

Mission Statement:

- The group discussed the recommendations that emerged from the surveys. Everyone aligned around modifying the statement to include language akin to: **Protects** the Park, **Enhances** experiences at the park, **Educates** the public about nature and the environment, and **Restores** the park property.”
- This language comes out of the master plan, and the bylaws committee, and the words have resonated with the public.
- The group talked about the feelings of some that the park itself should be elevated above people, but ultimately, the group determined that education is critical to protecting the park itself. Education and engagement are also about understanding community needs and getting their input, which is important for how we want to do our work.
- It was suggested to move away from the word “property” and towards something more like ecosystem or habitat. We’re not just protecting the physical thing, but the whole ecosystem and everything in it.
- It was noted that the County has the right to review our mission (and the bylaws, more broadly) per the MOU, so we should assure that the group finalizing language compares to the MOU.
- It was requested by Don and others that there be an inclusion of language, either in the mission or as a sub-statement to the mission, regarding human interaction with the park in a way that does no damage. The principle of authority of the resource. The mission should reflect the authority that the parkland has and we humans work within it to sustain it and maintain it. In other words, how can we move away from human-centric words and look at concepts of land ethics via Leopold.
 - Group agreed if there is a very simple way of incorporating this type of language, we will, but if not, it can be included in a sub-statement.
- It was also requested that the wording should be Nature Center first and Park last. That’s how you answer the phone. Want to make it clear they are separate from us.

Next Steps:

- Group will massage the language and bring a final recommendation to the board for approval
- Martha to chair, with support from Cathy, Pat, Winny, Judy

5-Year Vision - 2030

A broader and more diverse community of engaged people who feel ownership over the park and are working to protect it and make their own impact on it. The county is achieving the master plan in partnership with us.

Strategic Priorities for 2025-26

Strengthen internal processes

- Updated bylaws, clarified and streamlined committee structures, roles, responsibilities
- Board development plan
- Volunteer onboarding and stewardship
 - (includes answering question about sharing of volunteers with county)
- Fundraising plan
- Programming and events decision making matrix, including how many events to put on and what to invest in as an organization

Advance key priorities in the master plan

- Land use manager in place for Oregon Ridge by 2030
- Trails are refurbished, rerouted and re-opened
- Plan for restoring, protecting, and stewarding the deciduous forest as a sanctuary is in place
- An attractive and modern nature center is open for the public

Sharpen our ability to advocate for the park

- Clear plan for building power with decision-makers
- Increased and activated membership
- Deeper community engagement
 - Recruit younger and more diverse volunteers
- Better communications with the county, transparency with the county
 - More effectively advocate for staff

Priority 1: Strengthen Internal Processes

- Bylaws and committee structure
 - Martha to lead
 - Send out request to committee chairs to work with their committees on developing manuals, and clarify what is requested in the manual
 - Include what work the committee does
 - Responsibilities of chairs
 - Capacity gaps / volunteer needs moving forward
 - Extra-budgetary requests for consideration
 - Process points for how committee interact with other committees, and when
 - Decisions that require full board approval
 - Michelle to pull a sample from MANO and Winny to send out
 - Martha to get connected with MANO consultant for support on bylaws rewriting process
 - Consider creating more committees with subcommittees, i.e. newsletter, web, marketing should all fall under communications, as you're working towards the same goal of servicing a broader communications plan with goals and strategies attached to strategic priorities
 - Begin review by end of September, understanding there are multiple pieces for discussion, i.e. mission, committees, county relationship, etc.
- Board development plan
 - Ask MANO for support in creating a plan that audits existing capabilities and demographics, needed capabilities and demographics, and a plan for achieving new board members
 - Consider creating Governance Committee that includes subcommittees for Nominations, ByLaws, Onboarding
 - SEE POWERPOINT suggestions from the board on how to strengthen board and add - Winny, Michelle, Donna
- Volunteer onboarding and stewardship
 - Request support from MANO in working with the County to improve and streamline shared volunteer procedures, which is relevant for all nature councils
 - Judy to take the lead on working with MANO on volunteer onboarding and stewardship processes, as well as a recruitment plan that begins with learning from committees how many volunteers are needed and for what
- Fundraising plan
 - Roscoe will begin working on a fundraising plan in September
 - Fundraising plan will obviously be built around the articulated needs of the organization to meet its budget / committees goals to achieve their work

while holding the desired cushion in the bank for fiscal responsibility.

- We need to clarify what it means to be good stewards of our money, hold money in an endowment fund. Gary, Mark and Budget Committee to provide recommendations based on best practices.
 - We should explore how to fundraise with a purpose: i.e. restricted support can inspire new and additional giving. To start, budget committee will present what is held now in restricted vs. unrestricted funds.
 - We should consider adding a special projects line to the budget for county requests that occur throughout the year, and consider a formal process for these requests, i.e. a grant form with our stipulations
 - Budget committee can present at board meeting in October.
 - Budget committee needs to learn from committees what they want to do / additional budgetary needs.
 - We also need clarity on what the county is doing in order to know what to supplement in our own budget. And what we'll be allowed to spend money on!
 - The board needs clearer parameters around expenditures.
 - In other words, if we spend money on the telescope, what value must it provide that aligns with our strategic priorities?
 - What expectations do we have from the county in order to release the funds for their requests?
 - The board needs 75+ minutes or more to figure out how to align the budget with the strategic priorities
 - MANO may be able to provide support in this whole area
 - Once we know what needs to be raised, a fundraising plan will include an exploration of sponsorship opportunities, esp. ones that may match specific line item requests
 - Need to ensure there is a coordinated plan for specific requests and get board clarity on how line items are prioritized, including what we do and don't want to publicly fundraise for
 - Will include an audit of individual donors and opportunities to increase those who have given just once and may be inclined to give more. Will examine our current donor stewardship practices and needed upgrades to them.
 - Will also explore how to recruit new individual donors.
 - Once a plan is complete, the communications committee can work on developing talking points for our budgetary priorities and needs, and explore vehicles for reaching our target donor audiences
- Programming and events decision making matrix, including how many events to put on and what to invest in
 - Need to define/ clarify what programming vs. volunteering vs. events are vs. stewardship activities
 - Need to clarify how we define success in programming? SEE POWERPOINT for evaluating programs and events, determining when we do/don't need to make money off of something
 - Gary to take the lead on the steps needed for making financial decisions on

extra-budgetary items

Priority 2: Advance key priorities in the master plan

- Land use manager in place for Oregon Ridge by 2030
- Trails are refurbished, rerouted and re-opened
 - Recommendation by Don and others is to set a goal of 75% of trails restored within 5 years.
 - There is already agreement on what trails need to be closed, redone, etc. We need to create a clear calendar of requests that have been made to the county, with the date the request was made, and by whom.
 - Brian Nelson, in support of Anthony who is in charge of the trails?
 - Most of county reporting is internal, and not being made available to us. Need to explore how to get this information. (PIA requests?)
 - Stewardship committee needs to clarify the work of its subcommittees/workgroups, describe what's needed from volunteers, and do a seasonal calendar to accompany recruitment
 - We need a plan for getting involved in budgetary hearings process next spring related to trails.
 - Need to memorialize all of this work in a stewardship template / land use manual for long-term succession planning. i.e. Why do we do X in the spring, X in the fall.
 - Goal for completion: June 2026.
- Plan for restoring, protecting, and stewarding the deciduous forest as a sanctuary
 - Work with new natural resources manager on the invasives program. Under the MOU we can do some of that work independently and some with staff - need to understand what that means. It has to be place-based, calendarized.
 - We need a plan for getting involved in budgetary hearings process next spring - to get park projects funded and put into the budget at a time when austerity is everywhere.
 - Work with County GIS Dept and Jill to determine how we can best track the work needed that will be performed by both volunteers and the county - i.e. using GIS apps in the public domain so people can pull weeds, snap a picture, report the geolocation and declare the work performed, how many hours, etc. Then, county can see the work done and Friends can see it and there are ways to let the public know too.
 - To accomplish this with full transparency, we need clarity around what the county is doing
 - Collect everything to one central storage
 - Mike to explore?
- An attractive and modern nature center is open for the public
 - Discussion with folks from Cromwell of putting together a task force from all of the parks to talk about how to work with resources for reforestation,

habit reconstruction, as well as status updates on playground, restrooms, etc.

- Track public budgeting process towards this end, in collaboration with other nature centers.

Priority 3: Sharpen our ability to advocate for the park

- Create an advocacy plan for building power with decision-makers to increase support for the park
 - Create a power map / chart to clarify the decision makers.
 - Who are our champions? Who should support us more? Where do they fall on a spectrum of support?
 - Who do they listen to; who influences them?
 - How can we reach the people who have influence over the decision-makers?
 - Need an accompanying communications plan for communicating our priorities and clear asks to the primary and secondary targets, and who should be the messengers with each
 - Clarify who are current and potential allies are, including organizations and coalitions, and a plan for deepening alliances
 - Maximize meetings with other nature councils to share and build power together.
 - Leverage bird club, land trusts, Blue Water, Green Trust. Gunpowder Watershed Partners. Forestry Board.
 - Start by crowdsourcing a list of allies and asks for each
 - Needs to include a plan for effectively engaging in budgetary process
 - Donna to lead
- Increased and activated membership
 - Cathy to work with Debbie to create an audit of members - what are their demographics, where do they live, how did we recruit them, what are their interests?
 - Turn membership profiles into a new member recruitment plan
 - Work with finance committee on new member recruitment goal numbers
 - Work to determine how to engage and activate membership on advocating for the park
- Deepen community engagement
 - Recruit younger and more diverse volunteers
 - Clarify requirements for student volunteers. Would we lower the age from 18?
 - Judy to look at existing volunteer profiles to get ideas on how we have recruited in the past, where volunteers come from, other ways to engage our volunteers.
 - Gain clarity from County regarding expectations from us when it comes to collaborations with volunteers.
 - Have 150 people on our volunteer lists. We need to understand what people want to do.
 - Application form is failing - need to fine tune the process so if a volunteer only wants to volunteer for us, we get that person's name and contact to follow up.
 - Consider risk management variables with county

- MANO can hopefully lead this process with Nature Councils and the County.
 - As we clarify programming goals, determine if we need any more processes to onboard non-board volunteers, such as committee volunteers and event volunteers
 - Coordinate with group working on board onboarding manual
- Better communications with the county / transparency with the county
 - More effectively advocate for staff - engage in collaborative problem solving
 - Consider asking MANO to interview county staff about what they want and need from communications with Councils like ours.
 - We should memorialize what worked well with the master plan process that might be replicated
 - Need to clarify from our end who is talking to staff and track this better - need internal parameters to manage how many communicate with staff
 - We would benefit from lobbying training and tips on building relationships with government agencies - MANO to help?
 - Kathy can present at an upcoming meeting what she learns at the nature center convening
 - Need clarity on what county is doing for programming to understand what the gaps are that need to be filled