



Educate and inspire a global audience to value, thrive in, and conserve desert environments through transformative experiences based on scientific studies in Scottsdale's McDowell Sonoran Preserve and from around the world.

## DESERT DISCOVERY CENTER ALERT

Dear Friends –

Recently, DDC opponents have engaged in personal attacks and have alleged conflicts and conspiracies against DDCS and other DDC supporters. We'd like to set the record straight with you – the supporters of the DDC.

Desert Discovery Center Scottsdale, Inc. is the 501(c)3 nonprofit organization established for the purpose of planning and possibly operating the Desert Discovery Center. Opponents have accused us of expecting to "profit" from the DDC, presumably because some of us may continue to serve as unpaid, volunteer board members of a nonprofit organization operating a facility owned by the City of Scottsdale.

DDCS grew out of the Desert Discovery Center Advocates organization, an

unofficial group of interested citizens that formed with the desire to move the DDC concept forward. The DDCA held more than 350 meetings with individuals and groups to gauge support for the DDC as the economy improved. Based on the response received, one goal of the DDCA was to encourage the City of Scottsdale to re-issue the 2012 Request for Qualifications for an operator of the DDC. That original RFQ drew no responses at the time. The City staff issued a new RFQ after getting *unanimous* direction to do so at a work study session held in March 2015. Although the RFQ was sent to an extensive City mailing list and the mandatory pre-submittal meeting was attended by many firms, DDCS was the only respondent to the RFQ. The RFQ was handled through the normal City procurement process as required by law. The DDCS submittal was evaluated by a panel of City staff and independent reviewers and received a score of 895 out of a total of 1000 possible points. City Council voted 6 – 1 to accept the contract negotiated with DDCS in January 2016. Notwithstanding any claims by the opposition, the procurement process was handled per the normal, required City processes.

We submitted an application for 501(c)3 status to the IRS in April 2015 and received the necessary non-profit IRS designation in July 2015. That designation allows us to raise donations in the private sector for the required \$270,000 private sector investment in this phase and the required 10% of the capital campaign for the DDC. Our application to the IRS required a project description. Since City Council directed the contractor to develop a *new* version of the DDC from the existing 2010 project concept – a new version, which obviously could not be known at the time of submission – we incorporated the 2010 concept into our IRS submission. That inclusion in no way obligates us to the 2010 concept nor does it indicate the expected result of our current work.

The planning boundary established by the City Council for the contract is 30 acres at the Gateway. This is not the planned or expected project size. The 2010 concept plus the associated increased parking had an actual footprint of considerably less than 30 acres. We have heard clearly that the community wishes us to develop a proposal that will have an even smaller footprint and we will endeavor to do so.

We believe the proposal that will be brought forward next year will differ substantially from the 2010 concept. Those who claim that we already know what the new DDC will be and that it will be as big as or bigger than the 2010 concept have no basis whatsoever for those statements and will likely be proven wrong when the actual proposal is presented.

The RFQ issued by the City and the contract with DDCS specifically call for the project to be planned for the Gateway location in the Preserve. There is no instruction in the contract scope to evaluate other sites within or outside the Preserve. Alternative sites were studied by professionals in 1999 and 2013, and as a result, the Gateway remained the preferred site.

A significant part of this phase of the contract is community outreach. DDCS and the City of Scottsdale already have held two public open houses to provide basic information about the project scope. In addition, DDCS has presented to many neighborhood and community groups, and the City has an open comment form on its website. All comments received through these channels and the results of the multiple workshops conducted with stakeholders – including members of the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy, the McDowell Sonoran Preserve Commission, the Scottsdale Convention and Visitors Bureau, Arizona State University, and others – will be summarized to provide input for project development.

We have heard enthusiasm for the DDC's proposed mission and for the potential research, programming and educational opportunities it could provide. We also have heard concerns about its size, cost, and compatibility with the Preserve. All constructive input received is welcome, valuable, and being thoughtfully considered as we develop the project concept.

DDCS and its staff and sub-contractors are working hard to plan for the DDC. Our responsibility and focus are to bring forward a terrific, exciting proposal next year. A public vote on the DDC is not our decision to make, but we feel strongly that the only way for the community to make an informed decision about the DDC is to first see our final proposal next fall.

We thank you for your continued support, input, and guidance along this journey. Please contact us if you have any questions about our work or about things you may hear about the project.

Christine Kovach,

Chairman of the Board

(Of course you're welcome to forward this message or post it on social media, but we ask that you do so in its entirety.)



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