

Mission Canyon Association

MINUTES

9/7/21, 7:30 p.m.

Minutes by Ray Smith

1. Meeting Called to Order (Jason Saltoun-Ebin)

Board Members Present: Alex Feldwinn, Darby Feldwinn, Erika Sharghi, Hugh Twibell, Jason Saltoun-Ebin, Jean Yamamura, Kevin Snow, Nancy Weiss, Ray Smith, and Seldon Edner

Board Members Absent: Laurie Guitteau, Sandy Robertson

Guests: Steve Windhager

2. Minutes of July and August Meetings Approved

1st: Nancy Weiss

2nd: Darby Feldwinn

Both minutes approved unanimously

3. County Update: Supervisor Das Williams/Kadie McShirley

There was no meeting with Supervisor Williams this past month.

4. Museum of Natural History update (Luke Swetland)

Luke did not attend the meeting but submitted the following prior to the meeting.

1. We wrapped Butterflies Alive yesterday and it was a wildly successful run.

Attendance will be much calmer now during the school week.

2. The Towbes Pedestrian Bridge repair project is complete.

3. Work continues on the Collections and Research Center – we will have cranes for a day here and there over the next few weeks delivering the HVAC units for installation. Solar panels are going on the roof soon. The project should be fully finished by Halloween.

4. Starting in October, we will have some onsite school group visits two mornings a week; the other two mornings we are offering virtual school group visits.

5. SBCC Astronomy students are back onsite four nights a week using the Planetarium and doing telescope observation.

There was no further discussion

5. Botanic Garden update (Steve Windhager)

Prior to our meeting Steve sent an email to the board outlining his report so as to give everyone a “head’s up” as to his planned discussion.

I will be attending the zoom meeting tonight, and as part of my report, I will want to just give everyone a head’s up about a conversation that I have begun with some of our neighbors and county staff.

The Garden has been having record breaking attendance since last August – literally the highest level of attendance that we have ever experienced due in large part to the flexibility that remote work has given to people to be able to work in different locations and visit the Garden during mid-week. Our visitation from September 2020 through August 2021 was over 116,000 people. If this visitation level had occurred within a calendar year, we would have violated our CUP.

We have had this high level of monthly visitation while maintaining our at any one time caps (255 in low fire season from Dec through April, and 205 from May through November), as well as restricting street parking. Outside of some issues in the spring (which it will be impossible to resolve until we have modified our parking lot), I have not heard any neighbor concerns with this level of visitation. We do not think that the annual visitation limits relate to any safety concerns that we are aware of, but were set based on previous high levels of attendance.

The Garden is considering requesting a temporary amendment to our CUP to allow for 130,000 people to visit the Garden annually during the years when pandemic restrictions are in place (so this would certainly be for 2021, and it might include 2022 depending on how things move forward). This would be an 18% increase over non-COVID years. The Garden continues to be an essential business in SB County and we feel we are providing residents and visitors a safe place to recreate and renew themselves during the pandemic (and a great way to discover the beauty and benefits of California native plants). Because the increase in visitation is primarily mid-week, and we are not allowing an increase in at any one time visitation, there is no increased evacuation risk.

The alternative to increasing our annual visitation limit would be for the Garden to close to the public (and members) at least one (probably 2) days a week to ensure that we do not surpass and therefore violate our annual visitation limits. To communicate this change in service to our community, we would need to issue notices to Garden members and followers via our newsletters, website and social media platforms. In addition, to ensure we inform local tourists, we’d also need to plan to distribute a press release to regional media and tourism bureaus. Despite all these efforts, I fear we would still have a large number of people needing to be turned away, necessitating many 3-point-turns on Mission Canyon Road– potentially impacting our neighbors to a greater extent than allowing a temporary increase in visitation.

I have already reached out to some of our neighbors above us on Mission Canyon Road to solicit their thoughts. If the Garden moves forward with making an official request of the County to consider this temporary modification to our permit, I would certainly be stronger if we also had a letter of support from the MCA board, so I hope to introduce this idea and get feedback that the Garden can incorporate into our planning.

Steve showed a graph of 2017-2021 Garden attendance (attached) and noted that, presumably because of covid/flexible work/etc., more folk were visiting the garden midweek and that they were having “record breaking attendance”. He was concerned that if this attendance continued they would exceed their Conditional Use Permit (CUP) unless they periodically closed the Garden or obtained a “temporary amendment” from the County for their CUP to allow “130,000 people to visit the Garden annually during the years when pandemic restrictions are in place” while maintaining their any one time caps as well as restricting street parking.

There followed a detailed discussion by all of Steve’s proposal, mostly centered on making sure the proposal would not involve safety concerns or an increase in evacuation risk. After much discussion it was agreed that Nancy would work with Steve and neighbors to determine a position for the MCA.

6. Treasurer’s report (if needed):

Erika Sharghi There was no Treasurer’s report this past month.

7. Committee Reports

7.1. Mission Canyon Brush Cleanup and Chipping

Ray reported that there was no new news.

7.2. Newsletter (Jean Yamamura)

Jean reported that the Newsletter was “coming along” and noted that items discussed included an update on SCE, lighting within the canyon to inform new people in the canyon of this issue, among other issues. Items not included in the upcoming Newsletter could be posted on the MCA web site.

7.3. Architectural Design Review (Hugh Twibell)

Hugh reported there was not much recent activity. A question regarding the illegal addition on Orange Grove was raised. This is a 4 or 5 year old issue that the owners seem to bring back periodically with no current resolution. There was also a question regarding SBAR's granting of ADUs but a specific answer was not known at this time.

7.4. Parking & Traffic (Jason Saltoun-Ebin)

Jason reported that a neighbor had complained that someone was living in a car parked in front of her home. The car was tagged by Highway Patrol and moved. The neighbor also asked if No Parking signs could be installed. It was noted that this is a long-standing issue in the heights area, especially in the area of the horseshoe area on Montrose. It was recalled that several years ago it was suggested that fog lines be put on all streets on Mission Canyon as this would demark legal from illegal parking areas. At that time a few neighbors strongly resisted the idea of fog lines and the County dropped the issue in spite of the argument that restricting illegal parking would make emergency ingress/egress safer for all.

7.5. Land Use Committee (Kevin Snow)

Kevin reported that there was nothing new. The lighting issue on Torno Rd. and the unpermitted activity at 2001 Tunnel have no further information.

7.6. Membership (Laurie Guitteau)

No report.

7.7. Fire Committee (Ray Smith)

No report.

7.8. Website (Alex Feldwinn)

We got a note from iPower that our hosting "was downgraded to a parked account" which was in error. Erika called customer service and set us up to pay via our Paypal account that ipower has on file, and to auto renew. She also added herself and a security question to the ipower website, so that when I call, I can be identified by their system. Once the payment went through we got the following email from iPower:

Thank you for your recent renewal with IPOWER! Your renewal has been processed successfully:

- Order Total: \$95.40
 - Sales Tax: \$0.00
 - Amount Paid: \$95.40
 - Date of purchase: 9/17/2021
 - IPOWER username: missioncanyon
- Order details: IPowerPro Hosting Plan - 95.40

7.9. Tunnel Trial (Nancy Weiss)

Nancy reported that there is much going on with the SCE/Tunnel Trail issue. She noted that SCE's permit remains under consideration as well as several mitigation projects that Selden and his committee have been working on. They are waiting for responses from both SCE and SBCounty permit folk and timing remains uncertain. Key issues included: making sure no grading or scaling on upslope areas above the road occurs; working to minimize material export and maximize onsite use; and concern over how and where the berms will be constructed. Considerable discussion followed. In response to questions Nancy noted that SCE has been responsive to the committee's concerns, taking responsibility for their actions, and Selden listed the original failures of SCE: not supervising their contractor, not getting permits and not seeking to find out what was required prior to their work.

A final discussion centered on use of SCE & county funds and creation of a community based project focused on improvements at the trailhead. It was also suggested that we might meet with the Montecito Association and other front country neighborhood associations to establish common ground and work together.

7.10. Historical Bridge/Mission Heritage Trail Association (Erika Sharghi)

Erika read from the following report.

1. If you have been following the local news, you know that on August 10, Santa Barbara City Council voted to relinquish the CalTrans Highway Bridge Program grant for the Mission Canyon Bridge Project. They rejected the bridge and roadway options proposed by the Wallace Engineering Group and directed staff to return in the fall with a new solution for a pedestrian footbridge on either side of the bridge, and to identify a new funding source. The Council recognized the hazards of walking along the corridor and crossing the bridge and understood that it has yet to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act. So, the safety issues still exist, but at the meeting, the City Council has committed itself to come up with a solution that improves and ensures safe pedestrian access within the corridor and have them come to fruition.

2. Last Thursday's Independent carried an ad by MHTA seeking local support on a petition to hold Santa Barbara City Council and County Supervisors to their commitment on safety infrastructure improvements along the Mission Canyon corridor. Without a show of local support, it's so easy for projects to end up shelved indefinitely. The petition lets our officials know that their constituents want them to stay focused on our safety concerns, to improve and ensure the safety of pedestrian access, make it a priority and solidify a funding source. If you agree, then MHTA encourages you to add your name to the list of supporters. Login to their website missionheritagetrailassociation.org and click on 'petition'.

3. The Walk About with MHTA will be held on Wednesday, September 15 at 6:00PM. We'll meet at the pepper trees located at the corner of Laguna and Plaza Rubio. Get an on-the-ground understanding of the pedestrian safety shortfalls surrounding the Laguna to Puesta de Sol area.

4. MHTA released it's brochure titled Mission Heritage Trail Walking Guide.

This brochure is a general narrative of the many cultural and historical highlights located within the Mission Canyon corridor. It includes illustrations, historical photos and a detailed site tour map. The series of brief descriptions is meant to tell the story of this area from its early geological formations, to the thousands of years it was home to the Chumash peoples, to the earliest Spanish and Mexican settlements beginning with the founding of the Presidio of Santa Barbara in 1782, to the city we see today.

You can download it from their website or pick one up at the SB Presidio Historical Park, SB Historical Museum, Old Mission SB, SBMNH, and SB Botanic Garden.

Discussion then followed, asked what were the key issues and grass roots associated with safe passage and if there was any link to the coalition. Erika responded that the answer to these questions could be answered by checking the MHTA website that gives relevant history, studies, reports, etc. It was not clear at this time when the City & County would again review the issue and she reminded everyone of the upcoming Walk About.

Next Board Meeting: October 4, 2021.