



Board of Commissioners of Cook County

118 North Clark Street
Chicago, IL

Legislation Text

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PROPOSED RESOLUTION

HONORING THE SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTIONS OF GENERAL SUPERINTENDENT ARNOLD RANDALL TO COOK COUNTY

WHEREAS, Arnold Randall has served as the General Superintendent of the Forest Preserves of Cook County since his appointment in 2010, and as the leader of one of the country's oldest and largest forest preserve districts, he has focused on restoring and protecting these lands and has been ardently committed to ensuring that all people feel welcome in the forest preserves; and

WHEREAS, because of his leadership as General Superintendent, the Forest Preserves is forever committed to making everyone feel welcome and to being an important asset to Cook County residents. Under his direction the Forest Preserves dedicated itself to offering innovative new programs, expanding opportunities for collaboration, adopting strategies that ensure meaningful public engagement, and developing master plans and accelerating the work to expand and preserve the unique natural areas of Cook County; and

WHEREAS, through Arnold's visionary and transformative leadership, Arnold ensured the Forest Preserves has been managed with excellence, transparency, and sound financial practices. His commitment to good government has greatly improved public perception of the Forest Preserves. He worked closely with elected local officials and communicated with state and federal legislators on issues that impact the Forest Preserves; and

WHEREAS, under his guidance, the Forest Preserves made significant progress in building and strengthening relationships with hundreds of organizations in Cook County, regionally and nationally. Arnold initiated and elevated new and existing partnerships, working extensively across boundaries to leverage resources and to link new and diverse audiences with nature; and

WHEREAS, at the beginning of his tenure, Arnold led a comprehensive operational audit of the agency and quickly developed and implemented key recommendations. The creation of an Employment Plan implemented by a newly created Human Resources Department resulted in the Forest Preserves becoming the second local government agency to be released from the Shakman Decree by reaching Substantial Compliance in February 2013, a finding that verified that political consideration plays no role in employment decisions for non-exempt employees at the Forest Preserves; and

WHEREAS, he has supported the development of many strategic plans, including plans pertaining to recreation, campgrounds, trails, natural and cultural resources, and sustainability. These investments illustrate his commitment to sound planning principles, strategic leadership, fiduciary duty, and best practices and engagement strategies; and

WHEREAS, Arnold facilitated the development and implementation of the 2014 Next Century Conservation Plan, a visionary strategy that lays out a set of bold actions to ensure that the Forest Preserves will continue to thrive and that the people of Cook County will treasure and sustain this amazing resource now and in the future; and

WHEREAS, he has made restoration and conservation of Cook County's important natural habitats a fundamental priority. Since 2010, the Forest Preserves has had six new Illinois Nature Preserves dedicated and four Land and Water Reserves totaling more than 3,600 acres and have grown the number of acres under active restoration management by over 15,000. He championed the 2015 Natural and Cultural Resources Master Plan, a comprehensive strategy for the management of the Forest Preserves' natural and cultural resources; and

WHEREAS, Arnold helped advance science and research by supporting the wildlife biology division's efforts to better understand wildlife health and how it relates to human health, including the creation of a state of the art wildlife research center; support for the publishing of the award winning updated Flora of the Chicago Region, a ground-breaking book that documents and details nearly 3,200 plant species and their associated organisms found in the Chicago region; hosting multiple science symposiums; and beginning to implement ecological restoration strategies to enhance the resilience of the forest preserves habitats to ensure that local plants and animals can better withstand impacts from climate change; and

WHEREAS, he has embraced the development of innovative projects, programs and initiatives, including the formation of the Conservation & Policy Council, an advisory body of distinguished civic-minded experts who generously volunteer time to the mission, established by ordinance and charged with guiding the efforts to implement the Next Century Conservation Plan - including the expansion of the Conservation Corps program; the formation of the Conservation and Experiential Programming Department, a department dedicated solely to public programming and engagement; streamlining the picnic permit, concessions and rental program to enhance visitors' experiences; and overseeing the historic re-opening of five campgrounds in the Forest Preserves; and

WHEREAS, Arnold prioritized the promotion of an infrastructure and culture that is based on equity and inclusion, forming a Racial Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Committee in 2018 focused on analyzing and understanding challenges and barriers to implementing solutions based on racial equity; and

WHEREAS, during his tenure the Forest Preserves has acquired and protected nearly 1,600 acres of land, including Horizon Farm, one of the largest land purchases in the Forest Preserves most recent history and launched the creation of a new forest preserve system in Southeast Cook County, an area where people lack access to public lands and outdoor recreation. Under Arnold's leadership, the Forest Preserves and partners developed the award-winning 2019 Southeast Cook County Land Acquisition Plan, which represents a unique and innovative approach to prioritizing acquisitions by identifying and protecting valuable open space based not only on the ecological value of sites, but also considers criteria related to flood mitigation, economic development, health, and social vulnerability; and

WHEREAS, Arnold believes in the power of collaboration and alliances and has supported Chicago Wilderness, a regional alliance of more than 250 different organizations working together to preserve, improve, and expand nature and quality of life in the region, serving as its chair from 2012 to 2018. He has also positioned the Forest Preserves as one of the lead agencies of the Millennium Reserve Compact, a partnership of government, businesses, and nonprofit groups working together to advance a shared action agenda in the Calumet region in southeast Cook County, serving on its Steering Committee; and

WHEREAS, Arnold's focus on transparency, accountability and fiscal responsibility has helped the Forest Preserves restructure its budget and identify new ways to reduce costs and raise revenues and secured nearly \$135,000,000 in grant funding, including funds raised by partners. He ultimately advocated for a sustainable source of revenue for the Forest Preserves which led to the successful passage of a tax referendum in 2022, bringing in much needed resources to care for nature, improve outdoor recreation amenities, maintain infrastructure, and stabilize the Forest Preserves' pension fund; and

WHEREAS, in 2011 he supported the launch of the Forest Preserve Foundation, the Forest Preserves' philanthropic partner dedicated to protecting and restoring natural habits and to enhancing outdoor experiences for all people, to expand resources for key Forest Preserves programs and initiatives. The Forest Preserve Foundation has become a stalwart supporter of the Forest Preserves' Conservation Corps program, has helped restore critical natural areas including Cap Sauers Holdings Nature Preserve, and has raised more than \$3,000,000 to support the Forest Preserves; and

WHEREAS, Arnold is committed to developing, training and hiring the Next Generation of Conservation Leaders and supported and helped grow the Chicago Conservation Corps Leadership program and supported the creation of the Youth Outdoor Ambassador and the Forest Preserves Experience programs. His leadership led to continued and renewed partnerships with Friends of the Forest Preserves, Student Conservation Association, the Chicago Housing Authority, and

Openlands. During his tenure, these programs have trained and employed thousands of young people in restoration, environmental education and engagement, and other skills; and

WHEREAS, Arnold is active in numerous civic and professional organizations. Affiliations have included the Chicago Community Development Commission (chair), Chicago Plan Commission, Commission on Chicago Landmarks, Public Buildings Commission, Delta Institute Board, Woodlawn Children's Promise Community, Woodlawn New Communities Program (NCP), American City Planning Directors' Council, American Planning Association, Illinois Parks and Recreation Association (IPRA), National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA), South East Chicago Commission (SECC) Executive Committee, Harper Court Foundation Board, and the 53rd Street TIF Advisory Board; and

WHEREAS, he has been recognized by both local and national organizations including becoming a “Legend” in the field of parks and recreation by the American Academy for Park and Recreation Administration in 2022, receiving the Agency Leadership Award from the Public Lands Alliance in 2019 and most notably receiving the Motorola Solutions Foundation Excellence in Public Service Award from the Civic Federation in 2017; and

WHEREAS, Arnold's parents instilled in him a love of nature, taking him swimming, fishing and horseback riding, and Arnold, in turn, shares his respect for nature and wildlife with his wife and children; and

WHEREAS, Arnold's contributions and dedication to conserving nature and promoting and enhancing access to outdoor recreation for all people are exemplary and he leaves behind a thriving and vibrant Forest Preserves and will long be remembered as one of the most outstanding General Superintendents that has ever managed the Forest Preserves of Cook County.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that President Toni Preckwinkle and the Cook County Board of Commissioners, on behalf of the residents of Cook County do hereby extend thanks to Arnold Randall for his dedication, leadership and outstanding service to the Forest Preserves and wish him continued success in his next position.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that a suitable copy of this resolution be provided to Arnold Randall in recognition of his significant contributions to Cook County.