

BOARD OF TRUSTEES ANNUAL MEETING MINUTES
THE WILD CENTER
January 27, 2020 - The University Club, NYC
1:00 PM - 5:00 PM

Board of Trustees Present:

Joe Beck, Terry Birdsong, George Cigale, Larry Clifford, Lynn Fox, Sally Hart, Nancy Howard, Thomas Jorling, Betsy Lowe, Brooks Reynolds, Linda Rosenstock, Nancy Simpkins, and Virginia Valkenburgh.

Board/Advisory Board/Staff Present via GoToMeeting:

Paul Alioto, Michael Bettmann, Rick Godin, Michael Hunsinger, Peter Kindler, Pamela Matt, and Charlie Svenson.

Advisory Board Present:

Lynn Birdsong, Juan Rodriguez and Stan Rumbough.

Board Absent:

Charles Frenette, Paul Maroun, Jack Ryder, James Schoff, Karen Thomas, and Joel Treisman.

Staff/Consultants Present:

Marci Bencze, Hillarie Logan-Dechene, Robin Ellis, Bob Kronenberger, and Stephanie Ratcliffe.

Welcome

Discussion:

Nancy Simpkins called the meeting to order at 1:03 pm. She began by thanking Marci Bencze for her work in getting the Sunday evening dinner as well as the Board meeting set up. She then mentioned that the first order of business would be a bylaw revision discussion as well as Board elections. She also stated that the Board structure would undergo some changes which would be discussed.

I. By-law Revision Discussion and Board Elections

Discussion: Lynn Fox began by giving the following background on By-law revision discussions:

- We had exceeded the number of Trustees allowed per our charter
- We proposed and submitted an amendment to our charter which was approved
- The change would allow the number of Trustees to increase to a maximum of 40 people

- Made change to the terms of officers
 - Chair 3 years
 - Others 2 years
- Addition of vice chairs:
 - Would allow workload to be spread out and would provide support for the Board chair which would open them up to provide leadership support
 - A vice chair role does not indicate “succession”
 - Terms would be renewable per revision

Hillarie mentioned that per the By-Laws, changes were not given to Trustees for review 7 days prior to the meeting so copies of the revised by-laws were handed out for review and Trustees were asked to vote on the changes electronically within 7 days. The next order of business was to elect the new slate of officers. Before that took place Nancy Simpkins spoke briefly regarding some recent Board of Trustee and Advisory Board changes and reported the following:

- Tom Aydelotte - Was a member of the Board for 20 years, brought his passion for marketing and The Wild Center (TWC) to the table and always pushed the Trustees to look to the future.
- Sandie Strader - Was a member of the Board for 19 years, she plans to continue on as a Volunteer at the Plan Your Visit table and would serve as a member of the Advisory Board.
- Rich Malloch - Stepped down to spend more time with family
- Barbara Grose - Served for approximately 20 years, was thanked for her work as a past Advisory Board Co-chair
- Frances Beinecke - Served for approximately 20 years
- Martha Bullock - Will chair the Advisory Board
- Nancy Howard - Was thanked for her work as secretary for 21 years
- Lee Bailey - Was thanked for his work as a past Advisory Board Co-chair

Board Elections

Discussion: Nancy Simpkins stated that there were some Trustees whose terms were expiring who would need to be re-elected as well as officers who would need to be re-elected.

Action: A motion to elect Paul Alioto, Joe Beck, Michael Bettmann, Charles Frenette, Sally Hart, Jack Ryder and Joel Treisman was unanimously approved.

Linda Rosenstock motion, Larry Clifford second.

A motion to elect the following officers to the Board of Trustees was also unanimously approved:

- Nancy Simpkins - Chair
- Jack Ryder - Vice Chair
- Lynn Fox - Vice Chair
- Linda Rosenstock - Secretary
- Joe Beck - Treasurer

Lynn Fox reported on the new committee structure and stated that most of the committees on the list had not been populated stating that if people wanted to join one they should let the chair know.

Nancy Simpkins then gave a very brief report and shared the following:

- Many have an uncomfortable relationship with asking for money
- Spoke with some consultants regarding a full day workshop during the April Board meeting
- A major focus of the training would be regarding messaging (i.e., Who is TWC?, Why should people support it?)
- Need some uniformity in messaging
- Need to get better
- They are creating a Wild Center centric training
- A short survey will be sent in February/March to gauge Board comfort levels
- Suggested that the Board read the case statement ahead of the training
- It is so important as Trustees to aid in the sustainability of TWC
- Thanked Board members in advance for their participation
- Asked Board members to reserve all of Monday, April 20th for a full day meeting/training.

II. Approval of Minutes

Discussion: Minutes of the October 11, 2019 meeting were unanimously approved as presented.

Joe Beck motion, Ginny Valkenburgh second.

III. Executive Director Report

Discussion: Stephanie Ratcliffe reported on 2019 accomplishments:

- Stabilized attendance and membership revenue
- Exceeded annual fundraising goals, ended year with smaller deficit (\$40 k vs. \$236 k)

- Maintained high level customer service and visitor experience even with reduced staff
- Ways of Knowing (WOK) Year 2 (reciprocity)
- Closing in on meeting Obie Clifford Fund goal of \$2 Million
- Won major IMLS grant for \$249,549 for exhibit/program Climate Change Solutions
- Won major NYS marketing grant for \$366,000 to fuel marketing efforts for shoulder season (2 yr budget relief)

Stephanie then took some time to share the following goals for 2020:

- Maintain 2019 admission levels and earned revenue levels.
- Explore/experiment with multiple strategies to increase incremental attendance and earned revenue.
- Offer something “new” (Get Outside) to encourage repeat visitation and keep members engaged
- Continue to develop elements of the Campus Master Plan
- Access and recalibrate all school and other group offerings.
- Continue to sustain and grow climate change public programming to make it more central, visible and nested with all other TWC public programs.
- Complete WOK Project Year Three
- Execute Year one of IMLS Climate Solutions Grant

Stephanie then took a few minutes to answer Board questions:

- Terry Birdsong - Two areas - Store/Cafe - didn't do well this year. How will we handle that going forward (see Bob's discussion below).
- Larry Clifford - What has the reception been to Wild Walk being open in the winter? Early indications are positive.
- Lynn Birdsong - Is the gift of Oxbow settled?
 - Advisory Board member Stan Rumbough gave an update of the Adirondack Club and Resort (ACR) situation and his personal involvement. The property is currently in foreclosure. One scenario is that the new owners will gift the property once it is acquired. The timeline on this would be the end of summer 2020 or later.
 - Stephanie shared that while the promise to give the property to TWC was stated publicly and verbally, requests to complete the paperwork were stalled repeatedly by previous developers. According to newspaper reports, it appears Tom Lawson did not have the right to make such promises. If we can not acquire the transfer of the oxbow property we will simply pull back that information off our materials and we do not

want a public discussion of this issue. Please keep this information confidential.

IV. Financial Report

Discussion: Joe Beck began by thanking all members of the Finance Committee for all of their efforts. He then shared the following thoughts:

- Staff was able to perform better than budget/ and come close to closing deficit
- There have been some challenges, issues and opportunities to address
- Contributions have been up slightly
- Member revenues are up and retention has been good
- Cafe/Store - Trying to do a better job
- There are some good rental opportunities to explore
- Working on Youth Climate Summit support, need to do our best to maintain those efforts
- Investments are in good shape
- Obie Clifford Fund - goal is almost met
 - Thanked all who have contributed
- All Board members should have The Wild Center in their wills
- Need to work hard to try and increase endowment for the future

Joe then shared a few of the Finance Committees main areas of focus:

- Need to maintain Annual Fund levels
- Need to encourage bequests to build endowment
- Capital facilities plan and programs - need to meet needs and still stay within annual budget constraints.
- Looking at socially responsible investments - tailoring investment portfolio to align with values of organization
 - Was a presentation at pre-meeting by Wells Fargo
 - Not a bad idea to pursue for TWC
 - In the fact finding stage currently
 - Important to explore, could retain someone as a fiduciary advisor to the Board

Bob Kronenberger then took some time to share the information that was included in his Finance presentation (see the full presentation that was provided in the Board packet for details) including the following objectives of the Finance Committee:

- Develop and monitor annual budget and spending trends
- Advise Board Chair and Executive Director on financial conditions
- Monitor loans and other financial obligations
- Coordinate with Audit and Investment Committees

Discussion then ensued regarding ways to increase revenues in the store and cafe with the following ideas/suggestions being shared:

- Cafe already making changes, better menu, seeing positive reactions. Need to look at staffing and margin on sale of products
- Look at possibly expanding footprint of store, change displays to improve view from outside the store.
- Brooks Reynolds - Could we add a food truck to increase traffic outside kiosk?
 - Would pull from cafe sales and TWC would only get a portion of sales
 - Explored ice cream truck option
 - Was issue because there is no water where it would be located
 - Couldn't run air system in truck
 - Staffing issues
 - Major feedback delays - TWC would ask questions and the vendor did not respond quickly
- Hillarie Logan-Dechene - Finding summer employees has been an issue as the season is so short
 - Stanley Rumbough - Suggested Paul Smith's College (PSC) students - they leave in May

2020 Budget Approval

Discussion: A motion to adopt the 2020 budget as presented was unanimously approved.

Lynn Fox motion, Linda Rosenstock second

V. Development Report

Discussion: Hillarie Logan-Dechene began her report by providing the following brief overview of 2019 membership :

- Was a recovery and stabilization year
- New members increased despite slight attendance decline as a result of better staff training and message reinforcement

- Summer members renewed at higher rates in 2019 which emphasizes the need for increased member involvement during the shoulder season

Operating Support and Overall Philanthropy

Discussion: Hillarie took a few minutes to express the importance of Development Events stating that there had been 18 Development/Membership events in 2019. Stephanie shared the sentiment stating that it was important to attend events as you may make a really great contact. Hillarie then thanked all for attending and hosting.

Another area that Hillarie discussed was Board involvement in the Take Five program stating that involvement had been amazing. She shared a copy of a postcard that someone had sent to Board member Ginny Valkenburgh where they had increased their annual giving in response to a note that Ginny had sent.

Fundraising Overview

Discussion: Hillarie then shared the following regarding fundraising:

- Overall it was a very good year
- Operating support is over budget and ahead of last year
- Gifts, grants and pledges over \$3.35 million in a non-campaign year

Bequest and Endowment Giving - Linda Vaughan Society (LVS)

- Active members - 69 = \$6,049,016+
- New intentions - 8 = \$176,502+
- Realized - 4 = \$588,486
- In Probate - 2 = \$128,692

Market NY Grant

- Until endowment grows, these grants are so important to us
- \$366,300 for two years (\$180,000 +/- per year = Get Outside - programming & marketing costs
- Grant application requires us to meet proof points

Development Takeaways

- Grants will play major role in operating model
- Board "Take Five" involvement matters
- Membership relies on active promotion and year round member events
- Having a special appeal increases results - Obie Clifford Fund, Intern House

VI. Marketing and Program Update

Discussion: Hillarie Logan-Dechene then provided a brief marketing and program update.

Marketing

- Team monitored results carefully
- Pivoted in July
- Reversed trend with new strategy
- Used a November MacDonal Foundation grant to prototype and accelerate Get Outside - Winter Wild Walk
- Winter activities such as Ice fishing on pond exceeded expectations
 - Stan Rumbough mentioned offering an admission discount for ice fishing derby participants.

New Programming

- Winter Weekends - already led to 26.6% increase in year over year (11/1 - 1/23).
- First to Fall - custom messaging in Fall 2019 was a success.
- Continue to position region as first place in New York State to see fall colors and TWC as the ideal place to experience foliage.
- Backyard exhibit and film coming for next summer
- Thematic programming centered around outdoor recreation.

Youth Climate Program

- Rick Godin and Nick Gunn produced a video update with Jen Kretser
- Been working on this for about a year with Youth Climate Summit (YCS) team
- All materials, usage agreement, tool kit are updated and available in a dedicated section of the TWC website.
- Discussion regarding how materials will be used and how that is all tracked.
- Ginny Valkenburgh encouraged all to attend at least one YCS in person so that they are better prepared to explain it to others.

Nancy Simpkins then called for an Executive Session.

VII. Upcoming 2020 Meeting Dates

Monday, April 20, 2020 (NYC) - Full Day Meeting (Location TBD)

Friday, July 10, 2020 (TWC)

Friday, October 9, 2020 (TWC)

Monday, January 25, 2021 (NYC) (Location TBD)