



**MINUTES**  
**WILD CENTER JANUARY 2024 BOARD OF TRUSTEE MEETING**  
**VIRTUAL - Monday, January 22, 2024**  
1:00 - 5:00 pm - Virtual via Zoom

**Trustees Present Virtual:** Karen Thomas, Board Chair, Linda Rosenstock, Vice-Chair, Jack Ryder, Vice-Chair, Joseph Beck, Treasurer, Virginia Valkenburgh, Secretary, Paul Alioto, Lee Bailey, Michael Bettmann, Lynn Birdsong, Trustee Emeritus, Terry Birdsong, George Cigale, Larry Clifford, David Kanietakeron Fadden, Ed Forbes, Lynn Fox, Charlie Frenette, Rick Godin, Robin Gosnell, Sally Hart, Nancy Howard, Nicky Hylton-Patterson, Ben Ireland, Betsy Lowe, Paul Maroun, Pamela Matt, Nancy Simpkins, Emeritus Trustee, Brooks Reynolds, Juan Rodriguez, Meadow Rutenbar, Jack Ryder, Charlie Svenson, Joel Treisman

**Advisory Board Members Present in Person:** Martha Bullock, AB Chair, Allison Birdsong, Sarah Bogdanovitch, Emily Hunt Forbes, Michael Hunsinger, Dave Jones, Stanley Rumbough, Curt Stager, Mark Valkenburgh, Ross Whaley, Margaret Wiener

**Staff Present:** Stephanie Ratcliffe, Executive Director, Hillarie Logan-Dechene, Deputy Director, Ruth Burnell, Libby Clark, Lillian Dechene, Robin Ellis, Jen Kretser, Robert Kronenberger, Sara Paula, Phil Wagschal

**Outside Consultants:** Campbell & Company Consultants: Cassie Carter, Christina Knaier, Perry Brimijoin. Hailey Nishita, AD Hamingson & Associates: Theresa Koberstein

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Karen Thomas formally called the meeting to order at 1:02 pm.

Stephanie Ratcliffe began with a land acknowledgement statement.

**Approval of Minutes**

K. Thomas began the Business Meeting portion of the agenda. She asked for a motion to approve the October 2023 Minutes. *Motion made by Robin Gosnell, duly seconded by Charlie Svenson and unanimously approved.*

**I. Annual Meeting Business - Election and Re-election of Board Members**

K. Thomas invited Committee on Trustees Chair, Terry Birdsong to present the slate of officer, election, and re-election of the Board and Advisory Board.

**a. Election of New Trustee - Lynn Fox**

- T. Birdsong announced that Advisory Board member Lynn Fox will be rejoining the Trustees.  
***Motion to elect by Sally Hart, seconded by Nancy Simpkins and unanimously approved.***

**b. Election of Officers**

- T. Birdsong presented the slate of officers for a one-year term to be approved by the board.  
Chair: Karen Thomas , Vice Chairs: Linda Rosenstock & Jack Ryder, Secretary: Ginny Valkenburgh, Treasurer: Joseph G. Beck

***Motion by Paul Maroun, seconded by Lynn Fox and unanimously approved.***

- Re-election of board for three-year term  
Terry Birdsong, George Cigale, Richard Godin, Jr., Nancy S. Howard

***Motion by Jack Ryder, seconded by Ginny Valkenburgh and unanimously approved.***

- T. Birdsong noted that the following folks have resigned from their Trustee and Advisory Board positions, respectively - Kathleen Colson, Trustee, MaryBeth Reiss, Advisory Board, George Whaling, Advisory Board
- Michael Hunsinger, who has been a longtime trustee and head of the executive compensation committee, has moved to the Advisory Board.

**c. New Advisory Board Appointments**

T. Birdsong then introduced the four new advisory members, Mark Valkenburgh, Elizabeth “Nell” Ryder, Curt Stager (effective 10/23), and Margaret “Margy” Wiener

- Curt Stager, Mark Valkenburgh, and Margy Wiener all introduced themselves and expressed their excitement for serving on the Advisory Board. T. Birdsong made note that Nell Ryder was unable to make the meeting.
  - New Trustee and Advisory Board orientation scheduled for **Friday, March 8, 2024 from 2:00 - 4:00pm**. Any Trustees or Advisory Board member who is interested is invited to attend.

- K. Thomas reminded the Trustees to fill out the [Code of Ethical Conduct & Annual Potential Conflict Disclosure](#) and [Whistleblower Policy](#) forms by January 31st, 2024. (Advisory Board members do not need to complete these forms.)

**II. Board Chair Report**

K. Thomas welcomed back Executive Director, Stephanie Ratcliffe and thanked Hillarie Logan-Dechene for stepping up while Stephanie was out of the office.

K. Thomas noted the following:

- a. The annual fund surpassed its goal, allowing us to close the 2023 deficit. Kudos to the team at The Wild Center who helped support all of this work and make this happen.
- b. The climate program continues its acceleration, with partnership with the National Park Service, The White House and a new partnership with UPenn.

- c. Pre-Capital Campaign consultants, Campbell and Company will report on their pre-feasibility study later in this meeting. Thrilled to announce Lynn Fox and Lee Bailey as the campaign chairs.
- d. April 8 Total Eclipse is a once in a lifetime event, happening right in our backyard and we are ready.
- e. **New Mission statement.** A new succinct, inspiring, and visionary statement to guide us to 2030 was drafted during the Strategic planning process last year. This has been a collaborative effort of the board, staff leadership and staff.

**"Ignite an enduring passion for nature that inspires action to ensure a thriving natural world."**

Before a vote on the new mission statement, H. Logan-Dechene gave a brief report on the all-staff retreat held the week prior

- K. Thomas called for a motion to approve the new mission statement
  - *Motion by Ginny Valkenburgh, seconded by Charlie Svenson, unanimously approved the new mission statement.*

### **III. Executive Director Report**

S. Ratcliffe began by briefly noting what the staff will be working on in 2024:

- a. Executing early phase of Capital Campaign
- b. Multi-year and ongoing goals
  - i. Launch and promote new trail phase 1
  - ii. Build Trail Phase II
  - iii. Outline steps for a path to net-zero campus
- c. Continue placing science in the forefront of programs to connect at a deeper level with families for STEM education
- d. Formalize our education pedagogy that support youth development and leadership around climate solutions
- e. Collaborate with strategic community partners to plan and promote a once in a lifetime 3-day total solar eclipse festival
- f. Continue to integrate DEAI principles in all aspects of Wild Center work.

S. Ratcliffe took the opportunity to report on the Wild Lights success from the first part of the season in 2023.

- The attendance has increased in 2023 and we had our first over 1,000 person night, and an increase in revenue.
- There was a robust discussion on how these numbers correlate to memberships and if Wild Lights is driving membership growth. As well as how our attendance has changed year to year and in our shoulder seasons. Balancing our attendance helps with unpredictable influences like weather.

### **IV. Committee on Trustees, DEIA Sub-Committee - Stephanie Ratcliffe**

- S. Ratcliffe led an educational session on Territorial and Land Acknowledgements.

A Territorial or Land Acknowledgement is a formal statement made at the beginning of an event, gathering or presentation to recognize and show respect for Indigenous peoples and their ancestral lands on which the event is taking place. This practice is particularly common in countries such as Canada, the USA, Australia, and New Zealand.

## **Purpose and Intent**

- Raise awareness about the history of colonization, displacement and ongoing struggles.
- Honor the Indigenous people, connection to the land, their contributions and their ongoing presence.
- Content varies
  - Information about the specific Indigenous nations or tribes
  - Acknowledgment of their stewardship of the land
  - Recognition of the continued impact of colonization reminds us that events and activities taking place today are occurring on land that has a rich Indigenous history and that Indigenous people are here.
- Land Acknowledgement is part of our Strategic Framework
  - There are several new exhibits at TWC, which show different ways that land acknowledgements can appear in different ways and formats.
- If you are curious about learning more, visit <https://native-land.ca/> to search any location and learn more about Indigenous territories and lands.

Stephanie invited Dave Fadden to share his thoughts on land acknowledgements.

NOTE TO BOARD MEMBERS: If you would like to read the full transcript of Stephanie's Land Acknowledgement and Dave's reflection for your own continued learning, you can find that [here](#).

Further discussion followed, with multiple members thanking Dave and reflecting on his words and echoing the importance of considering additional Board education.

## **V. Climate Program Update -**

Jen Kretser gave a Climate Program update.

- a. Updates
  - i. Trustee Joel Treisman connected the Climate Team to UPenn to begin building a network for our YouthClimate Team Alumni.
  - ii. Partnering for a national climate camp for professionals in Pittsburgh
  - iii. IMLS Emerging leaders program, supports 10 new teens across the region
  - iv. Youth Climate Summits being planned in Malaysia and East Asia
- b. Exciting new initiatives for 2024
  - i. Partnering with Shauna Potocky, Education Strategist from the National Parks Service to bring the Youth Climate Summit model to the NPS. There are over 420 National Park sites that could implement this program. To hear a small clip of Shuana's keynote at the 2023 Youth Climate Summit: [NPS-YouthSummits.mp4](#).
  - ii. The National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Office of Education will convene a major event at The Wild Center for their yearly meeting. 150 people from all of the NOAA funded literacy projects and leadership will be onsite from May 6 - 9, 2024.
  - iii. The First White House Youth Climate Leadership Forum is currently being considered and planned. This will be an opportunity to collaborate with the Smithsonian network and the White House. This opportunity stems from when the Youth Climate Program and Youth

Climate program alumni, Gina Fiorle was recognized by the Obama Administration in 2014 as a top 20 climate change program in the nation.

## **VI. Finance**

**K. Thomas highlighted that the Finance Committee, Buildings and Grounds, and the Executive Committee will meet in February to review the master plan that will include a long-term maintenance plan.**

Committee Chair Joe Beck began by noting this was a successful year. Our activity levels returned to 2019 pre-covid levels and that we have an ambitious 2024 budget. He noted that special costs associated with campaign and consultants are included and will project a small deficit. J. Beck noted that the Finance Committee unanimously approved the budget, and we will be seeking the full board's approval.

**The Finance Committee also reviewed a preliminary schedule of Capital Projects along with a large maintenance project plan. This will be presented at a future Board meeting.**

- a. Key takeaways:
  - i. Overall, the forecast for 2023 shows a small operating surplus, based on strong fundraising offsetting our budgeted deficit for the year.
  - ii. 2023 attendance was up 14% from LY, with admission revenues being up by 9%. The 2024 budget assumes about a 5% increase in attendance levels, including special April eclipse attendance. 2024 admissions reflect an increase of \$72k including an increase in Wild Lights ticket prices.
  - iii. 2023 earned Income up \$172k from LY with increased admissions and strong membership growth.
  - iv. Total contributions and operating grants \$148k over budget and \$36k over LY.
  - v. 2023 Operating expenses \$64k under budget.
  - vi. Total endowment funds are \$11.5mm, including almost \$2mm in Obie Clifford Fund and \$1.6 in Permanent Endowment.
  - vii. Investment market value increases + realized gains totaled \$1.4mm in 2023 and led to an overall investment return of 15.7% in 2023.
  - viii. \$1mm line of credit available (used for short durations in 2023).
  - ix. While our plan for 2024 reflects a deficit budget, it includes a significant increase in special program costs (some of which are grant funded). The plan contains both realistic and aspirational elements that build on our successful programs.
  - x. The 2024 budget proposal is supported by the Finance Committee.

Discussion and questions from members followed B. Kronenberger's report. Things to consider for future meetings:

- a. Look at admission pricing and make sure that it is affordable for visitors and in line with market standards and review with the board the different ways that visitors can access discounted or fully

comped tickets.

- b. Plan a Board University session about Membership and related material.

K. Thomas asked for a motion to approve the 2024 budget:

**Motion by Lee Bailey and seconded by Linda Rosenstock, unanimously approved.**

## **VII. Development**

### **a. Annual Fund**

Hillarie Logan-Dechene gave a quick report on the 2023 Annual Fund. She noted that we surpassed our Annual Fund goal for 2023. Huge thank you to the board for your giving and for your work on our Take 5 program, which is extremely important for us.

### **b. Capital Campaign**

Lee Bailey, Development Committee co-chair began by stating that there are “there are a number of parallel processes with the capital campaign, the convening center topic, new programs and endowments going on. Ideally, we would have some of these flushed out before we do campaign planning but that is not how the world works.” He continued that this process is still unfolding and we do not have the answers and will be finding out more in the coming months.

#### **i. Grounding in the campaign planning**

S. Ratcliffe led a brief overview of the plans for the Convening Center to remind everyone what the overall vision is and “why” we are talking about this.

- a) Launch programmatic expansion
- b) Amenities
- c) Elevated campus
- d) Intentional flexibility

S. Ratcliffe noted that museums have the public's trust and infrastructure to do more and increase their role in the community.

- e) Promote dialogue and understanding
- f) Facilitate difficult conversations
- g) Inspiring action

#### **ii. Pre-Campaign Planning Timeline**

**Lee Bailey and Lynn Fox are co-chairing the Capital Campaign**

**January:** Preliminary Feasibility Study Report - Jan. Board Meeting

**February:** Final Feasibility Study Report Delivery Joint Pre-Campaign Group & Development Committee meeting

**March:** Convening Center Business Model/Plan Delivery Mini-Board Retreat

**April:** Pre-Meeting Campaign Work Session - April Board Meeting - NYC

#### **iii. Pre-Capital Campaign Feasibility Study Report**

Campbell & Company - Dr. Cassie Carter

Cassie Carter outlined Campbell & Company's process and work that they have been doing since November. \$40 Million is the number that The Wild Center gave Campbell to test.

### Campbell's Campaign Planning Study Process:

- Assess the effectiveness and readiness of The Wild Center's fundraising program for a significant campaign
- Examine The Wild Center's fundraising potential for a campaign
- Provides findings and recommendations that outlines actionable activities to help The Wild Center achieve its potential in a campaign

Lynn Fox, Capital Campaign Co-chair, noted that she is really optimistic about this and that she is hopeful for this moving forward. Betsy Lowe noted how far we have come as an organization and how our fundraising and capital campaign has come so far.

**Campbell & Company will deliver the more in depth feasibility study results at the April Board Meeting in NYC.**

## **VIII. Programming**

### **A. Total Eclipse, April 5 - April 8, 2024**

1. Hilarie reviewed plans for a three day Eclipse festival
  - a) Highlights include the Corning Museum of Glass being onsite, food trucks, and specific eclipse programming.
  - b) Saturday, April 6- Opening Community Party and Silent Auction with local organizations
  - c) Monday, April 8 is a Community Free Day

### **B. Convening Center Business Model Workshop with Teresa Koberstein from AD Hamingson & Associates**

1. Teresa Koberstein first detailed the Business Plan process
  - a) The Business Plan Roadmap will assist with expanding The Wild Center's business model, linked to a new space on its campus and to support capital fundraising plans.
  - b) A generative process which will inform the business model
    - (1) Impacts, Objectives and Strategy and other defining parameters
    - (2) Financial Pro Forma - 3 years (after three, there is the ability to change things and course correct as things will change in 4 and 5 years)
      - (a) The plan will include a budget that will show projections for utilizing the space, understanding programming, rentals, and maintenance, estimated expenses and revenue, and strategies and recommendations.
2. Teresa then took the group through a visioning exercise to think more broadly and strategically about the Net-Zero Convening Center.

There was a robust discussion with the board with many ideas shared around what the Convening Center could be used for, how it will impact the community both positively and potentially negatively, as well as how this will help move us to our 2030 goals.

**Teresa and the AD Hamingson & Associates will present the final report in March 2024.**

The meeting was adjourned at 5:00 pm

**IX. Executive Session** - The Board went into Executive Session.

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**2024 Board Meeting Dates:**

Friday, April 19, 1 to 5 pm **NOTE: meeting time may be extended and additional meetings and social events may added the day prior Thursday, April 18**

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

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