



Meeting Minutes
Friends of the Rio de Flag Membership Meeting
5 January 2017, 6-7:30PM
Montoya Community Center, 245 N. Thorpe Road

Agenda: Discussion of Watershed Planning for the Rio de Flag with Special Guest Mayor Coral Evans

No. people in attendance: 34

List of acronyms:

ACE: Army Corps of Engineers

FoRio: Friends of the Rio de Flag

WRDA: Water Resources Development Act

Announcements from the Board of Directors and FoRio Members:

- 1/13, 6:30-8:30PM Night at the Museum at Pioneer Museum (see [flyer](#))
- 1/14, 11AM-3PM Night at the Museum contd. at the Pioneer Museum
- 1/28, Rumble on the Mountain (see [press release](#))
- 1/29 Future of the Colorado Plateau Forum at Museum of Northern Arizona – event full, but get on waiting list (see [MNA webpage](#) for event)

Background on watershed planning efforts: Board President Rick Miller

- FoRio Board of Directors agreed on need for watershed plan for the Rio de Flag in Fall 2015
- Small steps towards this goal include:
 - Hiring AmeriCorps STEM VISTA Chelsea Silva to build capacity of the organization
 - Awarded grant through the Arizona Community Foundation to conduct community outreach on current and future strategies for watershed management
 - Initiated the Adopt-the-Rio program with six schools involved in stewardship and citizen science projects; curriculum being developed to support the program
 - Board members began writing the Watershed Plan using a reach by reach approach that describes each reach according to specific criteria values (i.e., environmental and socioeconomic indicators)
 - FoRio recognizes need for collaborating with relevant stakeholders; FoRio met with City of Flagstaff and discussed opportunities for collaboration; FoRio will meet late January with Coconino County to discuss opportunities for collaboration
- Background on formation of Friends of the Rio

- FoRio formed in response to Army Corps of Engineers (ACE) flood control project – FoRio did not want to see the Rio de Flag undergrounded and advocated for an aboveground channel for the entire length of the main stem of the Rio de Flag
- FoRio would like to work in collaboration with the City of Flagstaff on ensuring that the Rio remain aboveground

Insight from Southside resident Mr. Soto: history of the Rio de Flag

- He grew up in the Southside and worked on the Rio channel
- Rio de Flag was rerouted in the late 1800s by the Babbitt's
- The City used to be dredged on a regular basis about 20 yrs. ago which helped control flooding
 - This no longer occurs because of the liability issues associated with the City's easement of the Rio channel going through people's property on the Southside (from Beaver St. to Lone Tree Rd.)
- The benefits of having flood insurance are null in the Southside neighborhood which sits in the floodplain of the Rio de Flag; the Southside residents do not receive the benefits that some flood control measures could provide
 - Mr. Soto: "Due to the fact that the Southside is in the Rio de Flag floodplain, many people pay flood insurance but never receive any insurance benefits"

FoRio member insights on ACE flood control project

- The original plan for the ACE flood control project was keep the Rio de Flag aboveground – this plan was abandoned because ACE said that they would not cost share bridges and the City of Flagstaff only wanted a plan that was 100% cost-shared with ACE
- There was another ACE plan that is considered a hybrid plan which would put flood water underground with low flow in an open channel aboveground – this plan was requested by the City of Flagstaff to try and preserve some character of the Rio de Flag
- The railroad owns the southern half of Rt. 66

Insights for Mayor Coral Evans regarding ACE flood control project

- Historically the North and Southside neighborhoods have disagreed about flood control – some (mainly Southside residents) want the Rio put underground to control flooding immediately, others (mainly Northside residents, although there are some Northside residents who might not mind the Rio going underground) want to see it kept aboveground as an amenity
- Three things should give us hope regarding the flood control project:
 1. The Rio de Flag Flood Control Project was reauthorized with the signing of the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) 2016 in December 2016
 2. McCain is serving what will most likely be his last term and he's interested in legacy projects – he called Coral to discuss moving the flood control project forward
 3. ACE recommend that they City of Flagstaff ask for the full amount of funds needed to complete the Rio flood control project (they've never had us ask

for the full amount [in the past, they would tell us to only ask for a portion of the funds])

- Question to Coral from Board member: Does McCain know about Friends of the Rio and our hope for a flood control project that meets everyone's needs?
 - o Mayor Evans response: Probably not; could try to meet with one of McCain's staffers to fill them in on who we are and our goals as an organization
 - o Board member Allen Haden suggests that McCain's interest in the Rio de Flag might open up interest from the railroad
 - o Mayor Evans response: the railroad has been clear that they want to protect their rights for a 3rd line – this has implications for alternative designs for the ACE Rio de Flag flood control project (i.e., the railroad's desire to protect rights for a 3rd line likely rules out a lengthy stretch of open channel downstream of Rt. 66)
 - o If the community/City does not address flood control, private developers will deal with it and they may not design things in a way that FoRio might hope for
- Mayor Evans notes that she will send an email to the Flagstaff City Manager to set up a work session to get an update on the ACE flood control project
 - o Board members suggest that membership send requests to Council for the work session as well

Member suggestions:

- FoRio should look at models from other cities such as Santa Fe, NM to get an idea of how to manage watershed issues
- FoRio should consider options for slowing down water in the watershed to help ameliorate flooding
- FoRio should offer ways in which members and the community can get involved in watershed planning efforts
- FoRio should promote open channel design because the underground/"put the Rio in a box" plan would be a disaster if the wilderness area at the top of the peaks were to burn (refers to major issues with flooding post Schultz Fire)