



MINUTES

WILD CENTER OCTOBER 2023 BOARD OF TRUSTEE MEETING

The Wild Center, Tupper Lake, NY - Friday, October 6, 2023

1:00 - 4:00 pm - Hybrid: in-person at TWC and via Zoom

Trustees Present in person: Karen Thomas, Board Chair, Linda Rosenstock, Vice-Chair, Jack Ryder, Vice-Chair, Virginia Valkenburgh, Secretary, Lee Bailey, Michael Bettmann, George Cigale, David Kanietakeron Fadden, Rick Godin, Sally Hart, Michael Hunsinger, Ben Ireland, Betsy Lowe, Pamela Matt, Jim Schoff, Nancy Simpkins, Emeritus Trustee

Advisory Board Members Present in Person: Martha Bullock, AB Chair, Lynn Fox, Ross Whaley

Trustees present Virtual: Joseph Beck, Treasurer, Paul Alioto, Lynn Birdsong, Trustee Emeritus, Terry Birdsong, Larry Clifford, Ed Forbes, Robin Gosnell, Nancy Howard, Nicky Hylton-Patterson, Paul Maroun, Juan Rodriguez, Meadow Rutenbar, Joel Treisman

Advisory Board Members Present Virtual: Allison Birdsong, Emily Hunt Forbes, Stanley Rumbough, Curt Stager

Staff Present: Stephanie Ratcliffe, Hillarie Logan-Dechene, Jen Kretser (virtual), Robert Kronenberger, Ruth Burnell, Libby Clark, Lillian Dechene, Robin Ellis, and Sara Paula

Outside Consultants: Tony Sielbert, Jennie Sielbert (virtual)

Meet Americorps Members: Board Chair Karen Thomas and Board Members welcomed our new Americorps members. We have eight full time members who will be serving a total of 1700 hours through next August. There will be four additional half-time members beginning intermittently and will be serving 900 hours over the course of their time here.

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Karen Thomas formally called the meeting to order at 1:07 pm

Karen asked for a motion to approve the June Minutes. ***Motion by M. Bettmann. Was duly seconded by S. Hart and unanimously approved.***

Board Chair Report - Karen then offered her Board Chair Report. She began with welcome to new Advisory board member Curt Stager. She then outlined key conversations to be discussed today:

- We are starting Phase 1 of the New Trail construction on Monday, October 9.
 - Peter and Hela Kindler have very generously expanded their support with a new gift towards funding Phase 2 of this project.

- She thanked board members who went in the lift to see an overhead view of the new trail and all of the natural systems. She recommended and gave out copies of the book: Fen, Bogs, and Swamps by Annie Proulx.
- Karen shared her positive experiences participating in the Appreciative Inquiry Community Listening session. Guest consultants from Spartina will offer a comprehensive look at the community listening sessions.
- She reported that the Pre-Campaign Planning Group interviewed and hired philanthropic counsel to facilitate a feasibility study.
- Karen then remarked on the exciting Climate Program initiatives. How we are expanding our reach with our Climate Program staff and new partnerships.
- Before turning the floor over to the Executive Director, she thanked the many Board Members who participated in the lengthy Convening Center briefing.

Executive Director Report - Stephanie Ratcliffe then offered her report, starting with a New Trail Update. She noted that with the generous new gift from the Kindlers, the trail will now loop instead of needing to doubleback as it was previously planned. At the peninsula of the new trail, there is an opportunity to create some type of elevated overlook for visitors to see a birds eye view of the fen, the river, and the trail. If this is something the board deems important, we will explore design options and make a more formal presentation.

N. Simpkins, S. Hart, both commented that seeing this area from above, in the morning's lift experience, accentuated the experience and showed the importance of the interconnectedness of everything in those areas and would help with understanding the context of the area.

Stephanie then reported on the Net Zero Convening and Education Center briefing discussion and steps taken after Wednesday's meeting concerning the center. Immediate next actions include:

- Outlined next steps with Executive Committee
- Staff worked with architects and cost estimation identifying cost reduction options.
- Staff will identify a consultant to assist with the business modeling.

Generative Discussion - The Chair then invited Spartina Consultants to report on their work. With the help of the Spartina Consultants, we conducted four community listening sessions; two in person and two virtually with over 1,000 people invited to participate.

Karen asked Stephanie to read the moving introduction for which she began each session with. It is the story of the evolving growth of The Wild Center.

“Hard to believe that this past July 4th marked the beginning of our 17th year open to the public and in just a few years we will reach our 20th anniversary. As many of you know I began working at this museum three years before it opened, so this August I will be beginning my 21st year. I can tell you that the vision for the beginning was ambitious and inspiring and I was inspired to move my family to be a part of it. And now 20 years later I can look back on all our work and be amazed at how the original vision was achieved and from the very first day we opened, we have kept evolving and changing and continue to aspire to new goals and chase new ideas. On our opening day 17 years ago, we opened a new wonderful kind of science museum, but that was just the beginning. At the time we hadn't even begun to dream of an elevated walkway to take people into the treetops stand in an eagles nest and play in spider

web - we never dreamed of tapping trees in the community from LP Quinn to Tupper lake back yards to honor heritage of this place and learn about sugaring - we never dreamed of ice fishing on the pond (in fact we would say stay off the pond), we never dreamed of creating a place for our youngest visitors to build a stick fort, speaking of sticks, a place where we could all walk through a sculpture woven with twigs. And since that opening we have made new friends with our Haudenosaunee neighbors, and understand Native ways of knowing and perspectives about this special place. We never dreamed of a patch of woods where music comes from the trees and we had never dreamed of 13 years of important work of youth of the Adirondacks and literally all over the world to educate and take action on climate change.”

Tony and Jennie Silbert, from Spartina consulting then facilitated a Generative Session based on the Community Listening Session data and experiences. They led the board through an exercise to synthesize and understand the data that has come out of these community listening sessions.

They prompted Board Members to consider:

- What are the implications to the strategic framework?
- What else might we add based on the listening?
- Get consensus for next steps and action.

A video produced by Rick Godin was then shared. It offered testimony from community listening session participants.

Action: R. Burnell will share the video with the full board. Link can be found [here](#).

Trustees were asked to analyze the database individually and then meet in small groups to discuss general reactions. Takeaways from Board Members analyzing the data:

- Would be helpful to look at different perspectives from different generations as their views, behaviors, and insights are so different.
- Recommendation: Book entitled Generations: The Real Differences Between Gen Z, Millennials, Gen X, Boomers, and Silents—and What They Mean for America’s Future by Jean Twenge
- The Wild Center seems on track, with room to improve our online and virtual offerings.
- Outreach initiatives - both in person and via communications/marketing to “brag” more about what TWC is doing and its achievements
- Access and inclusivity: Consider offering discounted or free membership for locals, as it is expensive for locals.
- Focus on engaging teenagers and older youth outside of the classroom. What is the link between education and action and the link between education and fun?
- Partner more formally with local colleges - Paul Smiths, NCCC, St. Lawrence, Canton, Clarkson, and the SUNY network.
- TWC is looked at as an expert and a beacon in the community to attract and convene people. There are calls for more experiential experiences - hiking, forest safety, etc.
- Create a more formal pipeline for jobs and how to be a connector for people looking for jobs in the green space
- Identify new programming to bring people back more often.
- Create a linkedin for the Youth Climate Program and build the YCP advisory board.

Questions and ideas that that arose:

- How do we manage expectations?

- What do we do as a formal response to this?
- How do we hear from people not in our community?
- What do we hear from our social media influence?
- Explore free admission for everyone under the age of 21 or an equivalent idea to make it more accessible.
- Are there options for a local family membership based on zip code for the tri-lakes area.
- Access and inclusivity: how do we do this for locals, but also access for visually impaired, Deaf/hard of hearing, mobility, etc. While this shows up in our values, it is not shown in our framework.
- Need to be clear and intentional with outlining our convening and outreach goals and how we will achieve them
- Consider outsourcing and collaborating with other experts to help bridge the gap between staff capacity, with the hope of monetizing more of these experiences and offerings to get the message out.

The Community listening sessions (not to be confused with the upcoming Feasibility Study) have been an important moment to take a pulse check on how we are doing in the community, especially as we move forward with our proposed expansion of facilities and programs.

Stephanie noted that in the 17 years that The Wild Center has been open, we have not done something like this before. If there are other groups with whom we should be speaking, please let Stephanie know.

Climate Program Update - Next the Chair invited a report on the Climate Program. J. Kretser reported that two new staff members have started on the Youth Climate Program team: Alicia Lamb, Jeanne Hutchins Climate Program Manager and Garrett Marino, Youth Climate Leadership Coordinator. They offered highlights of three new grant projects and then reported on Climate Program Initiatives.

Hannah Barg, YCP Manager, reported that two Youth Climate Advisory Board members, Cedar Young and Andrew Fagerheim attended The White House Summit on Building Climate Resilient Communities. Cedar and Andrew were the youngest people among the 70 other attendees. The one day summit was covered in NCPR and Adirondack Daily Enterprise. Jen had received a request for referral for Youth Leaders in the climate resilience space. Both Cedar and Andrew are Youth Climate Program alumni and have worked with Climate Smart Communities in their own communities which led to their referral from Jen. YCP youth have been heavily involved with getting the only two ADK towns, Lake Placid and Saranac Lake, certified as a Climate Smart Communities.

Hannah Barg also reported that she had received a fellowship through the North American Association for Environmental Education and their project will be about climate smart communities in the area.

As the Board has been apprised, Jen Kretser has been representing The Wild Center in Taiwan and Malaysia at the Taiwan Youth Climate Forum and launch of the Asia-Pacific Youth Climate Summit Initiative. Jen spent three weeks in the New Taipei city government to participate in the forum and be a guest lecturer at the university. Jen connected with partners, green council and the Ministry for the Environment in Malaysia to talk about an initiative to launch an Asia-Pacific youth climate summit.

Jen and Hannah also reported on upcoming YCP events and programs:

- New partnership with NYSERDA (New York State Energy Research and Development Authority)
- NYS Clean Energy Educator Workshops- October 18, 2023
- Youth Climate Summit- November 8 - 9, 2023

Ginny Valkenburgh encouraged Board Members to sign up to attend the Adirondack Youth Climate Summit at The Wild Center in November. Those interested can reach out to Jen at jkrestser@wildcenter.org.

Convening Center - Stephanie and Karen then presented on the Convening Center project. The Convening Center is a multi-flexible space for educational programming, Youth Climate programming, special events, and other revenue generating rental events. This is an organization-wide need as we are outgrowing spaces both on and off-site. This center is an opportunity to bring it “home” and engage more people in convening than we currently do and wish to do. Additionally, it will be a premiere example of Net Zero building and green building practices. It is a meaningful space for community gathering and potential space for additional revenue. Inspiration for use of a building like this comes from the examples of Chautauqua and the Aspen Institute.

Stephanie addressed questions raised at Wednesday's Board Briefing. "Why Net Zero?" While it does have additional upfront costs, it does have less operating costs over time, is leading environmental responsibility, and aligns with New York State goals for net-zero. If we want to achieve Net Zero campus, we must build Net Zero moving forward.

Next the Executive Director addressed "How did it get so expensive?" The concept of the convening center has changed since this was first discussed in 2017. Our needs have also evolved. The original design was a 3-season Pavillion, which has been redesigned to a 4-season Net Zero ideal. With Board feedback, it is now a 4 season- \$15 million Net Zero just right concept. Since 2017, there have been specific needs that need to be addressed with this new space:

- Programming from a (5,600 + 1,600 -7,200 sq. ft. with auxiliary buildings to a 20,000 sq ft. with basement)
- Need a four-season convening space, as we are becoming more four season with programming like Wild Lights
- Basement needed for storage to relieve main building inadequacies and storage to phase in additional geothermal.
- Indoor restroom facilities
- Demonstration project: as we evolve so do projects in green-building tech.
- Post Pandemic- Reality the cost of building has gone up
 - \$500 & \$400 per sq. ft. for Pavillion and auxiliary buildings (not Net Zero)
 - \$1,400 per sq. ft. - LPCA is using this for a building they are considering

Stephanie reported that since the Board Briefing, the project has evolved. To reduce costs of the first, ideal option, we have worked with the architects to make changes to reduce cost to \$15 million target, excluding contingency.

Items to consider moving forward:

- Staff will work with architects to see what other examples they may have of money saving techniques and ideas for this building, which still align with our must haves of the convening center.
- Net Zero is aspirational, the technology is going to improve. However, we need to plan to build the building with infrastructure that could be used with other green technology in the future. “If we back away from Net Zero, are we still a leader, and do we still get the same funding access upside?”

Next steps necessary to proceed with planning and to compete for pending grant opportunities work in, several parallel tracks must continue:

- Staff is working on a multi-million dollar grant opportunity from the state that would help kick-start this project.
 - To apply for this grant, we need to have a more substantial design schematic from the architects, which will cost \$400,000.
- There needs to be a decision made by the Board to move forward with spending \$400,000 on the next step with the architects and then apply for the grant. Much conversation ensued.
 - Funds to pay for this can come from the Obie Clifford Fund and can be financed down the road during the Capital Campaign.

Linda Rosenstock noted that the Executive Committee has met and is in strong support of moving forward with the \$400,000 to not lose out on the grant to potentially get \$3-4 million. She made a motion to pay the \$400,000 to move to the next step of this project. ***Duly moved by L. Rosenstock and seconded by K. Thomas; unanimous approval was gained, with a commitment to \$15m building and a parallel process of developing a business model for the convening center.***

Development Committee & Pre-Campaign Planning Group - Development Committee Co-Chair L. Bailey began with the following remarks:

*“First off, I know many of us are involved with boards, management, whatever it is. We’re involved with institutions’ work that are broken and are breaking daily. This is not the case here. This is thriving. This is on a trajectory of being very successful. Yes, we need to take risks, we don’t have the answers, all good ones being asked, but this is not a broken institution in American Society. This is one that is thriving and has huge opportunities and costs associated with it. Secondly, on every board I am on there are two questions the board has to consider before they do anything. One, do you support the current management team and CEO? And I think there is a resounding, hell yes. This is a great team and they are working their a** off. The second question is that if that’s true - we support the CEO and staff - how can we help them? That’s where the Development Committee comes in to help them because it is clear we need to raise some money for this expansion of the mission of The Wild Center.*

We interviewed consultants and have a unanimous recommendation for a group moving forward. We don’t know how much money we can raise, we don’t know that yet. We don’t know how much money we are going to need, but we will find that out and it won’t be precise, but it will be close. Until we know some of the questions we have asked today and until we do the feasibility study, make some inquiries with donors, we need to know where half of the money is going to come from. We have work to do. I am confident that with an institution like this and a management team like this and we can’t sell this, then there is something wrong with us as a board.”

Lee then asked Hillarie Logan-Dechene, Deputy Director to give the Development and Pre-Campaign Planning Group reports. Hillarie reiterated that the Campaign Pre-Planning Group met and unanimously decided to engage Campbell & Company to do our feasibility study.

She clarified that we have parallel tracks of what we are raising money for at this moment:

- Annual Fund - This is ongoing and we are currently meeting all of our marks and we are actively trying to close the board approved deficit budget. If anyone has any interest in writing personal notes, make phone calls, etc, please let us know.
- Investment in TWC Youth Climate Program: Opportunity Knocking: We are in need of more staff for the Youth Climate Program and are looking for separate support for this initiative.
- And the silent phase of the Capital Campaign

She thanks those Board Members with Take Five portfolios, and encourages all Board Members to reach out to the Development Team for names so they can also help with stewardship of our current and future supporters.

Committee on Trustees -Terry Birdsong, COT Chair reported that in addition to Curt Stager joining the Advisory Board, we will also be welcoming Mark Valkenburgh and Nell Ryder to the Advisory Board. Their bios and a more formal welcome will occur at the January Board meeting. The Committee on Trustees is reviewing new Board prospects and will share and vote on these at the January Board meeting. If you have any questions, or if you have anyone that you think would be a great member of the Board, please share with Terry.

DEAI Sub-Committee Update - Stephanie shared that the DEAI sub-committee will be putting together a Board University for Territorial/Land Acknowledgements as well as decolonizing exhibits. Dave Fadden has agreed to help with the deck and advise on this topic. The first one will be planned for sometime in February.

Finance Committee Report - Joe Beck, Finance Committee Chair reported that the budget is on point for the year. He also noted that at the recommendation of Lynn Birdsong, the Investment Committee is positioning a little more conservatively and will wait to invest more aggressively in the future.

Bob Kronenberger reported on current revenue and budget standings for 2023 so far:

- 2023 earned revenues are \$20k over budget
- YTD 2023 attendance up 5% from LY, admission revenues up by 9%
- 2023 operating expenses are \$212k under budget
- 2023 total operating support \$94k over budget
- Overall 2023 YTD operating results \$326k ahead of LY

Executive Session - Last, the Board went into Executive Session. ED and Board Chair note: Stephanie will be on a restorative leave 10/9-12/9/2023.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:00 pm

2024 Board Meeting Dates:

Monday, January 22, - 1 to 5 p.m. VIRTUAL ONLY

Friday, April 19, 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. Campaign meetings, 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. Board meeting NYC + hybrid

Friday, June 28, 9 to 1 p.m. Tupper Lake + hybrid
Friday, October 11, 1 to 5 p.m. Tupper Lake + hybrid