

Saw Mill River Audubon
December 9, 2019 Board Meeting Minutes (taken by Bill Kellner)
Meeting at the Croton Point County Park Nature Center, Croton-on-Hudson, NY

Present (in bold type): Cary Andrews, Ginger Bernardin, Earl DePass, Louisa Gagliardi, Phil Heidelberger, Rik Kaufman, Bill Kellner, Donna Lassiter, Valerie Lyle, Michael Madias, Jr., Joanne McAuley, Tom McEnerney, Ken Novenster, Steve Rappaport, Nina Romanoff, Tom Ruth, Lynn Salmon, Richard Saravay, Jean Sparacin, Larry Trachtenberg, Debbie van Zyl, Kathleen Williamson. Executive Director Anne Swaim was also present.

ABSENT: Earl, Rik

Meeting started at 7:30 pm.

President's Report— Valerie Lyle

It was noted that a quorum was present.

Kathleen moved that the board of directors approve the minutes for the board of directors meeting held on Oct. 9, 2019. Lynn seconded this motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

It was noted that fundraising letters were distributed to board members prior to the start of the meeting; board members are asked to sign a personal PS to the letters assigned to them.

Board members who have not yet made a donation to SMRA in 2019 are asked to make a donation before the end of the month.

Shortly after our November Board retreat, several of us were approached by a donor who wishes to remain anonymous offering a donation of up to \$100,000 to be given over several years to help support improved compensation for Anne, as well as SMRA's long-term financial sustainability. Details are still being worked out with the donor, but we have already received the first installment of \$19,342, which will be added to our endowment. The donor expressed a strong preference that our programs and local bird walks, such as the Monday morning walks, remain free of charge.

While this is a very substantial and much-appreciated donation for Saw Mill, it will not in itself put us on a sustainable financial footing. We would like this gift to serve as a catalyst to increase our annual fund revenue going forward. To that end, a portion of the donor's contributions in future years will be given as matches for contributions from other donors that are over and above their past annual donations. This has already inspired several other donors to pledge \$5,000 in additional annual donations in the coming years. We hope that those of us who are able to do so will increase our contributions to take advantage of this matching opportunity. We will be forming a development committee to focus on developing donor relationships and enhancing the effectiveness of our fund drives. This committee will work out the details of the matching program with the donor and will report on them at a future board meeting.

Lastly, we believe that to best leverage the matching grant portion of this donation, a single, well-coordinated effort is needed, led by the new development and fundraising committees. It will probably be connected to the annual appeal. In light of that—with the exception of the follow-up 2019 appeal letters to past large donors who have not yet donated that we are PSing tonight—we strongly recommend that no additional appeals be sent in 2019.

The board expressed its appreciation to Louisa, who will chair the new fundraising committee.

The breakout groups from the SMRA board of directors retreat held on Nov. 9, 2019 need to forward the written reports of their discussions to the SMRA office.

Roger Garrison has resigned from the board. Roger has expressed interest in staying active with SMRA in his chosen area of environmental education.

Staff Compensation— Tom McEnerney

The following discussion was held in executive (closed) session. Anne Swaim left the meeting prior to this discussion.

Tom distributed a hand-out to the Board showing three different compensation proposals for Anne Swaim. A copy of the hand-out is attached to the minutes. Tom briefly explained the three proposals and an extensive discussion followed during which the Board members asked many questions and made many comments. This included discussing the requirements of New York law relating to salaried employees who are exempt from overtime, the fact that Anne's current compensation is based on a 30-hour work week, the value of the housing that Anne receives from SMRA, and the salaries earned by employees of other Audubon chapters in the area.

Following the discussion, upon motion made by Louisa Gagliardi and seconded by Ken Novenster, the Board voted unanimously to approve the compensation proposal called "Alternative" on the hand-out. Thus, the Board approved a one-time payment to Anne of \$3,360 in 2019 and the reimbursement of her expenses for electricity, propane and water at Pruy House for 2019. The Board also approved a salary of \$45,800 for 2020 and the payment by SMRA of all utilities at Pruy House in 2020 and subsequent years.

With passage of the motion, the executive (closed) session ended; Anne was asked to rejoin the meeting.

Finance Committee— Phil Heidelberger

[Reference Investment Portfolio Performance Report for Period Ending Sept. 30, 2019 and Investment Portfolio and Asset Allocation Mix Oct. 1, 2019]

For our official quarterly report, as of October 1, 2019 the portfolio balance was \$982,399, a \$95,823 (10.8%) increase above the January 1, 2019 balance of \$886,576. The three-month, year-to-date, one year and three-year investment rates of return were 0.9%, 14.2%, 4.0% and 8.0% respectively, compared to our Morningstar Allocation Fund Index benchmark returns of 0.7%, 10.6%, 2.3% and 5.5% for the same periods. The portfolio balance on December 1, 2019 was \$993,812, an increase of \$107,236 (12.1%) YTD. As of December 1, we are \$23,404 (16.2%) above our guideline to maintain two years of budgeted expenses in highly liquid assets such as checking and money market funds. As of December 8, there have been \$22,016 in additions to and \$50,700 in withdrawals from the portfolio during 2019.

Pruyn House Report— Ginger Bernardin

Repairs to the kitchen and upstairs sinks have been completed by a plumber at a cost of \$269. The Pruy House Budget Committee met on Nov. 25, 2019. The committee is looking at getting part of the interior of Pruy House painted; estimates range from \$1,780 to \$2,225. Additional work required in 2020 includes locating and correcting the cause of a water-damaged wall in the kitchen and repairing the wall. Additional kitchen work that should be done as funds are allocated by the Board includes painting cabinets, walls, and ceiling and replacing the linoleum floor. Ginger also noted that the roof of Pruy House, though apparently not leaking now, is long past its expected life and may need replacement soon. The Committee will return to the board in early 2020 with specific proposals for these jobs.

Treasurer's Report— Tom McEnerney

[Reference SMRA 2020 Budget 12-4-19]

Net expenses for 2019 are expected to be about \$11,000 better than the 2019 Budget due to about \$6,000 of higher revenues and about \$5,000 of lower expenses.

Tom then went through the proposed 2020 Budget line by line. Comments on the SMRA 2020 Budget report include:

- 1) the \$9,140 budgeted revenue for membership includes the annual membership grant of \$3,540 from National Audubon (NAS).
- 2) the \$82,500 budgeted expense for salaries and benefits in 2020 is based on the staff compensation proposal decided on at the SMRA board of directors retreat held on Nov. 9, 2019. However, based on the passage of the motion described above in these minutes (see *Staff Compensation*) the figure of \$83,750 should be substituted for the figure of \$82,500 in the printed 2020 Budget.

Treasurer's Report— Tom McEnerney cont'd

3) Expenditures for the development consultant have been reduced but not eliminated. The figure of \$500 is budgeted in case SMRA needs the services of the consultant during 2020.

Ken moved that the board of directors approve the 2020 Budget as presented in the printed report and with the change in expenditures for salaries and benefits to \$83,750 as noted in 2) above. Louisa provided a second for the motion. The motion was approved with all present voting in the affirmative.

Development Report—Valerie Lyle

[Reference handout: *Membership and Donation Report as of Dec. 9, 2019.*]

There are currently 969 member households. There are currently 512 SMRA chapter member households while the number of joint NAS/SMRA Member has increased to 457 households. Donations year-to-date are at \$62,256.

Val asked SMRA Treasurer Tom McEnerney to report on revenues received from SMRA's participation in the Amazon Smile charities program. Tom explained that an Amazon customer can participate in the Smile program by designating a specific charity for which Amazon will donate one-half of one-percent of the costs of purchases. Tom reported that SMRA has received \$100 to date in 2019 from Amazon. He also said that SMRA receives materials from Amazon to promote the Smile program but that SMRA has not used these. Anne said promotion of the Smile program has been limited to small ads in the SMRA newsletter and brief mentions in upcoming events emails.

Bill reminded the board that when it approved SMRA's participation in the Amazon Smile program, there was opposition based on some board members' feelings that Amazon engages in monopolistic or predatory practices. Bill said that, as the board has not weighed-in on the Smile program in over two years, the board should decide whether or not to reauthorize SMRA's continued participation in the Amazon Smile program.

Ken moved that the board approve continued participation by SMRA in the Amazon Smile program. Nina provided a second for the motion. The motion passed with 16 votes in favor and four opposed.

Seed Sale— Ken Novenstern

Ken expressed concern about the aging demographic of the seed sale customer base. We're looking for ideas on how to reach out to a younger clientele, including families with children. Only one customer showed up for November's third Saturday seed sale. We're hoping for a better turnout with the coming of colder weather for our third Saturday sales dates in December and beyond.

Executive Director's Report— Anne Swaim

SMRA's annual chapter recertification with National Audubon Society has been completed.

We had an excellent trip to Trinidad.

We are planning a two-week trip in the fall of 2020 to South Africa. Our itinerary spans the country from the world-famous Kruger National Park in the north to the unique, biodiverse Cape region in the south. South African guides from Birding Ecotours will lead us.

Larry raised the issue of offsetting the significant carbon footprint of this trip. Anne will look into providing information for trip participants on how to purchase carbon offsets for the long flight to South Africa. While acknowledging the issue of the large carbon footprint for the trip, Anne reminded the board of the many environmental, economic and social benefits of this type of ecotourism.

Although the March, 2020 trip to Florida will not take place, we are hoping to substitute a trip to the remote but spectacular Big Bend National Park in Texas. We may also consider a return trip to Quebec's Gaspé Peninsula with Charlie Roberto.

Advocacy— Tom Ruth

The keynote speaker at our Oct. 26 Climate Change Boot Camp, Dr. Chandu Visweswariah, made the important point that, to avoid the most serious impacts of climate change, we must all work to reduce our carbon footprints and take active steps to move to cleaner forms of energy. Switching from burning fossil fuels in a home furnace to using an electric heat pump system for home heating is the kind of step that everyone should consider. Another step is, when it's time to replace your current vehicle, instead of buying an internal combustion car, buy a plug-in hybrid or an all-electric vehicle.

At the SMRA board retreat, the advocacy group discussed the offer by another of the boot camp participants, Lindsay Audin, to host a training session to train community leaders to work for decarbonization. Lindsay wants to limit the program to committed activists—those who have already taken active steps toward becoming carbon neutral. The advocacy group will work with Lindsay to set up this program as a follow-up to the Climate Change Boot Camp.

Another retreat discussion item was using SMRA's web presence or other outreach tools, to inform the public about steps individuals can take to mitigate climate change. Finally, the advocacy group will look into determining SMRA's carbon footprint as an organization with the goal of reducing those impacts.

Sanctuaries— Michael Madias, Jr.

The deer season ends on 12/31/19. To date, participants in the SMRA deer management program have taken nine deer (four in Brinton Brook Sanctuary, two in Choate Sanctuary and three in Pruyn Sanctuary).

The PRISM (Partnership for Regional Invasive Species Management) invasive species task force has been active in our Brinton Brook Sanctuary. In July, the task force worked on removing hardy kiwi and invasive viburnum species.

Programs and Field Trips— Debbie van Zyl

The annual Christmas Bird Count will start in our area this coming weekend, with the Peekskill and Greenwich Stamford Christmas Bird Counts.

Our Monday walks will have a new third Monday location starting this month: Croton Gorge County Park. On December 19 we'll hold our Members' Best night featuring holiday desserts and outstanding photographs taken by SMRA members. On New Year's Day, Larry will lead our annual outing to Rockwood Hall in the Rockefeller State Park Preserve. And, on Jan. 11, Charlie Roberto will lead an Eagle walk at Croton Point County Park to be followed by the SMRA Soup Social at the Croton Point Nature Center.

To date, nine of the 15 places for the South Africa trip (see Executive Director's Report, above) have been filled.

Kathleen Williamson— SMRA Nature Book Club

On Jan. 7 we will discuss Mariana Gosnell's book *Ice: the Nature, the History, and the Uses of an Astonishing Substance*. The book after that will be *Desert Solitaire* by Edward Abbey (Mar. 3) and *Seeing Trees: Discover the Extraordinary Secrets of Everyday Trees* by Nancy Hugo (May 5).

The club meets at 7:00 PM in the Mount Pleasant Library in Pleasantville.

Newsletter— Anne Swaim

The spring issue deadline is Feb. 1

Hospitality— Jean Sparacin

The board thanked Jean, Ken and Cary for providing refreshments

Adjournment—Valerie Lyle

Ken motioned that the meeting be adjourned; Richard seconded this motion. With all present voting in favor, Valerie adjourned the meeting at 9:22.