



## MINUTES

### WILD CENTER April 2024 BOARD OF TRUSTEE MEETING

Hybrid in New York City & Virtually via Zoom

Friday, April 19, 2024 - 1:00 - 4:00 pm

**Trustees Present In Person:** Karen Thomas, Board Chair, Jack Ryder, Vice-Chair, Joseph Beck, Treasurer, Virginia Valkenburgh, Secretary, Paul Alioto, Terry Birdsong, George Cigale, Lynn Fox, Ed Forbes, Sally Hart, Nicky Hylton-Patterson, Betsy Lowe, Ben Ireland, Meadow Rutenbar

**Advisory Board Members Present in Person:** Allison Birdsong, Emily Forbes

**Trustees Present Virtual:** Linda Rosenstock, Vice-Chair. Lee Bailey, Michael Bettmann, Lynn Birdsong, Trustee Emeritus, Larry Clifford, David Kanietakeron Fadden, Charlie Frenette, Rick Godin, Robin Gosnell, Nancy Howard, Paul Maroun, Pamela Matt, Juan Rodriguez

**Advisory Board Members Present Virtual:** Rob Gillis, Nell Ryder, Curt Stager, Margaret Wiener

**Staff Present:** Stephanie Ratcliffe, Executive Director, Hillarie Logan-Dechene, Deputy Director, Robert Kronenberger, Director of Finance, Phil Wagschal, Facilities and IT Director, Ruth Burnell, Libby Clark, Lillian Dechene, Robin Ellis, Sara Paula, Isabella Sandersen

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Karen Thomas formally called the meeting to order at 10:02 am.

### Approval of Minutes

K. Thomas called for a motion to approve the January Board Meeting minutes.

*A motion was made by Ed Forbes, seconded by Nicky Hilton-Patterson and unanimously approved by the Trustees.*

### I. Board Chair Report

Karen remarked that the group of board members who were in New York City had a wonderful session at the new Gilder Center for Science, Education and Innovation at American Museum of Natural History with Lauri Halderman, Senior Vice President for Exhibition. The dinner that followed provided important and fun social time together for board members and partners.

Karen reported on the successful Total Eclipse weekend. She commended The Wild Center and staff.

## **II. Executive Director Report**

S. Ratcliffe recounted what was happening at The Wild Center during the Eclipse event. It was estimated that about 5,100 people were on The Wild Center campus on Monday, April 8. The demonstration program by the Corning Museum of Glass was a huge hit and would love to bring them back in the future.

S. Ratcliffe presented the positive financial outcomes of the Eclipse weekend. B. Kronenberger also remarked that it was great to have the partner event that we had and that we were able to generate some revenue.

K. Thomas said that she thought that the community Kick-off party was lovely with community non profits and leaders gathered. Karen gave kudos to the dynamic team for a great event.

B. Kronenberger noted that it was the biggest day ever for the store.

H. Logan-Dechene shared the Tupper Lake Free Press. She noted that we connected over 7,000 people with nature and built stronger ties with the community and with I Love NY, who made a statewide press release covering TWC.

## **III. Audit and Finance Committee Reports**

B. Kronenberger reviewed the reports of the Audit and Finance Committees. He shared the attendance and revenue highlights through March 31 this year. These numbers do not include the Eclipse weekend.

Paul Alioto remarked that the committee members and auditors met on April 4. Pleased to report that the prelim draft was unremarkable in every way, which is what we want to hear.

Paul Alioto noted that the 2023 Audit Report was very positive. The auditors gave us a “clean opinion” which indicates that our financial statements present fairly our financial position and results of operations.

- Observation from Audit Committee:  
To date, draws from the Endowment funds + inflation exceed investment income and unrealized gains.

Highlights include:

- 2023 audit report completed. Final results for 2023 reflect an increase in net assets of \$300k.
- Significantly, when factoring in the endowment draw the operating results were a positive \$15k in 2023 (completely eliminating the budget deficit we went into the year with).
- Overall 2024 March YTD operations are on plan.
- Total endowment funds are \$11.6mm, including \$1.8mm in Obie Clifford Fund and \$1.7mm in permanent endowment, and \$8.1mm in board designated.

There was discussion regarding bequest intentions:

- We have 61 bequests, and out of these 61 intentions, 17 people have indicated a gift with an unknown amount and thus are currently designated as \$1, where others have told us a specific amount.

G. Cigale asked if we can compare the 17.1% investment return to another benchmark other than the S&P 500 Index (more representative of non-profit endowment returns). L. Birdsong noted he didn't have a basis, but that anything in the double digits is very good.

*A motion was made by Lee Bailey to approve the 2023 Audit Report, Ben Ireland seconded and the board unanimously approved.*

#### **IV. Mini Retreat**

The meeting then transitioned to a mini-retreat.

K. Thomas began by stating that The Wild Center is in a great position to embark on more ambitious initiatives.

- “In the past couple of years the board has developed a new mission statement, crafted a new strategic framework to leverage the location and decade plus of experience and expertise. We have built on where we excel as leaders in experiential learning and climate change education, as an economic driver in our community and as innovators in the science world. And now have the opportunity to deepen our focus on the science of nature to experience the interconnectedness of the natural world and understand the impact of actions and our actions on that system. We have a roadmap, a plan, and a view of where we want to go and I encourage everyone to engage in this vital journey as we work together to further this plan.”

The goals for the mini-retreat:

1. Deeply explore our approved mission and strategic framework.
  - a. The mission was approved in January and the strategic plan over a year ago, but we have not dove deeply into it.
2. Ensure that the campaign goals are strategic and tied to our mission.

L. Bailey added thanks to the staff and he noted that we have a mission that's clear and goals that are clear and are in a good place to make the campaign successful.

K. Thomas said we will not resolve all thoughts and issues today but we need to hear them so we can come back together in June with a more refined plan.

She remarked she and Stephanie have been listening to the board members learning lessons:

- I. The current convening center design is too expensive.
  - A. Karen noted that convening remains an exciting and even visionary centerpiece of the coming campaign, and that we need to build it on a budget that makes sense
- II. We are also looking at other campaign priorities, such as endowment and ongoing and future maintenance and the continued development of the Riverfront.
- III. Campbell & Co's feasibility study points us to a \$35,000,000 Campaign Goal.

L. Fox detailed the stage that The Wild Center is progressing on the organizational life cycle. The Wild Center is in a great place to be able to raise \$35mm, and is growing.

K. Thomas continued and noted that we want to grow, but we need to maintain, endow and grow, which will help inform today's discussion and movement forward.

- **We need to endow**

Launch a *Why Not Now* endowment campaign inspired by the model 3 years ago.

- Increase endowment to \$20mm at 25th anniversary in 2031 with a \$10mm campaign goal for endowment.

- **We need to Maintain (buildings, campus, exhibits)**

- The Wild Center is almost 20 years old, and at the age where we have to look at our buildings and campus.
  - We are considering a Capital Reserve Fund of +/- \$300,000 for next 6 years or until

**We need to Grow (Riverfront, programming, YCP, Convening)**

- The Riverfront Program: is in progress with the renovation of the existing boardwalks and overlook and the new trails to the fen.
- Tells the story of water, wetlands and its vital role in the Adirondacks.
  - Programmatically, this helps us show the interconnectedness of the waterfront

J. Ryder, C. Frenette, L. Birdsong, and B. Lowe all emphasized what a wonderful asset the waterfront is, that it should not be underestimated and that in 20 years this could be a huge cornerstone for The Wild Center.

S. Ratcliffe then said that the June Board meeting could be structured to dive more deeply on how we use and interpret water and what we would want that to look like.

J. Rodriguez asked about the limitations or restrictions for the waterfront.

- S. Ratcliffe explained there are a lot of restrictions in the Adirondack Park.
  - Staff have been working with the Adirondack Park Agency (APA), who have been on-site, and are now ready to see what can be permitted.
  - The Cabin at the waterfront is not compatible with today's standards, but is exempt. If the building is raised, we cannot build at a larger footprint than what is currently there.
  - Overall, permitting for any waterfront development could take up to a year.
  - Any structure built cannot go up above 41 feet.
  - We know development of the waterfront will take time, so there is opportunity to create programming, films for the theater, and marketing that could be geared towards the story of water that we could do much sooner.

Questions regarding access and transporting people to and from the new trails were discussed.

- B. Ireland mentioned an idea to have a Wild Center app that would outline how far you need to travel to get to another area of campus, as well as the grade, and how to wayfind while onsite.
  - Potential for TWC to gather data from the app to see how people are using the campus.
  - TWC has explored. Our infrastructure needs to be expanded for such an app to be optimized.
- G. Valkenburgh also remarked that the trail and the riverfront are paramount for our visitors to experience nature.

**Mission and Strategic Framework**

K. Thomas emphasized that the work the board will be doing in the rest of the session is being informed and influenced by the mission:

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

S. Ratcliffe and H. Logan-Dechene then took the board through a Strategic Framework Refresher.

- Hillarie reviewed the five different focus areas of the Strategic Framework
  - **The Vibrant and Experiential Campus**
  - **Convening and Outreach**
  - **Organizational Capability & Capacity**
  - **Marketing, Branding & Constituent Communication**
  - **Investment Capacity**

K. Thomas noted that the board wrote this and today, the board is going to dive into the new mission and use that lens to help us make some choices and direction.

### **Breakout #1 Exercise:**

Question 1: What is your favorite part of the new mission - what words inspire you the most?

Question 2: On the Summary Focus & Goals page, what excites you?

Breakout #1 Exercise: Report Out

Virtual- Lee Bailey, Lynn Birdsong, Charlie Frenette, Nancy Howard, Margaret Wiener

- General consensus that everyone in the group loves the new mission statement.
  - Ignite, inspire, thrive are words we can all live by and internalize.
  - This should be the touchstone and inform us in terms of our behavior.
  - The notion that we are a science, experiential learning center based and grounded in mission is important. The convening center must be consistent with that and should engage people to go outside.
  - We are not advocates but we are helping people connect and inspiring them to take action.

In person-Terry Birdsong, Lynn Fox, Nicky Hylton-Patterson, Ben Ireland, Karen Thomas, Ginny Valkenburgh

- Best expressed in the mission, but everything we do we need to make for ALL people. And the mission and campaign we do for ALL.
- Ginny said that it looks beyond the ADKs and is worldwide and we can do more of it.
- The mission is not tied to ADKs, but it is long lived and is a resilient statement
- Mission puts us more macro - larger communities and ultimately worldwide.
- The idea of reaching beyond came up a lot. Lots of support for expanding the campus in all the ways that are listed in the framework.
- Power of storytelling and power of youth.

Virtual: Michael Bettmann, Robin Gosnell, Linda Rosenstock, Nell Ryder, Paul Maroun, Pam Matt

- The active words in it- ignite and passion are very important.
- Does the word 'Adirondacks' need to be in it?
- Make sure we have more hands-on activities and exhibits for children.

- Keep the entire campus exciting to attract repeat visitors.
- The convening center is key and there needs to be flexibility.
- Paul pointed out that we have significant constraints at the waterfront because of the APA.
- ADKs should be referenced more in the goals since it is no longer in the mission statement.
- In terms of fundraising, the riverfront and convening center is good to attract contributors.
- Admiration and faith in the leadership of TWC with Stephanie and staff to keep it relevant and up front.

In person: Ed Forbes, Sally Hart, Meadow Rutenbar

- Discussed the opportunity we have at the riverfront.
- Explored the tensions between waterfront and convening center, opportunities of both and rethinking the convening center scale.
- Need to be more upfront about thinking about the convening center as a public/private partnership to help us create this center and identify partners in NYS or other public entities.
- There is a lot of discussion of the waterfront on how exciting it would be.
- Talked about the ongoing need of being the Chitauqua of NY regarding the climate discussion in New York State.
- Talked about how these are ongoing things that we need to continue to do and are important to the further investing in the endowment.
- Enduring passion inspiring action and continuing to be inspired by that

Virtual - Larry Clifford, David Fadden, Juan Roqriguez, Rick Godin

- Agreed with many of the other groups.
- The mission has done a great job bringing what has been the mission all along to be much more succinct
- Igniting and passion - are very important and are a good start to the next phase of TWC's future.
- Comment: We should base our decisions on who our target audience is and how we attract those people to campus and work backwards from that.
- Questions regarding the convening center - who is the target audience? Lots of flags and questions about purpose, expense (is this the best place to be putting our dollar). Why is the convening center worthy for consideration and look at in greater scope of things.
- The waterfront feels exciting and a Disney feel. A whole new facility like that and experience would attract more new visitors than we have had before.
- Net-zero came up in discussion- is a very viable goal for us. But the experience achieved by our visitors is paramount.
- How important it is that our staff is trained with presentation, as that experience is important. If the presenter is not well engaged, we need to help people come along and improve their skills. This is for current staffing and future staffing needs.

In person -George Cigale, Emily Forbes, Betsy Lowe, Jack Ryder

- We all agreed that inspiration, passion, thrive, and did have a robust discussion about not having the word Adirondack and how important is place?
- We were wondering about grounding in place, being Adirondacks. It's not in our name and it's not in our mission. We are not going back to wordsmithing, but it was a question on our mind.

- There is such great diversity on the board and diversity of thought with goals.
- We came together with the idea of nature's four systems, and doing something with the waterfront is really important and setting us up for doing feature exhibitions, etc.
- We don't want people to have a stagnant feeling about TWC.
- How important is it to have a net-zero campus? Is it costing us too much money in the long term run and is it worth it with that price tag? Great goal, but a little lofty, plus we are lead certified.
- The endowment is so important for the long run and need to pay attention to that.
- Forward thinking of our digital presence. If someone cannot get to campus, then joining us digitally and connecting with the wider world is really important.

After a lunch break, H. Logan- Dechene proposed a strategy for the campaign aligned with the framework.

- Imaging this campaign to have three large strategic “buckets” that correlate to the strategic framework. Under each “bucket,” there are projects that are immediate (need cash), projects that are ongoing and projects, and areas that would benefit from endowment and annual support.
  - Vibrant & Experiential Campus: Exhibit and Facility Capital Investments
    - Building Reserve Fund
    - Exhibits & Facility Endowment fund
    - Priority Capital Project
  - Convening & Outreach: Program Support
    - Program Endowment Fund
    - Priority Capital Projects
  - Organization Capability & Capacity: Undesignated Support
    - Annual Fund (2025 - 2029)
    - Designated Endowment Fund
    - Priority Capital Projects

There was discussion about the annual fund being a part of the campaign as a part of the \$35mm to be raised: The annual fund is a proposed part of the campaign, which we know will take some work and will require different conversations with different donors. E. Forbes challenged everyone to think long and hard about taking the \$35mm to the capital project and raise a healthy annual fund on the side. The annual fund will be sequenced from three years to five years and will be engaging people at different levels and getting people on board to build those funds.

B. Ireland noted that it would be helpful for the board to look at the different chunks of money that will be raised during the campaign - \$5mm for operating, \$10mm for endowment - with the intention to become a bigger goal, and \$20mm for capital. When we look at what needs to be raised.

L. Bailey then presented one example of how this fits into this strategy: **Office Annex Proposal**

The bank building down the road from TWC on the corner of Route 3 and Hosley Avenue is for sale.

The purchase of this building would help solve the staff space problem.

- The YCP works mostly remotely because there is not a lot of space at the campus.
- It is relatively cost effective and efficient.
- It is a gateway to Tupper Lake and has a high presence.

- The building has about four offices and spaces for about ten staff members (TWC has about 37 year round people)
- It is about 2600 square feet.

There was robust discussion regarding what the use of this building will be.

L. Rosenstock noted that the Executive Committee proposed that we need to make sure that we do not lose an opportunity and how do we facilitate this and not make it too difficult.

- Board members request a one page proposal detailing the financial implications of purchasing the building and the use case of this building. **Action:** Hillarie Logan-Dechene will create this memo and circulate the board to then help inform a vote via email on whether or not to move on purchasing the building.
- S. Ratcliffe requested approval for Karen to create a small committee of three people to be able to pursue the property as needed if this moves forward.
- P. Alioto noted that people in rural areas would rather see a building be purchased than sit vacant for years.

### **Breakout #2 Exercise:**

The group then proceeded to a Second Breakout to discuss the following:

- How are the three strategic areas connected?
- Can you suggest ways that we can make these interconnections come to life?
- Are there goals we need to add given our mission and areas of focus- living document?

### Session #2 Exercise Report:

In Person: Ed Forbes, Emily Forbes, Nicky Hylton-Patterson

- Looked at the three things a triangle - plant, programs, money
  - Thought about what kind of programmatic force we would need.
- Imagined the convenience center as a driving force to help with things. Building an institute of thought around the center and looking at the Youth Climate Program.
- With the waterfront- what are our dreams for this programmatically, the dollars?

Virtual: Charlie Frenette, Dave Fadden, Juan Rodriguez, Linda Rosenstock, Curt Stager

- Dealt with the questions philosophically.
  - The three buckets - the vibrant campus/convening/finance - formed a rubric that if we do these three things well, and we are more sustained, this would be a good signal that things are in the right order. The analog of this is nature itself.
  - Everything that happens in those four spheres are interconnected. Everything has to be interconnected and interdependent.
  - If we disturb one aspect of nature we would then put something else out of whack.
- Have to have a campus, use the ADKs as a teaching medium, have to convene to bring people in who will broadcast our message in terms of reach and will bring people in, and the finance side.
  - Getting clear on actual expenses, the capital reserve for example, having a campaign to focus on those things that we want to do - will help us get those things in a row and feel like there is synergy there.

- Focus areas are fine, the goals and the actions/initiatives. Need to be looked at in context of earlier conversation.
  - The opinion is that we have finite resources and an ambitious agenda and more to do than we have resources (people) to do. Need to be consciously aware of that.
  - The concern we have is that as we expand our reach and deepen our impact that we don't lose sight of what we have. We do certain things very well and that should be a mandate that we continue doing this very well. We ought to do it and do it purposefully.

In Person: Joe Beck, Terry Birdsong, Sally Hart, Betsy Lowe, Jack Ryder, Ginny Valkenburgh

- We looked at these three vibrant, convening, and capability as all involving expansion and growth. We all said that it involves the four systems: air, water, living things, and land.
- We need to have the whole campus digitally interconnected.
- Talked a little bit about how we could take the campus and broadcast it to the world - live videos, etc.
- Terry brought up the point about didactic learning- classroom inside and outside.
- The convening center could be connected to other Youth Climate summits worldwide. There could be sessions happening at the same time, and we could be connected to that.
- We talked about financial sustainability - having whatever we do to be long term financially sustainable.
- Try to reach younger audiences - everyone is connected to phones, so leveraging that to reach people where they are at.

Virtual: Robin Gosnell, Nancy Howard, Paul Maroun, Pam Matt, Nell Ryder

- We looked at the three buckets as a structure. One as a foundation and the other two as pillars that stood as the foundation.
- The mission statement has a strong presence.
- Fiscal responsibility is an important goal
- Continue to enhance the credibility and recognition of the Wild Center. It is a quiet gem and we would love to have it sparkle more brightly.

In Person: Paul Alioto, Allison Birdsong, George Cigale, Ben Ireland, Meadow Rutenbar

- One of our big themes was our three buckets as a tripod.
- George made a point about meta storytelling and interconnectedness. Systems thinking - with so many different systems and how can we effectively speak about TWC as its own system and have all of these elements to help tell the story.
- Spoke about opportunities for digital and an angle for ppl that would get excited about the waterfront from a programmatic and experiential campus standpoint. Build in the amount of money that would be put into the project, so donors know that up front.
- Helping move people to action and how do we talk about the outcomes and make an impact and what is that measurement of impact.
- We talked about how the campus extends further from the staff to visitors. The Youth Climate Program could be used differently and expanded to different age groups.

Virtual: Lee Bailey, Michael Bettmann, Lynn Birdsong, Larry Clifford, Rick Godin, Margy Wiener

- Difficulty separating the three strategic areas because we thought they were hard to separate. They are interconnected. The need for money connects them.

- Talk about how to bring this interconnectedness to life and specifically make our program more available to others and talked about how to get more people to the campus.
  - Some mobile aspects to TWC education program. Financing school trips, talked about building digital availability. Success of distance learning and possibly packaging digital assets to be more available that would be of interest to people across the country/world. Educational programming that expands to a digital course.
- We cannot try to monetise these things as that is unsuccessful. Lee pointed out that this kind of activity can be very attractive to donors and help with finding financial support for these types of programs.
- Any expansion takes more money, staff, and programming.

K. Thomas then moved into a wrap up discussion. G. Valkenburgh brought up the need for a small document, like a business plan that brings all of this together and puts everyone on the same page - such as something that includes mission, vision, target audience, the goals, marketing plan, and the financials. Further discussion narrowed in on this to be more like an executive summary or cover sheet to a binder that includes the plans for other programs, etc.

Discussion regarding what information does the board need? What decisions does the board, if any, need to make in June? A timeline of goals for the rest of the year would be helpful - outline goals for June, October, etc.

Emily Forbes cautioned our timeline for the campaign with the 5 year and then an additional 5 years for the extended endowment, as there will most likely be a lot of donor fatigue. It will be important to build in a break for staff and donors. With anticipated 50% of donors being new, we need to be aware of this.

The plan for June will be informed by this meeting. L. Fox noted that the timeline really starts in June and we can spend the next year organizing and getting ready. There is a lot of time to get the case statement, story telling, campaign committee, etc. ready for the next steps. J. Ryder remarked that this meeting was a great reset and for everyone to be able to weigh in and now we lay out the process moving forward.

In other business, S. Ratcliffe briefed the board on Follensby Pond and the partnership with the Nature Conservancy. We are in conversation and we will decide what we want to do year by year. They are ambitious and while we are a part of that, we are not driving that. The Wild Center will be helping and supporting some of their public programming. There is the possibility of having two interns for 6 weeks to help with this. H. Logan-Dechene reported on the partnership opportunity with graduate students from UPenn, thanks to connections through Board Member, Joel Treisman. We were invited to apply for and were awarded to be a participant in the UPenn, Masters of Applied Psychology project. They chose the Youth Climate Program and specially, how to engage the alumni of the Youth Climate Program, wherever they may be. Hillarie will be going to Philadelphia to hear the presentation. Very grateful to Joel for making this connection.

**V. Executive Session** - The Board of Trustees went into Executive Session.

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**2024 Board Meeting Dates:**

Friday, June 28, 10 to 4 p.m. Tupper Lake + hybrid

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