

**BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING MINUTES  
THE WILD CENTER**

**April 15, 2013 – American Museum of Natural History, New York City  
1:00 PM – 4:00 PM**

**Board Present:**

Tom Aydelotte, Joe Beck, Lynn Birdsong, Obie Clifford, John Colston, Amy Elrod, Connie Ferguson, Lynn Fox, Nancy Howard, John Huwiler, Thomas Jorling, Peter Kindler, Betsy Lowe, James Schoff, Nancy Simpkins, Dan Sullivan, Charles Svenson, and Karen Thomas.

**Board/Advisory Board Present via Web Ex:** Paul Alioto, Jim Carr, Rick Godin, Mike Hunsinger, Joel Treisman, and Gene Zeltmann.

**Board Absent:**

Michael Bettmann, Charles Frenette, Robert Friedman, Bill Hutchens, Dave Johnson, Kevin Keane, Claire Leonardi, Paul Maroun, Chris McFadden, and Sandra Strader.

**Advisory Board Present:**

Lee Bailey, Tim Barnett, Sally Hart, Kevin Keane, Linda Rosenstock and Jack Ryder.

**Others:**

Emily Forbes (Wings Designee)

**Staff/Consultants Present:** Marci Bencze, Hillarie Logan-Dechene, Robin Ellis, Jamie Ford, Howard Fish, Bob Kronenberger, Christine Owens, and Stephanie Ratcliffe.

**Welcome**

**Discussion:** Lynn Birdsong called the meeting to order at 9:15 am. He welcomed all in attendance and thanked Board members who were in the room as well as on Web Ex for their participation. He began by introducing newest Board member, John Huwiler as well as Wings Representative, Emily Forbes. He also introduced the two newest Advisory Board members, Lee Bailey and Linda Rosenstock stating that they were the longest distance travelers for the meeting, traveling from California.

**I. Approval of Minutes**

**Discussion:** Minutes of the January 7, 2013 meeting were unanimously approved with one edit.

*Dan Sullivan, Peter Kindler second.*

**Action:** N/A

**II. Report from the President**

**Discussion:** Lynn Birdsong stated that this meeting was a very important one and that there were three things that would be highlighted:

- Introduction of a Positioning Statement by Tom Aydelotte: He stated that this was a vital thing for any organization and that it identifies who you are and who you are trying to be.
- Three years ago, the “quiet phase” of the campaign was approved. He stated that a goal needed to be set before the campaign goes public and that the goal needed to be voted on.
- Wild Walk: He stated that this discussion would be a very important part of the meeting. He reported that the project had received APA approval without questions which was unheard of and gave a hats off to all.

### III. Report from the Executive Director

Discussion: Stephanie Ratcliffe began her report by sharing a few pointers to help make the Web Ex experience more user friendly for participants on site as well as on the phone. She then shared highlights to date for 2013:

- National Science Teachers Association Meeting – She reported that Jen Kretser, Director of Programs and Kendra Ormerod, Naturalist were attending the 2013 meeting in Texas and were handing out copies of Matter of Degrees. She asked Board members to let us know if they would like copies to distribute and stated that the target age was Jr. High and High School students.
- Maple Project – Sap is being collected and boiled every day. 82 gallons of syrup had been produced to date. The sugar shack has some of the newest technology. She also reported that a photo, titled “Sweet & Light” had been chosen as the North Country Public Radio “photo of the day”. She stated that the maple project began as a connection to nature but now helps with The Wild Center branding as well as economic impact.

### IV. Positioning Statement

Discussion: Tom Aydelotte began his presentation by stating that he was not prepared to give a lecture but wanted everyone to be fully engaged with the material that he planned to share, and in the end to have a deep, emotional and intellectual understanding of and commitment to the Development Team’s recommendation.

He started by acknowledging members of the Positioning Statement Development Team stating that everyone on the team has been totally involved. He stated that they had met as a group several times and had many conference calls resulting in a lot of hard work by everyone:

- Tom Aydelotte
- Howard Fish
- Clifford Hart
- Stephanie Ratcliffe

- Jack Ryder
- Karen Thomas

He then stated the three goals he wished to achieve during his presentation:

- Present recommended Positioning Statement to the Board for its comments and approval
- Share the process which was followed to create the Positioning Statement
- Next Steps

He then gave a brief description of what a positioning statement is. He stated that it is a precise statement of “who” The Wild Center is and how it should be readily and clearly perceived by all constituents.

Tom then stated that a positioning statement must:

- Be specific and distinctive
- Reflect how TWC is differentiated from competition
- Be “ownable”
- Be mission driven

He also gave a description of what a positioning statement is not. He stated that it is not a copy strategy and it is not advertising. It is not for external communication and it is not a slogan.

He then shared with board members the process for developing the positioning statement and said that five general areas were explored:

- Words – TWC has core attributes – interactive, experiential, learning, innovative, passion which suggest elements that should be prominent in positioning statement.
- Internet user patterns:
  - TWC frequent visitors are very engaged
  - Visitors say TWC is changing the future of the Adirondacks
  - Good content is critical to engagement, e.g. live exhibits, movies, live animal programs
  - Live experiential events are important
  - Word-of-mouth is most important to first-time visitors
  - New visitors are overwhelming visitors
- Prototype positioning statement key language:
  - Living
  - Constantly changing and evolving
  - One-on-one

- o Non-corrective – no right or wrong way
- o Inviting participants and curiosity
- o Ground breaking
- o Where society and science intersect
- o Connecting people to nature
- o Deeply personal
- Review of competition. Identified broad areas:
  - o Local causes where I live
  - o Global environmental organizations
  - o Regional and/or Adirondack environmental organizations
  - o Major science museums
  - o Adirondack cultural organization
  - o Universities and schools
- Personification of the organization.
  - o Loss of a trusted friend
  - o The one who understands me and my own particular way of interacting with nature
  - o The only place where I could be guaranteed something interesting will happen
  - o Loss of hopefulness
  - o Loss of special place
  - o Loss of piece of the Adirondacks

Tom then presented the new positioning statement and invited questions and comments from board members.

“To inquisitive minds, The Wild Center is the science-based community that cultivates and enriches your connection to nature so that you can actively engage in a future where people and nature can thrive together.”

There was then much discussion amongst Board members about how they felt about the statement. The following are some of the comments that were made:

- After some discussion about “to inquisitive minds” which some described as feeling elitist and provocative, Sally Hart said “don’t we want to cultivate inquiring minds?” Dan Sullivan stated that in higher education much time is spent learning to “say what it is” and that most people want to be addressed as an inquisitive mind. He stated that he likes it. Joe Beck suggested changing it to “to the inquisitive mind in all of us” to make it sound more inclusive.

Nancy Howard stated that the word inquisitive is a wonderful word to use when developing a marketing plan.

- There was then discussion regarding “science based”. John Huwiler felt that inquisitive and science based sounds too cerebral. John also stated that the linkage of science and community was unclear to him. Howard Fish said that he also had an issue with science based, he stated that it sounds scary and that his kids might not be interested in that although he said that The Wild Center events start with a science based platform. Betsy Lowe felt that it was important to have a science based message in the statement as the museum, cultivates its message based on science.
- There was also discussion about the word community. Stephanie Ratcliffe said that the feeling of community is very important. Lynn Birdsong stated that everything is about creating a community. Dan Sullivan stated that community makes you want to be involved and a part of something.

Tom Aydelotte then went over next steps:

- Need to go back and do more thinking about the positioning statement and do a work in suggestions from board discussion
- Prepare for the public announcement of Campaign
- Work on the constituent matrix
- Continue work on Wild Walk

## V. **Development/Campaign Report**

Discussion: Hillarie Logan-Dechene then gave her Development report. Lynn Birdsong stated that one of the goals is to set a public goal and to get approval from the Board. Hillarie reported that the campaign had brought in \$14,882,000 in gifts, pledges and bequest intentions to date and that it was still in the quiet phase. She then gave a brief overview of where the campaign began:

- July 2010 – Board approved 3 year campaign with working goal of \$20 million

\$5,000,000	Annual Fund for Operations
\$4,000,000	Wild Walk
\$9,000,000	Board Designated Endowment
\$2,000,000	Campaign Expenses

Hillarie then gave an overview of what has changed in terms of the campaign:

- Board approved extending end date to Dec. 2015 requiring more Annual Operating support.
- Wild Walk enhancements and construction cost inflation increased project budget.

- Board agreed to fund campaign expenses from campaign revenue (funded from Board designated endowment fund for past two years).

Hillarie then reported on the goals of the Campaign Cabinet:

- Cabinet recommends \$20 million goal
  - \$9,000,000 Annual fund for operation
  - \$3,000,000 Wild Walk
  - \$8,000,000 Board Designated Endowment Fund (BDEF)
    - \$3,000,000 Bequest Intentions
    - \$5,000,000 Cash gifts for BDEF

Lynn Birdsong stated that the good news is that we were awarded \$1million from the state and said that we need to work on a timeline and move forward on it. He stated that the possibility of financing Wild Walk is being explored. He said that the money would enable us to get going on building and stay within the timeline for the project.

Joe Beck had questions regarding the \$9 million for annual fund for operation. He stated that he would rather have someone give to endowment or Wild Walk, not Annual Fund or operating.

Lynn Birdsong stated that all campaigns needed to be inclusive. There was much discussion about the three campaign priorities. Hillarie noted that we would be letting up a bit on the gas on the BDEF fundraiser since we have met our original goal, and would be focused heavily on annual fund and Wild Walk for the next two years. She stated that prospect identification, engagement and solicitation are essential if we are to meet campaign goals. Lynn Birdsong stated that we were in annual fund mode and that we want to pick a date to end the campaign but still continue to ask for annual fund gifts. Hillarie stated that the campaign would go public at the July 8 Board meeting. She and Christine Owens then explained what the public phase is:

- The Public Phase is step 8 in the 10 phases of a capital campaign
- This is the sprint to the goal line
- It begins once the leadership gifts are secured and approximately 60-75% of the goal is committed
- Involved all types of fundraising from direct mail to face-to-face meetings, and large and small scale events
- Has only TWO objectives: Make the goal and reach the broadest constituency

She then gave a list of the ways that Board members could help the Campaign Cabinet its goals in the areas of key decision making and establishing policy as well as fundraising:

- Confirm the working goal and the priorities to be funded
- Accept the campaign budget
- Authorize investment practices and gift policies
- Adopt the public goal and timeline
- Make a personal stretch commitment
- Identify prospects, gather information, provide introductions and access
- Cultivate by being an ambassador
- Solicit
- Thank and steward

Hillarie then asked Board members to take ten minutes to decide how they would like to engage the people on their list of contacts in the Campaign and stated that lists would be collected at the conclusion of the Board meeting. (Due to time limitations, this task was assigned as homework.)

Action: A motion to approve a \$20 million goal for the Campaign was unanimously approved.

*Joe Beck motion, Dan Sullivan second.*

There was then a brief discussion about the importance of sharing your passion about The Wild Center with others. Obie Clifford stated he doesn't go anywhere without carrying photos of the museum. Joe Beck requested a pdf to send to people. Hillarie stated that there would be materials coming in May.

#### **VI. Audit Committee Report**

Discussion: Joe Beck began by thanking Audit Committee members for their work. He stated that during the recent audit the Auditors were very complimentary regarding the work done by museum staff. Joe recommended approval of the 2012 Audit. Joe Beck also stated that he is now listed as the Compliance Officer.

Action: A motion to accept the 2012 Audit was unanimously approved.

*Charles Svenson motion, Nancy Howard second.*

#### **VII. Financial Report**

Discussion: Bob Kronenberger went over the highlights of the financial dashboard that was handed out in the board packets:

- 50% of revenue is from annual fund contributions
- There are less than 20 donors giving 60% of annual fund needs
- Admission revenues were up but attendance was down.
- Store revenue per visitor was up from \$4.90 to \$5.47
- Café revenue was holding its own at \$2.00 per visitor on average
- Paid attendance was down 7% but revenue was up slightly

- There is a \$19,000 draw from the Board designated endowment
- 2012 expenses were very similar to 2011
- Endowment was at \$4.5 million at the end of March
- 2013 was on target so far for the year
- Attendance was up in the first quarter from the same time last year
- No debt at this point

Joe Beck stated that The Wild Center was a very healthy organization and that we should all be very proud of the audit report.

Gene Zeltmann stated that increasing revenue is dependent upon what we do to attract visitors. Lynn Birdsong stated that the core experience at The Wild Center needs to be protected. Discussion then ensued regarding ways to increase attendance numbers.

#### **VIII. Governance Report**

Discussion: Nancy Simpkins briefly reported on Ad Hoc Committees. She stated that sometimes the work of the committees is done by the committee and sometimes it is done by staff members. Howard Fish reported that the Website ad-hoc committee had completed its goals and that the staff would be interviewing companies in the near future. Michael Hunsinger reported that the Building and Grounds committee was working on its ten year plan. Jim Carr then stated that there would be a Distance Learning telecast of Matter of Degrees for his retirement community in Massachusetts via Web Ex.

Action: N/A

#### **IX. Wild Walk Update**

Discussion: Stephanie Ratcliffe then gave a brief update on Wild Walk next steps:

- Interview Contractors on 4/17 in Albany
- Open bids after interviews
- Value Engineering
- Final Budget
- Final contract with the State
- Financing and cash flow planning
- Construction schedule

Tom Jorling asked when it would be appropriate to authorize financing for Wild Walk. Lynn Birdsong replied that financing had been explored but that we may not be ready without current interest rates. He also stated that authorization would involve a board conference call.

#### **X. 2013 Program Plan**

Discussion: Stephanie Ratcliffe gave a brief overview of the 2013 Program Plan:

April - December

- Flip the Switch event
- Whiteface Opening – June 20
- Whiteface at The Wild Center
- Canoe Program continues
- Free Flight program prototyped
- BuzzzFest with Monarch theme
- Monarch Movie debuts, runs one year
- Flavor Fest Maple theme
- Distance Learning Conference – October 25
- Fifth Adirondack Youth Climate Summit
- Partnering with ADK Action to show *Flight of the Butterflies*

**XI. Executive Session**

**XII. Upcoming 2013 Meeting Dates**

- Monday, July 8, 2013 (TWC)
- Friday, October 11, 2013 (TWC)