



**MINUTES**  
**WILD CENTER OCTOBER BOARD OF TRUSTEE MEETING**  
**Hybrid in Tupper Lake & Virtually via Zoom**  
**Friday, October 11, 2024 - 9:00 am- 2:00 pm**

**Trustees Present In Person:** Karen Thomas, Board Chair, Linda Rosenstock, Vice-Chair, Jack Ryder, Vice-Chair, Virginia Valkenburgh, Secretary, Paul Alioto, Lee Bailey, Michael Bettmann, Lynn Fox, Charlie Frenette, Rick Godin, Betsy Lowe, Paul Maroun, Brooks Reynolds, Meadow Rutenbar, Nancy Simpkins (Trustee Emeritus)

**Advisory Board Members Present in Person:** Margaret Wiener, Michael Hunsinger, Stanley Rumbough

**Trustees Present Virtual:** Joe Beck, Treasurer, Lynn Birdsong (Trustee Emeritus), Terry Birdsong, Larry Clifford, David Kanietakeron Fadden, Ed Forbes, Robin Gosnell, Sally Hart, Ben Ireland, Pam Matt, Juan Rodriguez, Charlie Svenson, Joel Treisman

**Advisory Board Present virtual:** Allison Birdsong, Martha Bullock, Emily Forbes, Nell Ryder, Curt Stager, Mark Valkenburgh, Ross Whaley

**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, Robin Ellis, Sara Paula, Isabella Sandersen

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*Please note that these Board Minutes are longer and more detailed than normal given the importance of discussion and Board actions described below. We felt it better to include more detail for clarity and transparency.*

Karen Thomas formally called the meeting to order at 9:02 am.

**Approval of Minutes**

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

*A motion was made by Lee Bailey, seconded by Lynn Fox and unanimously approved by The full Board of Trustees.*

Karen introduced a resolution to honor Ross Whaley for his distinguished service to The Wild Center Board. Ross has moved to Michigan to be closer to family, but will still serve on the Advisory Board.

**Resolution Honoring Ross Whaley for  
Distinguished Service to The Wild Center Advisory Board  
October 11, 2024**

**WHEREAS**, Ross Whaley has served on the Board of Trustees and Advisory Board of The Wild Center since 1999, demonstrating unwavering commitment and leadership throughout his tenure; and

**WHEREAS**, during his time on the Board of Trustees and Advisory Board, Ross Whaley led the Science Advisory Committee during the development of The Wild Center's original exhibitions, identifying and engaging regional scientists across a wide range of disciplines and areas of expertise; and

**WHEREAS**, Ross Whaley has played a critical role in the ongoing content development of the Climate Solutions initiative, lending his vast knowledge and experience to ensure The Wild Center remains at the forefront of climate education; and

**WHEREAS**, Ross Whaley has been a key contributor to The Wild Center's Strategic Visioning process, offering valuable insights and direction to help shape the future of the institution; and

**WHEREAS**, Ross Whaley has been a loyal champion of The Wild Center, serving as a connector to the scientific community and a trusted thinking partner, whose generous gift of time and guidance has been instrumental in elevating The Wild Center's reputation as a trusted source of science education throughout the region; and

**WHEREAS**, Ross Whaley is an inspiration to staff and board and the entire Adirondack community with his grounded compassion, optimism, and always a sense of awe for the natural world;

**NOW THEREFORE**, be it resolved, that the Board of Trustees of The Wild Center, on behalf of the staff, volunteers, and community, hereby expresses its deepest appreciation to Ross Whaley for his exemplary service, leadership, and invaluable contributions to the growth and success of The Wild Center; and

**Be it further resolved**, that this resolution shall be recorded in the official minutes of The Wild Center and a copy presented to Ross Whaley as a token of our profound gratitude and respect.

***Motion to approve the resolution made by Michael Bettmann, seconded by Ginny Valkenburgh and approved unanimously by the Board of Trustees.***

## **1. Chair & Director Report**

Karen reported on the Anorthosite Permanent Endowment Fund (APEF) and called for two approvals to be made by the Board of Trustees for the fund. She noted that the Finance Committee had approved and recommended the two proposed actions.

**Desired approvals:**

1. Approve the establishment of this fund
2. Authorization of transfer of funds

The APEF is a permanent, self-sustaining fund, ensures financial stability, supports operational costs not supported by other revenue sources, and funds preventive maintenance and key system replacements.

**Note:** A comprehensive document with this information will be added to the Board Portal at [wildcenter.org/board](http://wildcenter.org/board) (password: twcboard06).

Karen described the current endowment structure that would be incorporated into the APEF and then outlined the goals for the APEF.

### **Goals for the Anorthosite Fund:**

#### **\$20 Million contributed fund balance - 2031**

- \$1.9mm from current Permanent Endowment
- \$6mm transferred from Board Designated Fund
  - \$4mm by 12.31.24
  - \$2mm from Petty gift by 2035
- \$12mm in new investments and donations from friends of TWC

#### **There was then a vote on the two proposals:**

1. Authorize creation of the Anorthosite Permanent Endowment Fund as a Permanent Endowment vehicle for The Wild Center.

*A motion by Lee Bailey to approve the creation, seconded by Joe Beck and was unanimously approved by the Board of Trustees.*

2. Authorize the transfer funds- \$1.9mm from current Permanent Endowment and \$6mm from Board Designated Fund:

*A motion by Joe Beck to approve transferring the funds, seconded by Charlie Frenette and unanimously approved by the Board of Trustees.*

## **2. Capital Campaign: Strategic Initiative Briefs**

Board members and staff presented the **five strategic initiative briefs**.

Each initiative was discussed on its own individual merit and how it aligns with our mission and strategic framework and connects people to nature.

### **1. Anorthosite Permanent Endowment Fund**

- Inspired by the \$1mm Why Not Now Gift in 2021 and was motivated by the need to secure the financial future of The Wild Center.

### **2. Building 2030: New Program & Exhibit Building**

Paul Alioto presented this initiative and how staff leadership and the Board have been thinking about how to grow and expand.

- The Buildings and Grounds Committee has worked to answer the Board’s questions regarding the New Building and have expanded the Committee to ensure many different levels of expertise. The Committee has also continued working with and challenging the architects to refine the design to further develop and unpack cost estimates.
- There were questions and discussion among Board members regarding whether net-zero elements were included in the plan, which they are. Paul and Stephanie noted that the information about the net-zero is included in the previously shared 40 page slide deck.
- There was a concern regarding the cost of the building at \$20mm, and whether the ongoing operating costs and costs for staffing are realistic and understood as well as what the 3, 5, 10 year cost implications are. There was a call for the numbers to be vetted and validated before making decisions. Paul noted that the review of numbers for the first year and beyond are covered in the Q&A portion of the building brief. Stephanie relayed that the next building phase is where there will be opportunity to figure out where to save money on design aspects and crunch numbers further. Paul also urged everyone to take a leap of faith and practice “ambiguity tolerance.”
- Others remarked that the Board should aim to build something ‘fantastic’ to match the already existing spaces of TWC. It was noted that as our mission has shifted, so has our reach and the Board should be thinking broadly in terms of fundraising and our goals.

### 3. Employee Investment Fund

Inspired by the regular inquiries from the board about the Wild Center staff, Hillarie presented this initiative that addresses benefit packages and professional development opportunities for the staff. TWC needs to be competitive in an area where other organizations - school, government jobs, etc can offer better benefits and compensation. This initiative does not address compensation or additional hires - something to aspire to.

- Board members agreed that the people make the place and that this is important to make sure staff are happy and taken care of. Board Members noted that they want to make sure that staff are included in the growth plans that have been laid out, and make sure that they are prioritized first over other initiatives.  
**Action:** Ross Whaley suggested adding staff into the Organizational Capacity under the Focus and Goals that are mentioned in the provided brief.
- There was discussion around making sure that the staff we have are not burnt out, as well as discussion around how TWC handles turnover, what causes turnover and an explanation of the evaluation process to make sure people are meeting the needs of the organization and vice versa.
- The Campaign is also an opportunity to look at things differently with a different budget model and see what we are doing well and things that can be improved on.
- Other ideas that were posed included staff exchanges with other organizations, training and collaboration with other organizations and hiring of additional staff.

#### **4. Hydrosphere Waterfront**

Nell Ryder reported on the Hydrosphere Waterfront initiative and what the ad hoc committee has been working on since the April and June Board Meetings.

- The Waterfront would allow The Wild Center to better interpret and explore the hydrosphere and be able to leverage the existing work that has been done across campus.
- Stephanie reported that last week the application has been submitted to the APA and once approved we can get started on redoing the canoe dock pending funding. Additionally, the overlooks and boardwalks are also being revamped.
- Additional things that will need to happen include:
  - resurfacing the road to the cabin as it is crucial for access to emergency services and accessibility.
  - Taking down the electricity poles and burying fiber optic, which allows more opportunities at the site.
- Other Board members expressed the importance of water and an increasing need to educate people on how to keep it clean, its interconnectedness to other life supports, as well as how to save it for future generations.
- There are opportunities to tie into the Youth Climate Program, provide a space that can be ever changing and bring people back. There are no limits on how we can use our imaginations when the infrastructure is there.

#### **5. Youth Climate Program**

Stephanie reported on the Youth Climate Program initiative. This existing program has expanded The Wild Center's reputation as leaders statewide, nationally and globally. The New Building is also tied to the expansion and growth of this program.

- This brief outlines the need for more intentional funding to the Youth Climate Program. It currently receives funding from both grants and individuals, but it needs more.
- The Youth Climate Program deserves its own brief and dialogue because we need to think about how to leverage this signature program as it has a lot of potential and opportunity for funding within the comprehensive campaign.

General Discussion regarding the Briefs:

- The goals and focus page of the brief mentioned digital capabilities and expansion.
  - This is something super tactical and our strategic directions need to be clarified before we expand digitally.
  - The audience and their needs all need to be decided on before something is developed and before more investment is put into the infrastructure.
  - If this is something that is being pursued, Board members and staff should get together to determine the actual needs in this area, identify what resources we already have, and what resources we need to invest in.

### **3. Strategy and Priorities for Capital Campaign**

**Endow, Grow + Maintain: Campaign for 2030**

Karen began by celebrating what we have already raised for the Campaign and noted that today we received a \$1mm gift to the Anorthosite Fund from Nancy Simpkins.

Stephanie continued that we have ambitious goals, and more than ever the world needs us to do this work. Paul said it so well that the health of the planet is at risk, the water crisis, human health because of our changing planet. We need to help people connect the dots, which is what we do so well. We have to do this, because it matters.

- All aspects of the Campaign are important
  - They solve current needs and provide tools for expansion and impact.
  - With a new strategic plan and updated mission, these fit really well together.
  - Great time for this push - experienced leadership team to help meet this challenge
  - It's clear how we can increase our impact and reach
  - We have a well established donor base, and it's been 10 years since our last campaign. The time is past due and the time is now. We can make bold asks.
  
- Campaign Co-Chairs, Lee Bailey and Lynn Fox

Lee and Lynn urged the Board to support the Campaign and support the visions. Lynn continued by noting that this campaign needs to be launched from a place of strength and that we do not want to waste the wisdom and strength that is in this room (and online).

Lynn emphasized that while this is our campaign, the donors will also decide what they want and that it is important that we know that the plan that is set forth is likely to change based on donors and interest.

They then proceeded to go through each of the three aspects of the Campaign as outlined below:

- **Campaign Priorities + Projects**
  - **Endow** - Solidify - Anorthosite Permanent Endowment Fund
    - 31% of Campaign goal
    - Ensure future financial sustainability to execute our refined mission for maximum impact.
      - Solution: Solidify with Anorthosite Endowment Fund
  - **Maintain** - Improve: Optimal Operations, Employee investment, YCP, Annual operations, office annex, campaign expenses
    - 32% of Campaign goal
    - Goal: Function at optimal performance, nurture the workforce & tools needed to deliver the mission
      - Solution: Invest in Optimal Operations
  - **Grow** - Create: New program, + Exhibit building, Waterfront Expansion
    - 37% of Campaign goal
    - Goal: We have outgrown space, and have an urgent need for indoor and outdoor facilities to have innovative exhibits & programs.

- Solution:
  - New Program Building
  - Waterfront

	LONG TERM INVESTMENT GOAL	LEFT TO RAISE TOWARD GOAL
<b>ENDOW-SOLIDIFY</b>	\$20,000,000	\$11,000,000
<b>GROW-CREATE</b>	\$21,500,000	\$13,044,000
<b>MAINTAIN-IMPROVE</b>	\$11,325,000	\$11,325,000
	\$52,825,000	\$35,369,000

Lee described that he and Lynn feel confident that that money is out there and probably even more than that. They are anxious to get ready and need to be able to commit to campaign expenses now to get moving. Lynn also noted that having been a part of many Campaigns elsewhere, she has never started with over **\$17,000,000** already raised in support of this Campaign, which is promising.

Lee wanted to make it clear that while there might not be perfect clarity on every aspect of this, we are close and the Board must tolerate some ambiguity.

**Lee made a motion to begin a five-year Capital Campaign to raise at least \$35.5 million for Priority Projects.**

The next steps are as follows:

- Re-engage Campaign Counsel
- Refine the campaign case for support and budget
- Build out messaging that can be used with blended asks
- Recruit and engage a Campaign Steering Committee (CSC)
- Conduct early leadership gift asks of \$100,000 and above
- \$329,000 for the next building design phase

Discussion with the board followed.

- There were questions regarding the \$5mm pledge for the building and if it could go away if the building project went away. The answer to this is not yet known.
- Joe Beck questioned how much the Board needs to commit to spending aside from what has already been spent and he urged that we have a lot going on that will stress the organization on an operating business and wants to be mindful of this. Joe also expressed doubt about whether the New Building projections are accurate and would like to know that the capital is available to us to move forward with other initiatives.
  - Joe asked for milestones and pricing for some of the initiatives to which Stephanie recommended this be the next step for Finance and the Buildings and Grounds Committee to model these scenarios.

- Both Lynn and Lee maintained that right now is the time to strike for beginning the Campaign so as to not miss out on crucial funding sources and lose the momentum with our donors and staff. Moving forward does denote a leap of faith on the Board's part. And they indicated the need to be able to go out and start talking with donors about what we have to offer. The go-no go for the building is dependent on how much we are able to raise for it. Lynn paraphrased a famous economist - Herb Stein- "*If something can't go on, it won't,*" which is an important mindset in that projects will not be moved forward if the interest and funding are not there.
- There was then discussion on the resolution and whether there is money to be approved in the resolution.
  - Linda Rosenstock made the point that there wasn't an ask right now and that the board would be approving next steps and moving forward with the Campaign.
  - Karen acknowledged the concerns that were being voiced regarding the expenses. The question is how much do we have to spend to get the necessary information to get the answers we need to move forward. There is another question regarding whether or not there are costs associated with the next steps. What are the costs of re-engaging Campaign Counsel?

The approval requested is to move forward with the campaign to be able to tease out more of the details. However, the Board is asking what expenses are coming up. Lee suggested adding a line item for Campaign expenses to be reported out quarterly for more transparency and clarity.

- Ginny Valkenburgh expressed that it would be helpful to have a vague timeline for each of the initiatives and see what their prioritizations are. Lee and Lynn noted that they could do this for the New Building, but it would be harder for the other initiatives since it is harder to predict what projects donors are going to specifically fund and we know that most of our gifts will come closer to the end.
- Ben Ireland noted that the resolution is asking for the Board to take a leap to figure out how realistic it is to close the \$35mm gap for each of the initiatives, and that there is a spend and design component that has to happen for the New Building and re-engaging the counsel.
- Hillarie said that they have budgeted 10% of the campaign goal towards campaign expenses, which is generous.
  - Over the next three to six months:
    - \$500,000 maximum will be spent on the campaign expenses, including \$329,000 for design development
    - \$100,000 approved for the campaign in June 2024 is part of the above \$500,000.
    - The \$400,000 that was previously put towards the building plan is not included in this budget as it was approved by the Board last fall (these funds have been expended).

- Multiple board members remarked that everyone seems to be saying similar things, and agreed that the Board has good information from the consultants and set strategic vision and urged the Board to move forward with a vote. There was an echo of the importance of moving forward now as costs will only continue to increase and we don't want to lose out on the collective knowledge and connections of many of our longstanding Board members.
- There were questions on whether spending money on the building design could be held off and to have more discussion around it. Lee was adamant that we could not wait and that the building design plans must move forward.
- A clarification was made regarding the Anorthosite endowment, that when money is moved from the current endowment fund we do not have to pay that back.
- Paul Alioto told a story of Charlie Frenette giving his commencement address and him saying that Tupper Lake is the center of the universe. Paul remarked that The Wild Center is supporting and furthering this sentiment and that moving forward is paramount. If we don't move forward, what are we losing? **He then said that he would like to second the motion put forth by Lee.**
- Lynn Birdsong remarked that when we did The Wild Walk, people thought we were nuts and were going to break the bank. Since then we have gone through so many things and have survived. A long list of proof statements of us doing things and being successful –starting with Wild Walk. Lynn called for identifying our proof statements which will help build confidence. He then said that he thinks we can do it again and we need to move forward.

There was then discussion on clarifying what the actual resolution is. There was strong concern that the original resolution did not include approving the use of up to \$500,000 (includes \$329,00 for design and \$100,000 approved June 28, 2024) for campaign expenses. **It was recommended that there be two resolutions as stated below:**

### **Resolution #1:**

**To begin the five year capital campaign to raise at least \$35.5 million for priority projects including:**

- The Anorthosite Permanent Endowment Fund
- A New Program & Exhibit Building
- Waterfront Initiative
- Employee Investments
- Youth Climate Program
- Annual Operations
- Office Annex

***Motion from Lee Bailey to approve, seconded by Paul Alioto, 23 approved, 1 opposed, 1 abstain, motion passes***

Breakdown of Vote:

1. Paul Alioto - Yes
2. Lee Bailey - Yes
3. Joseph Beck - Abstain
4. Michael Bettmann - Yes
5. Terry Birdsong - Yes
6. Larry Clifford - Yes
7. Dave Fadden - Yes
8. Ed Forbes - Yes
9. Lynn Fox - Yes
10. Charlie Frenette - Yes
11. Rick Godin - Yes
12. Robin Gosnell - Yes
13. Ben Ireland - Yes
14. Betsy Lowe - Yes
15. Paul Maroun - Yes
16. Pam Matt - Yes
17. Brooks Reynolds - Yes
18. Juan Rodriguez - Yes
19. Linda Rosenstock - Yes
20. Meadow Rutenbar - Yes
21. Jack Ryder - No
22. Charlie Svenson - Yes
23. Karen Thomas - Yes
24. Joel Treisman - Yes
25. Virginia Valkenburgh - Yes
26. George Cigale- Not present for vote
27. Sally Hart - Not present for vote
28. Nancy Howard -Not present for vote
29. Nicole Hylton-Patterson - Not present for vote
30. James Schoff - Not present for vote

**\*Note: A few Advisory Board Members and Emeritus Trustees registered a vote, but the Wild Center By-laws only count Trustee votes for the final count.**

**Resolution #2:**

**Management is authorized to spend up to \$500,000 during Q4 2024 on campaign related expenses.**

***Motion made by Linda Rosenstock, seconded by Lee Bailey, 24 approved, 1 opposed, 0 abstained, motion passes.***

Breakdown of vote:

1. Paul Alioto - Yes
2. Lee Bailey - Yes

3. Joseph Beck - Yes
4. Michael Bettmann - Yes
5. Terry Birdsong - Yes
6. Larry Clifford - Yes
7. Dave Fadden - Yes
8. Ed Forbes - Yes
9. Lynn Fox - Yes
10. Charlie Frenette - No
11. Rick Godin - Yes
12. Robin Gosnell - Yes
13. Ben Ireland - Yes
14. Betsy Lowe - Yes
15. Paul Maroun - Yes
16. Pam Matt - Yes
17. Brooks Reynolds - Yes
18. Juan Rodriguez - Yes
19. Linda Rosenstock - Yes
20. Meadow Rutenbar - Yes
21. Jack Ryder - Yes
22. Charlie Svenson - Yes
23. Karen Thomas - Yes
24. Joel Treisman - Yes
25. Virginia Valkenburgh - Yes
26. George Cigale- Not present for vote
27. Sally Hart - Not present for vote
28. Nancy Howard -Not present for vote
29. Nicole Hylton-Patterson - Not present for vote
30. James Schoff - Not present for vote

**\*Note: A few Advisory Board Members and Emeritus Trustees registered a vote, but the Wild Center By-laws only count Trustee votes for the final count.**

Next steps:

- Lynn and Lee will provide a more detailed list of expenditures at the January Board meeting
- Details and ideas will be teased out to be presented at the January Board meeting.
- The Finance Committee will work with staff to begin to dive into the expenses and scenarios to understand how to make New Building more operational.
- Calls are simultaneously happening in regards to the Anorthosite Fund.

#### **4. Development** - Lee Bailey, Charlie Svenson & Hillarie Logan-Dechene

1. 2024 Annual Fund - Trustee & Major Gifts
  - a. Take 5 - How can you help?
    - i. Take 5 Volunteers are writing note cards to be included in the annual fund letters for folks on their list

- ii. Not a Take 5 volunteer? Consider becoming one and help write note-cards to our closest supporters.
  1. Reach out to Sara Paula, [spaula@wildcenter.org](mailto:spaula@wildcenter.org) for more information.

## 5. Finance – Joe Beck & Bob Kronenberger

Joe Beck reported that we are on target, albeit below some of our operating support, mostly from grants. He noted that we did have an aggressive budget, so you will see that we have about \$500,000 lower net performance, so we'll be trying to make that up. As discussed previously, the Finance Committee will work to decide how to move the Endowment funds to the Anorthosite Fund.

### Highlights:

- 2024 Aug YTD results are slightly ahead of budget. Revenues are \$164k under budget (primarily grants), while operating expenses are \$169k under budget (primarily campaign and grant related expenses).
- Attendance through August is up about 21% from LY, while YTD admission revenues are up 5%.
- We will continue to strive to reduce our budgeted deficit by closely monitoring expenses and through annual fund appeal.
- Total endowment funds are now at \$12.5mm, including \$1.6mm in Obie Clifford Fund. Investments have seen an increase in market value of \$1.4mm YTD.

## 6. Programming - Hillarie Logan-Dechene, Jen Kretser

- Hillarie reminded everyone about TedX Tupper Lake coming up on **Saturday, October 26 1:00 PM - 8:00 PM**. Will be live streamed.
  - A link will be sent for the live stream and recording
  - **Action: Reach out to Sara Paula by October 18 to get your tickets, otherwise they will be released to the public.**
- Jen reported on Youth Climate initiatives
  - The full recording of her report can be found here: [Jen Board Meeting Report - YCP](#)
  - Highlights:
    - NYC Climate Week - *Educating for Climate Action Summit*
      - Partnered with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Smithsonian, Yale program for Climate Communication, NYC Public Schools Office of Energy and Sustainability, National Wildlife Federation and Climate Mental Health Network
    - Taiwan Summit
    - Malaysia Youth Climate Summit - October 14 - 18, 2024

## 7. Committee on Trustees, DEIA Sub-Committee - Terry Birdsong, Michael Bettmann, Dave Jones, Stephanie Ratcliffe

- **Nominations Updates/Advisory Board**

Terry Birdsong reminded the Board about the *Board Cultivating and Nominating Document*. The recommendations for the Board were due by September 15. However, if there is a name that someone would like to add to the ongoing Prospect list, they can let Terry, Ginny or Karen know.

- Bios and photos of prospects who are expected to join the Board and Advisory Board will be sent out before the January Board meeting.
- **DEAI Sub-Committee**
  - Michael Bettmann shared the plans for the Board and Staff Book Club
    - *Braiding Sweetgrass* by Robin Kimmerer (not the youth version)
      - Can be purchased from the Wild Supply Co. Store online or on-site.
    - To start **Wednesday, November 13th at 7:00 pm**
    - Four to five Zoom sessions to discuss the book
    - Alternating 7:00 pm and 12 noon on Tuesdays or Wednesdays

## 8. Executive Session

- **Mark your calendars: 2025 Board Meeting Dates**
  - NYC- Friday, January 31, 2025, Time 9am-1pm
  - NYC- Friday, April 25, 2025, Time TBD, dinner April 25
  - TWC- Monday, June 30, 2025, Time TBD, dinner June 29
  - TWC- Friday, October 10, 2025, Time TBD