

**BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING MINUTES**  
**THE WILD CENTER**  
**July 7, 2014 – The Wild Center, Tupper Lake**  
**1:00 PM – 5:00 PM**

**Board Present:**

Paul Alioto, Tom Aydelotte, Joe Beck, Michael Bettmann, Lynn Birdsong, Obie Clifford, John Colston, Amy Elrod, Connie Ferguson, Lynn Fox, Charles Frenette, Rick Godin, Sally Hart, Mike Hunsinger, Dave Johnson, Thomas Jorling, Peter Kindler, Betsy Lowe, Rich Malloch, Paul Maroun, Jack Ryder, James Schoff, Nancy Simpkins, Dan Sullivan, Charles Svenson, and Karen Thomas.

**Advisory Board Present:**

Barbara Grose, Gary Hartwick, Carl Shedd, and Eugene Zeltmann

**Board/Advisory Board/Staff Present via Web Ex:** Nancy Howard, John Huwiler, and Chris McFadden,

**Board Absent:** Robert Friedman, Claire Leonardi, Sandra Strader, and Joel Treisman.

**Staff/Consultants Present:** Katherine Alexander, Marci Bencze, Hillarie Logan-Dechene, Robin Ellis, Howard Fish, Jen Kretser, Bob Kronenberger, and Stephanie Ratcliffe.

**Welcome**

**Discussion:** Lynn Birdsong called the meeting to order at 1:10 pm. He took a moment to thank all who were participating in person as well as via Web Ex. He then congratulated all who were involved in the creation of the new Moments exhibit which was done internally by staff. He stated that they did an amazing job and that it was extremely well done. He also thanked Board member Rich Malloch and Hearst Business Media for underwriting the exhibit as well as the reception that would take place that evening.

Lynn also mentioned that Board member Dan Sullivan had recently moved to Minnesota and would be moving from the Board to the Advisory Board effective this meeting. Lynn took a moment to thank Dan for his dedicated service to The Wild Center.

Jen Kretser, Director of Programs, then took a few minutes to introduce five of the ten summer interns:

- **Emily Nestlerode** – She is a graduate of Penn State University. Emily is the project manager for the summer canoe program, family art and nature program, common core, Flavorfest and a number of other things. She stated that she is thankful for this opportunity.

- Zoe Tessler – Currently attending Hamilton College, Zoe is a Summer Naturalist and is project manager for Buzzfest. She is also working on doing photography with Rick Godin.
- Emily Bradshaw – Currently attending St. Lawrence University, Emily is a Summer Naturalist and is working on various programs as well as helping out in animal care.
- Kristen Balschut - She is a graduate of SUNY Geneseo. She has enjoyed the opportunity to connect with young people. Kristen is a Summer Naturalist and is currently working on the Moments exhibit.
- Emlyn Crocker – Currently attending St. Lawrence University, Emlyn is a Summer Naturalist who is also helping out in Animal Care. She is currently working on Breakfast with Animal Friends as well as The Pines natural play area.

**I. Approval of Minutes**

Discussion: Minutes of the April 7, 2014 meeting were unanimously approved. *Tom Jorling motion, Nancy Simpkins second.*

Action: N/A

**II. Report from the President**

Discussion: Lynn Birdsong began by sharing the top priorities of The Wild Center for 2014:

- The completion of Wild Walk.
- Complete Annual Fund and Campaign fundraising and exceed goals.
- Financial Sustainability – He stated that the work of the committee is a priority and what they are doing is very important to the future of The Wild Center.

He then stated that another important priority is to get Wild Walk off to an amazing start.

Lynn then took a few moments to share some fun wildlife stories from his recent relocation to Colorado. He shared a photo of a prairie rattlesnake that was ready to strike, a photo of a deer that showed up on his front walk to welcome him to the neighborhood and a photo of about 30,000 honey bees that had taken over and set up a comb.

**III. Report from the Director**

Discussion: Stephanie Ratcliffe began by sharing the following things that had taken place since the April Board meeting:

- Hillarie attended Governor Cuomo’s second annual Tourism Summit at the American Museum of Natural History. She was invited to sit at the table with the Governor as well as the New York State Tourism Community.
- Received the Museum Association of New York (MANY) Award of Merit as well as an Innovation in Interpretation Award for the Whiteface Mountain Exhibit.
- Maple – 81 families, 16 classes from the Elementary School (all of the K-4), 150 gallons of syrup. Also, daily public programs for visitors during the maple season, maple exhibit in lean-to, and planning a story telling workshop to capture important stories about the connection to nature. Keep an eye on the lean-to, a maple focused exhibit is being installed in the near future.
- Moments Exhibit – Stephanie stated that she can’t wait for all to observe what is going on in that space.
- Electric Car Charging Station - Dave St. Onge installed the wiring for the charging station. Had a young couple from the Albany area stop by and charge their car. May look at grant opportunities to make station nicer. Gene Zeltmann suggested contacting the owner of Tesla, an electric car manufacturer about funding opportunities.
- Video Drone – Working with Adirondack Gives to raise money to fund a video drone to get footage of the Adirondacks. Almost to goal - \$2,000 raised towards \$3,000 goal.
- Town Park Sunset Cam – Uses TWC’s broadband connection.
- Buzzfest 2014 – Was an amazing day, had a great turnout.

#### **IV. Governance-Sustainability Committee Update**

Discussion: Lynn Fox began by stating that she would catch all up on the work of the Sustainability Committee and shared the following:

- Chris McFadden has committed a lot of time to the project and work will continue this summer.
- The committee is comprised of the following Board/Staff members – Lynn Birdsong, Joe Beck, Charlie Frenette, Chris McFadden, Lynn Fox, Stephanie Ratcliffe, Bob Kronenberger and Hillarie Logan-Dechene.
- Stephanie Ratcliffe sent a draft charter out to Board members on 5/9/14 and again in late May. She said that it “describes goals and a process designed to study our current financial state” and that many Board members will be involved in various sub-projects.
- Need to think long and hard about the effectiveness of our mission.
- They are using a process to narrow their focus and plan for new resources.
- The initial work of the committee is being done in phases

Board Feedback on the charter:

- Several calls were made and found a consistently positive response. All in all we have a Board that is comfortable with project and willing to help.
- When asked about key concerns or potential issues, one member expressed concern about revisiting the mission; one emphasized the need to define our focus though said it does not have to be narrow; one wondered if we are moving a bit from our core, and there were of course comments on the need for new resources.

Initial Work:

- We are in Phase I of the project and are moving through the four elements we defined in the work plan, with the current focus on the first two elements.

There are the four elements that were defined in the work plan:

- Element A: Ad Hoc Task Forces (Stephanie) – Pricing committee has a report for the board, Building and Grounds has put together excellent data that will be shared, Gala and advancement events are being formed under Hillarie for work this summer, and HR will work this summer or fall.
- Element B: Develop a long-term financial framework – Joe and Bob will report on this.
- Element C: Conduct a strategic assessment of The Wild Center (Chris and Stephanie) – This is the review of the 2009 strategic plan and we need to update the work plan to move the date of the initial report from July to October.
- Element D: Conduct a Marketing and Brand assessment (Charlie) – Charlie's first project is to decompose the current marketing budget to assess what we are currently spending and where.

Next Steps:

- The committee will ask for comments and questions to be directed to the co-chairs and ad hoc task force chairs as appropriate. Work will continue over the summer and we will provide follow up reports.
- We are planning an extended board meeting in October and will create a retreat format for discussion of Phase I findings. Please plan to be at TWC all day on October 10.

**Pricing**

Bob Kronenberger then gave a report on the work of the Pricing committee and shared the following recommendations:

- It was proposed that most pricing be raised at the beginning of May 2015.

- There would be seasonal pricing (different ticket prices for May-Oct when Wild Walk is open)
- There would be a ticketing booth near entrance to Wild Walk.
- Increased revenue will be incorporated into financial modeling.
- There would be a change in age groups, children ages 5 and under would be free as opposed to 3 and under and the adult pricing would begin at age 18 instead of age 15.

There was then much discussion about pricing and how it will affect break even if attendance doesn't increase with the addition of Wild Walk.

Bob also reported that providing access for all income levels was a major priority of the team. He then shared the following points that show how we practice that:

- Two free days a year in the spring, fall or winter.
- Low cost days (i.e. \$5/days).
- The past two years we have been working with the library system in a three county region to offer a free pass that can be checked out. This program is open to all but primarily serves year-round residents because they hear about it. (491 passes used - \$6163)
- All LP Quinn students and classes have free use of the museum at any time. A few weeks ago, 600 LP Quinn students and parents came to the museum for an evening event that showcased the student's work.
- All New York State Teachers are free.

Betsy Lowe asked if we would be able to figure out the number of youth, etc. that come in based on the price changes. Stephanie Ratcliffe stated that The Wild Center is lucky in the science museum world to have as many adults who come on their own without children as we do. She said that we are being perceived as providing higher intellectual content.

### **Building and Grounds**

Michael Hunsinger then gave a brief report on the work of the Building and Grounds committee. He stated that the group had initially come together in October of 2012 saying that the museum is getting older by the day. He said that they have been working together to create a comprehensive ten year plan. A spreadsheet has been created that shows all of the work that needs to be completed throughout the museum as well as the grounds along with cost estimates to complete all of the work. The list will be discussed at an upcoming meeting of the committee that will take place on July 17, 2014. Stephanie Ratcliffe stated that it is possible that B & G will become a standing committee and that all building and grounds expenses would end up in the main budget.

Barbara Grose asked if there have been any major problems overall so far with the building that hadn't been planned on. Stephanie stated that the bridge around the pond had been replaced, and theater equipment was aging. She said that the staining of the building had been done but was not a surprise expense. Rick Godin said that there were many things that were starting to age (i.e. projectors, wifi access points). Stephanie also mentioned that the permanent exhibits would be in need of work in the near future. Rich Malloch asked whether or not there was a depreciation line for aging equipment. Bob Kronenberger stated that there was no reserve for funding depreciation at this time.

### **Financial Modeling**

Joe Beck stated that the committee had looked at our programs and developed a model to help determine our capital needs and encouraged all Board members to give their thoughts on what other areas should be modeled. He stated that the museum needed to re-invest in who it was every 3, 5 or 7 years and that he was encouraged to see funds in the restricted endowment. He also stated that the museum should always be conscious of revenue and expenses.

Lynn Birdsong asked how far along the committee was in creating a base case. Joe Beck said that they should be ready anytime to create a base case.

Chris McFadden stated that it had been a great discussion and thanked all. He said that he was thrilled by the level of involvement by Board members and he felt that we were on the right path to developing some useful framework in the near future.

Charlie Frenette stated that during the base case phase they would start with a baseline and then make an assessment about what areas were overfunded or underfunded. He said that we needed to figure out where best to utilize funds in budget. He also said that it was very important to open more doors to get people to invest in The Wild Center.

Lynn Birdsong took a moment to thank all for the great work of each committee. Lynn Fox stated that there would be a long discussion at the upcoming 10/10/14 Board meeting. Stephanie Ratcliffe took a moment to remind everyone that they should hold the entire day for a retreat style meeting.

Gene Zeltmann stated that numbers seem to be declining and said that we needed to figure out how to use marketing to get more people in the door. There was then a brief discussion regarding overall admission numbers.

### **V. Wild Walk Update**

Discussion: Stephanie Ratcliffe began by asking Board members in attendance if they had been on the Wild Walk site yet. She reported that to date the project was on time and on budget and that the snag was starting to come together. Nancy Simpkins asked if the construction process could someone be recorded.

Rick Godin said that transformative photos were being taken and that there would eventually be a construction cam installed. Stephanie stated that the structure would be up by the time snow flies and exhibitry would be installed in the Spring.

Tom Aydelotte then took a few minutes to talk about Wild Walk Marketing. First, he called on Howard Fish who stated that the objective was “to convince targeted audiences to increase their involvement with The Wild Center, whether that is to visit, advocate for, begin to support or increase their support and enthusiasm for the Center. Howard then shared the following seven assumptions that had influenced planning for Wild Walk :

- We need to raise more income from new sources to support The Wild Center, therefore, the plan needs to place attracting funders in addition to incremental visitation as one of its primary goals.
- Our first season will only be ten weeks long. The plan must consciously impact 2016/2017, therefore, we need to use Wild Walk to create long-term interest and avoid the idea it is something to “see” once and check off a list.
- We cannot market Wild Walk as a “new ride” or it will put us on an unsustainable course where we need to make regular “new ride” investments to maintain revenue streams, therefore, we need to position Wild Walk as an extension of an already amazing list of achievements. The marketing plan will focus on communicating the exciting ideas in The Wild Center mission and brand positioning.
- We need to focus our energy in order to be effective, therefore, we will limit the types and geographic range of our effort.
- We will conduct consumer research that will inform our thinking, therefore, we will develop a plan based on the best understanding of what people think or do not think of The Wild Center.
- Public Relations has the greatest potential to leverage our resources, therefore, we will invest heavily in PR activities to extend our messages. Given a reliance on free media to deliver our messaging, and on a larger public relations campaign to spread the word, it will be especially important that we master our narrative, this will be a complex undertaking.
- Marketing is an investment to help shape opinion, shift attitudes and change behaviors, therefore, we will develop a plan to express and deliver that story in a manner powerful enough to cause those shifts.

Tom then took some time to set the stage for the launch of Wild Walk in July 2015. He began by reminding all in attendance of the origins of the initial thinking which has since progressed to being on the cusp of launching the most important development second only to the opening of TWC ten years ago. He stated that three years ago, in July 2011,

he presented the initial thinking behind what was at the time called “The Wild Center, Chapter 2”. He then shared a few of the thoughts that he shared at that time:

- The Wild Center is a living institution/idea. It is alive and constantly evolving. The structure is not a new “exhibit”. Exhibits tend to be perceived as inert and inanimate.
- The structure is a literal extension of the life of The Wild Center. It is a demonstration of the fact that The Wild Center is a living entity.
- It is a necessity to take The Wild Center outdoors via the new structure to demonstrate that The Wild Center is a living institution.
- It is not so much that The Wild Center “needs” another structure. It is more that The Wild Center “must have” the structure to extend and maximize the fundamental idea of the Wild Center.

Tom then stated that it is imperative that the launch of Wild Walk be supported with a comprehensive, synergistic, and impactful marketing effort and said that Stephanie and the project team are creating exciting content that will elicit “wow” reactions from our visitors and supporters. He also said that Albany has rewarded our efforts with a significant grant and we must show results. He then said that we must excite our visitors and longtime and potentially new supporters and communicate the excitement with energy, that each will experience at Wild Walk. Launching Wild Walk has the potential to be the most exciting series of events in the entire Adirondacks for the next few years. It is the moment when all the thought and hard work which has gone into the creation of Wild Walk will come to real life and generate exceptional excitement and positive long term business results.

Tom then spoke about what the potential cost of Wild Walk marketing will be stating that at the moment, it is estimated that the minimum cost would be \$250,000 - \$275,000, and the upper level cost would be about \$450,000, or so. He said that included in the “upper level” cost would be a “contingency” which would permit us to capitalize on unanticipated opportunities if/as they might come along. The majority of these funds will be in the fiscal 2015 budget and will be addressed at a future date. He stated that it is not an issue to be solved at this meeting and that separate discussions will be held with the staff, finance and sustainability committees. He said that funds will need to be spent this Fall to execute the Wild Walk launch effort and that the approximate amount needed would be \$50,000 to \$75,000 saying that these funds should not be considered a “cost” but as a much needed “investment” to support a strong marketing plan that will help ensure the success of Wild Walk and contribute to the long term growth, health and sustainability of The Wild Center.

There was then much discussion regarding programming, etc. for Wild Walk. Paul Alioto asked if programs had been created yet and Howard Fish said that a program meeting has been scheduled to discuss possibilities. Paul Maroun stated that there might be an exceptional opportunity to tag onto the Adirondack Club and Resort (ACR) project.

Karen Thomas stated that it would be great if there was a tag line that people could start using so that they can begin the conversation with everyone that they talk to about Wild Walk.

## **VI. Financial Report**

Discussion: Bob Kronenberger went over the dashboard that was provided in the packet and shared the following:

- Overall revenue for May YTD are 5% above budget and 18% higher than 2003.
- Admission and program revenues are down 1% from last yr. but 2% over budget. Actual May YTD attendance is down 4% from last year (and paid attendance is down 13%).
- Contributions are \$113,000 (or 21%) over budget and \$109,000 more than last year through May. Board designated support is \$100 through May vs. \$414,000 last year. Wild Walk contributions received year to date are \$10,000.
- Membership revenues are 31% above budget and above last year. The number of active members at the end of June 2014 were 2713 vs. 2811 in June 2013.
- Store, café and facility rental revenues are below budget, but ahead of last year.
- Actual YTD expenses are \$137,000 under budget. Approximately 60% or \$82,000 of this reduced spending has been deferred until later in the year.
- Salaries and benefits are right on budget and 1% over last year.
- Consulting fees are \$14,000 below budget and \$10,000 less than last year.
- Maintenance and supplies are \$53,000 below budget and \$40,000 less than last year. About \$10,000 has been deferred until later this year for the completion of the rainbow bridge repairs.
- Utilities are \$9,000 over budget (and \$17,000 more than last year) primarily due to higher electric rates.
- Other costs below budget relate to campaign expenses. Budgeted costs of \$45,000 for printing and postage for Wild Walk campaign mailing have been deferred until later this year.
- As expected through May of this year we are running at a deficit. This is consistent with our budget and historical operations. The actual YTD operating deficit is \$183,000 less than budget and \$228,000 less than last year, primarily due to memorial contributions and lower expenses.

Bob also handed out a monthly financial dashboard. John Huwiler stated that when they created the dashboard they tried to segregate regular operating expenses from fundraising operating expenses. Bob reported that they had made a repayment towards

the term loan with money that had been received and that there was still \$161,000 cash in the pledge account to make payments. John Huwiler reported that the line of credit was at \$340,000 at the end of June. Lynn Birdsong stated that it was great to have a monthly snapshot of finances.

Lynn Birdsong mentioned that at the beginning of the year the Finance Committee took \$300,000 out of index funds to create some liquidity and that we have almost made the money back. Tom Jorling stated that it might be helpful to provide year over year data to help understand the cycle. Bob Kronenberger stated that more detailed data is provided to the Finance Committee. Tom asked if those numbers could be provided to the full Board.

## **VII. Development/Campaign Report**

Discussion: Karen Thomas began by stating that we are in the fourth year of the campaign and in the next 18 months, the two most important things to focus on are Wild Walk and meeting annual fund goals. She reported that there had been a couple of events recently, one hosted by Nancy Simpkins, Jack Ryder and Charlie Frenette at Grindstone Bay and one at the home of Connie Ferguson in Florida that had been successful. She stated that there would be more events over the summer as well to help raise money as well as new friends of The Wild Center. Lynn Birdsong stated that everyone has been incredibly generous and that the Grindstone Bay party was amazing. Hillarie Logan-Dechene stated that she would follow up with the co-hosts of the event and find out who they spoke with and what are the next steps to start to develop relationships with them.

Hillarie Logan-Dechene then gave a membership update and shared the following:

- Ad hoc membership committee recommendations have been implemented
- Increased emphasis on Customer Service – second year of expanded training and front desk staff training and incentive
- All visitors are potential members
- All staff embracing the need to grow membership
- Working toward a new member goal of 800 – At 25% of goal, capture rate is up, membership revenue is up 14% as of June 30

Hillarie also shared some facts and answered some frequently asked questions about the campaign:

- What is our Campaign goal? – Board approved a \$20 million campaign goal
- What is our full need? - \$24 million. To fully fund Wild Walk and the Annual Operating budgets for both 2014 and 2015 we need to raise a total of \$5.7 million in 17 months.

- How do we get there? – Find new friends, get together with old and new friends and ask friends to invest.

Hillarie then stated that national giving in 2013 had rebound by 3% and was at the highest it has been since the 2009 Great Recession. She then took a few moments to talk about the second year of the public phase of the Campaign which she called the “sprint to the goal line”. She said that it involves all types of fundraising from direct mail to face-to-face meetings, and large and small scale events. It only has two objectives, make the goal and reach the broadest constituency. She also shared the following ways in which people can help:

- Identify new friends, gather information, provide introduction and access
- Cultivate by being an ambassador
- Attend and host events
- Solicit
- Thank and steward

Hillarie then shared a list of 2014 Development events as well as a list of key future dates:

**Trustee Hosted**

- Vero Beach – 3/28
- Tupper Lake – 7/6
- Lake Placid – 7/16
- Upper Saranac – 7/21
- Rye/Greenwich – Fall

**At TWC**

- Member Reception – 6/25
- Patorn’s Circle – 7/7
- Sinfonietta #1 – 7/17
- Sinfonietta #2 – 8/7
- ALCA @ TWC – 8/15
- Wings – 8/16

**In Planning**

- Eagle Crag Lake – 8/9
- Wild Walk Opening – July 4, 2015
- Victory Celebration – TBD

Nancy Simpkins then gave a brief report-out on the Gala. She stated that the consensus was that there should be one in 2016 to celebrate ten years of accomplishments and finish the campaign. If it was held in New York City it would likely raise a lot of money.

Katherine Alexander handed out save the date cards with potential 2016 dates for a gala in New York City and asked Board members to return them to her as soon as possible.

**XI. Executive Session**

Discussion: There was a discussion about the potential purchase of the Klueck property. Lynn Birdsong took a moment to recount the history stating that the last offer to the Klueck's was \$600,000 in October of 2012. At the time, pledges were solicited over and above (incremental?). Ella Klueck passed away in May of this year. Since then there has been conversation with the Klueck's daughter, Liz Taylor. The Finance Committee met and gave the okay to offer \$600,000 for the property as supported by a motion that was unanimously approved at the July 9, 2012 Board meeting to authorize the Executive Committee to negotiate in good faith with Mrs. Ella Klueck to pursue the property and execute at a price agreeable to the board.

Betsy Lowe recently met with Liz Taylor in Albany, NY and Liz raised the topic that Obie's last offer was "about right". Betsy walked the property with Liz on Sunday, June 29. In subsequent conversation, Betsy asked her if she would accept \$600,000.

Action: A motion to approve Chairman Obie Clifford and his designees to negotiate an offer of \$600,000 for the Klueck property under standard terms and conditions was unanimously approved.

*Joe Beck motion, Jim Schoff second.*

It was then discussed that staff should draft a framing message for community and staff regarding the purchase of the Klueck property.

**XII. Upcoming 2014 Meeting Dates**

Friday, October 10, 2014 (TWC)