

ITEM 4A

Coachella Valley Conservation Commission Meeting Minutes May 14, 2026



The audio file for this committee can be found at: <http://www.cvag.org/audio.htm>

- 1. CALL TO ORDER** – The meeting was called to order by Chair Gary Gardner, City of Desert Hot Springs Councilmember, at 11:05 a.m. in the Coachella Valley Water District, Steve Robbins Administrative Building Training Room, 75515 Hovley Lane East, Palm Desert.

A roll call was taken, and it was determined that a quorum was present:

Members Present

Mayor Pro Tem Ernesto Gutierrez
Mayor Frank Figueroa
Councilmember Gary Gardner, *Chair*
Councilmember Dana Reed
Mayor Linda Evans
Councilmember Ted Weill
Director Amber Duff
Councilmember Stephanie Virgen
Mayor Pro Tem Kathleen Fitzpatrick
Councilmember Jan Harnik
Councilmember Nancy Ross
Councilmember Ben Guitron

Agency

City of Cathedral City
City of Coachella*
City of Desert Hot Springs
City of Indian Wells
City of La Quinta
City of Rancho Mirage
Mission Springs Water District
Riverside County – District 1
Riverside County – District 2
Riverside County – District 3
Riverside County – District 4
Riverside County – District 5

Members Not Present

Mayor Elaine Holmes, *Vice Chair*
Mayor Evan Trubee
Councilmember Grace Garner
Director Anthony Bianco
Director Alex Cardenas

City of Indio
City of Palm Desert
City of Palm Springs
Coachella Valley Water District
Imperial Irrigation District

** Arrived at Item 5A*

Chair Gardner led the Commission in the Pledge of Allegiance. There were no agenda modifications and no Conflict of Interest Disclosures.

2. PUBLIC COMMENTS ON AGENDA ITEMS

Ivette Zamora Cruz joined via Zoom to highlight her vermicompost education business Happy Worm and how it connects with conservation work. Her emailed comment was also shared with Commissioners.

3. COMMISSION CHAIR / DIRECTOR COMMENTS

None.

4. CONSENT CALENDAR

Item 4A was pulled from consent.

IT WAS MOVED BY COUNCILMEMBER REED AND SECONDED BY MAYOR EVANS TO APPROVE CONSENT CALENDAR ITEMS 4B-4E.

- A. (pulled)**
- B. Authorize the Executive Director to purchase a Chevrolet Silverado 1500 truck, based on the lowest quote and available vehicle, at a cost not to exceed \$62,000**
- C. Defer construction of a Peninsular bighorn sheep fence on a single residential lot in accordance with the provisions of the Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan by:
 - 1. Accepting an easement to allow for the construction, maintenance, and monitoring of such a fence should it become necessary in the future; and**
 - 2. Authorizing the Executive Director to enter into a Subordination Agreement with the City of Indian Wells to accommodate existing restrictions on the property****
- D. Authorize the Executive Director to provide a letter of support to the Wildlife Conservation Board for a grant application led by the Living Desert, inclusive of a commitment of \$100,000 for tortoise monitoring on conservation lands related to restoration of habitat if the grant is secured**
- E. Authorize the Executive Director to adjust budget lines in the 2025-26 budget, reducing CVCC directly-paid program expenses by \$20,000 and increasing the Coachella Valley Association of Governments (CVAG) administrative reimbursement by \$20,000**

THE MOTION CARRIED WITH 11 AYES AND 6 MEMBERS ABSENT.

Mayor Pro Tem Ernesto Gutierrez	Aye
Mayor Frank Figueroa	Absent
Director Anthony Bianco	Absent
Councilmember Gary Gardner	Aye
Director Alex Cardenas	Absent
Councilmember Dana Reed	Aye
Mayor Elaine Holmes	Absent
Mayor Linda Evans	Aye
Director Amber Duff	Aye
Mayor Evan Trubee	Absent
Councilmember Grace Garner	Absent
Councilmember Ted Weill	Aye

Councilmember Stephanie Virgen	Aye
Mayor Pro Tem Kathleen Fitzpatrick	Aye
Councilmember Jan Harnik	Aye
Councilmember Nancy Ross	Aye
Councilmember Ben Guitron	Aye

4.1 ITEMS HELD OVER FROM CONSENT CALENDAR

Director Duff indicated she wanted to abstain from the vote as she had not attended the previous meeting.

IT WAS MOVED BY MAYOR EVANS AND SECONDED BY MAYOR PRO TEM FITZPATRICK TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE APRIL 9, 2026 MEETING.

THE MOTION CARRIED WITH 10 AYES, 6 MEMBERS ABSENT AND 1 MEMBER ABSTAINING.

Mayor Pro Tem Ernesto Gutierrez	Aye
Mayor Frank Figueroa	Absent
Director Anthony Bianco	Absent
Councilmember Gary Gardner	Aye
Director Alex Cardenas	Absent
Councilmember Dana Reed	Aye
Mayor Elaine Holmes	Absent
Mayor Linda Evans	Aye
Director Amber Duff	Abstain
Mayor Evan Trubee	Absent
Councilmember Grace Garner	Absent
Councilmember Ted Weill	Aye
Councilmember Stephanie Virgen	Aye
Mayor Pro Tem Kathleen Fitzpatrick	Aye
Councilmember Jan Harnik	Aye
Councilmember Nancy Ross	Aye
Councilmember Ben Guitron	Aye

5. DISCUSSION / ACTION

A. Acquisition of one parcel in the Willow Hole Conservation Area

Diana Rosas of the Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy (CVMC) presented the staff report. She also acknowledged the CVCC's recent approval to continue retaining CVMC as the acquisition manager.

Responding to a question, Ms. Rosas noted that she would follow up to confirm the city in which the property is located.

IT WAS MOVED BY MAYOR EVANS AND SECONDED BY DIRECTOR DUFF TO APPROVE RESOLUTION 2026-05 FOR ACQUISITION OF ONE PARCEL CONSISTING OF APPROXIMATELY 5.0+/- ACRES IN THE WILLOW HOLE

CONSERVATION AREA AT A COST NOT TO EXCEED \$40,000 PLUS CLOSING AND TRANSACTION RELATED COSTS NOT TO EXCEED \$1,500; AND AUTHORIZE THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TO EXECUTE ALL NECESSARY CONTRACTS AND TAKE SUCH OTHER ACTIONS AS NECESSARY FOR THE ACQUISITION

THE MOTION CARRIED WITH 11 AYES, 5 MEMBERS ABSENT AND 1 MEMBER ABSTAINING.

Mayor Pro Tem Ernesto Gutierrez	Aye
Mayor Frank Figueroa	Abstain
Director Anthony Bianco	Absent
Councilmember Gary Gardner	Aye
Director Alex Cardenas	Absent
Councilmember Dana Reed	Aye
Mayor Elaine Holmes	Absent
Mayor Linda Evans	Aye
Director Amber Duff	Aye
Mayor Evan Trubee	Absent
Councilmember Grace Garner	Absent
Councilmember Ted Weill	Aye
Councilmember Stephanie Virgen	Aye
Mayor Pro Tem Kathleen Fitzpatrick	Aye
Councilmember Jan Harnik	Aye
Councilmember Nancy Ross	Aye
Councilmember Ben Guitron	Aye

B. Acquisition of one parcel in the Indio Hills/Joshua Tree National Park Linkage Conservation Area

Ms. Rosas presented the staff report.

IT WAS MOVED BY MAYOR PRO TEM GUTIERREZ AND SECONDED BY COUNCILMEMBER REED TO APPROVE RESOLUTION 2026-06 FOR ACQUISITION OF ONE PARCEL CONSISTING OF APPROXIMATELY 10.0 ACRES IN THE INDIO HILLS/ JOSHUA TREE NATIONAL PARK LINKAGE CONSERVATION AREA AT A COST NOT TO EXCEED \$70,000, PLUS CLOSING AND TRANSACTION RELATED COSTS NOT TO EXCEED \$2,500; AND AUTHORIZE THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TO EXECUTE ALL NECESSARY CONTRACTS AND TAKE SUCH OTHER ACTIONS AS NECESSARY FOR THE ACQUISITION

THE MOTION CARRIED WITH 12 AYES AND 5 MEMBERS ABSENT

Mayor Pro Tem Ernesto Gutierrez	Aye
Mayor Frank Figueroa	Aye
Director Anthony Bianco	Absent
Councilmember Gary Gardner	Aye
Director Alex Cardenas	Absent
Councilmember Dana Reed	Aye
Mayor Elaine Holmes	Absent
Mayor Linda Evans	Aye
Director Amber Duff	Aye

Mayor Evan Trubee	Absent
Councilmember Grace Garner	Absent
Councilmember Ted Weill	Aye
Councilmember Stephanie Virgen	Aye
Mayor Pro Tem Kathleen Fitzpatrick	Aye
Councilmember Jan Harnik	Aye
Councilmember Nancy Ross	Aye
Councilmember Ben Guitron	Aye

C. State Route 62 Wildlife Crossings Planning Project

Geary Hund of Mojave Desert Land Trust provided an overview of the project and the CVCC's role as a partner in the grant project. Brief member discussion ensued. Mr. Hund also thanked CVMC for its recent \$600,000 grant for the project.

IT WAS MOVED BY COUNCILMEMBER REED AND SECONDED BY MAYOR PRO TEM GUTIERREZ TO AUTHORIZE THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TO ENTER INTO A COOPERATIVE AGREEMENT WITH MOJAVE DESERT LAND TRUST TO COORDINATE EFFORTS ON THE STATE ROUTE 62 WILDLIFE CROSSINGS PLANNING GRANT PROJECT, AND TO EXECUTE ANY NECESSARY DOCUMENTS WITH CALTRANS AND OTHER AGENCIES THAT MAY BE NEEDED TO IMPLEMENT CVCC'S DUTIES UNDER THE COOPERATIVE AGREEMENT

THE MOTION CARRIED WITH 12 AYES AND 5 MEMBERS ABSENT

Mayor Pro Tem Ernesto Gutierrez	Aye
Mayor Frank Figueroa	Aye
Director Anthony Bianco	Absent
Councilmember Gary Gardner	Aye
Director Alex Cardenas	Absent
Councilmember Dana Reed	Aye
Mayor Elaine Holmes	Absent
Mayor Linda Evans	Aye
Director Amber Duff	Aye
Mayor Evan Trubee	Absent
Councilmember Grace Garner	Absent
Councilmember Ted Weill	Aye
Councilmember Stephanie Virgen	Aye
Mayor Pro Tem Kathleen Fitzpatrick	Aye
Councilmember Jan Harnik	Aye
Councilmember Nancy Ross	Aye
Councilmember Ben Guitron	Aye

D. Update on the Memorandum of Understanding with Desert Hot Springs Police Department

Management Analyst Will Steichen introduced Desert Hot Springs Police Lieutenant Chris Saucier, who provided an overview of the work that has been completed under the MOU with CVCC. Member discussion ensued.

CVCC staff addressed questions about how incidents such as broken fences or illegal dumping might be reported, including noting the use of apps to track such issues.

There was no action taken on this informational item.

E. Addressing Illegal Dumpsites and Encampments on Conservation Lands

Deputy Executive Director Erica Felci presented the staff report and potential partnerships to address homelessness on CVCC lands. Brief discussion ensued.

IT WAS MOVED BY MAYOR EVANS AND SECONDED BY MAYOR PRO TEM FITZPATRICK TO AUTHORIZE THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TO ADDRESS ENCAMPMENT ISSUES ON CONSERVATION LANDS BY TAKING THE NECESSARY STEPS TO 1.) PARTNER WITH RIVERSIDE COUNTY ON AN APPLICATION FOR THE CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT'S ENCAMPMENT RESOLUTION FUNDING AND 2.) EXECUTE ANY NECESSARY DOCUMENTS, INCLUDING A RIGHT OF ENTRY, IN ORDER TO PROVIDE ACCESS TO CALRECYCLE FOR ADDITIONAL STATE-LED REMEDIATION ON CVCC LANDS

THE MOTION CARRIED WITH 12 AYES AND 5 MEMBERS ABSENT

Mayor Pro Tem Ernesto Gutierrez	Aye
Mayor Frank Figueroa	Aye
Director Anthony Bianco	Absent
Councilmember Gary Gardner	Aye
Director Alex Cardenas	Absent
Councilmember Dana Reed	Aye
Mayor Elaine Holmes	Absent
Mayor Linda Evans	Aye
Director Amber Duff	Aye
Mayor Evan Trubee	Absent
Councilmember Grace Garner	Absent
Councilmember Ted Weill	Aye
Councilmember Stephanie Virgen	Aye
Mayor Pro Tem Kathleen Fitzpatrick	Aye
Councilmember Jan Harnik	Aye
Councilmember Nancy Ross	Aye
Councilmember Ben Guitron	Aye

6. INFORMATION

- A. Attendance Record**
- B. Contracts under Executive Director's signing authority**
- C. Acquisition Status Report**
- D. Coachella Valley Association of Governments' Annual Meeting Calendar**

These items were placed in the agenda packet for members' information.

7. PUBLIC COMMENTS ON NON-AGENDA ITEMS

Michael Harrington of Rancho Mirage provided written comments questioning CVCC Commissioners' previous comments about burrowing owls and acquisitions. A copy of the comments were provided to CVCC Commissioners.

8. ANNOUNCEMENTS

The next meeting of the **Coachella Valley Conservation Commission** will be held on Thursday, June 11, 2026, at 10:30 a.m. at the Coachella Valley Water District, Steve Robbins Administration Building Training Room, 75515 Hovley Lane East, Palm Desert, 92260.

9. ADJOURN

Chair Gardner adjourned the meeting at 11:51 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Erica Felci, Deputy Executive Director