

MBCA BOARD MEETING **APPROVED MINUTES**

Thursday, April 13, 2023 / 5:00 – 7:00 pm Via Zoom

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

Regular Meeting Called to Order at 5:02 PM

<u>_x_</u> Steve Bardwell	<u>_x_</u> Brian Hammer	<u>_x_</u> Arch McCulloch
<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		

- **Introduction of Guests and Board Directors**

Steve thanked repeat guests Eric Hamburg and Kerrie Aley for attending.

- **Agenda approval**

Laraine moved to approve the agenda. Sarah seconded, and all were in favor. (10-0)

- **Minutes from March 9, 2023 BOD meeting**

Steve moved to approve the agenda. Pat seconded, and all were in favor. (10-0)

- **Treasurer's Report**

Cathy noted we gained two new memberships in March. We received a thank-you letter from the MUSD Foundation for the \$738 gained in the December Auction. Our \$60,000 CD at Pacific Western (7 months at 2%) matures on April 19. With interest the total is \$60,677.26. Cathy researched renewal rates and found the highest at Pacific Western, 7 months @ 5.05%. No local rates were higher even at longer terms. Our current checking balance is \$22,115.96, with upcoming Tour-related expenses (including videos) totaling around \$13,000 and possibly \$4800 for field trips. Of course, there will be income from tour registrations and memberships, plus the water district grants for the Tour. ***Steve moved that we roll over the entire Pacific western CD for 7 months at 5.05%. David seconded and all were in favor.***

Outreach & Communications

1) Flamingo 640 Glamping, Wonder Inn, development in Morongo Basin– All Steve asked Eric to provide an update on Wonder Inn. While all 4 Planning Commissioners present had denied the plan, the developers are appealing to the Supervisors. The basis of discussion was the oddity of zoning for the “pink building” that formerly housed an Edison facility that they relinquished in 1981. The developer said he had a right to do anything he wanted on that acreage. Focus issues include the anomalous zoning in comparison to the rural living that surrounds it and the inadequacy of public services in the area. Commission Chair Weldy wasn't as concerned about environmental factors; he sees it as a land use decision. There were almost 50 public comments opposing. It will probably not be on the Supervisors' agenda until early July.

Eric has reviewed the developers' appeal and has asked Heidi Duron for a copy of all supplemental documents (no reply yet). The Stop Wonder Inn Group has decided to press for full denial, citing issues of zoning, public services, and reinforcing all

objections to the M&D. There is updated info on their [website](#) including video clips of all public comments and deliberations. Brian suggested they also request an EIR so it's on record if there's a legal filing later and review that move with their attorney.

Steve noted that Flamingo 640 has also been appealed and probably will be on the Supervisors' agenda in June.

Pat got a phone call from the Flaming 640 developer who by Commission Chair Weldy's suggestion, was invited to visit the site with him (developer) as they develop their new plans. She agreed and hopes to subsequently write for the Desert Report about what is it that the developers miss or overlook. She told him she'd be sharing what she learned with MBCA.

Stacy suggested finding someone to tell us how much it costs the County to end up in litigation because of ignoring codes. David noted that the Planning Department gets funding for initial studies, so development is income. Janet added that developers pay fees for processing which is County income. She also reminded us that the County asked for more density in the Alta Loma development. Steve added that LUS is severely understaffed, still with no permanent director. Steve also learned from some good sources that the County is moving forward on an overlay for Pioneertown development as a template for something that might be applied to Joshua Tree. There will have to be public comment.

There is need for more clear definitions of allowable land use. The land use map should be in sync with the zoning map and they shouldn't authorize any development plans until they get the development code to match with general plan. There was consensus to develop a special meeting on this issue plus Stacy's idea of finding out the cost of land use-related litigation. Arch pointed out the need to add the water issue, noting the recent rejection of California's proposal for Colorado River water. *Pat, Eric, Kerrie, Steve, and Ben will develop a special meeting focused on land use and water issues in the County.*

2) Housing

Program 4 JJ

SBCO Housing Trust JJ

Janet reported (via Astrid Johnson) that the County is just now hiring the consultant although they've implied it was further along. *Janet will draft a statement/letter about our ongoing position on Program 4.*

The HUD funding process is very muddled; homeless providers have little voice and HUD money gets held back. We need to continue pressing for having broad community representation on the Program 4 committee we have proposed. *Janet will put together a list of people and get a meeting scheduled. Keri agreed to begin drafting a letter outlining our issues of concern to be ready to send to the new LUS Director whenever they are appointed.*

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

Housing Annual Progress reports are due this month. Supervisor Rowe is aware of the need to keep STRs from being listed as available units, but it is unclear what the County is going to do. Keri wondered if they are going to count STRs among housing units built. *Janet is reviewing 2021 sales and permits to research which are or have*

become STRs. Two-thirds of sales seem to go to STRs. Twentynine Palms' cap on STRs has immediately slowed things there.

Request for interview KCET [Earth Focus](#) – SK

Sarah received an email from the couple who create this show, who attended our Annual Meeting. They are asking for assistance with developing a documentary tracking 3 generations of families in the Morongo Basin and comparing their motivations for living in the desert. Issues could include the impact on retirees of STRs and the general situation of lost affordable housing in a place where people used to move to downscale. The Sall and Kobaly families were mentioned and Janet and Pat have some suggestions. It would be good for MBCA to be involved in this.

Capacity Building & Organizational Issues

1) Reimbursement of [CDC](#) for joint event Fall 2022 - SB

In October we shared costs with CDC for a program on the Joshua tree. We've been invoiced for \$715.55 invoice, half of the total expense. Steve noted it was budgeted for our fall DWL series. ***Steve moved to approve this \$715.55 expenditure. Arch seconded, and all were in favor. (10-0)***

2) Draft policy for nomination of Board members - LT

Laraine shared a second draft of an MBCA Board Recruitment Policy and asked for comments and input.

- Pat suggested we ask for specific skills or interests.
- Arch suggested the vote be unanimous rather than majority; he feels that less than full confidence could have negative effects on Board functioning.
- Sarah noted this would be the first time we offered self-nomination, in comparison to our existing Nomination Committee process.
- Arch suggested we just keep doing it by invitation.
- Laraine believes we need to broaden our pool by going beyond the somewhat insular group we know among us, especially related to age.
- Stacy suggested setting up an advisory group open to self-nomination, as a sort of "try out."
- Pat suggested inviting interested people attend our meeting and speak about what we're working on. We're looking for people who are really committed and can express their knowledge.
- Steve suggested having an in-person Board meeting to hear from candidates. Sarah supported Stacy's idea, inviting people to join us as advisors or committee members, with a more focused direction.
- Cathy suggested an interview by a few Board members and bringing people onto committees or an advisory board. Laraine noted we had an advisory board some years ago that was discontinued.

Sarah, Stacy, Laraine, and Pat will meet and come up with a proposal and the Board should finalize a Policy before or no later than our August Retreat.

3) Events Committee reports: Spring Landscape Tour – SD, LT, SK, CZ

Many advertising modes for the Tour have been implemented or planned by Stacy with the committee, including rack cards, social media, radio ads, and the events calendar at California Welcome Center. Tour guides are printed and the digital version to be loaded ASAP. Cathy will be meeting Saturday at Applebee's at 9:30 with

site owners and docents for signs and clipboards. David will help with installing signs on Saturday.

4) Social Media and Website updates – SD, LT

Stacy has run some paid Facebook ads for the Tour and for the Wonder Valley Night Sky event, which received a lot of traction and interest.

5) Educational support

Scholarships – LT, JJ, SK, SB

The committee chose three of the four candidates and has notified them, and a press release will be sent.

General MBCA Scholarship to Landon Stitt of Yucca Valley High School
Female Scholarship (bequest) to Jadyn Bauer of Twentynine Palms High School
Rieman Scholarship to Kylie Morning of Black Rock High School

Field trips – JJ

MBCA will hopefully fund buses for a pilot field trip for 8th graders this spring or fall. Janet has been meeting with the La Contenta principal, the local County Parks & Recreation representative Tammy, plus Eva Soltes of Harrison House. Events include field trips to the Desert View Conservation Area (Section 6), a climbing demo, bike demo, a park ranger on the environment and map reading. There's also a Bus Tour to the permaculture garden at Harrison House and possibly a CMC visit to focus on job possibilities in the Basin.

We have \$1000 commitment towards this from a donor. Our expenses for a bus a day for 6 days @ \$800 = \$4800. (Earlier estimates had been over \$10,000.) Janet reported that contributions from possibly Rotary and/or Auto Camp will help with other costs.

Questions and discussion:

- Is it annual? → Yes (therefore annual expenditure).
- How does this align with our mission and vision? What is the curriculum?
→ Janet will be working with La Contenta teachers. A goal is to get students grounded in community and living in the Basin, and to understand and enjoy environmental factors.
- Pat asked for more detailed written information. *Janet will share updated information after meeting with La Contenta.* Another possible \$500 donor has asked for similar “white paper” or outline which she’s been preparing.
- Maybe we should wait until fall? → It would be good to try it out now and get students’ reactions.
- Stacy feels uncertain about this as priority spending. She suggests finding grants from Burrtec or other local/regional businesses, to fund a trial that would generate data for grant requests.
- Pat supports the idea of paying for buses this year, then waiting to see what other sources can be provided for repeating it.
- Stacy is concerned that the Board is asked for the money late in the game. Janet noted we (Events Committee) have agreed to keep developing this for a long time. Note that we have \$1000 committed to this project by Karin Messaros and there’s a potential to connect with 300 students.

- Cathy would like to see more about the expenditures. Janet explained it would just be the bus transportation and we'd get the bill directly. Other fees would be paid from other entities. *Janet will send a summary to the whole board after she meets with the school next Tuesday.*

6) Discuss allocation of \$25k donation received in July 2020 – LT, PF

Laraine shared on screen the sections from prior minutes that referenced the donation (January 2020 and July 2021). Pat recalled that after Fred Stearns, the donor, learned his donation couldn't be used to oppose the Daggett Solar project because of the demise of the local committee, he directed it should be used by MBCA to hire people to work on solar projects in the future. Being uncertain how we'd use it at the time, we asked to return his donation, but he declined and said to use the funds to fight solar projects.

The reference in the minutes to using \$5000 for NALC was in support of tribal gatherings at the Twentynine Palms Inn. (There was a Board vote.) David suggested using this "fund" for a short video on the need to protect desert soils which indirectly supports solar. Brian agreed and suggested getting Dr. Allen's involvement in presenting the need for carbon sequestration in desert soils. Stacy would be glad to work on this.

In the future we should always get donation intent (if any) in writing. While we realize that Fred's acknowledgement of the donation without specific usage agreement doesn't require us to notify him, *Pat will contact Fred and explain our plan to use the funds to develop a video to educate proactively against expanding solar projects.* What we've learned through the 30x30 process and state level attitudes is that this point is being overlooked or dismissed, so this could really make some difference.

7) Inventory MBCA equipment

Tabled.

8) Poetry on our website? – PF

Tabled.

9) MBCA table at MWA Conservation Fair 5-20-23 – CZ

Steve received an invitation; our participation will be discussed next month.

10) Card for Greg Mendoza, Phyllis Schwartz

Steve will send sympathy cards.

Conservation Issues

1) Little Hoover Commission CEQA – PF, SB, DF, All

Steve replied to a questionnaire. We'll watch and see what happens.

2) JT listing –DF, BH

David emailed to the Board Brendan Cummings' short version of the situation and there is not much to do at this time. Brian added that no one has picked up the issue as a separate bill; it's still a rider and will go through the budget process as it is now.

3) Solar and DRECP - PF

Pat and Brian will work on mapping disturbed land eligible for solar development.

4) [Save California Solar](#) / NEM 3.0 – DF, SB

There was a Zoom conference today. No news.

5) Air Quality update – AM, SK,

Contact Erin Rode - SB and Raul Ruiz re: Haboob - ?

No action.

6) 30x30 update – **SB 337** - AM, PF

DRECP Appendix G Air Quality – PF, SB

7) Chuckwalla National Monument - AM

The coalition is meeting with Congressman Ruiz's office.

8) MWA update re: water – BH

AB 1573 nonfunctional turf – AM

Brian noted that the MWA General Manager left, and he feels the new person represents a positive change. They are trying to capture the winter rains.

9) Dark Skies - Presentation in Wonder Valley 4-14-23 – PF, SB

Steve, Sarah and Pat will attend and Steve will be presenting.

Letter: Sign-on to letters in support of: SB233 Bi direction EVs; SB337 30x30; AB1573 non-function turf.

Adjourned 7:23 PM

Next Regular Meeting: Thursday, May 11, 2023, 5:00 – 7:00 PM - zoom