



**MINUTES**  
**WILD CENTER JUNE BOARD OF TRUSTEE MEETING**  
**Hybrid in Tupper Lake & Virtually via Zoom**  
**Friday, June 28, 2024 - 10:00 am- 4:00 pm**

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

**Advisory Board Members Present in Person:** Allison Birdsong, Nell Ryder, Curt Stager, Margaret Wiener

**Trustees Present Virtual:** Paul Alioto, Nancy Howard, Nicky Hylton-Patterson, Robin Gosnell, Meadow Rutenbar, Joel Treisman

**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, Jen Kretser, Sara Paula, Isabella Sandersen

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Karen Thomas formally called the meeting to order at 10:03 am.

### **Approval of Minutes**

Karen called for a motion to approve the April Board Meeting minutes.

***A motion was made by Ed Forbes, seconded by Lee Bailey and unanimously approved by the Trustees.***

### **I. Board Chair Report**

Building on the theme of the April Board meeting, today's meeting will continue to build on the April board meeting with the theme of Grow, Endow, and Maintain.

- **Community Bank Building Opportunity**

- The board was briefed on the bank building in April and Hillarie Logan-Dechene has since presented a case for support to purchase this building and was approved via an online vote.
- Hillarie, Bob Kronenberger, Paul Alioto, Sally Hart negotiated a price and was then vetted by the Finance Community, who has recommended the purchase of the property and to do the necessary renovations.

- **Board resolution:**

*The Board of Trustees authorizes the purchase of the 314 Hosley Avenue property for \$245,000, plus \$80,000 for renovations to be paid from the BDEF. These funds will be repaid from Capital Campaign proceeds.*

***Motion made to approve the above resolution by Charlie Svenson, seconded by Michael Bettman and unanimously approved by the Trustees.***

Hillarie noted that the town supervisor was very excited that this piece of property will be back in use and going to The Wild Center. This will be a positive development for the town of Tupper Lake.

- **COT: Process for cultivating and nominating board prospects**

- The Committee on Trustees has developed a step by step procedure to cultivate and nominate new Trustees and Advisory Board members. This has been shared with the board and is posted on the board portal. Please refer to this process moving forward if you have any board prospect recommendations.

## **II. Executive Director Report**

Stephanie Ratcliffe shared a photo of the board from 2014 on the piece of property at the river. Stephanie noted that at the time the board had a vision and they purchased that property on their own because of future opportunities and with the new trail as part of the original vision.

### **Exciting Projects for Summer 2024:**

- The Clothesline Exhibit
  - This will be up for one year, and then we will find another site to install it.
  - If anyone has an idea of where we should send this next, please let Stephanie know.
- Adirondack Woods, Waters and Wonder
  - TWC received funding to work with families and bring them all over the Adirondacks to explore the interconnectedness of place, science and the world around them.
- Follensby TWC Board Orientation Tour
  - Monday, August 5 (time TBD) and Thursday, October 10 (time TBD). Please let Stephanie know if you would like to attend.
- Summer July - October 2026 : Potential Travelling exhibit called “Trolls”
  - These are six large troll sculptures that tell a story of helping people rediscover nature and inspire them to be good stewards of the earth.
  - Will cost \$100,000 per month for four months
    - An attendance increase by 26,666 tickets can help to cover this cost, which is in line with 2019 numbers.
    - Other sites who have had this installation have seen record setting attendance with one site having a 200% increase.

- There are unlimited possibilities for workshops, drop-in activities and other programs.
  - Sharing voice, Co-designing Exhibits with Native Partners
    - Stephanie discussed the process and the ethos behind TWC's work with Native Partners by exploring reciprocity, decolonization, indigenization and Re-story-ation. Stephanie also outlined challenges for museums related to Native knowledge and relationships.
      - How can we be more inclusive?
        - Colonization vs. Decolonization
          - [Definitions: Decolonization and Colonization](#)
        - Indigenization and Re-story-ation
          - [Resources - Decolonizing and Indigenization](#)
          - TWC is sharing voice with Native partners in exhibits
            - To hear more from our Native Partners: <https://rickgodin.net/marla/Marla3.html>
  - **Upcoming Tours**
    - Six Nations Iroquois Cultural Center Tour
      - Saturday, August 17, 1:00 pm
    - Junior Frontiers of Utica Program, July 9-10.
      - Young people from the Utica area will be coming to the ADK for two days, visiting both John Brown's Farm on the 9th and The Wild Center on the 10th.

### **III. Finance Committee Report**

#### **Joe Beck & Bob Kronenberger**

Bob reported on the summary of where we are at through May 2024. We are seeing the effects of the eclipse weekend which has helped our earned income numbers through May to date.

#### **Highlights:**

- 2024 operations are ahead of plan YTD
- YTD attendance numbers are up 69% over LY (47% from eclipse weekend) and admission revenue are up 29% (13% from eclipse weekend).
- Membership numbers are up 32% compared to last year and are \$25k ahead of YTD budget
- Americorps grant renewed– have 8-10 new full time members that will start in September.
- \$1mm line of credit has been renewed with the bank

### **IV. Development Committee Reports**

#### **Charlie Svenson, Hillarie Logan-Dechene, Stephanie Ratcliffe**

Stephanie reported on the gift from Ed Petty and The Nature Conservancy (TNC).

- Ed Petty has been a long time supporter of The Wild Center, along with his father, Clarence Petty.
- The gift was approved by the Gift Acceptance Committee and the Finance Committee
  - The gift includes:
    - \$2 mm unrestricted gift to TWC when estate is settled
    - TNC to transfer property to TWC, assessed value \$550,000
      - Memorandum of understanding will state if TWC sells the property, TWC will return \$300k to TNC.

- Accept an additional \$1mm from the Petty Trust to support use, repairs and maintenance for the house
  - The house used seasonally to support TNC/TWC
  - Need to hire a caretaker to alleviate staff constraints
- **Next Steps**

Following a board resolution (below), an MOU will be created and reviewed with TNC to transfer the property, it will be reviewed and approved by the Gift Acceptance and Executive Committees and the estate is expected to settle in the next 15 months to 2 years.

- **Board resolution:**

*The Wild Center accepts a gift of property (108 Corey's Road, 10 acres) from The Nature Conservancy. If the property is ever sold it is agreed that \$300,000 of the proceeds will be returned to The Nature Conservancy. The remaining proceeds must be used for conservation activities (including education) to remain consistent with the donor's original intent.*

***Motion to accept the property from TNC made by Rick Godin, seconded by Lee Bailey and unanimously approved by the Trustees.***

On behalf of the Development Committee, Charlie Svenson encouraged everyone who is not part of the Take 5 program to consider reaching out to Sara Paula to see how they can be involved to cultivate and steward new donor prospects and supporters.

Hillarie echoed that there are many events throughout the summer, which are great opportunities to bring friends, folks from Take 5 lists, and other potential supporters.

- The Otter newsletter is out and is also a great tool to send to folks to show the listing of what is going on all summer.
- A curated summer events list of member, donor and public events has been shared with the board.

## **V. Session #1 - Capital Campaign Planning and Feedback**

Campaign Co-Chair Lynn Fox reported on the campaign planning that she, co-chair Lee Bailey and the leadership team have been working on.

- Over the course of four years, from 2019 - 2024, the board has worked hard on many different initiatives to help get us where we are today.
- The rest of the meeting will focus deeper on some of the priorities - the Endowment, the Waterfront and the Convening Center.
- Later in this meeting the Board will be asked to approve the next steps of Campaign Planning

Campaign Co-Chair Lee Bailey reported on key takeaways that he and Lynn heard while speaking to board members regarding the campaign and the key priorities.

1. We need a bigger endowment to ensure the longevity of TWC and there was a strong desire to ensure adequate capital for the existing buildings that need capital repairs and updates. This adequate support must be able to survive economic downturns. A \$20 million true endowment is needed to ensure longevity of TWC.

2. We heard enthusiasm for the waterfront
  - a. But what is it? We need to make it clearer on what this is.
3. Discussed cost of convening center and its design and purpose to make sure it is consistent with mission and that it serves daily visitors
4. We need to reach out to non-traditional donors and expand the donor base.
5. Finally, overall enthusiasm for all goals of the campaign and anxious to see it get started sooner rather than later.

Karen reflected on how the permanent endowment has been at the forefront of her mind. She recalled a story of climbing Coney Mountain and how everytime she does that hike there is always a sense of awe and wonder, and often challenges to overcome while hiking. The last time she went hiking, she noted that the stone at the top was anorthosite, a foundational bedrock and name of our new permanent endowment. She was reminded that like Coney Mountain, The Wild Center also stokes awe and wonder, has faced challenges but always overcomes and inspires action for a thriving natural world that appeals to individuals, families, groups and so many more.

At the last board meeting, the focus was on the need to maintain, endow, and grow. The need to maintain and grow is essential to the vibrancy of our programs, the campus and is interconnected to the need for a strong foundation. A strategic endowment, designed to provide perpetual funding is essential at this time. The Anorthosite Trust, which has been endorsed by the Executive Committee is meant to help do that.

## **VI. Session 2: Permanent Endowment**

- Lee outlined that we need to maintain an endowment for 1. Existing facilities, 2. Rainy day, 3. New programming. This is the time to do that and move to a permanent endowment.
- Lynn Birdsong remarked that when he began as chair, the endowment was really non-existent. A minor endowment campaign was done and raised 1mm - 1.5mm, which made everyone think right from the start that an endowment is necessary. This Anorthosite Trust is exactly that, as an Anorthosite is foundational, which is the objective to build the bedrock that we need.

The notion of **“Why Not Now?”** is essential and is related to if you are going to give, “why not now?” The foundation is essential before we start the campaign and this will help get a headstart on a \$20mm Endowment Fund, which helps show our supporters we’ve got the money and are worth investing in.

- Charlie Frenette presented the Anorthosite Trust. He reflected that the land that TWC is sitting on is thousands of years old made out of an anorthosite, which is a unique rock known for highly reflective properties, it is rare, and has a unique composition that makes it resistant and resilient. Charlie likened the anorthosite to The Wild Center where our impact of vitality and growth will be shaped by external forces and our ability to withstand pressures is vital. TWC needs to make sure its business model and its ability to make an impact with the mission statement is the main focus.

The Wild Center is at a point in its life cycle where:

1. We need to ensure continuity of operations

2. We need a financial foundation that is sustainable
  3. Need a trust that is dedicated solely to address our finances that is not impacted by donor fatigue or economic challenges
- **The Wild Center Anthrothsite Trust will be established as a “true endowment”**
    - Defined legally as an endowment whose principle/corpus must be preserved and cannot be dispersed. It will have added features of protecting corpus from inflation.
  - **Goal \$20 million Contributed by 2031**

The trust is designed to be a steadfast foundation. Aims to preserve and protect cherished assets and ensure they remain robust for the future.

**With an initial goal of \$20mm, Charlie outlined the following plan:**

- By 2024: Incorporate \$1.7 mm from current permanent endowment
  - Seek support to fund \$6 mm matching fund catalyst
  - By 2028 raise matching \$6 mm to trigger matching gifts
  - By 2031 raise additional \$6 mm
  - With compounding of investment income corpus to exceed \$20mm
  - Begin draws when goal is realized
- **Charlie suggested the following policies (draw or spend policies) for the new endowment:**

**Protect the corpus in real terms**

    - Tailor draw rates based on need from business plans, taking into account interest rate and long-term inflation rate. Ensure that the corpus grows in nominal terms and holds at least constant in inflation adjusted, purchase power parity terms.
  - **Benefits:**
    - Empower continued entrepreneurial TWC spirit & focus on increasing mission Impact
    - Strong governance, stewardship, and management principles and practices put in place to ensure discipline and adherence to governing objectives.
    - Secure future of TWC world-class learning about the science of nature using the ADK forest preserve and TWC campus as a teaching medium
    - Solid investment with solid intangible returns from something that matters.
  - **Breakout Group Overview**

Overall, groups reported that they were excited by the idea of creating something to help establish a solid foundation for the sustainability and longevity of The Wild Center. Some groups reported that they would like to know more about institutional endowments, what type of existing funds (ex. Obie Fund) we have and how they may change in the future. There were questions regarding the \$20mm goal and whether this is the right number, and to make sure that our staff/trustees know the language so that they can be prepared to speak to donors about it. \*To read responses from the full breakout notes please click [here](#).

**VII. Session #3: Increasing Mission Impact: Build a More Vibrant and Experiential Campus using TWC Waterfront**

Jack Ryder led the board through a discussion and then breakout regarding using the waterfront to help build a more vibrant and experiential campus. From the breakouts at the April meeting, an ad hoc committee was created to begin the discussion on how water systems can be leveraged.

The Ad Hoc committee, composed of Charlie Frenette, Brooks Reynolds, Meadow Rutenbar, Jack Ryder, Nell Ryder, Curt Stager, Karen Thomas and Mark Valkenburgh, who identified the following:

- Importance of hydrosphere: Talking about the hydrosphere aligns with the mission, creates new and significant sources of earned revenues and foot traffic and can inspire action around water.
- This has three steps to the approach:
  - Build a comprehensive program to include exhibits, lectures, activities and recreation
  - Leverage our unique capital assets (waterfront wetlands, fen trail system) for broader educational purposes
  - Create interactive learning experiences about the water system's interdependence with other natural systems.

- **Breakout Groups Overview**

The breakout groups reported on various ideas to be considered when thinking about what could happen at the waterfront. Groups discussed the importance of storytelling, programmatic themes, such as fly fishing and invasive species, safety and accessibility concerns, and the potential need for some sort of structure at the waterfront to accommodate all of these points. \*To read responses from all of the group, please find them [here](#).

**Action: The Waterfront Ad Hoc committee will reconvene throughout the summer and fall to continue processing and refining these ideas, and will have a report out at the October Board meeting.**

### VIII. Sessions 4 & 5: Convening Center

Stephanie Ratcliffe reviewed more information regarding the building project of the Net-Zero Convening Center (official name TBD). She identified critical needs and why now is the time for looking towards building this building and reviewed the various spaces and potential usage of the building.

- The critical need
  - Why do we need this now?
    - We are constrained by our indoor spaces - we cannot grow without more capacity
    - We are poised to expand on our signature convening programs, but we are forced to push these to the outer edges of the calendar and offsite
    - Large majority of audience comes in the summer months - we cannot accommodate them with new program offerings
    - Solves dysfunctional part of campus
      - Listen to staff perspectives: <https://vimeo.com/967046752/1c7dd07d13>
    - Allows us to plan something and reduces the amount of shifting we do in the main building
- Board Strategy

- Culturally, there is a surge of social isolation creating an urgent need for interpersonal interaction. Important to connect to the natural world, to each other, and to actions that impact our future world
- Museums can build community while serving the mission
- TWC already convenes and has been a leader of convening in our field through convenings such as the Youth Climate Summit, Adirondack Building Conference, to name a few. There are endless topics to explore through convenings - such as Nature in Early Childhood, Species Movement and Extinction, Fire in the Adirondacks.
  - There are many more opportunities for informal education
    - Future ideas from Curt Stager
      - Communication skills for scientists
      - Traditional ecological knowledge and western science
      - SAMFEST: Science, Art, Music Festival - partnership with Paul Smith's College
      - BIPOC outdoors
      - Science at camp
- Stephanie reported that per the board's request, the architect had modified the design and identified new lower cost estimates for the new building working with a different contractor and modifying the design. Pairing down the design to **\$19,952,501**.
  - Costs related to Net Zero components
    - Adding net-zero features would increase cost
      - Cost estimate: \$511,400
      - Payback period
        - Geothermal - about 20 years
        - Solar panels - 10-20 years
    - **With net zero features, building would cost - \$20,500,000**
- TWC can support the operational expenses of the facility through earned income, with specific convenings could yield \$94k per year and by adding rental events.

The modeling in the business plan estimated conservatively that the programming done in the new facility would attract an additional 10,000 general admission visitors and an additional \$200k in earned revenue per year. It would double rental events and there would be a corresponding need to add staffing.

**The recording of the overview of the convening center is below which helps answer what design elements have changed to bring the cost down.**

**<https://us02web.zoom.us/rec/share/MdZi6rOTw4t2VW0TrKsUC0rMZpEsRZidtm5teHYr2KLCg3begM3bFyhiIm2jvSGJ.bEMgsfftIOO89mjg>**

**Passcode: .6jAWZfj**

**General comments:**

There were comments concerning the clear constraints of space at TWC and that this building would help alleviate space issues while also opening up new programmatic opportunities. If funding can be found then this building would be able to help us with our aspirations, while the endowment and other streams of funding would be able to help with existing building projects. This building is also important for The Wild Center brand and how we are a thought leader bringing people together while solving other campus challenges. Through a bottom up process, the objectives of the Convening Center have not changed, but have been refined and new ideas have been added to it.

Three distinct buckets were identified that need to be addressed:

1. Significant deficiencies in our facilities in order for us to operate
2. We could be meeting much more demand with the things we already do
3. More aspirational - things we are not doing right now but could be doing

Concerns were voiced regarding the objectives of the convening center and felt that the objectives have shifted and that now, not only are we trying to get people to the center to convene but also to do our everyday programming to the fullest that we can. What we are actually trying to do needs to be better defined.

- Questions were posed regarding whether this is the minimum cost solution to solve the problem of space usage for all of our programming and whether this is the most cost efficient solution to the problem.
- We need to be clear on what costs we are looking at and how we are maintaining this moving forward.
- A general campaign question was raised, asking how much money is expected to be needed for the convening center, endowment, and waterfront?
- We would benefit from a pro forma analysis - What is The Wild Center looking like with this and without this?

Lee Bailey noted that we are still in the process of clarity and we know what we want to do and we think we can raise the money to do this and would like the flexibility to continue working to put this together so that we can build a compelling case statement. Lee proposed that he and Lynn would like the summer to be able to continue working and refining goals to then be able to develop a clearer case statement.

Karen Thomas asked everyone to continue thinking about this discussion. More work needs to be done to refine our convening strategy and addresses the needs presented. The campaign co-chairs are eager to move forward, there are conversations about the waterfront and another group will be discussing the convening center.

### **VIII. Session #6 - What is Next in Campaign Planning?**

Lynn Fox reported on what positive feedback from the board they have received, and what revenue we currently have in the pipeline that would be counted towards the campaign.

Co-chairs, Lynn and Lee, identified they would like to move forward and gain approval to identify and form a campaign committee as well as be allocated up to \$100,000 for the next year to put towards planning efforts - such as hiring consultants who can help with securing grants.

- It was noted that a gantt (sequencing) chart would be helpful to be able to visualize the timeline.
- Others felt that the work of getting the case statement written will help clarify what the goals are and that waiting to approve a committee would do a disservice to the planning process. It was expressed that there needs to be a balance with moving forward
- It was noted that this would be a comprehensive campaign, where work happens on parallel tracks, as we know that donors will determine what they want to give to once they hear their options.

### **Resolution**

*The Board of Trustees authorizes continued Capital Campaign planning and preparations and gives Karen authority to approve up to \$100,000 prior to a formal vote on Campaign priorities and goals in August.*

*More analysis, more thought and conversations around this needs to be had.*

**Joe Beck moved to authorize Karen Thomas to work with the Campaign Committee to spend up to \$100,000 to advance the campaign based on her judgment of what is necessary and can be done, seconded by Linda Rosenstock, and unanimously approved by the Trustees.**

### **IX. Executive Session**