

Saw Mill River Audubon
September 14, 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 was also present.

Absent: Ginger, Suzanne, Michael

Meeting started at 7:02 pm.

President's Report—Valerie Lyle

It was noted that a quorum was present.

Ken moved that the board of directors approve the minutes for the board of directors meeting held on August 3, 2020. Tom R. seconded this motion. The motion approving the minutes was adopted unanimously.

Membership Report [Reference Membership and Donation Report as of Sept. 11, 2020]

Total membership is now back over 1,000 members.

Annual Fund Drive receipts are significantly higher than the total received in 2019, and we may still receive additional donations as we make follow-up calls and emails. These receipts do not include the anonymous matching grant for increased donations, which would add approximately \$26,000 to the total received to date in 2020. Board members and staff were thanked for their efforts in making this year's drive so successful

SMRA will hold its Community Gathering on Oct. 18 at 5:00 pm. This will be done virtually—we'll celebrate all our connections with people, birds, and nature in the past year, including images from our past events and short presentations from our Larry Light Youth Scholarship students. We are especially pleased to feature a brief keynote presentation from David Ringer, National Audubon's Chief Network Office. Please make sure to attend. Anne mentioned that a planning meeting for the Oct. 18 gathering will be scheduled. Interested board members are urged to participate.

Development Committee Report—Valerie Lyle

Per our development consultant's recommendations, we are sending hand-written notes to larger donors as well as making thank you calls. We've gotten good feedback on these efforts from donors.

Cary commented that the Annual Fund Drive was very well organized, which facilitated board members' efforts. The preparatory work done by Office Manager Ellen Heidelberger was key to the drive's success.

Finance Committee—Phil Heidelberger

As of September 1, 2020, the portfolio balance was \$1,177,625, a \$148,938 (14.5%) increase above the January 1, 2020 balance of \$1,028,687. In August we received a \$10,000 donation match from the employer of our anonymous donor that was deposited into the endowment. We also received a \$26,237 matching grant donation from our anonymous donor representing the increased donations from our fund drive through the end of July. This donation was deposited into the endowment just after the September 1st portfolio valuation. So, we believe that the idea of a match on increased donations has really been effective. We are extremely grateful for the generosity of our anonymous donor.

There have been \$138,337 in additions to and \$13,000 in withdrawals from the portfolio so far during 2020. As of September 1, 2020, we are \$81,477 (61.3%) 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.

Treasurer's Report—Tom McEnerney

[Reference report: Operating Revenues and Expenses for 8 months ended Aug. 31, 2020]

Budgeted revenues for the first 8 months of the year are about \$7,000 higher than budget due primarily to significantly higher annual fund donations (\$17,000), offset in part by lower education revenue (\$2,350) and lower trip donations (\$3,200). Budgeted expenses for the first 8 months are about \$4,500 lower than budget due primarily to lower Garden, Advocacy and Education expenses. This results in a net deficit of about \$8,300, or about \$11,500 better than budget.

Unbudgeted expenses exceeded unbudgeted revenue by about \$6,000 and there were \$13,000 in withdrawals from the endowment. This resulted in a decrease of about \$1,500 in the checking account balance since the beginning of the year. Page 2 of the report shows the details of unbudgeted revenues and expenses. Adding the PPP Loan to the checking account balance results in an increase of \$14,700 since the beginning of the year.

On the bottom of page 2 of the report is a comparison of budgeted revenues for the first 8 months of this year and last year. Annual fund donations are up 57% this year. Special and matching gifts also increased this year; however, trip donations and quilt raffle sales were lower this year. The net result is a 31% increase in total donations.

For other revenue, seed sales were higher, but education revenue was significantly lower than last year, resulting in total budgeted revenue for 2020 increasing 17% over last year. Adding the matching grants received this year from our anonymous donor results in revenues increasing \$48,000, or 71%, over last year.

Fundraising Committee—Louisa Gagliardi

Our 2021 fundraising calendar featuring SMRA members' photos will be sent to the printer this week; we should have copies available for sale before the end of October. The print run will be 100. Anne and Valerie will meet to determine a price point for calendar sales. Anne was thanked for all her work getting the calendar produced.

We need to have more teams sign up for the upcoming Birdathon. This fundraising event will be held Oct. 9–11. A team can have as few as two participants.

Pruyn House—Anne Swaim

Ken raised the question of whether the board should consider doing a capital campaign to renovate Pruy House. The work done by our architectural consultants to explore Pruy House upgrades when Robert McCrillis was president was cited. Ken suggested forming a committee to revisit these plans and consider other options for improving the building.

Debbie expressed support for Ken's ideas. Richard said he would like to work with Ken and any other board members interested. Louisa said she knows an architect who has a strong interest in environmentally sensitive designs and might be available for pro-bono work.

Phil added that possible plans for the Weinstein property should be considered in this mix. Anne described some of the challenges of our consultant's concepts for Pruy House, including the need for a second driveway cut, upgraded septic system, and getting town and state approvals. Tom M. reminded the board that the original plan was a complete tear down with a rebuild on the Pruy House footprint as opposed to a renovation of the structure. He noted that SMRA spent about \$35,000 on this study, which called for the need to raise between \$2 million and \$3 million.

Bird Seed Sale—Ken Novenster

The fall Seed Sale dates were Sept. 12–13. The new protocol for our annual seed sale weekend worked very well. Volunteers working at the Pruy House shed had a number of positive interactions with sanctuary users. Sales, which were quite good, covered seed purchase expenses. Anne and Ellen were thanked for all their efforts in implementing the new system for selling seed at the Pruy House shed. Phil agreed with Ken that the new system was an improvement which should be continued in future years as opposed to returning to New Castle Town Hall for the sale.

Executive Director's Report—Anne Swaim

Monthly third Saturday pickups for seed sales will start next month (Oct. 17).

The Croton Point landfill grassland restoration project is nearing the end of the 2-year funding period on 12/31/2020 without meeting the original goals for removal of invasive species and restoration of natives. The problem is a funding shortfall. After 2 years, SMRA is getting better cooperation in terms of advance notification from the government agencies and contractor on scheduled ongoing work.

The future of the project is not clear. More herbicide treatment will be needed. It is hoped that the native grasses that have been seeded will come up but, in the absence of herbicidal treatment, invasive plants may continue to be a problem. The recent sighting of a Buff-breasted Sandpiper on the landfill is an example of the critical nature of this habitat—there have been no other local sightings of this bird.

Phil asked how much funding is needed to complete the landfill habitat restoration. Anne said it's not clear but probably more than \$100,000. A possible funding source is via Soil & Water Conservation District and the lead District employee is exploring additional funding for a third year of restoration work.

In terms of the issues related to a construction project on the John Jay Heritage Center property adjacent to the Marshlands Conservancy in Rye (see minutes of July 13 and Aug. 3 SMRA board meetings), there will be no changes or environmental restoration as it turns out the project was reviewed by Westchester County Parks, which did not object. SMRA is trying to ensure that local Audubon chapters get advance notification of any future projects that, like the one in question, have the potential to impact wildlife habitat at Marshlands.

SMRA's virtual Bird Chats have been very successful, with 192 people connecting. Our featured presenters as well as our many participants deserve a big thank you.

Board members were treated to Zoom shares of photos taken on recent small group bird walks.

Additional recent SMRA virtual programs included Raptors for Rookies that Anne conducted for Mecklenberg Audubon in North Carolina with about 60 participants and a Birding 101 program for the Greenburgh Library.

We're looking forward to this week's Zoom program on geocaching, which will be conducted by Lynn & John Salmon.

The update of our sanctuary maps has been completed; all maps have been reprinted.

Advocacy Committee Report—Tom Ruth

On Sept. 23 we will hold part 1 of our series exploring food and environmental quality, *A Bird's Eye View of Food*. This first program will focus on food production. Anne and State Senator Pete Harckham will introduce the program, which will be conducted via Zoom. The introductions will be followed by Ken interviewing an expert panel of two local farmers and the founder of one our larger community gardens. We will explore the benefits of local food production to the environment, in terms of habitat protection and climate change.

The next New York-Connecticut Audubon Council meeting will be virtual and is scheduled for October 21-23 and October 26. There will be a presentation by Dr. Chandu Visweswariah, who was the keynote speaker at the SMRA Climate Change Boot Camp. There will also be discussions of dealing with systemic racism and the Covid-19 pandemic. Richard reported that he reviewed the updated Audubon New York resolutions on climate change and urges SMRA to support them.

Programs and Field Trips—Debbie van Zyl

In addition to the Sept. 17 geocaching program mentioned by Anne, we are looking forward to the Nov. 12 Zoom program with the authors of *Walkable Westchester* on the upcoming release of the third edition of this valuable resource.

Small group birding continues. Thanks to Anne, these walks, with advance registration, have been a great success.

Nature Book Club—Kathleen Williamson

The Nature Book Club will meet Sept. 29 to discuss *The View from Lazy Point* by Carl Safina.

Sanctuaries Committee Report—Anne Swaim

Danny has completed the majority of storm repairs following tropical storm Isaias in August. Most of the work involved removal of fallen trees and limbs.

Phil reported that, with the help of five volunteers, the repainting of blazes on the trails in the Graff Sanctuary has been completed.

Michael Madias, chair of the SMRA Sanctuaries Committee submitted the following additional comments in writing after the board meeting:

1. The combined Hudson Valley Ramble/Second Saturday walk at Brinton Brook Sanctuary had only two participants. It was an enjoyable time nonetheless on a beautiful September Saturday morning.
2. Intrepid SMRA volunteer Rudy Fasciani has re-blazed all the Brinton Brook Trails. This work is much appreciated.
3. The Rewilding School Forest Preschool at Brinton Brinton has started for the year.

Newsletter—Anne Swaim

The deadline for the winter issue is Nov. 1.

Adjournment—Valerie Lyle

Cary moved that Valerie adjourn the meeting; Bill seconded this motion. With all present voting in favor, Valerie adjourned the meeting at 8:09.