



**Conservation and Policy Council  
of the Forest Preserves of Cook County**

**2017 Annual Report and  
2018 Budget Recommendation**

**Submitted on November 8, 2017**

**To President Preckwinkle and the Board of Commissioners  
Forest Preserves of Cook County**

**By Wendy Paulson, Chair, Conservation and Policy Council**





November 8, 2017

Dear President Preckwinkle:

It is my privilege to submit to you the 2017 annual report of the Conservation and Policy Council. The report summarizes efforts to date to develop and implement the *Next Century Conservation Plan* and highlights key challenges and opportunities going forward.

Each of the achievements described in this report and outlined in the updated 5-Year Implementation Strategy is an important step towards accomplishing the vision of the Next Century Conservation Plan. As indicated, nine thousand acres across the Forest Preserves are under restoration or active management, one hundred thousand campers have enjoyed our new campgrounds, and the important contribution of the Forest Preserves to the region's economy and quality of life has been documented and is being used to promote the preserves. Overall, 83% of phase one initiatives are on track or have been completed. This remarkable progress would not have been possible without your strong leadership and the support of the Board of Commissioners.

Superintendent Arnold Randall and his team have worked hard to ensure existing resources are being used efficiently and effectively. However, the massive scaling up required to fully implement the plan cannot occur without additional public resources. In addition, the pressures of addressing the Forest Preserves' structural operating deficit, its backlog of deferred maintenance, and its on-going pension deficit will continue to constrain the availability of resources to support restoration, acquisition, and a wide range of Forest Preserves' programs and services. Nonetheless, the Council is committed to exploring creative approaches to tackle the challenges, and to ensuring that the Forest Preserves will be protected for generations to come.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Andy J. Paulson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "A" and "P".

Conservation and Policy Council  
Forest Preserves of Cook County

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## **Next Century Conservation Plan Vision**

*The people of Cook County will celebrate and nurture our thriving woodlands, prairies and waters as world-class treasures that sustain our great metropolis.*

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The Next Century Conservation Plan (NCCP), adopted by the Forest Preserve District Board of Commissioners in 2014, lays out a set of bold actions to be implemented over the next 25-years to make Cook County a national leader in metro-area conservation. The plan calls for a massive commitment to restore habitat to robust ecological health, to acquire and protect more land, and to make the Forest Preserves more inviting and accessible to all Cook County residents.

This report presents the progress made to date towards implementing the NCCP. Specifically, it includes: (1) an overview of key achievements, (2) an assessment of operational priorities, and (3) a summary of progress for 66 initiatives and programs intended to be completed in the first five years. A detailed report on the 66 initiatives is presented in the updated 5-Year Implementation Strategy which accompanies this report.

The report also highlights critical challenges and presents strategies for addressing these challenges.

Finally, the report presents the Council's recommendation related to the Forest Preserves of Cook County's proposed 2018 budget.

### **KEY ACHIEVEMENTS TO DATE**

Superintendent Arnold Randall and the staff of the Forest Preserves of Cook County (FPCC) remain deeply committed to the Next Century Conservation Plan (NCCP) and are devoting substantial time and resources towards implementation. So, too, are conservation advocates across Cook County, stewards and other volunteers, and more than 70 partner organizations who are leading or assisting on a wide range of projects and programs designed to advance the NCCP goals. Despite insufficient resources to begin the massive scaling up required to fully implement the plan, the FPCC and its partners are working together more closely than ever before to ensure steady progress to advance the NCCP goals related to nature, people, economics and leadership. Key achievements to date are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1: Key Achievements to Date (2014-2017)**

<b>Nature</b> <i>Native landscapes will thrive for generations.</i>	<b>People</b> <i>Everyone in Cook County will feel welcome at the forest preserves—and will seek them out for discovery, renewal and fun.</i>	<b>Economics</b> <i>Communities will value the economic benefits of protected lands.</i>	<b>Leadership</b> <i>Visionary conservation leaders will safeguard, expand and bring increased resources to the Forest Preserves.</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Reached 9000 acres under restoration or active management</li> <li>✓ Incorporated restoration funding into the FPCC 2018 operating budget</li> <li>✓ Completed the <i>Natural and Cultural Resource Master Plan</i> to prioritize restoration efforts</li> <li>✓ Launched the Conservation Corps</li> <li>✓ Established robust training program for stewards and other volunteers</li> <li>✓ Acquired the 397-acre Horizon Farm site and the 164 acre Holy Family Villa</li> <li>✓ Completed field investigations for all high priority archaeological sites</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Welcomed more than 100,000 campers at new or renovated campgrounds</li> <li>✓ Developed new approaches to connect urban communities to nature (such as nature play and Camping Leadership Immersion Courses)</li> <li>✓ Piloted promising initiatives including Nature Cat and Health &amp; Nature workshops</li> <li>✓ Added 20 miles of new regional trails</li> <li>✓ Hired advisor and launched ADA working groups</li> <li>✓ Upgraded life-safety and accessibility improvements to trails, comfort stations, picnic groves and buildings</li> <li>✓ Built new pavilions at Swallow Cliff, Rolling Knolls, and Dan Ryan</li> <li>✓ Distributed 70,000 brochures (in English and Spanish) to 300 community health organizations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Promoted the FPCC to hundreds of thousands of people via billboards, radio, TV, and an Emmy-award-winning documentary</li> <li>✓ Collaborated with the Zoo, Garden and other partners to market special events such as Bird the Preserves</li> <li>✓ Completed ecosystems analysis estimating \$469M annual regional benefit generated by the FPCC via flood control, water recharge and purification, and carbon storage</li> <li>✓ Documented the FPCC's \$1.5B economic impact to region (2003 to 2015)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Refined cost estimates for major elements of the plan</li> <li>✓ Analyzed more than 40 initiatives to reduce costs or raise non-tax revenues</li> <li>✓ Completed concessions and permits master plan</li> <li>✓ Developed cost recovery guidelines</li> <li>✓ Aligned performance metrics for all the FPCC departments with the NCCP goals</li> <li>✓ Launched Conservation and Policy Council</li> <li>✓ Conduct annual evaluation of the NCCP implementation</li> </ul>

## ASSESSMENT OF OPERATIONAL PRIORITIES

The implementation of the NCCP is coordinated by five committees (Nature, People, Economics, Leadership and Steering) comprised of staff and partners. The committees focus on seven operational priorities deemed critical to successful implementation, and each year the Steering Committee evaluates progress to date.

On August 8, 2017, the NCCP Steering Committee conducted its annual evaluation. For each priority, the committee considered where we started, the challenges that have arisen, and any additional changes still needed. The committee then assigned a grade of *Excellent*, *Satisfactory*, or *Needs Improvement* to each operational priority. These grades, presented in Table 2, do not indicate whether the priority has or has not been achieved, rather they are intended to reflect progress to date. *Note: Where a grade changed from the previous evaluation, the 2016 grade is indicated by a grey checkmark.*

**Table 2: Operational Priorities – Progress to Date**

Operational Priority	Progress to Date			Comments
	Excellent	Satisfactory	Needs Improvement	
1. <b>Scaling up.</b> The FPCC and its partners have launched many successful programs and projects which address priority goals, but to achieve the level of impact envisioned by the plan, massive replication and scaling up is required. A major focus of the first five years will be to evaluate existing promising programs and explore the potential for replication and scaling up.		✓		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Civic Consulting Alliance (CCA) estimates it will cost approximately \$2 billion to complete major elements of the plan including restoring 30,000 acres (approximately \$344 million), acquiring 21,000 acres (approximately \$1.7B), and making the preserves more welcoming and accessible (over \$42M). Without additional resources, it is difficult to scale up the work; however, the FPCC and its partners are doing the best they can with available resources.</li> <li>Restoration work is holding steady, but not scaling up.</li> <li>Some land acquisition has occurred, but available funding will soon be depleted. The estimated cost of acquiring 21,000 acres represents 85% of the total \$2B CCA estimate and dwarfs all other resource needs. In a time of limited resources, this can be overwhelming. Therefore, future progress on land acquisition will be evaluated based upon partnerships and strategies</li> </ul>

Operational Priority	Progress to Date			Comments
	Excellent	Satisfactory	Needs Improvement	
				<p>developed—particularly strategies to acquire smaller parcels which provide key connectors to a broader wilderness.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promising programs piloted in 2016 have become models for collaboration and partnership and are being replicated. For example, the Camping Leadership Immersion Course (CLIC) teaches leaders of community based organizations how to use the preserves; this “teach the teacher” model is being replicated to empower leaders in target communities to connect their residents to nature.</li> <li>Some progress has been made developing metrics, but more work is needed to measure and document success.</li> </ul>
<b>2. Using Resources Effectively and Efficiently.</b> It is expected to take at least five years to scale up the capacity and resources required for successful implementation. However, it is critical that the FPCC position itself during these start-up years so that it is able to move quickly to respond to opportunities that may be presented.	✓			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Staff continues to explore best practices and implement initiatives designed to reduce costs and/or use resources more efficiently and effectively. For example, vehicles across the FPCC are being converted to propane. A cost-benefit analysis of services and fees resulted in adjustments to permit fees, a concession and permits master plan was completed to identify opportunities for earned revenue, and various assets across the FPCC (such as picnic groves and trails) are being marketed for corporate sponsorships.</li> <li>Excellent progress continues.</li> </ul>
<b>3. Building and Strengthening Partnerships and Leveraging Resources.</b> Success will require strong partnerships, and it is critical for the FPCC to figure out how to best leverage partner investment of time, talent and financial resources. Documenting the impact of these efforts over time is critical to making the case that		✓	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In 2015 and 2016, great progress was made by bringing partners to the table and asking them to help develop strategies for implementing NCCCP goals. While the FPCC welcomed and encouraged partners to lead specific strategies and initiatives, few partners were able to do so—either due to a lack of resources or because it was not clear how this would advance their work.</li> <li>In 2017, the FPCC staff began to articulate specific needs and work closely with partners to identify where and how these needs align with the work of</li> </ul>

Operational Priority	Progress to Date			Comments
	Excellent	Satisfactory	Needs Improvement	
resources are being invested efficiently and effectively.				partners. This represents important progress that should lead to more partners leading more initiatives in 2018 and beyond.
4. <b>Changing Organizational Culture.</b> The challenges the FPCC faces require new and creative approaches. The FPCC must be open to new ideas and opportunities. The FPCC will measure results and be frank about what is working, and what isn't.	✓			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A new way of doing business has been embraced and promoted by President Preckwinkle and Superintendent Arnold Randall and is being embedded throughout the entire FPCC.</li> <li>Goals have been incorporated into performance management metrics for each department and the senior team meets quarterly to understand what is working and what is not, review overall progress towards these goals, and explore alternative approaches as needed. Inter-department cooperation is improving, and senior leadership at the FPCC is working as a team to address on-going budget challenges.</li> <li>Progress to date remains excellent and is reflected in the growing number national awards and honors received by the Superintendent and the FPCC.</li> </ul>
5. <b>Communicating.</b> Building the community of support needed to back the ambitious <i>Next Century Conservation Plan</i> will require an expanded investment in outreach, education, and marketing. Partners like the Brookfield Zoo and the Chicago Botanic Garden can help spread the word via their large networks, and social media can activate the networks of advocates and other partners. Open communication between the FPCC and the network of partners working to implement the plan is also critical.		✓		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In 2016 and 2017, new communications strategies such as billboard advertisements, a radio campaign, and a documentary on the history of the FPCC reached hundreds of thousands of people. A communications strategy house and tagline were developed in 2017, and collaborations with the Zoo and Garden are helping promote the preserves to a network of like-minded residents. The FPCC is providing more materials in multiple languages. All of this represents important progress, but there is still a need to better target communities and a need for additional resources for communications and outreach.</li> <li>The FPCC is working closely with partners to identify where mutual goals align with the NCCP and to better leverage resources.</li> </ul>







Operational Priority	Progress to Date			Comments
	Excellent	Satisfactory	Needs Improvement	
<b>6. Raising New Resources.</b> In Cook County and throughout the country, an intense debate over the proper level of public funding for services and programs continues. The FPCC will continue to assess the gap between resources needed and resources available to implement the plan, and will seek to fill the gap through non-tax revenues including public-private partnerships, corporate sponsorships, expanded concessions, outsourcing and other operational efficiencies.			✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ In 2016, the Civic Consulting Alliance concluded that a broad range of initiatives to raise non-tax revenue and other resources for the FPCC will prove inadequate to fully fund the NCCP goals (though they can provide resources for key projects and programs).</li> <li>▪ In 2017, market research conducted by the Trust for Public Land (TPL) indicated that, at this time, voters aren't ready to pass an increase to the property tax rate to fund the NCCP goals, though this could change over time.</li> <li>▪ The FPCC will work with the Conservation and Policy Council and advocates to build a community of support and to raise awareness of the NCCP goals and resources needed.</li> <li>▪ The FPCC will also continue to explore non-tax revenue initiatives—including those which may be highly controversial and/or in direct conflict with the FPCC's mission.</li> <li>▪ The FPCC is preparing to make difficult choices as needed to address future budget challenges.</li> </ul>
<b>7. Ensuring Continuity.</b> The level of change envisioned cannot occur without a long term, sustained effort over many years and multiple administrations. The Conservation and Policy Council, advocates, and partners will each play a key role in guiding efforts and ensuring continuity over time.			✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The role of the Conservation and Policy Council is critical, but continuity is not ensured. As a result, much of the progress made to date could be lost.</li> </ul> <p><i>Note: The "needs improvement" grade is not meant to characterize participation or commitment of the Council, which the Steering Committee considers to be very strong. The Committee acknowledges the important role the Council has played to date and wants to ensure the Council continues its work in the future.</i></p>

## PROGRESS ON PRIORITY INITIATIVES AND PROGRAMS

NCCP implementation committees also conduct an annual review of the 66 priority actions (programs, projects, etc.) intended to be completed by 2020. As indicated in the 5-year implementation strategy which accompanies this report, the vast majority of these priority actions are completed or moving forward. A summary of progress is presented here; a detailed discussion of all 66 priority actions is presented in the 5-year implementation strategy.

**Table 3: Priority Initiatives – Progress to Date**

<p><b>83%</b></p> <div>  <span>Completed</span> </div> OR <div>  <span>In progress</span> </div>	<p><b>Projects moving forward.</b> 83 percent of the phase one initiatives (55 out of 66) have been completed or continue to move forward; however, several key projects are not on pace to meet 2020 milestones let alone able to scale up to meet ambitious long-term goals. For example, the NCCP calls for 30,000 acres to be restored by 2040. The 2020 milepost of 12,000 acres restored and under active management will not be achieved without additional resources.</p>
<p><b>8%</b></p> <div>  </div> <p>Redirected</p>	<p><b>Re-directed projects.</b> During 2016 and 2017, five initiatives were re-directed to adapt to lessons learned and/or to respond to new challenges or opportunities as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The FPCC is re-evaluating the native seed nursery project and exploring lower cost alternatives.</li> <li>▪ A pilot passport program initially targeting picnickers was modified to partner with WTTW's Nature Cat, an animated television series which encourages kids to explore nature. Children who visit ten Forest Preserves sites earn a small, wooden "tree cookie."</li> <li>▪ As Chicago Wilderness transitions to an all-volunteer organization, the organization is no longer able to lead efforts to incorporate highly localized data to estimate the annual economic value provided by the preserves' ecosystems. Instead, the FPCC will utilize analysis recently completed by CMAP.</li> <li>▪ The FPCC will make visitor data and other information available to local municipalities, but it will not play a lead role in business recruitment for business districts adjacent to Forest Preserves.</li> <li>▪ Resources are not available to undertake a comprehensive evaluation of every NCCP initiative; however, tracking systems and metrics are in place for many NCCP initiatives. The annual evaluation presented in this report will supplement these metrics to document and communicate overall progress.</li> </ul>

<p>9%</p>  <p>Stalled</p>	<p><b>Stalled projects.</b> Six additional projects are stalled due a lack of funds or limited staff capacity. These include: creation of an online interactive mapping system to track resources invested at various restoration sites; tracking post-program success of Conservation Corps graduates; a \$7 million evaluation of restoration/conservation management practices; expansion of cultural programs; and expansion of a pilot program to collect socio-economic data at selected FPCC sites (# of events, # of visitors, etc.) and within adjacent communities (major employers, household income, etc.)</p>
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For the most part, the Council believes this reflects a healthy balance of steady progress, adaptability, and risk taking. However, the Council is concerned that several initiatives are not on target to meet 2020 milestones. Furthermore, the pressures of addressing the FPCC’s structural operating deficit, its backlog of deferred maintenance, its on-going pension deficit and other rising costs will continue to constrain the availability of resources to support key restoration, acquisition, accessibility improvements and other NCCP goals. As described in the final section of this report, the proposed 2018 budget begins to address some, but not all, of these funding challenges.

## CRITICAL CHALLENGES

During this initial phase of implementation, the NCCP implementation committees continue to struggle with challenges related to documenting investments, measuring and communicating progress, and aligning the work of partners with the NCCP goals. As indicated in this section, the FPCC and its partners have made significant strides to address these challenges. Another challenge is the need to raise resources sufficient to support the massive scaling up called for in the plan.

**Documenting Investments.** It is important to acknowledge the substantial amount of time and money partners are investing to advance the NCCP goals. However, efforts to document this investment and fully measure its impact consistently have been unsuccessful. The NCCP Steering Committee acknowledges it is both difficult and time consuming to manage a comprehensive tracking system, and that the costs outweigh the benefits. The committee recommends instead utilizing more general estimates of time and money invested to acknowledge the ongoing contributions of partners in 2018 and beyond.

**Measuring and Communicating Overall Progress.** Documenting partner investments is difficult; documenting and measuring overall progress for the entire NCCP implementation is even more expensive and time consuming. Rather than consuming time compiling data on details, the NCCP implementation committees are focusing on key outcomes and measuring progress towards these outcomes. In 2018, the NCCP Steering Committee will help further focus efforts to identify unifying themes, each with a few outcomes and a few key metrics to be tracked. The Economics Committee will then help identify outcome-related messages which resonate with specific target audiences and develop a strategy for communicating with these audiences.

**Aligning Partners' Work with the NCCP Goals.** In 2015 and 2016, the FPCC hoped that more partners would take lead roles on the NCCP projects and programs, but many lack the capacity or resources to take on new work. By the end of 2016, it became clear that partners will become more engaged when they see how they can advance the plan by moving forward their organizations' own goals. In 2017 the FPCC began working closely with partners to align the NCCP goals and the work these partners are already doing. This approach has been a significant improvement and will continue in 2018.

**Raising Resources.** Analysis conducted by the Civic Consulting Alliance (CCA) and included in the Council's 2016 annual report estimates it will cost approximately \$2.18 billion to complete major elements of the plan. The biggest cost driver, land acquisition, accounts for \$1.7 billion or 78 percent of total cost.

The CCA analysis also indicates that a broad range of initiatives being explored by the FPCC to reduce costs and increase earned revenue are insufficient to raise the level of resources needed. To implement the plan fully, therefore, additional public resources and new operating models are needed.

Research conducted by the Trust for Public Land in 2017 indicates that voters trust the FPCC and support the NCCP goals, but do not sufficiently support an increase to the tax rate to fund these goals at this time. While there may be an opportunity to secure additional public resources in future years, there is no guarantee when, or even if, this will happen. Therefore, the FPCC and its partners will plan a path forward without the infusion of public funds in the foreseeable future, but with an emphasis on doing more with what we have.. This will be a major focus of 2018 efforts.

## **THE PATH FORWARD**

Moving forward, we must build support for additional public resources to implement the plan fully. We must also continue to explore options to leverage limited resources and prepare for difficult choices which may become necessary. The Council will work with the FPCC and partners to plan a path forward as follows:

**Building a Community of Support.** A lack of community support for increased public resources makes it difficult for the FPCC implement the NCCP fully. In August of 2017, the Friends of the Forest Preserves and Openlands convened a working group with the FPCC staff, conservation advocates and other partners to develop and advance marketing, messaging and legislative activities focused on audiences identified in an August 2015 report prepared by CBWhite for Openlands. The two primary audiences are identified as (1) those who visit the preserves but show only moderate budget support, and (2) those who express strong support for the preserves but don't visit. Additional target audiences will be identified by the working group and messages will be crafted by partners around recommendations outlined in CBWhite's report and those provided by Anzalone Liszt Grove Research dated June 2, 2017.

The working group will focus on three areas to affect change:

- **Marketing and communications.** Tell the story of the importance of the preserves; highlight successes; provide opportunities for supporters to tell their stories; show how the preserves are important to communities throughout Cook County.
- **Legislative.** Identify the breadth and sources of public resources available; work to keep Council members and Commissioners apprised of strategies and progress; identify State elected officials who would support the NCCP goals.
- **Engage and Activate Networks & Stakeholders.** Provide briefings to engage networks and stakeholders.

In 2018, the working group will develop metrics to measure progress and provide updates to the NCCP Steering Committee and the Conservation and Policy Council. The Council will work closely with the working group to identify specific tasks that individual Council members and others can undertake to build our community of support.

**Exploring Creative Approaches and Preparing for Difficult Choices.** As the FPCC continues to raise awareness and build support for additional resources, it must also continue to pursue opportunities to reduce costs and increase earned revenue and explore new and creative approaches to advancing the NCCP goals. In addition, the FPCC must prepare now for the difficult choices it will face should no new resources become available. In 2018, the NCCP Committees will explore the following options and return specific recommendations to the Council.

- **New approaches to restoration, acquisition, and making the preserves more welcoming and accessible.** In 2017, the Council convened a workshop with the FPCC staff and partners to explore how new approaches to restoration, acquisition and accessibility can be used to continue making modest progress towards the NCCP goals even if no new resources are available in the next five to ten years. During 2018, the FPCC and its partners will continue to develop these ideas by working with stewards to identify and implement best practices for building a pipeline of stewards; working with the Chicago Park District, MWRD and other partners to build a stronger presence in the City; prioritizing potential acquisition sites and exploring a major donor campaign to fund acquisition; and using gateway sites to create awareness and welcome more people to the Forest Preserves.
- **High impact initiatives to reduce cost or raise revenue.** The FPCC continues to explore more than 40 initiatives to reduce costs or raise revenues. Although many initiatives (such as improved energy efficiency, reduced printing, improved collection of fines, and installation of cell towers at maintenance facilities or other appropriate locations) have already been implemented, they have not generated the level of cost reductions or new revenues necessary. To do so, the FPCC must begin exploring a range of higher impact initiatives which may be highly controversial (such as charging for parking or closing aquatic centers) and sometimes in direct conflict with the FPCC's mission (such as leasing or selling land for commercial use). In 2018, the NCCP Leadership Committee will vet these high impact initiatives and recommend to the Council a financial strategy for 2019 and beyond.
- **Major restructuring of FPCC programs and services.** Under this option, limited resources would be redistributed, and selected services or programs discontinued or severely reduced.

- **Modifications to the NCCP timeline.** Without additional resources, it is highly unlikely the NCCP goals will be achieved within the 25-year timeframe of the plan. One option the Council will explore is keeping the same goals, but allowing a longer period to achieve these goals.
- **Separate land acquisition from other NCCP goals.** As previously stated, land acquisition is, by far, the most costly NCCP goal. The estimated cost of acquiring 21,000 acres is \$1.7 billion or 78 percent of the total \$2.18 billion cost to implement major NCCP goals. This dwarfs all other resource needs, and, in a time of limited resources, can be overwhelming. There is also some question about the amount of acreage suitable for acquisition. Therefore, it may be necessary to reassess the land acquisition goal.
- **Modifications to other NCCP goals.** At this point in time, the Council is not recommending modifications to other NCCP goals. However, this option may be considered at a future date.

With no new public resources, the FPCC will continue to protect and restore the preserves utilizing one or more of these options. Progress can and will continue in some areas, but other programs and services will be eliminated or severely reduced.

## 2018 BUDGET RECOMMENDATION

Each year the Conservation and Policy Council reviews the FPCC's annual budget and makes a recommendation to the General Superintendent, the President, and the Board of Commissioners about the budget and its alignment with the 5-year implementation strategy.

While it is not practical for the Council to conduct a line by line review of the proposed budget, we have reviewed the overview of the FPCC's proposed budget presented in Attachment 1 to this report. The CFO has discussed with the Council the challenges related to ongoing structural issues, including rising costs related to personnel and healthcare, the need to find a sustainable funding source for restoration efforts, a \$30 million backlog of deferred maintenance, the FPCC's ongoing pension deficit, and the need to raise additional resources to implement all the NCCP goals. The proposed 2018 budget addresses some, but not all, of these needs.

**Operating funds.** Restoration work, a core part of the FPCC's mission, has historically been funded with reserve funds. The FPCC currently spends about \$3.9 million per year on restoration and land management. For the first time, this work will be incorporated into the FPCC's annual operating budget in 2018 without further reliance on reserve funds. This change is critical to future success, but also a difficult adjustment to make in a single year; the Council deeply appreciates this important achievement. Cost of living adjustments included in collective bargaining agreements and increasing healthcare costs represent an additional increase of approximately \$1.6 million in 2018. Together these factors have created a \$5.5 million gap in the 2018 operating budget. As indicated in Attachment 1, the FPCC proposes to fill this gap by freezing 12.4 FTE vacancies (approximately 2% of total positions), reducing non-personnel costs, increasing earned revenue, and capturing inflationary revenue from the tax levy. The Chicago Botanic Garden and the Chicago Zoological Society will also receive a reduction

in funding in the amounts of \$400,000 for the Garden and \$600,000 for the Zoo (approximately 1% of each agency's total annual budget). These historic partnerships are valued and respected; we are grateful that the Garden and the Zoo are working closely with the FPCC to leverage resources and to address both the current and future budget challenges.

The budget also incorporates a proposal to charge for parking at Swallow Cliff Woods in Palos Hills to generate approximately \$160,000 in 2018. Under this proposal, visitors to this high demand site would be required to pay \$1 per hour. Given current budget constraints, the Council believe this is both a reasonable and necessary change, but careful planning is needed to educate visitors prior to implementation.

**Addressing Urgent Capital Needs.** In addition to increasing pressures on its operating budget, the FPCC also faces urgent capital needs. Older facilities and an expansive network of parking lots and roadways throughout the preserves suffer from years of deferred maintenance. While the FPCC has addressed a wide range of urgent capital needs in recent years, an estimated backlog of \$30 million in deferred maintenance remains. (Both the Zoo and the Garden also have substantial capital needs.)

In 2018 or 2019, the FPCC will issue a modest capital bond of approximately \$8 million to fund its most urgent capital improvements (roof repairs, boiler replacements, parking lot repairs, etc.) In addition, the FPCC will expand a 2017 pilot program to perform pavement repairs in-house. The in-house work has proven cost effective and will be expanded from one crew to two crews in 2018.

**Future Challenges.** The proposed 2018 budget does not address the FPCC's ongoing pension deficit, and it does not provide additional funding needed to meet the NCCP goals; resources are simply not available at this point in time. The Council will continue to address these challenges as discussed in previous sections of this report.

**Comparison to Peer Agencies.** In addition to reviewing the annual budget proposal, the Council has also reviewed analysis conducted in 2016 by the Civic Consulting Alliance which compared the FPCC's revenues to that of peer agencies in the region and across the country. It is important to note that this analysis indicates the FPCC is managing more land with fewer dollars than most peers. Specifically, the CCA analysis indicates that, compared to its peers:

- (1) The FPCC has lower tax revenue per capita AND per acre, and
- (2) The FPCC has modest expenses per acre.

**Based upon our review of the FPCC's recent accomplishments, current needs, and future goals, the Conservation and Policy Council recommends approval of the proposed 2018 budget for the Forest Preserves of Cook County.**

The Council appreciates the opportunity to advise this honorable body and will continue to explore how it can be most helpful in ensuring the success of the Next Century Conservation Plan and the Forest Preserves of Cook County.

Sincerely,

Wendy Paulson, Chairman

Peter Ellis

Mark N. Templeton, Secretary

Terry Guen, FASLA

Robert Castaneda

Sylvia M. Jenkins, Ph.D.

Michael DeSantiago

Laurel Ross

*Note: Falona Joy, Vice Chairman of the Conservation and Policy Council, is on sabbatical.*



## Attachment 1A

### Overview of Proposed 2018 Budget for the Forest Preserves of Cook County

#### 1. 2018 Budget Challenges

Operating budget gap: \$3.9M (restoration) + \$1.6M (COLA/steps/health care) = **\$5.5M**

Urgent capital needs: ~\$2M per year (to address \$30M backlog of deferred maintenance)

Additional need: \$0.5M (marketing & outreach)

Notes:

- (1) *The Zoo and the Garden also have substantial capital needs.*
- (2) *An additional ~\$10M per year will be needed after 2018 to address on-going pension deficit.*

#### 2. Strategies to Close Gap and Address Urgent Capital Needs. The FPCC proposes a combination of cost reductions, increases in earned revenue, and other strategies to close the budget gap as follows:

Cost Reductions	Earned Revenue	Other
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ \$1M reduction in personnel (close ~12.4 FTE vacancies)</li> <li>▪ \$600K reduction in non-personnel (fleet/energy efficiency, computers, programs, and \$125K reduction to FPCC partners)</li> <li>▪ \$600K reduction to Zoo, \$400K reduction to Garden</li> <li>▪ In-house parking lot repairs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ \$60K+ from cell tower(s)</li> <li>▪ \$150K parking fees (Swallow Cliff)</li> <li>▪ Begin restructuring Permits Department to focus on revenue generation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Increases property tax levy by inflation</li> <li>▪ \$8M capital bond (over three years, issued 2018/2019)</li> <li>▪ Assistance from Zoo and Garden (promotion, other collaborations)</li> </ul>

Notes:

- (1) **Restoration.** Moves \$3.9M for restoration/land management off reserve funds.
- (2) **Land Acquisition.** No additional funding for land acquisition.
- (3) **Programs.** Includes 17% reduction to non-personnel spending in the Department of Conservation and Experiential Programs accomplished by consolidating multiple small events to a regional “taste of preserve” model, building partnerships to drive participation in target communities, and a \$40K reduction to operation of pools and campgrounds.
- (4) **Capital Needs.** Modest bond will address urgent capital needs for a few years. Does not provide funding to assist with capital needs at Zoo and Garden.
- (5) **Marketing/Outreach.** Does not provide additional funding for marketing/outreach.
- (6) **Other NCCP Goals.** Holds steady, but no scaling up to meet the NCCP goals.
- (7) **Pension.** Does not address on-going pension deficit; this is deferred to 2019.

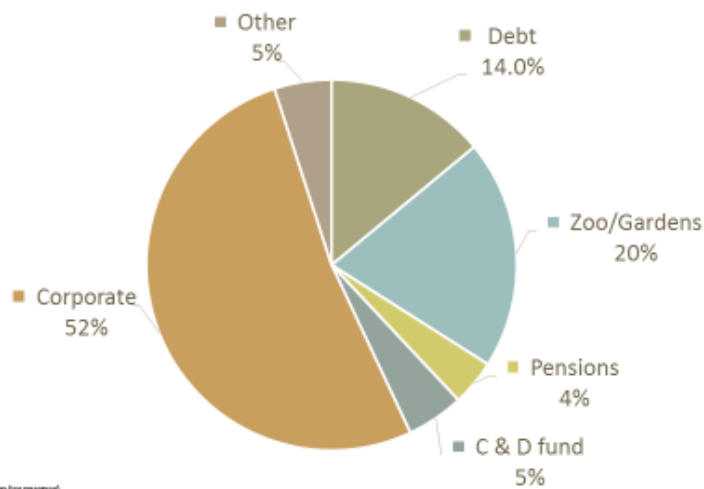
# Forest Preserves of Cook County 2018 Budget Overview

October 23, 2017



( 1 )

## Forest Preserves of Cook County FY 2018 Budget – All Funds \$115,353,915



(excludes Zoo & Garden non-tax revenue)

( 2 )

## Forest Preserves of Cook County FY 2018 Budget Recommendation

### Original Budget Gap \$5.5M

- COLA & Step Increases \$1.6M
- Landscape Restoration \$3.9M
  - Formerly funded from reserves

### How We Closed the Gap

- Cut 12 vacant FTE's \$1.0M
- Cut Non-personnel Spending \$0.6M
- Increase Property Tax by Inflation \$1.2M
- Reallocate Const. & Dev Levy to Restoration \$1.8M
- Lower Appropriation to Zoo & Garden \$1.0M

- Landscape Restoration & Land Management now have a sustainable funding source

[ 3 ]

## Forest Preserves of Cook County FY 2018 Budget Recommendation

**Corporate Fund Budget \$59,787,827**

### Expenditures

- \$1.7M under 2017 Corporate Budget
- No Layoffs
- Cut 12 FTE vacant positions
  - 5 fulltime
  - 7 seasonal/part time FTEs
- Personnel Services up \$1.5M (COLA & step increases)
- \$3.1M cut in Program Spending vs 2017
  - Reduce Fund Balance Transfer by \$2.9M
  - Net reduction in non-personnel spending by \$200K

[ 4 ]

## Forest Preserves of Cook County FY 2018 Budget Recommendation

### Corporate Fund (continued)

#### Revenue

- PPRT Up \$211K (+10%)
- Non- Tax Revenue Up \$1.0M (+15%)
  - Concessions
  - Campgrounds
  - Permits
  - Interest earnings
  - Fines
  - Cell towers
  - Swallow Cliff parking
- Lower Fund Reserve Transfer by \$2.9M
- No Change in Corporate Property Tax Levy

( 5 )

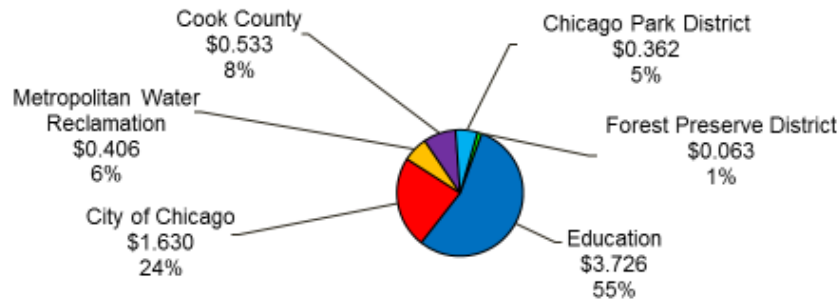
## Forest Preserves of Cook County FY 2018 Budget Recommendation

### Property Tax Levy Overview FY 2018 Levy \$94.4M

Operating Funds Increase (inflation at 2.1%)	\$1,732,626
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Corporate Fund no change</li> <li>• Employee Annuity &amp; Benefit Fund \$482,6265               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Statutory requirement</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Construction &amp; Development Fund \$2,250,000               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase for Landscape Restoration</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Brookfield Zoo (\$600,000)</li> <li>• Botanic Garden (\$400,000)</li> </ul>	
Debt Service Fund Increase	<u>\$1,293.957</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Abatement of 2004 GO bonds reduced by \$1.0M</li> </ul>	
Total Increase (+3.3%)	\$3,025,583

( 6 )

**FOREST PRESERVE DISTRICT**  
**2016 Cook County – City of Chicago**  
**Property Tax Rates Comparison**  
**(Per \$100 of Equalized Assessed Valuation)**



City of Chicago	Village of Skokie	Village of Oak Park	Village of Orland Park
FPCC Portion of Tax Bill: 1%	FPCC Portion of Tax Bill: 0.14%	FPCC Portion of Tax Bill: 0.63%	FPCC Portion of Tax Bill: 0.63%

Source: Office of the Clerk of Cook County (2017 Rates Not Available)

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## Forest Preserves of Cook County FY 2018 Budget Recommendation

### Ongoing Structural Issues

- No additional funding for NCCP scale up
- \$10M Pension funding gap not addressed
  - 66% funding ratio
  - Fund depletion date is 2042
- \$30M backlog of deferred maintenance needs
  - Plan to issue \$8m GO Bond in 2018/2019
  - This nearly closes our GO bonding capacity under state law
    - Building repairs - roofs , exterior, HVAC
    - Trail, dam & shoreline repair
    - Parking lots

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## ATTACHMENT 2: Summary of TPL Analysis and Recommendations



June 2, 2017

**To: Interested Parties**  
**From: Brian Stryker**  
**Re: Messaging to prepare for 2020**

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Voters aren't ready to pass a property tax hike to fund the Forest Preserves. There are numerous factors out of the Forest Preserves' control that will affect support in 2020, including the state/county/city budget situations and turnout in the electorate. But what is in the county's control is perceptions of the Forest Preserves. Reinforcing that is the best path towards putting the measure in a position to win.

To do so, the Forest Preserves should talk about popular programs that people might not know about. It should also work where it can to reinforce the idea that it's trustworthy with money. We recommend working within this frame:

"The Forest Preserve makes our air and water cleaner by protecting and improving natural areas and habitats, and making those areas as well as the Brookfield Zoo and Botanic Garden accessible to everyone. It runs summer jobs programs and provides scholarships for kids from all neighborhoods including the underserved, to give kids from everywhere real job and education opportunities. And it has outdoor programs for children to keep them physically active and learning, instead of at home playing video games or out on the streets."

### **Messaging recommendations:**

- **Focus habitat and nature discussion on benefits to people—air and water, specifically.** People like the idea of protecting wildlife habitats (67% strongly favor this as a use of Forest Preserve money, including 71% of people who are persuadable to Yes on a ballot measure). But even more popular are the ideas of "acquiring and improving lands to protect drinking water sources" (79% strongly favor among persuadables) and "acquiring and restoring lands to protect the water quality of rivers, lakes, and streams" (76% among persuadables). So while the Forest Preserves can talk about keeping natural areas for its own sake, it does even better when focusing it on why that's good for people's health.
- **The Forest Preserves, Zoo, and Botanic Garden should highlight job + scholarship programs for underserved communities, especially among African Americans.** By far the most popular use of funds from the Forest Preserves for African American was "adding permanent jobs, summer jobs, and scholarships for all communities including underserved neighborhoods" (79% strongly support). To be clear, this is a good message among all voters (68% strongly support), and it should be used more broadly than just among African



Americans. This lines up with every focus group and poll we've seen with Cook County African American voters: they desperately want solutions to problems with schools, lack of economic opportunity, and crime (which they see as all linked together). The Forest Preserves has a real story to tell here, and it should do so as much as possible.

- **Communicate about outdoor programs for children.** Persuadable voters heavily favor using resources for “adding outdoor programs for children” (75% strong support). While the poll does not get into specifics about the program, we know from a lot of other research in Chicago and elsewhere that the following benefits really matter to people:
  - Helping make our kids healthier and combating childhood obesity
  - Giving them educational opportunities outside the classrooms
  - Keeping kids safe and off the streets
- **As a secondary messaging lane, talk about good financial stewardship.** This does not feel as critical to communicate broadly, but voters need to know you will spend their money wisely. Part of that is going to be legal language in a future ballot measure, but anything you can do to improve the 57% of voters who say they trust the Forest Preserves to spend their money wisely would help your cause in the long run. One easy way would be noting energy efficiency investments you have made to cut long-term energy costs; 63% of persuadable voters strongly support your using resources on that.
- **Don't solely think of messaging and communications as talking to reporters or buying ads.** That should be part of the strategy, but a massive percentage of Cook County voters will visit one or more of your facilities in the next four years. We'd strongly recommend talking to them about these programs when they do so. This might include signs on new energy efficiency projects, inserts into programs about community programs, or branding the Forest Preserves property as water that flows into Cook County faucets.
- **Target messaging very broadly.** In the context of a ballot-measure campaign, with messaging a property-tax increase gains more support among voters of color, voters under 50, and Chicago Lakefront whites (defined as east of Western Ave from the Loop to Evanston). But in general voters' opinions are fluid, so we would not spend 3-4 years narrowcasting a message and leaving people out.

ATTACHMENT 3: DRAFT Summary of Potential Initiatives to Reduce Costs or Raise Revenue (Updated 7.11.17)

Note: Many initiatives shown in the table below are controversial and/or in direct conflict with the FPCC’s mission. The FPCC is not recommending implementation of these initiatives, but rather we are analyzing the initiatives to understand the potential impact to the district’s budget and to our ability to fulfill our mission and achieve the goals outlined in the Next Century Conservation Plan.

		2018	2019	2020	
	Initiative	\$s in millions			Notes/Assumptions
1	TAXES				
1.1	Property tax increase	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	If referendum or legislation approved 2020; revenue available 2021. Amount TBD.
1.2	GO Bond within existing debt limit	\$2.00	\$2.00	\$2.00	Assumes \$8M GO bond issued in 2018/2019; averages \$2M per year in new revenues for 3 years.
1.3	GO Bond via referendum or State legislation	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	Assumes referendum or legislation approved 2020; revenue available 2021. Amount TBD.
2	PHILANTHROPIC AND GOVERNMENT SUPPORT				
2.1	Forest Preserve Foundation	\$0.43	\$0.43	\$0.42	Stretch goal modeled on Lake Co FPF = amount above \$168,000 granted by Foundation in 2015.
2.2	Endowments	\$0.25	\$0.25	\$0.25	Modeled after Seattle's Myrtle Edwards Park \$5M endowment which generates \$250K annually.
2.3	Philanthropic support (non-FPF)	\$0.01	\$0.01	\$0.01	20% growth based on \$50,000 baseline. Explore giving for new program areas (quality of life, jobs). Work with FPF to accept individual donations.
2.4	Partner support	\$0.52	\$0.51	\$0.51	20% growth from 2016 baseline of \$3M, then return to baseline growth rate.
2.5	Government grants	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	20% growth in federal grants in 2017 and 2018 from 2016 baseline of \$600,000. No new state grants.
2.6	Corporate conservation partnerships	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.50	\$10M savings in land acquisition costs over 20 years. 10 corporate partners each commit to maintain 10 acres of natural areas in large office parks.
2.7	Collaboration with Zoo & Garden	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	Still determining what is possible.
2.8	Land donation	\$0.40	\$0.40	\$0.40	This is based on the historical avg. acres per year via donation x CCA \$80k per acre projected acquisition cost per acre
3	MONETIZE ASSETS				
3.1	Billboards	\$0.00	\$0.13	\$0.26	Install 5 billboards, 1 per year. Each generates an average of \$130K per year.
3.2	Cell towers	\$0.05	\$0.10	\$0.15	Install 6 towers, 1 per year. Each generates \$30K to \$40K/year w/2.5% annual growth plus \$10K signing bonus.
3.3	Asset marketing	\$0.00	\$0.50	\$0.50	Working with Superlative to market bike rentals, trails, camping, picnic groves. Limits size, colors, placement.
3.4	Parking fees - non-users	\$0.04	\$0.04	\$0.04	Pay and display parking implemented in 2016 near Loyola Hospital is generating little revenue. Agreements with other non-users generates an estimated \$35,000 per year which is already incorporated into current budget.
3.5	Parking fees - FPCC users	\$0.51	\$0.62	\$0.62	Consider parking fees for high use areas such as Swallow Cliff and nature centers.
4	REDUCE PERSONNEL COSTS				
4.1	Eliminate (or reduce) overtime	\$0.32	\$0.32	\$0.32	Paid \$300K in overtime for police in 2015.
4.2	Reduce contractual & professional services	\$0.60	\$0.60	\$0.60	This reduction has already been made and incorporated into the budget. (Deeper reductions could be considered.)
4.3	Close vacancies/eliminate X positions	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	Assumes \$80K savings per FTE. FPCC currently has 533 FTEs.
4.4	Close vacancies/eliminate 16 positions	\$1.28	\$1.28	\$1.28	Assumes \$80K savings per FTE. FPCC currently has 533 FTE.
4.5	Eliminate or reduce step increases				Requires discussion with HR and Law. This reduction in compensation would need to be negotiated with the unions.
4.6	Institute 3 furlough days per year	\$0.20	\$0.20		To avoid layoffs, would apply to non-union employees who make more than \$50K per year for 2018 & 2019.
4.7	Reduce support for Zoo, Garden, other partners				
5	RESTRUCTURE DEPARTMENTS				
5.2	Reduce parking lot maintenance			\$0.35	Reduce/remove under-utilized lots & service roads. Save \$7M over 25 years, but no impact until 2024.
5.3	Reduce mowing				Assumes 30% reduction in mowing (X acres) per year at savings of \$X per acre per year.
5.4	Reduce restoration				
6	SELL GOLF COURSES & AQUATIC CENTERS				
6.1	Sell aquatic centers	\$0.00	\$2.00	\$0.50	The sale of 3 aquatic centers is estimated to generate \$1.5M. FPCC also saves \$500K per year on capital and operating costs. Authority from ILGA required to sell.
6.2	Sell golf courses as courses	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$2.75	Sale of all golf courses @ \$67M (w/o rezoning). FPCC loses \$760K per year in annual revenue. No impact before 2023. \$67M figure is questionable as it was based on comparable sales, golf course properties are typically valued as going concerns. Authority from ILGA required to sell.



		2018	2019	2020	
	Initiative	\$s in millions			Notes/Assumptions
6.3	Sell golf course(s) for highest & best use	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$14.00	Rezone & sale golf courses @\$280M (or \$14M per year over 20 years). No impact before 2023.
6.4	Long term license of golf course(s)	\$0.00	\$0.00		Authority from ILGA required to lease for commercial purposes. Local Municipality would need to rezone.
<b>7     SELL OR LEASE LAND</b>				Authority from ILGA required to sell/Local Municipality would potentially need to rezone to maximize sale price/assumes conservative \$35/SF (only considers sale of Touhy/Caldwell parcel, need to identify other surplus candidates before estimating revenue from those potential sales)	
7.1	Lease land for commercial use	\$0.00	\$1.00	\$1.00	FPCC leases ten 1-acre sites for long-term commercial leases generating \$100K per site less broker fees. Authority from ILGA required to sell. Municipality would need to rezone to maximize sale price.
7.2	Sell surplus land (yet to be identified)	\$0.00	\$2.30	?	Such as 1.5 acre site at Touhy/Caldwell.
7.3	Sell land	\$0.00	\$10.00	\$10.00	Sale high value sites to generate \$250M over 25 years. Revenue would be uneven.
7.4	Reduce/eliminate space leased by FPCC.	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.30	Would take several years to phase in. Consider tennis court at GHQ, other sites.
<b>8     WAIVE COOK COUNTY FEES</b>					
8.1	Waive Cook County fees	\$2.30	\$2.30	\$0.00	Waive fees county charges FPCC for technology, print shop, etc.
<b>9     ECOSYSTEM SERVICES</b>					
9.1	Wetlands mitigation partnerships	\$0.00	\$3.00	\$0.00	FPCC to seek mitigation \$s for major infrastructure project. (Assumes \$3M in single year.)
9.2	Sell carbon offsets	\$0.00	\$0.20	\$0.20	TNC is studying viability; assumes \$200K annually based on very preliminary estimates.
9.3	Flood mitigation	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.50	MWRD could work with FPCC to acquire land to be flooded temporarily. TPL estimates opportunity for \$500K per year.
<b>10    INCREASE PERMIT, LICENSES AND FEE REVENUES</b>					
10.1	Permits/concessions master plan	\$0.10	\$0.10	\$0.10	Already incorporated into budget baseline.
10.2	Increasing license revenues				Additional increase over \$40K per year already incorporated into budget baseline.
10.3	Increase special events (sports leagues, etc.)				
10.4	Develop concert, other fee-generating venue				
10.5	Establish membership fee				
<b>11    MANAGEMENT INITIATIVES</b>					
11.1	Fleet & energy efficiency	\$0.25	\$0.25	\$0.25	Assumes reduced vehicles, fuel costs, and maintenance.
11.2	Vendor management (golf courses)	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.06	Move from outsource model to management contract after 2023.
11.3	Reduce paper use	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	Saves \$4k per year.
11.4	Reduce landlines	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	Saves \$5K per year.
11.5	Outsource/reduce seasonal labor	\$0.23	\$0.23	\$0.23	FPCC would work with community groups, partners to outsource some programming, other seasonal labor.
11.6	Reduce printing costs	\$0.02	\$0.02	\$0.03	FPCC would move to digital advertising, reduce rack cards, and incorporate ads into seasonal brochures.
11.7	Additional reductions in non-personnel costs	\$1.00			
<b>12    DEFERRED MAINTENANCE</b>					
12.1	Deferred maintenance	\$0.00	\$0.00	?	FPCC has over \$80M in unfunded capital needs for 2017 to 2020, including \$30M of deferred maintenance in urgent need of repair. Defer all but most urgent needs and close select facilities.
<b>13    DRAW DOWN RESERVE FUND</b>					
13.1	low draw-down of Reserve Funds	\$1.00	\$2.00	\$2.00	
13.2	high draw-down of Reserve Funds	\$4.00	\$4.00	\$4.00	

- Initiative implemented & savings/revenues incorporated into 2017 budget.
- Initiative to be implemented during next 12 months.
- Presentation to Council recommended.