

## MBCA BOARD MEETING **APPROVED** MINUTES

Thursday, September 14, 2023 / 5:00 – 7:00 pm Via Zoom

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

### Regular Meeting Called to Order at 5:01 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**

Allan Songer, Kerrie Aley, Wendy Hadley, Tim Stimpfel, Donna Leo, Russ Cohn, Gina Cohn, Bob Wold, Helen Jeong, and Justin Moreno introduced themselves briefly. Steve announced an in-person evening gathering on Sunday, October 22, for folks interested in more MBCA involvement. All present will be invited.

- **Agenda approval**

Steve added AB 1183 to the Housing topic. Arch asked to add AB 1573 under Climate Change. ***Steve moved to approve the agenda with additions. Sarah seconded and all were in favor.***

- **Minutes from July 13, 2023 BOD meeting**

With two minor corrections noted by Laraine, ***Steve moved to approve the July minutes. Pat seconded, and all were in favor.***

- **Treasurer's Report** - accounting update, budget update, support for non-profit.

Cathy reported one new and one renewal membership. Our Directors' insurance was paid this month (\$554) and one of the \$1000 scholarships was distributed. Our checking balance is \$22,229.97 and the CD is \$60,669.93. The CD rollover date is in November. Next month we should discuss our earlier consideration of withdrawing some funds from the CD for specific projects. *Steve and Cathy will be meeting with an accountant to request a budget review, and they will work on our 2024 budget.* Since only one scholarship check has been claimed, *Laraine will send a reminder to the two who haven't communicated yet.* We tabled the issue of nonprofit support for a future meeting. The Treasurer's report was accepted by consensus.

### Climate Change

1) 30x30 status update – AM, PF

(added) Arch spoke about the Friedman bill AB 1573 on water conservation. ([MCBA News Post April 13, 2023](#)) It included a mandate in public plantings for a certain percentage of native plants. There was wide support but it was shot down by the plant growing industry because they'd have to change their business model.

Steve provided a brief overview of California's 30x30 for visitors. The plan is intended to conserve 30% of our lands and waters by 2030 to keep them in a natural state. The desert areas have been overlooked as significant carbon sequestration areas, and the Inland Desert Working Group pressed on several fronts to include more desert conservation in the plan. The leadership group agreed to appoint a desert member (Dr. Tim Krantz) but they never seated him. They gave the desert group 2 weeks to write a report on why the desert should be preserved for carbon sequestration and it has been filed.

- 2) Chuckwalla National Monument – AM – Not addressed.
- 3) Air Quality – Rule 401, MDAQMD – PF  
Pat is on the agency's Tech Advisory committee. Rule 401 should include reference to visible emissions that are only noted in Rule 403, fugitive dust control. ([MBCA News post August 22, 2023](#)) *Pat and Steve plan to talk with the new LUS Director to inform and update him.* Owens Lake is a model for how to treat dust rather than just using water, which evaporates and depletes sources.
- 4) Joshua tree ordinance re-cap – DF,LT  
The August 29 meeting at MDLT was attended by around 100 people. David summarized the politics of the late-appointed Commission member who then resigned shortly after the legislative solution was in place. He added that Brendan Cummings of CBD, originator of the threatened species petition, felt that this legislative solution will actually be better than a Commission decision. The last speaker, Drew Kaiser, is the head of state staff who will write the regulations. Steve said that MDLT will publish the final regulations on their website and we will link to it.
- 5) Fire Safe Awareness – SB, SK  
Pioneertown area resident Max Thomas has written a widely-shared essay (*does anyone have this – can't find it*) about local fire concerns to draw attention to needed mitigation of extreme fire hazards. A focused local meeting is being planned. Justin has created a Community Wildfire Projection Plan. CWPP is a nationwide program to help local communities. A Fire District review is completed with all local agencies and signatories and is close to a final version. His organization is the Fire Safe Council. The CWPP is the business plan to ask for money for particular needs.

Ted from Newberry Springs said he has requested his letter about fire concerns be read as public comment at Supervisor meetings, but it hasn't been so far.

## **Water Issues**

- 1) Cadiz – DF  
David related some Cadiz history, including that they helped fight against the BOLO Rail Cycle mega dump in the 90s, then changed course to make profit from water. They have requested access to a 220-mile unused gas pipeline to use for water distribution from the desert. The recent unannounced Joint Powers Authority agreement with San Bernardino County empowers Cadiz to go ahead with the project. A meeting is to be scheduled with the County to complain that there was no public notice and should have been.
- 2) MWA update  
Brian reported a good recharge situation for MWA, up to 240,000 acre feet from the mountains and the California Aqueduct. "It's been a banner year for getting water in the ground!"

## **Housing**

- 1) STR study update – JJ,SB,LT,DF

The August 24 [County Open House meeting](#) about the Program 4 study was attended by about 100 people. It is through MCBA's attention, with a huge amount of work on Janet's part, that the state required such a study before accepting the County's Housing Element. Janet is researching the Regional Housing Needs Assessment that has been counting STRs as new available housing. In 2021, there were over 200 STR application permits. About 80-90 were built, and about 80% seem to be short term rentals, so they didn't provide "real" housing. We have communicated with the state about this.

- 2) Morongo Basin Housing Solutions Working Group – JJ  
Janet suggests more people should attend the East Valley Regional meetings to learn more and help the cause. There is some forward progress and some new funding coming. Navigation centers are being discussed widely. She noted that Twentynine Palms is stepping up on housing issues and making progress. Morongo Basin ARCH is a key player and a font of information but needs more help. Janet compared the work on housing as "building the plane while flying it."
- 3) (added) Steve noted that AB 1633 was passed by the legislature and is on the Governor's desk. It was written to short-circuit CEQA in its application to housing projects. MBCA signed a [letter of opposition](#). It would allow legal action before the administrative project record is complete, allowing lawsuits before approval or denial, thereby upending CEQA. This is a concern for environmental justice because of limitations on petitioners to recover attorney fees. There is a campaign to ask for a veto on this bill.

## **Renewable Energy**

- 1) Update on solar projects in SBCO – BH PF  
Brian said there are several on hold by applicants but they are probably "zombie projects."
- 2) Solar Valley recap – LT,PF,SB  
Steve described MBCA's long-term connections with the UCR [CEERT](#) program and its [Solar Valley Consortium](#). Laraine summarized today's Solar Valley webinar positively and suggested everyone watch the video when available. Steve noted that though renewable energy targets have been set, the current issue is "how do we achieve the targets we set?" The AB 205 trailer bill allows CEC to license RE projects, foregoing local jurisdictions. To meet legislative targets, a lot of RE needs to be constructed in a short period of time.

Pat found the webinar very disappointing, with no discussion on carbon sequestration, not enough creative thinking, and no rooftop discussion. Laraine noted that the last webinar presentation had a focus on microgrids, and also asked about verifiable data on how much rooftop solar can meet goals. Pat pointed to a report noting that previously disturbed areas available for solar from a 2009 estimate including canals, ag land, rooftops, etc. total 1,190,000 to 1,590,000 acres. Agri-voltaics could cover 25,000,000 acres. So there's data but it's not being accepted or utilized. Arch added that all those available places are closer to the load than distant desert locations so line losses would be less and would therefore be more efficient.

- 3) Solar Rights Alliance -AM  
We signed onto a letter objecting to utilities adding fees/taxes on sliding scale that would discourage energy conservation.

- 4) SB 233 – SB  
This wasn't passed but is a 2-year bill to mandate all EVs be equipped to be bidirectional.
- 5) Agri photovoltaics, Aqueduct PVs – BH – Not addressed.

## **County Governance**

- 1) Recap LUS open house  
Several Directors attended the August 30 [Land Use Services Open House](#) at the JT Government Center. Steve expressed several suggestions to new LUS Director Mark Wardlaw at the event. A follow-up detailed [letter](#) was sent to him. In an email they said they'd get back to us on our input. Since there is only one Supervisorial representative for the desert, and none on the Planning Commission, LUS provides the only avenue for us to influence County decisions for our regional benefit.
- 2) Update on Wonder Inn, Flamingo 640  
[Wonder Inn](#). Russ Cohn of Wonder Valley summarized the situation including the denial of the project in March, the appeal filed by the project proponent, and the lack of a hearing for the appeal more than 6 months later. An appeal hearing was supposed to be scheduled within 30 days.

Eric Hamburg is trying to get answers from LUS staff Heidi Duron (LUS) and Claire Cozad (Sup. Rowe). He's been told new Director Wardlaw is "diving deep into the issue" and it will take a few more weeks. With all the discrepancies between the project content and the related guidelines, policies, and processes, it doesn't seem possible it could be approved. [Stop Wonder Inn](#) is starting another letter campaign. Uncertainties abound due to the current power vacuum in the County after the CEO's sudden departure, leaving a chaotic situation.

[Flamingo 640](#). We received an inquiry from a journalism student at USC looking to talk to MBCA about Flamingo 640. [Steve and Pat will get in touch with her](#). Like the Wonder Inn project, LUS doesn't follow their own policies, CAGs, etc.

- 3) Light Trespass Ordinance  
As of June 6, all commercial lighting is under the new policy. Report violations. Bob got a call back on an LTO complaint he made, and the staff member said they had a lot of complaints. [Laraine will add the phone number to call on the website](#).
- 4) Scenic 247 - SK  
Sarah reported that the County has assigned a couple of people to this project that has languished for at least a year. CalTrans wants some reformatting of project components, so it is still moving, if slowly. Staff changeover adds to the challenges.

## **Outreach and Organizational Issues**

- 1) Mission Statement discussion - All  
*The Morongo Basin Conservation Association educates and advocates for a healthy desert environment that protects wildlife and wildlands, and supports the rural character, cultural abundance, and economic well-being of our communities.*  
This version evolved to capture the entire desert area in our scope of interest.

- 2) *Letters signed onto – See email of agenda for listing of letters.*  
Comment letters referenced in News posts and Eblasts are also eventually added to the page “MBCA Takes a Stand.” This includes group sign-on letters and MBCA-only letters.
- 3) Participation in panel re: tourism impacts  
Chris Clarke of NPCA requested we be part of a September 27 [meeting](#) on the impacts of the recent high levels of desert visitation. The Perseids traffic jam was a triggering event. This was the topic of our [2020 annual meeting](#), with several of the same speakers expected at the upcoming meeting. Steve asked for comments.
- a) MBCA as an influencer
  - b) Development we encourage
- No more Park promotion.
  - The Park has a powerful voice and “puts out the welcome mat” and that’s a problem.
  - How do you plan for people coming?
  - Think of Hawaii, Italy, Yosemite, or Tahoe: this is a global issue. Lots of communities are having this problem, and it’s exacerbated by social media.
  - Take the position of looking for a solution.
  - Encourage appropriate development, *concentrated*.
  - MBCA’s mission includes maintaining the Basin as a rural area. That helps guide a lot of issues.
  - Send messaging to come at another time rather than peak weekends; add desert living advice. Message better behavior.
  - There is some uncertainty about how long such destination-focused trends last.
  - It seems the younger people among the incoming tourists are coming to party, not necessarily for loving the Park.
  - Build local culture of taking care of the desert. Emphasize the origins via the Small Tract Act, rural land use, the widespread open living spaces.
  - Maybe signs in the Park (like Burma Shave sequential signs) could point to problem behaviors to educate visitors; many don’t even understand what they’re doing wrong.
  - It would help to have data on different types of visitors. If we knew more, we might have some better ideas about how to influence the problems.
  - Use billboards along I-10 to stop people from coming. Also have positive messages, RESPECT the Park. Focus on one thing e.g. dark skies.
  - Use the Art Tours to connect with visitors who will probably also visit the Park. Maybe handouts at each artist who’s willing.
  - Email more ideas to Steve.
- 4) Events Committee reports:
- a) Video production – SD, LT, SK, CZ  
Launching very soon. We will be using short vertical videos (previews) on social media in advance of each full video release over the next 4 weeks.
  - b) Fall Event  
Our co-sponsorship of CDC’s program on September 30 can be considered our fall event.
- 5) Educational Support
- a) Funding

One of the 3 scholarship recipients received their check and the scholarship donor has made another of the planned 3 annual donations toward the scholarship (\$1000) and the field trips program (\$1000).

b) Field Trips – JJ

The inaugural first phase of the 8<sup>th</sup> grade La Contenta Field Trips was held this spring. Students were educated on local water and other infrastructure places plus spent time at Harrison House learning about permaculture, saw locations in the Basin from the bus that can provide them jobs, learned about what CMC offers, and overall received positive messages about life possibilities in the Morongo Basin.

The inaugural 2<sup>nd</sup> phase trip focused on the Desert View Conservation Area will hopefully occur this fall and will include hiking, a bit of environmental education, demonstrations of climbing and mountain biking, and family recreation possibilities.

6) Website and Social media updates.

Encourage promoting MBCA calendar of events. Acronyms lists are being developed for the website.

7) Inventory MBCA equipment – SK, CZ, LT

Steve thanked all the visitors for their presence and input.

**Adjourned 7:13 PM**

**NOTE CHANGE OF USUAL DAY FOR NEXT MEETING – 3rd Thursday instead of 2nd.**

**Next Regular Meeting:** Thursday, **October 19**, 2023, 5:00 – 7:00 PM - zoom