lots. The YV planner says the development is not what people want now so the developer isn't building; it's just a portfolio.

Short Term Rentals – Legislative action to mandate tabulation of STRs - JJ

Noted above: Push the County to proceed on Program 4.

5) Adopt-A-Highway update– DF - Nothing new.

6) meet with FOJT – SB - Steve hasn't been able to get a meeting date yet.

7) Conservation priorities mapping MDLT – PF, SB, LT, AM

Schedule meeting – SB. No meeting set yet.

Conservation Issues

1) Soda Mountain Solar Project

February 16 is the scoping comment deadline for this 4100+ acre project off I-15 near Baker. DWP transmission lines are there so would take the power. The lead agency is Fish and Wildlife. Steve said we will reiterate many of our 2015 comments which are still appropriate, including dust problems across I-15 and bighorn sheep crossing. Water was the main issue but now they say they'll truck in the water. The project crosses the highway about 6 miles SW of Baker. Brian wondered, if it's a MWA service area, where will they get the water?? There may be an inter-basin water transfer issue.

2) JT listing –DF, BH

Brian listened to the hearing online. The decision will be delayed until the Fish and Game Commission's summer meeting. A bill was introduced very recently and will be developed over spring, apparently to deal with the issue legislatively instead of as a threatened species listing. *Brian will send us a copy of the proposed legislation "Trailer Bill for the Western Joshua Tree Conservation Act." <Completed during meeting.> There's a boundary and he'll develop and distribute a map to show it.*

3) Save California Solar / NEM 3.0 – DF, SB

Solar installations contracted by April 14 will receive benefits under NEM 2.0 before the new standards take place.

4) Air Quality update – AM, SK,

Warehouses Health State of Emergency – We signed onto this letter pointing to environmental justice issues of the overbuilding of warehouses across southern California.

Contact Erin Rode – SB and Raul Ruiz re: Haboob. Nothing new.

5) 30x30 update –AM

Research EPA study re: solar siting recommendations –PF

Arch is taking on what Gary started before leaving the Board, and he has most recent copy of the priority site list. He and Gary and Pat developed the original list.

Grant possibilities – AM - Nothing new.

6) MWA update re: water – BH

MWA is working on a drought response plan for immediate and long-term needs. Mega storms are anticipated with increasing frequency. Brian sent us photos of “the great California flood of 1861-62” with 5 ft. of water in the central valley. The last series of 5 storms amounted to about half of the expected annual rainfall in the headwaters of Mojave River. In the Lake Arrowhead area there was as much as 24-34 inches in some places, but it’s still not enough to end the drought. At Pioneertown Mountains Preserve there were 6.4 inches. Brian is working on a presentation that can be viewed at the MWA Board meeting on February 21 at 9:30AM at www.Mojavewater.org.

7) Dark Skies - Presentation in Wonder Valley 3-18-23 - SB

Steve will be presenting with Pat and others at the WV community center.

Capacity Building & Organizational Issues

1) Events Committee reports:

Annual meeting: recap

As noted before, it was well attended and we had very good feedback. Program 4 is the lynchpin for action.

Spring DWL program

The Committee will be meeting Monday for another hybrid Tour. *We’re looking for desert-wise and water-wise landscapes to visit in-person or on video and Directors are asked to make recommendations.*

2) Memberships – CZ, LT

Contained in Cathy’s Treasurer’s report.

3) Social Media and Website updates – Stacy / Laraine

Stacy reported there were 1000 users in January, a lot after January 15, probably related to the Annual Meeting. Most use is either in the morning or around 9PM. Over 60% of users were on desktop devices, about 34% on mobile devices.

4) Educational support

Scholarships – LT, JJ, SK, SB

The Scholarship Committee will send out the Press Release tonight announcing 3 thousand-dollar scholarships to local high school graduates. Donors have chipped in so we can again offer the Steve Rieman scholarship. *The Committee plans to do some additional advertising to be sure we get applicants.*

Field trips – JJ

Janet will continue to work with Tami at the County Recreation Department. She hopeful we can start this spring with a day for 8th graders, doing hiking, maybe climbing and/or biking in the County's Desert View Conservation area. The expansion since early plans is to include an educational experience at the Harrison House, and also to use the driving in a bus between the Desert View Conservation area north of the National Park out to Harrison House on the east side of Joshua Tree to highlight places in the Basin where students might find good jobs after graduating. They also hope to arrange a stop at the CMC campus for learning about job-related education, emphasizing a wide variety of possibilities. *At David's suggestion, Janet will contact Steve Brown, who is now working on publicity at CMC.*

5) Inventory MBCA equipment

We no longer have a video projector. The Stop Wonder Inn group purchased one and we can have access, but they are asking for a \$300 contribution for the cost of purchase. Since we also have purchased light meters, and may buy sound meters, Sarah will be "registrar" for our "owned" items. Steve moved that MBCA pay \$300 in reimbursement toward purchase of a video project that we can borrow. The motion was not seconded as we discussed the need to first create a clear agreement about ownership and access to the projector. *There was consensus to go ahead and talk further with Eric Hamburg about the donation/purchase.*

6) Card for Greg Mendoza

Sarah noted MBCA made a presentation and gave a card to David Smith at his "goodbye" party at MDLT, thanking him for all the support and help in the community.

Adjourned at 7:05 PM.

Letter signed onto: [RAMP](#), [Letter to Gov. Newsome re: Warehouses State of Health Emergency](#).

Next Regular Meeting: Thursday, March 9, 2023 - 5:00 – 7:00 PM - zoom
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