

Fields & Save the Dells: the good, bad in the AED Letter of Intent

Talk of the Town

AMBER FIELDS, Special to the Courier

Originally Published: June 6, 2020 7:28 p.m.

<https://www.dcourier.com/news/2020/jun/06/fields-save-dells-good-bad-aed-letter-intent/>

As reported in The Daily Courier on May 23, the three parties to the Arizona Eco Development (AED) negotiations are close to finalizing a preliminary agreement on a deal that would protect 475 acres in the Granite Dells as public open space.

The Letter of Intent (LOI) discussed in that article represents the outcomes of two years of work between the City of Prescott, AED, and Save the Dells. While our community has been mainly focused on the concurrent economic, health and political crises, we have continued this work.

As reported in the Courier's June 3 article, the city will accept public comment on the LOI during a June 9 study session. To help the public understand the LOI and consider how to comment, Save the Dells would like to use this opportunity to provide our thoughts on the deal that's in the works.

First of all, let's celebrate this milestone. The road to this preliminary agreement has been rocky at times, but through hard work and patience, we're very close to accomplishing the vision outlined in our original position paper, which we released on Aug. 18, 2018.

All along we've maintained a consistent and unwavering position that this community must do everything possible to protect the undeveloped portions of the Granite Dells before it is too late.

That position has not changed. Our objective, as stated in our 2018 position paper, can be summarized as this:

Save the Dells' initial objective is to protect 500 specific high-value acres of AED's proposed development as public open space, consistent with the city Land Development Code requirement for new developments to set aside a minimum of 25% of their acreage as open space. If AED protects the land, then we would not oppose the transfer of 300 acre-feet of city water rights to AED for this annexation or on additional AED lands.

The LOI to be discussed at the June 9 study session nearly meets this vision. We should be proud of how this community put its differences aside to focus on shared values and love for a landscape.

That's the good part. So, what about the bad?

There's still room for improvement in the final deal, which will unfold over the next six months of city staff review, Planning and Zoning Commission review, a 60-day public comment period required by Proposition 400, and, ultimately, the City Council's vote. Here's what we see as key changes needed:

- 1 - AED should protect the Native American ruins perched above the confluence of No-Name Creek and Granite Creek. These are irreplaceable national treasures, harboring scientific and educational opportunities as part of a regional park. More so, these are culturally significant sites with direct ties to our fellow community members, the Yavapai people. This is also an important part of the viewshed from the Peavine Trail. Right now, the LOI would allow these to be catalogued, excavated, and covered with homes.

2 - AED should protect more of the Peavine Trail. Sections H and K creep 1,000 feet farther down the Peavine Trail into the Dells than in the 500-acre area we have been advocating for protection. Already, the part of the development that we are not opposing will line almost a full mile of the trail with high-density housing. The Peavine National Recreation Trail sees more than 100,000 visits annually, with use increasing every year. Let's commit to protecting the Peavine Trail corridor, which we identified as a priority to ensure we retain the stunning vistas that draw people here.

Aside from these two issues, there are other unmet conditions in our 2018 policy that we can let go. That's compromise. But we can do a little bit better for Prescott by addressing these concerns.

We got here because of you, the people of Prescott. Over the past two years, this newspaper has been at times flooded with letters supporting our mission. One-thousand people peaceably gathered at City Hall to support our resolution adopting our position, which council unanimously rejected. We marched in parades, held events with massive turnouts, won the strong support of state Rep. Noel Campbell, R-Prescott, and so much more.

This has been a journey for Prescott. Let's make sure it's a rewarding one. We're one step closer to a regional park of national significance. We look forward to the next steps we take, together.

Amber Fields, a native of Prescott, is a Whiskey Row business owner and chair of Save the Dells.