

The Wild Center Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes

Friday, June 30th, 2023 – 9:00 AM - 2:00 PM

The Wild Center & Virtual Zoom Meeting

Board of Trustees in Attendance: Karen Thomas, Chair, Ginny Valkenburgh, Secretary, Joseph Beck, Treasurer, Michael Bettmann, Terry Birdsong, George Cigale, Larry Clifford, Ed Forbes, Rick Godin, Robin Gosnell, Meadow Hackett Rutenbar, Sally Hart, Michael Hunsinger, Nicky Hylton-Patterson, Betsy Lowe, Ben Ireland, Paul Maroun, Brooks Reynolds, Jack Ryder, Charlie Svenson **Virtual:** Paul Alioto, Lee Bailey, David Fadden, Pam Matt, Juan Rodriguez, Linda Rosenstock, Vice Chair, Joel Treisman

Emeritus Trustees in Attendance: Lynn Birdsong, Nancy Simpkins

Advisory Board in Attendance: Stan Rumbough **Virtual:** Allison Birdsong, Martha Bullock, Lynn Fox, Rob Gillis, Carl Shedd

Staff in Attendance: Stephanie Ratcliffe, Executive Director, Hillarie Logan-Dechene, Deputy Director, Robert Kronenberger, Director of Finance, Robin Ellis, Sara Paula, Kerri Ziemann, Lillian Dechene **Virtual:** Ruth Burnell

Excused: Board of Trustees: Kathleen Colson **Emeritus Trustee:** G. Thomas Aydelotte, Peter Kindler **Advisory Board:** David Jones, Sarah Bogdanovitch, Michael Phinney, Anna Sommer

Trustee Chair, Karen Thomas called the meeting to order at 9:03 AM.

Administration - Karen Thomas and Stephanie Ratcliffe began with **approval of April Minutes**

- Karen Thomas asked for a motion to approve the April 17, 2023 Board Meeting Minutes
- Motion moved by C. Svenson and seconded by M. Bettmann
- April 17, 2023 minutes unanimously approved.

In her **Chair's Report**, Karen reviewed the list of Summer Events at The Wild Center. She highlighted the new Science Speaker series starting with David Sobel and ending with the Beaverland lecture.

Karen encouraged board members to attend our upcoming Board Family Night on August 7th and try the new Birdly virtual reality experience.

Stephanie reported on the upcoming Appreciative Inquiry Community Listening project. She noted that our focus would be on listening to our communities as we make our future priorities final. Spartina Consulting would be joining us this morning to help us understand "Appreciative Inquiry" which was introduced by Joel Treisman at the last Board meeting.

Karen amplified it was a time to listen to our multiple communities.

Stephanie explained the purpose of the dot exercise is part of our capital campaign and strategic planning work and will help with aligning with our strategic vision/mission with specific projects.

The meeting will conclude with David Sobel who many met at the pre-board dinner last evening. He will talk about the importance of youth spending time in nature and its multitude of benefits.

Stephanie Ratcliffe shared a recent report from the USDA on the care of our animals. It was a glowing report and the final comment was "This is the cleanest and most well enriched facility I visit."

A free cooler is being installed to help take some dependence off our other aging systems. This is both a smart way to use our environment and cut down on our electrical use. It was a quarter of a million-dollar upgrade, and it was partially grant funded at \$131,000.

Community Listening - Stephanie then introduced Tony and Jen Sielbert, of Spartina Consulting. Spartina was introduced to us from Joel, and we've had several conversations, and we are very excited to have them be our partner in delivering the best way to conduct community listening sessions as we go into our campaign planning.

Jen Sielbert gave a quick overview of their business. She explained they use a positive reframe of SWOT analysis, called SOAR (Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, Results), which focuses still on the strengths of what you value most. The exemplar examines assets, all of the things that make The Wild Center great. Then there's the opportunities, where are the greatest opportunities for innovation and improvement or changes that you would like to see happen that would have the greatest positive impact on the organization and the community. Instead of the weaknesses and threats we focus on the aspirations and results. What are the highest hopes for the future, and what are the desired results in impact? This process creates a positive image of the future, which makes it much easier to plan.

Tony from Spartina introduced the core team which consists of Stephanie, Karen, Hillarie, Joel, Ruth from The Wild Center. He explained that our core planning team are our guides for making sure that this process is smartly designed and providing input and feedback on not only the process but the questions that we create together. There will be four sessions: two will be onsite, two will be virtual. Onsite August 8 and 9, two virtual August 24 and September 7.

Karen suggested that Board members attend at least one. She said that board members will appreciate hearing what community members, stakeholders, partners, and other citizens have to say. After all the listening is done, we will come together with the core planning team to do some collation in synthesis and then bring that back to the Board at the October 6th Board meeting to do a deeper dive and say, "What does this mean for our strategic directions?"

The Board Members in the theater were broken into groups and those on Zoom were sent to one virtual breakout room, each group having a core member and a note taker. Discussion and ideas were given to the following questions:

Strength's Questions:

What do you value most about The Wild Center?

What do you want to see preserved, no matter what changes in the future?

Opportunities Question:

What are the greatest opportunities for innovation and or improvement at The Wild Center?

What's one change, big or small, that would have the greatest positive impact on the future?

Aspirations and Results

What are the measurable impact and results you're having on visitors, employees, the Center, the community, and the broader world? What are your highest hopes for the future of The Wild Center?

After the session, Jen gave a summary of the answers that were given in each group and noted that there is a lot of energy both in the room and online. Tony thanked the Board for their participation. They will have results to show at our October Board meeting from the in-person and virtual sessions.

Generative Discussion - Dot Session

Stephanie gave an update on a list of proposed capital projects. The capital projects are only one part of the campaign, which will likely include endowment, program, new climate program investments, and annual fund.

She noted an explanation of each project idea sent in the Board Meeting packet. This session, participants were given red, green and yellow dots to place on a chart of each project. Their job was to distribute their dots according to their thoughts about each project. She noted that the red dot represented a "no" vote and if used on a project that project would be set aside for some time in the future or not at all. Yellow being not stopped but not the highest score you can give today for that project. Green dot being we are excited, let's move on it. She went through slides of each project and gave an explanation of why the convening center had changed design from the original and would now hopefully be a net zero structure. Staff collected the dots to analyze the Board's feelings on each project and the results were reviewed at the end of the session.

Committee on Trustees

Terry Birdsong, Committee on Trustees Chair, expressed that COT is always looking for Board candidates, ones that will fill expertise in education, the environment, nature, science. and technology. She said that we hope to have some bright new faces joining our Advisory Board, and from there some members transitioning to the Board of Trustees. She requested names of

people you'd like to recommend getting to know. She would like to have a list of people to get to know for the October meeting, as well as some possible candidates from our existing lists. Terry also asked for Board members to consider hosting a small event or attending other events with their friends, family and potential candidates this summer.

Terry then reported that committee charters have been updated and revised by most committees to better reflect the work that The Wild Center is doing on DEIA. All revised charters will be made available on the Board Library on the website.

She then turned the meeting over to Michael Bettmann, Co-Chair of the DEIA subcommittee who explained the changes in committee charters. He then conducted a group exercise with everyone breaking into groups with a DEIA committee person to help facilitate the discussion. The exercise is designed to get participants thinking about implicit bias; realize that it exists and consider what we can learn from it. This way we can make progress in diversity and equity. He gave the group 10 minutes to discuss two questions. When the groups returned, each DEIA committee person gave a summary of the discussions in their group.

Nicky Hylton-Patterson put up the two discussion questions. She noted that the exercise is really about socialization and social systems, and how these manifest on the individual level. She concluded that one of the important things is just the discussion that we're having now. She urged that it has to be an ongoing discussion. This is an ongoing conversation and ongoing efforts, and a lot of it is purely education. She emphasized the continuing need to learn. She thanked the DEIA Committee for their presentation today. She gave a reminder about the John Brown Farm event on Tuesday, July 11.

Finance – Bob Kronenberger and Joe Beck gave a brief Finance Committee report. Joe noted that we're in good shape financially; on budget and consistent with last year. We have a lot of big issues, capital campaign being one and the things we talked about today, will define how we go forward. Joe noted that we still are relying on annual contributions to close our deficit by the end of the year.

Development - Lee Bailey and Charlie Svenson opened the Development Committee report and then invited Hillarie Logan-Dechene to continue. Hillarie gave a shout out to Brooks Reynolds for our new business partnership program. We set an ambitious goal of getting 10 new business partnerships. With Brooks' help, we did our first event and met our goal. More events and activities to follow as we forge relationships with community businesses.

Capital Campaign Planning - Hillarie then reviewed work on the pending campaign. Board members each received a pre-campaign preparation summary before the meeting. As noted in the summary, the Executive Committee will work with the Development Committee Co-Chairs and senior leadership staff as a small working group, who then will lead the pre-campaign planning efforts until a Campaign Committee is established.

A few Board members have inquired about our campaign goal. Hillarie noted that the dot exercise data and a pre-campaign study will inform what that number will be. The Wild Center needs to decide what is going to be funded through a campaign before we can determine a goal. To do that we need to follow the multi-step process described in the planning document. We need to do pre-campaign planning, a feasibility study, and test our needs and objectives. She asked the Board for approval to plan a campaign because the process of planning will incur expenses. She noted that it will require us to shift gears.

- Linda Rosenstock then made a motion to vote to start a campaign and allocate the resources for the pre-planning phase, Charlie Svenson noted that we should have a cost estimate not to exceed. Hillarie explained that as detailed in the planning document, the feasibility study shall cost roughly \$50,000. And then, once we determine what the goal is for the overall campaign, the cost of those campaigns will probably be between 10 and 15% of the goal.
- Lee Bailey seconded the motion.

Joe Beck asked if the annual fund would be part of the capital campaign. He questioned if we're better off raising that alongside the capital campaign. Hillarie explained that decision would be part of the pre-planning process. To make those assessments, we need to test what our priorities are with people who would be providing some of the funding. The questions of whether we do a comprehensive campaign, or whether we just decide on a particular capital project or multiple capital projects, as well as if and when we roll the annual fund into it, will all be decided by the results of our pre-campaign study.

- The Chair called for a vote and all in person and virtual attendees gave their ayes. The motion passed unanimously.

Take Five - Summer Events - Hillarie then amplified Terry Birdsong's appeal to use the summer to steward current museum friends and cultivate new ones. She invited board members to reach out to Sara Paula if they don't have an active Take 5 list.

Programming - Hillarie Logan- Dechene – Hillarie introduced Hannah Barg, Youth Climate Program Manager who offered updates on the Climate Program, and highlighted a few key partnerships and programs:

Science North, Canada - a science center in Sudbury, Ontario is hosting 13 youth climate summits across the province of Ontario over the next year. Recently we had 5 students from the Youth Climate program who attended the Summit in Sudbury. While there, they had the amazing opportunity to meet Dr. Jane Goodall, one of their climate heroes. They also were able to present climate action plans and sit on a youth panel and interact with other youth in Canada working on climate education.

Cornell Lab of Ornithology - The Wild Center Climate program has built a partnership with Jennifer Fee, who works at the Cornell lab of ornithology. On May 20 of this year we hosted the supporting students in a nature-based learning conference at The Wild Center. We had

over 72 educators on site learning about water quality testing, nature journaling and with a special focus on community science apps.

Climate Field Days - Carthage NY Middle School - We developed a relationship with 2 teachers at Carthage Middle School. Carthage is a middle school in the Western Adirondacks. They had never had a field trip at The Wild Center, and we had over 200 students from this middle school come to do climate field days at the Museum. They watched the Age of Humans documentary; did climate action planning; and they also piloted a new activity in the Solutions exhibit with a Bingo sheet that we developed.

Hannah gave a rundown of the numerous Climate happenings for them through the rest of the Summer. She reported that we have had over 165 youth climate summits happen in 9 countries and 22 states since 2009, when the first summit was here and our network continues to grow. We had 50 youth climate summits happen between January 2022 and June 2023 and 15 of those were in New York City.

Special Content Briefing

Nature Positive – Trustee Joel Treisman - Joel reported that there's a growing body of research, suggesting a very strong link between exposure to nature and a variety of measures of psychological well-being and happiness. Things like positive relationships, resilience flow experiences, pro-environmental attitudes and behavior. There's research that shows that individuals who spend time in green spaces have lower levels of psychological distress, lower rates of depression, lower anxiety even as little as 20 minutes in nature reduces the stress hormone cortisol. Spending time outside has an impact on your well being.

Stephanie then introduced a special guest speaker - **David Sobel - Antioch University** - David talked about the relationship between childhood nature experience and adult environmental behavior. Dr. Sobel posed the challenge. How does our programming actually generate conscience that builds environmental values and behavior?

The Chair thanked Dr. Sobel for sharing his research and the meeting adjourned at 1:17 PM