

Saw Mill River Audubon
June 10, 2020 Board Meeting Minutes (taken by Bill Kellner)
Meeting conducted via Zoom

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

ABSENT: [all present]

Meeting started at 7:07 pm.

President's Report— Valerie Lyle

It was noted that a quorum was present.

Cary moved that the board of directors approve the minutes for the board of directors meeting held on May 6, 2020. Tom R. seconded this motion. The motion approving the minutes was adopted unanimously.

Covid-19 update: SMRA office will remain closed to the public at least through June, with Ellen working from home, until we better understand the legal requirements for reopening and how to ensure the safety of employees and visitors in this space. Some of us have signed up for a Pro Bono Partnership webinar next week that will address this topic.

Small group bird walks have been successful and will continue (see also Executive Director's Report, below).

We need to decide by July 1 whether to hold our Annual Dinner, which is scheduled for August 23. An outside event is possible at Crabtree's Kittle House, but this would present a number of logistical problems, including the possibility of having to cancel if the weather is bad. Other issues include the possibility of low attendance and how to handle refunds for signups.

Richard asked whether the August 23 date for the dinner could be changed. Anne responded that it is unlikely that we could come up with another date at the Kittle House. Phil suggested we consider a virtual event instead of holding an in-person gathering. Tom M. expressed support for this concept. He said the alternative, assuming we don't have an in-person event, is to postpone the quilt raffle and silent auction until 2021. Anne raised the idea of doing a virtual event around the time of the December (2020) holidays, with an online silent auction. Louisa mentioned that the "experiences" being auctioned off may not be usable because of the pandemic. Anne said we may have to postpone the in-person Annual Dinner until April 2021. Suzanne said, based on her contacts with experts in the medical community, in-person events will be problematic until at least February 2021 and, if scheduled, attendance could well be low. Anne suggested holding a Zoom meeting with interested board members to discuss a virtual event and its timing, whether late summer, fall or winter in 2021.

[Reference report: Membership and Donations as of June 8, 2020.] Membership numbers are showing modest increases—as of June 8 we have a total of 1,052 member households (532 joint NAS/SMRA and 520 SMRA chapter households)

Board members are urged to make their contributions to our Annual Fund Drive as soon as possible.

Board of directors meetings have been scheduled for July 6 and August 3. These will be virtual (Zoom) meetings. Richard asked if one of the summer meetings could be held at Senasqua Park in conjunction with a dinner picnic. He suggested that each attendee bring their own food and utensils. Val responded that social distancing requirements would make this problematic; also permits for this type of gathering are not currently available.

Development Committee Report— Valerie Lyle

PS packets will arrive at board members' homes by June 20. PSing should be on a post-it note, not the letter. Also window envelopes will be used this year. Letters will be pre-folded to fit properly in these envelopes.

Development Committee Report cont'd

In advance of the fund drive, board members who have agreed to be part of our larger-donor relationship-building effort will make contact calls to higher-level donors that they have "adopted." Tom R. mentioned that these calls are part of the new fundraising strategy developed with our fundraising consultant. After a donation is received, the board member who adopted that donor will follow up with a thank you call. Val noted that our consultant, as well as some fundraising and development webinars that some of us have seen, suggest making thank-you calls for all donations rather than just donations. After some board discussion, it was agreed to encourage all board members to make thank-you calls for donations of \$100 or more from people whose letters they PS'd. Ellen said that she would add board member initials to the return envelopes so she can match each donation received to the board member who PS'd the letter in order to let them know when a thank-you call is needed. Val noted that all donors, as in past years, will receive a thank-you letter signed by either her or Anne.

Finance Committee—Phil Heidelberg

As of June 1, 2020, the portfolio balance was \$1,078,257, a \$49,570 (4.8%) increase above the January 1, 2020 balance of \$1,028,687. Without the Mertz bequest, we would be about \$50,000 (4.8%) down for the year. As of June 1, 2020, we are \$38,551 (29%) above our guideline to maintain two years of budgeted expenses in highly liquid assets such as checking and money market funds. This figure excludes about \$67,000 in cash from the Mertz bequest that will be invested in the market over time. There have been \$100,000 in additions to and \$13,000 in withdrawals from the portfolio so far during 2020.

Phil, responding to Richard's question, said the next meeting of the Finance Committee will be on July 30

Treasurer's Report—Tom McEnerney

[Reference report: Operating Revenues and Expenses for 5 months ended May 31, 2020]

Revenues year-to-date are about \$4,000 below budget—\$2,500 is a donation shortfall; the remainder is lower than budgeted quilt raffle sales and loss of trip deposits. Seed sales are about \$700 less than budgeted. Revenue for education programs is expected to be under budget by approximately \$5,000, but, as education program expenses will be about \$2,000 less than expected, the net reduction is about \$3,000.

Most other expense items are close to budget. Advocacy expense is down as there was no in-person Audubon NY Spring Council meeting and thus no travel expenditures.

Revenues less expenses year-to-date are approximately \$23,300; adding unbudgeted expenses of \$9,300 gives a total cash expenditure of about \$32,600. With an endowment transfer of \$8,000 and unbudgeted revenues of approximately \$7,400, total cash inflows are at \$15,400. The change in the balance of our checking account is approximately minus \$17,200.

Phil noted that the cost of our new development consultant is \$2,000, which is an unbudgeted expense. Tom M. explained that SMRA has already paid \$1,000 of this expense; this is reflected in the current report. The balance of the \$2,000 will be reflected in the next report.

The \$8,000 endowment transfer to fund the budget deficit was necessary as our annual fund drive is later this year than in past years. This should not cause any adverse impacts.

Ellen, responding to Richard's query, said printing costs for the annual fund drive are approximately \$1,300. This figure is somewhat higher than past years as we are printing the appeal letter in color.

Tom M. reported on staff compensation for March, April and May 2020 as compared to the same period in 2019. Anne's compensation was about 16% higher in 2020, Danny's compensation was about 12% higher and Ellen's was down about 6%.

The Executive Committee agreed to pay educator Pete Salmansohn \$650 to compensate for loss of income from SMRA because of the pandemic. We have not paid this amount because Pete is making a claim for unemployment insurance, for which SMRA will have a \$2,400 reimbursement liability. We will be eligible for a refund of \$1,200 of this liability.

Fund Raising Committee—Louisa Gagliardi

SMRA's Birdathon is still set for Oct 16–18. We plan to have teams of three to five people who will bird in two categories. A third category, the "Big Sit" will allow up to ten team members in a circle of 30 feet (up from 17 feet to allow for social distancing). The Big Sit will be open to other birding clubs, which will retain \$50 of the \$100 entrance fee. Anne suggested that the compilation event does not have to be done in-person. Debbie concurred that doing the compilation on Zoom would be preferable.

Pruyn House—Ginger Bernardin

Debbie was thanked for getting the new refrigerator installed.

Repairs to the upstairs toilet resulted in a \$450 expenditure. An electrician was hired for \$160 to fix a defective light switch and ground the outlet for the upstairs AC.

Bird Seed Sale—Ken Novenster

Seed sale revenues were approximately \$700 less than budget through May 31. Ken, Anne and Ellen will meet on Zoom to plan the fall seed sale. Anne questioned whether we need to hold the event at the New Castle Town Hall this year. This will be discussed in the Zoom meeting. Phil raised the question of how much seed is left in the shed. Despite extensive discussion, the board was unable to resolve whether the shed is half full or half empty. Ken reminded the board that all seed is being offered for sale at a 25% discount.

Executive Director's Report—Anne Swaim

There has been a significant increase in bird queries via Facebook, text and email to Anne. While some of these emails have been related to our weekly Bird Chats, people spending more time at home may also be a factor.

Efforts to create video content for virtual education programs have run into difficulties. It is hoped that the virtual programs will provide a link to local schools with the aim of teaching students about area habitats. SMRA needs help with video, including filming, editing and overall structure. Richard asked whether NAS has video content that could be shared and also whether expert advice could be obtained from Purchase College students or faculty. Nina said that creating and following a script is critical in video production of the type SMRA is doing. Kathleen said she will reach out to her contacts at the Jacob Burns Film Center for advice on creating video content if they are available during NY Pause. Board members should reach out to Anne via email with any suggestions about video production for education programs.

Advocacy Committee Report—Tom Ruth

The Advocacy Committee met on May 28. Discussion topics included working on a pilot program for three or four participants following the outline created for SMRA by Boot Camp panel member Lindsay Auden on climate change leadership training. Any interested board members should reach out to Tom.

We are also looking at producing a virtual program on food with an emphasis on local agriculture and steps individuals can take to reduce food waste. Representatives of local farms will be asked to participate.

The Advocacy Committee is scheduled to hold a virtual meeting on June 17. Ken thanked Tom R. for all his work on advocacy and mentioned Tom's leadership as SMRA liaison to The Hudson to Housatonic Regional Conservation Partnership (H2H). Ken noted that SMRA is looking forward to participation in the Northeast Bird Habitat Conservation Initiative with H2H and other Regional Conservation Partnerships.

Tom noted that H2H will hold a Zoom meeting on June 16 on steps member organizations are taking to carry out their missions during the pandemic.

Sanctuaries Committee Report—Michael Madias, Jr.

Improvements to the parking lot at Brinton Brook Sanctuary were completed during a volunteer workday in May.

SMRA has received a donation of wildflowers from Jim Gurski, a Monday bird walk participant. While they will primarily be used for sanctuary plantings, some could be provided to board members for planting in their personal gardens.

Sanctuaries Committee Report cont'd

Brinton Brook neighbor Richard Masur donated funds to place a bench in the sanctuary back in 2008; he now wants to donate a second bench. The new bench will be placed along the Green Trail. It will be dedicated to intrepid volunteer Rudy Fasciani.

Phil pointed out that newly georeferenced trail maps of the SMRA sanctuaries have been made available on the Avenza PDF Maps platform. He thanked Anne for undertaking this worthwhile project. Bill also expressed his appreciation to Anne for all the work involved in updating the maps and making them available in digital format.

Phil reported on the NAS collaborative grant that SMRA received to train volunteers to perform sanctuary maintenance. A video of the workshop, which was held on May 19 via Zoom, is available on SMRA's website. There were 27 registrations for the workshop. As a result of the grant for the workshop and follow-up projects in five of our sanctuaries, we've added seven new volunteers. We're ready to file a report to NAS now that we've fulfilled terms of the collaborative grant.

On June 13 at 9:00 AM we are planning to plant 25 trees at Brinton Brook. These were received from the Buffer in a Bag program of NYS.

Tom M. asked about the status of repairs to the spillway in Brinton Brook for which the board approved spending up to \$3,000. Michael reported that repairs were completed in May and that an invoice has been submitted.

Pruyn Garden Report—Donna Lassiter

We are not planning to hold a summer garden tour this year, nor are we looking to do a virtual tour. But Donna will present a talk via Zoom on native plants in August. A second talk planned for next year will cover the topic of planting to attract birds. Kathleen raised the question of having Doug Tallamy present a virtual talk. Anne noted that Dr. Tallamy has done four Zoom presentations in our area recently. Anne will send a link to one of these presentations so the board can evaluate. She noted that Tallamy typically does charge a significant fee.

Programs and Field Trips—Debbie van Zyl

Monday evening Bird Chats will move to Tuesday. We are considering reducing the frequency of these virtual programs.

SMRA's fall and winter programs will be conducted via Zoom. In September, Lynn and John Salmon will give a presentation on geocaching. We're looking to have the authors of *Walkable Westchester* give a book talk in October. Another possibility is to have Joan Collins give a presentation on the Adirondacks in November. Our December Members' Best program may also be done as a Zoom gathering.

Anne reported on the recently initiated small group birding walks. These have had three to six participants. In July and August, we're considering scheduling about two small group bird walks per week with a 7:00 AM start time. The maximum number of signups will remain at six people with pre-registration required.

Nature Book Club—Kathleen Williamson

On June 2, the book club discussed *The Feather Thief* via Zoon. We are considering adding a summer book club session; alternatively, we may decide to take the summer off as originally planned and meet again in September.

Newsletter—Anne Swaim

The deadline for the fall newsletter is the first week of August. Board members are asked to provide newsletter content. Richard said that each issue should have an article on climate change and actions individuals can take. Val suggested an article on the problem of inappropriate outdoor lighting and negative impacts on wildlife; also, an article on dealing with invasive vines might be of interest. Kathleen suggested an article on the problem of off-leash dogs in parks and wildlife sanctuaries.

New Business—Ken Novenstern

Ken requested that the board discuss the possibility of applying for a loan under the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) of the CARES act that was recently passed by Congress. Tom M. said that he discussed PPP with SMRA's auditors who recommended that SMRA apply. Tom went on to explain that loan amounts may be up to 250% of monthly payroll with additional factors considered. Thus, SMRA could apply for a loan of approximately \$13,700.

New Business cont'd

The board discussion included concerns about PPP certification requirements and whether SMRA would be able to receive loan forgiveness as detailed in the CARES act.

Ken moved that SMRA apply for a PPP loan and, if the application is approved, utilize funds received in accordance with the CARES act, including the possibility of seeking forgiveness for the loan. Mike seconded Ken's motion. The motion passed with 18 votes in favor and four opposed.

Adjournment—Valerie Lyle

Ken moved that Valerie adjourn the meeting; Bill seconded this motion. With all present voting in favor, Valerie adjourned the meeting at 9:07.