

**BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING MINUTES**  
**THE WILD CENTER**  
**October 6, 2011 – The Wild Center, Tupper Lake**  
**1:00 PM – 5:00 PM**

**Board Present:**

Paul Alioto, Tom Aydelotte, Joe Beck (via WebEx), Michael Bettmann, Lynn Birdsong, Obie Clifford, John Colston, Charlie Frenette (via WebEx), Rick Godin, Nancy Howard, Mike Hunsinger, Bill Hutchens, Dave Johnson, Peter Kindler, Betsy Lowe, Paul Maroun, Chris McFadden (via WebEx), Nancy Simpkins, Sandra Strader, Charles Svenson, and Karen Thomas.

**Board Absent:**

Jim Carr, Amy Elrod, Robert Friedman, Thomas Jorling, Kevin Keane, Claire Leonardi, Steve Potter, and Dan Sullivan.

**Advisory Board Present:**

Tim Barnett, Sally Hart, Gary Hartwick, Jack Ryder, and Ross Whaley.

**Staff/Consultants Present:** Marci Bencze, Hillarie Logan-Dechene, Howard Fish, Jen Kretser, Bob Kronenberger, Stephanie Ratcliffe and Tracy Thomas.

**I. Welcome**

Discussion: Lynn Birdsong called the meeting to order and thanked all board members for being there. He stated that there was nothing better than waking up to fresh pine needles and fog on the lake.

Lynn then reported that Bill Grabe had recently joined the Advisory Board per Obie Clifford.

Action: N/A

**II. Approval of Minutes**

Discussion: Lynn stated that amendments to the July 5 minutes needed to be made and that they would not be approved until the January meeting.

Action: Minutes of both meetings to be approved at the January 9 meeting.

**III. Reports from the President and Executive Director**

Discussion: Lynn reported on the recent \$2.4m gift from Linda Vaughan and stated that it was a remarkable day with a luncheon provided by Hillarie Logan-Dechene and attended by staff of TWC, and Adirondack Museum as well as Ms. Vaughan's niece. There was discussion regarding whether the gift was restricted or unrestricted. Lynn stated that it was unrestricted and would go into

the board designated endowment per our policy. He said that the gift enables the museum to do a number of things in the strategic plan and that it also gives the ability to invest in some new exhibitry.

Lynn then spoke about the summer which he stated was one of the nicest on record and said this encouraged people to get outside and enjoy some of the museum's fests. He reported that the fests were wildly successful. He also reported on some of the other events that took place this summer stating that the Patron Circle reception that was held at the Keane's was well attended by a remarkable group of the museum's friends.

He also spoke about the transformation of the museum café/kitchen by new café manager Phil Smith saying that he has received many compliments.

Lynn wrapped up his report by stating that he would be seeking feedback regarding the new schedule of board meetings saying that the old schedule of July and August was too close and that we were experimenting with an October meeting.

Stephanie Ratcliffe then gave a brief report to board members. She reminded those in attendance about the upcoming Featherfest as well as Oktupperfest that would take place at Big Tupper Ski Area. She reported that TWC had been working closely with others in the community to co-promote events. She also commented on the recent Barncast of the book "The Dirty Life" stating that it was extremely successful and there was the possibility of doing it again in the future.

She also discussed the fact that the museum had formed an ad-hoc committee to look at the possibility of producing maple as a potential revenue stream.

Stephanie and Sally Hart also reported on the fourth Finland trip. Stephanie said the exchange grew from the museum's climate work and that it would help to extend what the museum knows about climate change. Sally gave board members a brief overview of the trip. Tom Aydelotte asked how we could maximize the amount of PR the museum gets from this story. Stephanie said that amplification is very important. Gary Hartwick asked if there would be a final report on the exchange and Stephanie stated that there would be and that an evaluator was already working on it. Michael Bettmann stated that this might be just the right story for the Associated Press.

Action: N/A

#### **IV. Current Visitor Studies**

Discussion: Stephanie reported that Tracy Thomas had mentored an intern to count and interview visitors during counting week.

Action: An economic impact study would be done.

#### **V. Science on a Sphere**

Discussion: Tracy Thomas began by giving a brief overview on what Science on a Sphere is and stated that since she gave the board briefing a year ago it was determined that it was the right “new move” for the museum to add new exhibitry.

Why The Wild Center? Tracy reported that out of 70 worldwide installations, none represent the northeast or the Adirondacks and stated that we could be telling a great story that is not being told. She explained that the sphere provides “real time” scientific data in an understandable way.

Tracy then spoke about the many ways that the new exhibit would benefit the museum:

- Place based programs connect local to global, global to local
- Can form a program immediately following a natural disaster
- Follow worldwide research on migration patterns
- It is a strategic fit
- Will keep The Wild Center experience new and fresh
- Will be a platform to explore learning beyond the museum’s walls
- Strengthen and build on current programs
- Allow for multiple connection points with New York State curriculum
- Exciting VTS opportunities

She reported that the cost of the system including installation was \$283,500 and that the installation would tentatively happen on or around May 7, 2012 with exhibit opening on 7/1/12.

There was then brief discussion about the exhibit. Stephanie stated that it would change the way people see the Adirondacks and their place in the world. Lynn said that it will add new dimensions to what the museum offers and Michael Hunsinger stated that it was a great testament to the donor, Miss Vaughan, and her feelings regarding education.

Board members were asked to permit the expenditure of approximately \$290,000 to ensure that the museum gets on the installation list for the upcoming year.

Action: It was recommended by the Finance Committee (and approved by the Board) that funds received from the Vaughan estate be made available for this exhibit so that it can be installed and open for the summer 2012 season.

## **VI. Financial Report**

Discussion: Robert Kronenberger presented the financial report to the Board. The report showed that operating revenues through the end of August are 22% below budget but 3% below 2010. He stated that the staff had done a terrific job controlling expenses. He reported that this year's plan was very ambitious and that financials have been reforecast based on experience through August. This forecast shows a possible \$258,000 shortfall depending on fund raising efforts through the end of the year.

Action: The Development staff has a very active and inclusive plan for the final three months of the year to help meet the museum's goals.

Discussion: Claire Leonardi has led the Finance and Investment Committee in a review of museum finances and the investment of its' growing endowment which took into account the existing loan obligation of The Wild Center and the need to invest in a new exhibit. The main goal is to support the museum's mission as well as its' long term financial health and viability. It was recommended that the board approve the following two expenditures to help with this:

- Invest in Science on a Sphere - \$290,000
- Pay down our existing loan - \$840,000

Action: The board unanimously approved both expenditures. *Bill Hutchens motion, Tom Aydelotte second.*

There were some slides shown that outline the investment considerations that have led to the current conservative endowment investment policy. Based on current and expected funds through the end of the year the endowment will stand at approximately \$3.5 million after the above two expenditures.

## **VII. Audit Report**

Discussion: Bill Hutchens reported that there had been a modest increase in the fee for the museum's independent auditor. He also reported that the committee had discussed auditor rotation and that they had decided to ask for an engagement partner from the same accounting firm. He stated that they had scheduled an account clearing for March 20, 2012 and once there is agreement on the financial statements they would be provided to the board. Lynn Birdsong thanked the committee for all of their work.

Action: N/A

### **VIII. Development/Campaign Report**

Discussion: Hillarie Logan-Dechene reminded board members about the importance of membership. She stated that the membership program is critical to connecting the museum to the community and that it also helps to broaden the donor base. She reported that membership has experienced a steady decline in participation and revenue over the last few years. While this pattern was originally anticipated it needs to be looked at with fresh eyes. The membership program needs to be taken to the next level so that it is on par with The Wild Center brand.

Hillarie stated that on the development front, there were only three months (86 days) left to raise \$1 million to meet the Annual Fund goal. She reported that the appeal schedule had been accelerated and that it had been segmented so that the appeals were more personalized. After a suggestion from Charles Svenson, Board members were invited to assist with calls to current and past donors. A list was circulated during the board meeting and Board members took calling assignments. Hillarie stated that the campaign is still in the quiet phase. She reported that total gifts and pledges to the campaign were now just over \$9.3 million, which included the Vaughan estate gifts which was an increase of \$2,048,455 since the July 5<sup>th</sup> board meeting. She stated that the top priority now was to secure gifts from the Board and Advisory Board.

Action: N/A

### **IX. The Wild Center Chapter 2**

Discussion: Tom Aydelotte and a task force consisting of Claire Leonardi, Karen Thomas, Chris McFadden, Howard Fish and Clifford Hart reported at the July board meeting on new conceptual plans for the Skytower project. The exciting new plan was referred to as “The Wild Center Chapter 2”. At the July meeting the group was tasked with continuing their good work and coming up with a name for the project. The first step in that process was to develop a naming strategy. The committee created and recommended a “working name”. The recommended working name is “WILD WALK”. Tom Aydelotte presented some rough sketches showing how the name could be used. The Board was very enthusiastic about the new working name as well as the sketches that they saw. All were in agreement that ‘WILD WALK’ could be used in the campaign. Lynn Birdsong stated that the next step is for the group to develop a plan through completion, with a timeline to be developed and also what the cost will be to complete it.

Stephanie Ratcliffe stated that the APA permit needed to be renewed. She also reported that the museum has retained the services of HOK (Hellmuth, Obata and Kassabaum), Chip Reay and Bill Palmer who are exploring the possibility of increasing the size of the structure, etc. and that the process is underway. She stated that she will keep the board updated.

Action: N/A

**X. Marketing/Web Content**

Discussion: Howard Fish gave a brief presentation to board members on areas of progress in strategic plan driven areas on the web. He reported that he has begun to create and test online mission based content and that there has been a very strong response from users. The new content areas show that the museum can effectively drive its mission to offsite audiences. One example of that was the recent Barncast from Essex Farm where The Wild Center had cameras and staff on site reporting to an online audience. The group of viewers included people who have never visited the museum. He said with the creation of the online guide to the Adirondacks, "46 Wonders", it will be the number one guide to seeing nature in the Adirondacks. He stated that this is an example of using the web to fulfill the mission. He also spoke regarding the use of the Google ads grant in helping to deliver the museums strategic goal of creating deeper and broader goals, distributing mission based work on the web and growing The Wild Center's web audiences proactively for a low cost. The museum is currently spending the entire grant allowance of \$10,000/month. The ultimate goal is to continue to expand the number of ads so that we can apply for additional grant funds.

Action: N/A

**XI. Year of the Forest Resolution**

Discussion: Betsy Lowe reported to board members that the United Nations General Assembly had declared 2011 the International Year of the Forest and then gave some background information. She then asked board members for a Wild Center resolution in support of this declaration.

Action: A motion was unanimously approved to adopt The Wild Center's resolution in support of the 2011 International Year of the Forests. *Michael Bettmann motion, Nancy Simpkins second.*

Betsy Lowe also mentioned that she would make sure that the resolution was put on the United Nations website.

**XII. Presentation in Honor of Diana Fortune**

Discussion: Lynn Birdsong gave a brief background on Diana Fortune's history with The Wild Center. He stated that she was the first employee hired by Betsy Lowe to help make Betsy's dream a reality. He mentioned that she was the first Director of Development and that she has worked tirelessly from January of 2000 through her departure in September 2011. He then asked Betsy Lowe to read a proclamation in honor of Diana and asked Board members to pass the resolution honoring Diana Fortune for her over eleven years of dedicated service to The

Wild Center as Director of Development through its founding and early years. Diana was also presented with a beautiful painting done by her husband, artist Tim Fortune, that would soon hang outside the Board room.

Action: The resolution was unanimously adopted to honor Diana Fortune for her service to The Wild Center. *Michael Bettmann motion, Nancy Simpkins second.*

**XIII. Executive Session**

**XIV. Upcoming 2011/2012 Meeting Dates**

- January 9, 2012 – New York City
- April 2, 2012 – New York City
- July 9, 2012 – The Wild Center
- October 4, 2012 – The Wild Center

**XV. Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 5:30 pm and board members made their way to the Great Hall where they enjoyed a special maple themed dinner prepared by Wild Center chef, Phil Smith. Stephanie Ratcliffe then outlined the museum's intentions to do maple sugaring on site from locally sourced sap. The syrup would be branded and sold for the benefit of The Wild Center.