

Saw Mill River Audubon
May 2, 2016 Board Meeting Minutes
Held at Croton Point Park Nature Center, Croton-on-Hudson, NY

Present: Phil Heidelberger, Rik Kaufman, Bill Kellner, Karalyn Lamb, Donna Lassiter, Valerie Lyle, Michael Madias, Jr., Joanne McAuley, Christine McCluskey, Robert McCrillis, Tom McEnerney, Ken Novenstern, John Phillips, Nina Romanoff, Tom Ruth, and Richard Saravay. Anne Swaim was also present.

Meeting started at 7:30 pm. Minutes of March 7, 2016 Board Meeting and April 3, 2016 Annual Meeting were approved.

President's Report – Valerie Lyle

Valerie thanked Robert McCrillis for his 12 years of service as board president, to applause from the board, and noted that Robert's speech given at the April 3, 2016 SMRA Annual Dinner was circulated to the board with the announcement of the May board meeting.

The Annual Dinner was well received with 70 guests, 61 paying guests, positive comments about the scholarship student presentations and the Cuba Birding program. We netted approximately \$1,100 from this event. There was some discussion about the drawbacks of the Table 9 venue including the shape of the room being difficult for all to see the presentations and the low lighting.

The June Board Picnic sign-up sheet was circulated. Jean Sparacin has agreed to coordinate the food sign-ups again. The invitation was sent via email.

The current Board Committee roster was discussed. Valerie noted that we are lacking a Publicity Committee and Education and Scholarship Committee. We will need a new Recording Secretary since Valerie Heemstra's work schedule makes it difficult for her to attend Monday board meetings. We also need a new representative to the NYS Ornithological Association (NYSOA). Nina Romanoff expressed an interest in this.

The slate for officers and board member for the Audubon Council of New York was affirmed by unanimous board vote.

Richard Saravay was proposed as the new Audit Committee chair. Approved by board vote.

Our 2016 Fund Drive PS Party will be held Monday, May 16, 6:00-9:00 pm at the Croton Point Nature Center.

At Valerie's request, Anne Swaim summarized the formation and work of the Weinstein Property Committee to date. Minutes from the committee's May 18, 2016 meeting are appended to these minutes covering the items discussed. The Board voted to affirm the selection of committee members: Phil Heidelberger, Michael Madias, Jr, Robert McCrillis, Tom McEnerney, Ken Novenstern, Tom Ruth, and Valerie Lyle with Anne Swaim as staff support. The committee will meet again on Monday, June 13.

Saturday, September 17 will be the 2016 Board Retreat, a half-day event with location to be decided.

Community Relations and Development – Robert McCrillis

Robert reviewed highlights from the May Development Report handed out. He reported that the Development Committee met on Monday, March 14 to consider ideas for increasing SMRA income as well as volunteer involvement. A near-term goal is to hold two special fundraising events before the end of 2016: another Hudson River cruise and a gathering at the Weinstains' home for our larger donors. Anne noted that Saturday, October 22 has tentatively been booked for the River Cruise with details to follow.

Finance Committee – Philip Heidelberger

For our official quarterly report, as of April 1, 2016 the portfolio balance was \$924,724 a year-to-date increase of 1.7% (\$15,566) above the January 1, 2016 balance of \$909,158. The year-to-date, one year and three year investment rates of return were 1.2%, -1.8% and 5.9% respectively, compared to our Morningstar Allocation Fund Index benchmark returns of 0.8%, -3.0% and 3.4% for the same periods.

The balance on May 1, 2016 was \$924,473 representing a 1.7% year-to-date increase. There have been \$8,000 in withdrawals from the portfolio and \$5,000 in additions (The Coggeshall bequest) to the portfolio during 2016.

Treasurer's Report – Tom McEnerney

Tom distributed a report of revenues and expenses for the first four months of 2016. Revenues were higher than budget, primarily due to higher donations. Expenses were almost exactly on budget.

Executive Director's Report – Anne Swaim

Anne noted that SMRA was added to a sign-on letter recommended by National Audubon supporting legislation that would allow NOAA and the US Fish & Wildlife Service more support and resources in international efforts to protect various species of albatross and petrels.

Anne reviewed the pilot idea for a Westchester Birdathon to support Rockefeller State Park Preserve's nesting monitoring program with half of funds raised also to be shared with SMRA. We have had responses from people who want to go birding but SMRA does not expect to raise more than a few hundred dollars from this effort this year.

We have filled the Southwestern Canyons & Birding trip scheduled for October 8 to 15, 2016. Two possible spaces remain on the Gaspe Peninsula trip June 30-July 7, both shared rooms.

In the interest of time, the Croton Point update was omitted except to report that the second interpretive sign is to be installed this month and a meeting is expected to be set by County Parks representative to review the timeline for the landfill grasslands restoration. SMRA and other Westchester Audubon chapters will be part of this discussion.

A railing plaque is in production acknowledging Don & Jo Lunetta's more than 50 years involvement with Pinecliff Sanctuary. This was an effort initiated by Meiko Lunetta, their granddaughter, and agreed through email to board officers and Sanctuary Chair Michael Madias, Jr. The plaque will be funded by the family. Don Lunetta is facing terminal cancer.

Advocacy

Tom Ruth updated the *Hudson to Housatonic Conservation Initiative*. A date has been set for the first property survey to encourage native plantings and bird habitat improvements. Three other surveys are in the works.

Richard Saravay distributed resources on native plantings and other Audubon New York chapter newsletters from the March New York Audubon Council meeting and noted that the fall meeting will be October 28-29 in Plainview, on Long Island.

Sanctuaries Committee – Michael Madias

Michael reported on the committee's efforts to improve habitat in SMRA sanctuaries. 63 containers of native wildflowers encompassing 15 different species were planted in the meadow at the Brinton sanctuary on April 30 (Croton Earth Day). Michael has also secured 750 native trees and shrubs, which will be added to Brinton and other sanctuaries in the coming months. The first tree/shrub planting is scheduled for May 21 at Brinton.

Karalyn Lamb gave an update on the LHPRISM-funded project to control Hardy Kiwi vine at Brinton Brook and neighboring properties. The 2016 LHPRISM grant was for \$4650 of the \$5460 request. The difference will involve fall monitoring of the area which Michael and Karalyn have agreed to do.

Karalyn also reviewed the status of plans to control the *Hydrilla* infestation in the Croton River. NYDEC has announced plan for use of a herbicide that will require a one-day closing of the Silver Lake swimming beach on the Croton River. It was suggested that SMRA prepare a web page with links for more information on *Hydrilla* and its control from the resources that Karalyn has gathered.

Programs and Field Trips – Christine McCluskey

We are co-sponsoring a program with Westmoreland Sanctuary on Saturday, May 21 with the author of the book *Heart of the Lion*, the story of the mountain lion that traveled from South Dakota to Connecticut.

Christine reviewed the other upcoming field trips on the SMRA calendar.

Newsletter

In Brian's absence, Anne noted that this week is the deadline for the summer issue of the SMRA newsletter and more articles are welcome.

Bird Seed Sale - Ken Novenstern

We will not have a 3rd Saturday seed sale in May. All seed is now discounted 25% off until our final clearance sale on Saturday, June 18. A sale volunteer sheet was circulated.

Hospitality

Valerie thanked Phil Heidelberger and Michael Madias who brought refreshments.

New Business: None.

Meeting adjourned at: 9:20pm

Next meeting: June 6, Senasqua Park, 6:00 pm picnic, 7:30 pm meeting.

Minutes taken by Anne Swaim.

SMRA Weinstein Property Committee
April 18, 2016 Meeting Minutes

Present: Phil Heidelberger, Valerie Lyle, Michael Madias, Jr., Robert McCrillis, Tom McEnerney, Tom Ruth, Ken Novenstern, Anne Swaim.

We reviewed SMRA/Weinstein family connections to date including our July 2014 meeting with Martin Weinstein and his wife Teresa Liszka during which they verbally confirmed the family's desire to donate the property with its two residences to SMRA. They noted that Gerald (Jerry) Weinstein, Martin's brother who lives in the second, smaller residence on the property, affirms this decision and would be the only other family member involved in decision making about this transfer. We also noted the Weinstains' hosting of the Hudson to Housatonic Conservation Initiative gathering for landowners in September 2015 as well as their offer to host other SMRA events on their property.

It is uncertain how quickly the Weinstains want to settle the future disposition of their property.

In January 2016, the Westchester Land Trust assisted the Weinstains with establishing a conservation easement on their property. Susan Carpenter is WLT counsel involved in this process. We discussed the ongoing value of Susan Carpenter as a SMRA resource as we explore the possibility of SMRA accepting title to the Weinstein property. (We also should obtain a copy of the conservation easement text to review the land use restrictions it contains.)

Title Transfer Discussion

- Life estate versus testamentary gift, upon the death of last surviving family member.
 - advantage of decision recorded now in case of changing family conditions later
 - Susan Carpenter noted, in an email to Ken, that if the Weinstains retain a life estate, they are still responsible for maintenance and property taxes and they can take an amortized tax deduction for the property now.
 - Question of SMRA access/use between now and end of life estate?
 - Recognition that SMRA full ownership/use could be as much as 20-30 years out.
- Costs to SMRA considered
 - Necessary endowment amount to cover, at least, property operating and maintenance costs
 - Timing of transfer re: removal from town tax rolls and coverage of any taxes in this transition
 - Evaluation of any SMRA taxes even after property is on the tax rolls as belonging to SMRA
 - Pending need for current costs from Weinstains.
 - Additional expenses to convert either residence for SMRA needs?
 - Additional endowment for additional programming at this venue?

The committee affirmed the statement that "We agree Saw Mill River Audubon would be interested in taking title of the Weinstein property assuming a sufficient endowment for SMRA proposed uses."

SMRA and Weinstein Next Steps

- Discussion could be framed in terms of “what would be in the deed transfer document” and best between Weinstein’s attorney and Ken?
- Weinstein’s attorney info noted here:
David Kellman, (212) 455-0457, David Kellman DKELLMAN@mclaughlinstern.com
- (Follow-up email after meeting from Susan Carpenter to Ken suggested that Kellman is “basically the make it happen guy not the ‘decide what happens guy’.”
- Discussion on need for SMRA to have some vision for property in place before speaking with Weinstein’s.

SMRA Long-Term Planning for Weinstein Property

- Use as staff residence?
- Use as program/meeting space?
- Use as potential additional residences for interns?
- Need to evaluate site limitations on parking, bus access, and septic
- Possibility of selling portion of Weinstein and/or Pruyn for additional income for transition?
especially with potential shift of SMRA headquarters to Weinstein property
- Pending question of near and long-term maintenance costs of Pruyn House

**** DRAFT ** Vision Statement**

As suggested at meeting, this was drafted post-meeting by Anne Swaim based on our conversations and for the committee to review and edit.

- *We envision Saw Mill River Audubon shifting its headquarters to this beautiful property*
- *and allowing the public to enjoy its extraordinary landscaping and Hudson River views*
- *We also envision the main residence as a highly desirable meeting and program space*
- *to enhance collaborative conservation efforts between regional organizations and agencies.*
- *We also envision being able to provide intern educator & researcher short-term housing*
- *in the main residence and/or the second residence;*
- *we believe this benefit would attract college or graduate level interns*
- *to research and improve the wildlife habitat potential of Brinton Brook Sanctuary and the Weinstein property,*
- *as well as enhance both properties as living classrooms for students and the general public.*

NEXT MEETING DATE

Monday, June 13, 7:30pm, at Robert McCrillis’ house was proposed as the next meeting date for the SMRA Weinstein Property Committee.