



City of Flagstaff McMillan Mesa Natural Area Proposed Rezone Neighborhood Meetings and Public Comment Summary

Neighborhood Meeting Session 1

December 14, 2020 | 5:00 PM – 7:00 PM

Virtual Meeting (Zoom)

This meeting was noticed and conducted in compliance with Zoning Code Section 10-20.30.060.

22 Attendees

Meeting Summary

The purpose of this neighborhood meeting was to provide background information and get feedback from the public on the McMillan Mesa area's proposed rezoning. The area is currently a patchwork of different types of zoning. To align with Proposition 413, the City's Regional Plan, and better manage the site, the City is proposing to rezone ten parcels currently zoned as Rural Residential, Public Facilities, and Research & Development to Public Open Space. Below is a summary of concerns, issues, and questions regarding clarification and process that were discussed during the meeting on December 14, 2020. Additional feedback was provided through the Flagstaff Community Forum. A summary of the results from the 60 – day public comment period and the community forum are included in this document (Section: 60 – Day Public Comment Period and Community Forum Results).

Questions

When will this application be going to City Council for approval?

- **Response:** There is no date set yet, as the timing will be dependent on when the application materials are completed. The Open Space Program will be posting the date on social media when it is finalized. This information will also be included in the public notice for the Planning and Zoning Commission hearing.

Is any opposition from City Council expected for the rezone?

- **Response:** The rezone application process was initiated with direction from Council; the public is welcome to attend the Council meeting to share their agreement/disagreement with the proposed rezone and ordinance.

What are opposing voices saying to this proposal?

- **Response:** Both positive and negative impacts have been considered by staff and are included in the proposed rezoning application. Proposition 413 and the proposed rezoning eliminates a possible future access road between Ponderosa Pkwy and Gemini Rd., reduces the size of the business park on McMillan Mesa, reduces the potential for a source of in-fill for the City, and would further separate the east side of town from the west side.

Is there an existing plan that includes mapping the current vegetation and treatment of invasive plants on McMillan Mesa?

- **Response:** There is a Legally-Designated Open Space Management Plan that was recently revised and approved by the City Council, which includes directives for managing invasive plants and vegetation.

However, implementation is limited by funding availability. Plans specific to each of the main Natural Areas can be found on the Flagstaff Open Space [website](#).

With the establishment of the Open Space, what is the possibility of cooperation with the adjacent landowners on invasive plant treatments?

- **Response:** With partner support, the Open Space Program has already started to connect with neighboring landowners to encourage cooperation on invasive plant management, and so far, neighbors are favorable to cooperating. The City will continue these efforts and utilize existing partnerships with organizations like the Arboretum at Flagstaff to help coordinate volunteer-based weed pulls that target invasive weeds on McMillan Mesa.

What is the current zoning of parcel 10128007F? The City zoning map shows it as Public Open Space already, but it is not included in this rezone.

- **Response:** The parcel in question is not owned by the City of Flagstaff. The owner's name is MMV DEVCO LLC, address: 15300 N 90th St. Number 200 Scottsdale, AZ 85260. This parcel already has Public Open Space zoning. It was set aside as part of the Switzer Mesa subdivision development, so it does not need to be rezoned. It is included as part of the McMillan Mesa Small Area Plan.

To the east of the Natural Area is mostly zoned as medium-density residential (MR), but there are some high-density zoned (HR) parcels to the south. Would it be possible to rezone those parcels?

- **Response:** While those areas are zoned as HR, there is currently no high-density residential development there. However, those parcels are privately owned, so they are outside of the scope of the current rezoning process.

Has there been any feedback provided from residents that back the trails and the Open Space property?

- **Response:** While there has been targeted outreach to these residents within the required radius of the McMillan Mesa property, there have been no comments received yet regarding the preservation of the Property. These residents will also be receiving notifications for the public hearing. All notifications for the neighborhood meeting(s), the Planning and Zoning Commission, and City Council hearings have been or will be noticed according to the requirements set forth in the City of Flagstaff Zoning Code.

Additional Feedback – Community Forum Questions

Questions asked:

1. How satisfied are you with current trailhead access and parking for the McMillan Mesa Natural Area? (main parking at Buffalo Park)
 - a. Satisfied
 - b. Neutral
 - c. Dissatisfied
 - d. Other
2. Do you support rezoning this Property to Public Open Space from Public Facilities and Rural Residential?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. What's a rezoning?
 - d. Other
3. What concerns do you have for McMillan Mesa Natural Area?
 - a. Illegal camping in the Natural Area
 - b. Human/wildlife interactions

- c. Deterioration of the Natural Area due to increased use
 - d. Lack of wildlife corridors to and from the Natural Area
 - e. Illegal dumping and litter
 - f. Other
4. Would you attend a community tour to become more familiar with the McMillan Mesa Natural Area?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Other
 5. If the City were to allocate additional funding to support the management of McMillan Mesa Natural Area, what funding mechanisms would you support?
 - a. Municipal Bond
 - b. An additional fee (less than \$2.00) on City municipal bill (trash, water, sewer)
 - c. A small increase to Flagstaff's sales tax (less than 0.1%)
 - d. A small property tax increase
 - e. User fees
 - f. None of the above
 - g. Other
 6. If you had \$10,000 to spend on McMillan Mesa Natural Area, how would you allocate it across the following categories? (1 dot = \$1,000)
 - a. Routine maintenance
 - b. Maintaining existing trails
 - c. Restoration of unauthorized trails
 - d. Trail improvements
 - e. Signage improvements
 - f. Invasive plant management
 - g. Other
 7. Is there a preserved OS property within a 15-minute walk of where you live?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. I'm not sure
 8. What neighborhood do you live in?
 - a. Write response
 9. Do you have additional comments you would like to share regarding McMillan Mesa Natural Area?
 - a. Other

Feedback:

- Most attendees were generally satisfied with the current trailhead access and parking for McMillan Mesa, though alternate parking is sometimes required, and parking can be difficult to find when there are events.
- Attendees generally supported rezoning this Property to Public Open Space.
- Concerns for McMillan Mesa Natural Area include illegal camping, human/wildlife interactions, deterioration due to increased use, lack of wildlife corridors, illegal dumping and litter, and invasive plants.
- Attendees expressed interest in attending a community tour to become more familiar with the Natural Area.
- If the City were to allocate additional funding to support the management of McMillan Mesa Natural Area, what funding mechanisms would you support?
 - Municipal bond (4 agreed, 1 disagreed, 1 agreed only if the bond would apply to other Open Space areas as well)

- An additional fee on City municipal bill (3 agreed)
- A small increase to Flagstaff's sales tax (4 agreed)
- Small property tax increase (4 agreed)
- User fees (1 agreed, 2 disagreed)
- Additional suggestions: donations, outside grants
- Most attendees would allocate \$10,000 on maintenance, with some suggestions for restoration of unauthorized trails and signage in addition to invasive plant treatments.
- Most attendees have a preserved Open Space property within a 15-minute walk of where they live, with the exception of the south side of Flagstaff.
- These neighborhoods were represented:
 - Switzer Ridge/Mesa
 - Sunnyside
 - Lower Greenlaw
 - Ponderosa Trails
 - Downtown Flagstaff
 - Flagstaff Townsite
 - University Heights/Highlands
 - Grand View Homes
 - Cherry Hill
 - Hospital Hill
 - Koch Field
 - Valley Crest

Neighborhood Meeting Session 2

January 13, 2021 | 5:00 PM – 7:00 PM

Virtual Meeting (Zoom)

This meeting was noticed and conducted in compliance with Zoning Code Section 10-20.30.060.

16 Attendees

Meeting Summary

The purpose of this neighborhood meeting was to provide background information and get feedback from the public on the McMillan Mesa area's proposed rezoning. The area is currently a patchwork of different types of zoning. To align with Proposition 413, the City's Regional Plan, and better manage the site, the City is proposing to rezone ten parcels currently zoned as Rural Residential, Public Facilities, and Research & Development to Public Open Space. At this meeting, there was only one concern specifically related to the rezone application regarding the need for it, while other concerns were related to the management of the Open Space area. Details from the January 13, 2021 meeting, including answers to process and clarification questions, are shown below. Nearly all attendees supported the proposed rezone of the McMillan Mesa area. Additional feedback was provided through the Flagstaff Community Forum. A summary of the results from the 60 – day public comment period and the community forum are included in this document (Section: 60 – Day Public Comment Period and Community Forum Results).

Questions

What areas are included in the rezone?

- **Response:** South of Cedar Ave. around the residential areas and north of Cedar Ave. just southwest of Buffalo Park.

What is meant by "Open Space"?

- **Response:** Certain open areas are identified in the City Open Space and Greenways Plan. These areas are different from parks within the City as they contain minimal infrastructure. Protecting these areas also protects the natural integrity of the area and maintains the natural character of our community. The following are the City's current, formally managed Open Space areas: Picture Canyon Natural and Cultural Preserve, McMillan Mesa Natural Area, Observatory Mesa Natural Area, and Schultz Creek Natural Area.

Have there been any efforts or initiatives to put another bridge on the lower end of Cedar by McPherson Park?

- **Response:** This idea was discussed by the Flagstaff Open Space and Parks and Recreation joint commissions when a potential bond measure was being crafted. The intent was to allow for the development of a loop system of trails, but there have not been any more specific discussions in the Open Space Program yet due to a lack of funding. The idea is currently tabled, though it could be brought back for review.

Is it correct to assume that this is likely to pass easily at the City Council level?

- **Response:** The rezoning effort was started based on City Council's direction, but with new Council members and a new Mayor in place, there are some unknowns. Regardless, there is value in participating in the process, and attendees are encouraged to comment during the Planning and Zoning Commission and City Council meetings to represent their views. If the rezone does not pass, the property management should not change due to Proposition 413, but those areas would not be zoned Public Open Space.

When will this item be on the City Council agenda?

- **Response:** It is not on a City Council agenda yet as the other steps (e.g., completing the application, staff review, Planning and Zoning Commission hearing, etc.) need to happen first, but those dates will be published when they are finalized.

Concerns

Rezone: What is the value in rezoning and having this public meeting if the Proposition vote already happened?

- **Response:** Rezoning the Property to Public Open Space solidifies these properties as open space. Public Open Space land is primarily for passive recreation. Rezoning the Property will also align with Proposition 413, the City's Regional Plan, and allow for clarity pertaining to property management. The public can share their views with City Council during public participation. The materials provided to City Council will also include a record of proceedings from neighborhood meetings.

Open Space: Unauthorized trail use through the grasslands at the top of the mesa

- **Discussion:** These trails need to be formalized or closed to use and restored because of the impact on the grassland. They are mostly utilized by students, so the City should work with the school to improve the parking situation and mitigate the need to use the unauthorized trails.
- **Response:** These trails will be assessed by the Open Space Commission.

Open Space: While homeless encampments are an issue on McMillan Mesa, other options need to be provided to these individuals rather than just asking them to leave.

- **Response:** The Open Space Program works with the Flagstaff Police Department when clearing these encampments. The Police Department always provides information about other services and resources in town that can be utilized.

Additional Feedback – Community Forum Questions

Attendees were asked the same questions as in the first neighborhood meeting (See above list of questions).

Feedback:

- Attendees were generally concerned that the shared parking for McMillan Mesa and Buffalo Park is not always sufficient to handle the number of vehicles. Suggested upgrades included paving the parking lot and removing invasive elm trees.
- Attendees generally supported rezoning this Property to Public Open Space.
- Concerns for McMillan Mesa Natural Area include deterioration due to increased use, illegal dumping and litter, illegal camping, lack of wildlife corridors, human/wildlife interactions, unauthorized trails, and erosion from runoff.
- Attendees expressed interest in attending a community tour to become more familiar with the Natural Area.
- If the City were to allocate additional funding to support the management of McMillan Mesa Natural Area, what funding mechanisms would you support?
 - A municipal bond that would be put on a ballot (5 agreed)
 - An additional fee on City municipal bill (4 agreed)
 - A small increase to Flagstaff's sales tax (5 agreed)
 - A small property tax increase (5 agreed)
 - User fees such as a self-pay station for entrance fees (2 agreed, 2 disagreed)
 - Additional suggestions: donations, fundraising, Friends of McMillan Mesa effort possibly led by Friends of Flagstaff's Future or another Flagstaff-based non-governmental organization
- Generally, attendees agreed that funding should be focused primarily on maintenance with additional suggestions to restore unauthorized trails, implement trail improvements, signage improvements, and invasive plant control.
- Most attendees have a preserved Open Space property within a 15-minute walk of where they live, with the exception of University Heights.
- These neighborhoods were represented:
 - Country Club Estates
 - McMillan Mesa Village
 - Switzer Ridge/Mesa
 - Sunnyside
 - Lower Greenlaw
 - Ponderosa Trails
 - Downtown Flagstaff
 - Flagstaff Townsite
 - University Heights/Highlands

60 – Day Public Comment Period and Community Forum Results

Open Comment Period:

Topic Start: November 20, 2020, 8:11 PM

Topic End: February 2, 2021, 3:58 PM

This forum had:

- Attendees: 127
- Responses: 73
- Written feedback submission: 1
- Approximate verbal comments conveyed to staff: 5

Community Forum High-Level Summary (Includes review of Community Forum survey, written comments, and verbal comments received separately from neighborhood meetings):

The City of Flagstaff received 79 responses during the public comment period. Overall, the majority of respondents, approximately 84%, indicated that they support McMillan Mesa Natural Area's rezone to Public Open Space from Public Facilities, Rural Residential, and Research & Development. In comparison, only 8% stated that they did not support the proposed rezoning. Respondents indicated in written feedback the need for the zoning change to meet the voters' intent for the Greater Buffalo Park. Most preferred minimized or no developments or improvements to the Property and keeping the Property in a natural state. There were some concerns related to increased use and the deterioration of the Natural Area. Over 80% of respondents indicated support for additional funding to assist McMillan Mesa Natural Area's management, with 49% specifically supporting an additional fee (less than \$2.00) on City municipal bill. A detailed survey report can be viewed on the Flagstaff's Community Forum: <https://www.flagstaff.az.gov/3284/Flagstaff-Community-Forum>

Community Forum Specific Question Results:

Questions asked:

1. What might keep you from using the McMillan Mesa Natural Area? (select as many as applicable).
 - a. 26.8 % Proximity to where I live
 - b. 16.9 % Inadequate trailhead access points
 - c. 21.1 % Not enough parking
 - d. 5.6 % Unfamiliar with the area
 - e. 16.9 % Other
 - f. 36.6 % None
2. How satisfied are you with current trailhead access and parking for the McMillan Mesa Natural Area? (main parking at Buffalo Park)
 - a. 54.9 % Satisfied
 - b. 31 % Neutral
 - c. 11.3 % Dissatisfied
 - d. 2.8 % Other
3. Do you support rezoning this Property to Public Open Space from Public Facilities and Rural Residential?
 - a. 84.7 % Yes
 - b. 8.3 % No
 - c. 2.8 % What's a rezoning?
 - d. 4.2 % Other

4. What concerns do you have for McMillan Mesa Natural Area?
 - a. 37.1 % Illegal camping in the Natural Area
 - b. 14.3 % Human/wildlife interactions
 - c. 55.7 % Deterioration of the Natural Area due to increased use
 - d. 67.1 % Lack of wildlife corridors to and from the Natural Area
 - e. 54.3 % Illegal dumping and litter
 - f. 18.6 % Other
5. Would you attend a community tour to become more familiar with the McMillan Mesa Natural Area?
 - a. 44.3 % Yes
 - b. 32.9 % No
 - c. 22.9 % Other
6. If the City were to allocate additional funding to support the management of McMillan Mesa Natural Area, what funding mechanisms would you support?
 - a. 35.2 % Municipal Bond
 - b. 49.3 % An additional fee (less than \$2.00) on City municipal bill (trash, water, sewer)
 - c. 40.8 % A small increase to Flagstaff's sales tax (less than 0.1%)
 - d. 43.7 % Small property tax increase
 - e. 12.7 % User fees
 - f. 8.5 % None of the above
 - g. 11.3 % Other
7. If you had \$10,000 to spend on McMillan Mesa Natural Area, how would you allocate it across the following categories? (1 dot = \$1,000)
 - a. 25.2 % Routine maintenance
 - b. 21.3 % Maintaining existing trails
 - c. 12.5 % Restoration of unauthorized trails
 - d. 12 % Trail improvements
 - e. 5.9 % Signage improvements
 - f. 13.9 % Invasive plant management
 - g. 3.5 % Other
8. Is there a preserved OS property within a 15-minute walk of where you live?
 - a. 66.2 % Yes
 - b. 19.7% No
 - c. 9.9 % I'm not sure
 - d. 4.2 % Other
9. Do you have additional comments you would like to share regarding McMillan Mesa Natural Area?
 - a. 25 written responses