

Saw Mill River Audubon
October 05, 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: Nina, Earl

Meeting started at 7:03 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 September 14, 2020. Tom R. seconded this motion. The motion approving the minutes was adopted unanimously.

Membership Report—Valerie Lyle

[Reference Membership and Donation Report as of Oct. 02, 2020]

Total membership is now at 1,040 households (553 SMRA chapter member households and 487 joint NAS/SMRA member households).

The Annual Fund Drive has done extremely well with to date over \$51,000 received. This figure does not include \$26,230 received from our anonymous donor to match annual fund increased donations received through July.

The board will not meet in November. Each committee will meet during the month and prepare budget requests for 2021.

Development Committee Report—Valerie Lyle

We are still doing hand-written thank you notes to larger donors. We will do a follow-up fund drive by the end of the year to Fund Drive non-respondents and those who gave shortly before the Fund Drive and thus were not included in the initial outreach. Tom M. stated that the matching program will continue in the follow-up drive (amounts in excess of 2019 contributions will be matched).

Finance Committee—Phil Heidelberger

As of October 1, 2020, the portfolio balance was \$1,183,184, a \$154,497 (15.0%) increase above the January 1, 2020 balance of \$1,028,687 and a \$5,559 (0.5%) increase for the month of September. There have been \$138,337 in additions to and \$13,000 in withdrawals from the portfolio so far during 2020. As of October 1, 2020, we are \$99,262 (74.7%) 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 9 months ended Sep. 30, 2020]

Budgeted revenue for the first nine months of the year is about \$6,000 better than expectations due primarily to higher donations, offset in part by lower education program revenues. Donations are now about \$4,000 higher than the full year budget due primarily to a very successful Annual Fund drive.

Expenses are about \$4,500 lower than expectations due primarily to lower garden, seed sale and advocacy expenses. As a result, the deficit for the first nine months is about \$10,400 better than budget.

The deficit plus unbudgeted expenses were about \$30,300. Unbudgeted revenue of \$7,300 plus \$13,000 in withdrawals from the endowment resulted in a decrease in the checking account of about \$10,000 since the beginning of the year.

Treasurer's Report—Tom McEnerney cont'd

Page 2 of the report shows the details of unbudgeted revenue and expenses. Adding the PPP loan to the checking account results in the balance increasing about \$6,250 since the beginning of the year.

Comparing revenue for 2019 and 2020 at the bottom of page 2, shows the Annual Fund was up \$17,000 this year or about 56%. Total revenue is up about \$9,000, or 11%, however, adding the matching grants from our anonymous donor results in revenue for 2020 increasing about \$45,000, or 55%.

Fundraising Committee—Louisa Gagliardi

The printed copies of our 2021 fundraising calendar featuring SMRA members' photos are expected to be received this week. The calendars will be sold for \$15 plus shipping. Net profit will be \$9.49 per calendar sold.

With six teams signed up for our upcoming Birdathon (Oct. 9–11) revenues are at \$600. Any additional donations will add to this total.

Pruyn House—Anne Swaim

1. New fencing has been installed and brush cleared on the back of Pruy House, creating a privacy buffer between the meadow garden and the private residence. The storm-damaged cedar trees located near the rear patio doors were removed.
2. Visitors may have noted the dumpster located in the Pruy House driveway. It is being utilized as part of the ongoing cleanup of the garage and garden shed.
3. Val asked Ken about the status of his request at the September board meeting that the board revisit the idea of initiating a capital campaign to raise funds to renovate or replace our Pruy House headquarters. Ken said that a meeting with interested board members is being set up to look at the original plans and to propose a path forward. Ken said maintenance projects for Pruy House that are currently scheduled should not be deferred pending any action on initiating a capital campaign. Ginger agreed, saying that painting the interior is a high priority and should not be held up.
4. Board members discussed the need to purchase and install a generator for Pruy House. Anne described the critical importance of doing this before the winter. The concern is that a power failure in winter could lead to freezing of the water pipes serving the baseboards of the oil-hot water heating system. These small-diameter pipes run inside the concrete floors; repairing any leaks caused by freezing would be extremely costly.

The pros and cons of portable vs. whole-house stand-by generators were discussed. The general consensus was that a portable generator would make more sense for Pruy House for reasons of cost and ease of installation. A downside of a portable system is that it requires someone to be present at the time of power loss to start it and refill it several times per day. Rik said that we could also install a WiFi sensor that would alert him and other interested board members of a power failure in case the Pruy House tenant was away. Rik continued that he would assist in helping to choose a generator for Pruy House and that he would be available to go to Pruy House to start the portable generator if necessary.

Ginger moved that the board approve spending up to \$6,000 to purchase and install a portable generator at Pruy House. This amount would also cover a service contract for the generator. Cary seconded the motion, which was approved unanimously.

Bird Seed Sale—Anne Swaim

Seed has been purchased by personnel from the Rockefeller State Park Preserve.

The question of whether to hold the scheduled third Saturday sale for October was raised and also if the sale hours should be reduced. It was decided to hold the sale as scheduled as there are several customers expecting to pick up seed on that day. It was noted the sale is for pre-paid orders only in order to reduce contact during the pandemic.

We are sold out of some items. We will need to place re-order for seed at some point during this month.

Executive Director's Report—Anne Swaim

SMRA's virtual Community Gathering will take place on Oct. 18. David Ringer of NAS has confirmed his participation as have our scholarship winners. The program will last approximately 1^{1/4} to 1^{1/2} hours.

We have signed on to Audubon New York's advocacy letters supporting environmental funding for the state and protecting horseshoe crabs.

Anne and Debbie were the Zoom hosts for the Oct. 3 virtual annual meeting of the New York State Ornithological Association. This was a positive experience; we continue to improve management skills for large Zoom gatherings.

There has been an ongoing issue of the public walking on parts of the landfill at Croton Point Park that are restricted. This is critical habitat for several species of grassland birds. The signs posted on the landfill are confusing; they have failed to prevent public access and, as a result, potential disturbance to these birds. We have suggested to the relevant government agencies (County Parks and Dept. of Environmental Facilities) that clearer signs be placed at the spots where walkers are leaving the designated path to enter the restricted zones. There has been an initial positive response from County Parks. Some board members expressed the opinion that new signs should explain the reasons for barring public access while others felt that simple signs saying No Entry would be more effective. Another idea was to give people entering the park a written handout explaining the importance of the landfill habitat and why public access is limited to the main path.

Small group bird walks for board members (plus 1) at Croton Point Park are being scheduled. The dates will be sent by email to the board. This will be a good opportunity for board members who have not been on a bird walk lately; it will allow them to experience the headset system that facilitates social distancing on our small group walks.

On Oct. 7 Anne will lead a bird walk for the Linnaean Society of New York. SMRA has been a regional innovator during the pandemic with its small group walks; the Linnaean Society has adopted our model. A concept developed by the Linnaean Society on their walks is to send a PDF file explaining social distancing and mask requirements to walk registrants who are then required to confirm that they have read and agree to the guidelines. It is suggested that SMRA follow a similar policy.

Advocacy Committee Report—Tom Ruth

On Sept. 23 we held part I of our series on food production, consumption and impacts with our Zoom webinar *A Bird's Eye View of Food*. We had 96 registrants; 68 logged on for the webinar (although all registrants received a recording of the event). We had an excellent panel (two local farmers and a community garden organizer) to discuss the benefits of local agriculture and community gardening. Anne, Tom R., and State Senator Pete Hareckham introduced the program. Webinar participants learned how local farms and community gardens create healthier soils and maintain wildlife habitat while reducing greenhouse gas emissions compared to industrial agriculture. In addition, customers who purchase their food at local farms or participate in community gardening maintain an important connection to the landscape that is lacking for many of us. Anne did a great job of managing the technical side of this Zoom event as did Ken by moderating the panel discussion. Ken thanked Tom for his efforts at coordinating this program. There is a link to a recording of the Webinar on the SMRA website (see calendar entry for Sept 23). The summary document for this event is attached to these minutes as requested by Tom Ruth.

We are now working on Part II of our food series with a focus on how our consumption choices impact the environment. One idea is to host a film viewing and follow-up discussion. Kathleen suggested we consider the film *The Biggest Little Farm*.

The annual chapter meeting of Audubon NY/CT will be held virtually later this month. Since travel expenses are not an issue, we are looking forward to more SMRA board members participating. On Oct. 21 Dr. Chandu Visweswariah, who was the keynote speaker at SMRA's Climate Change Boot Camp, will give the kickoff lecture for the meeting. The following day will feature a Chapter Roundtable in which each local chapter will summarize the specific projects that they are undertaking. On Oct. 23 David Yarnold of NAS will speak about Audubon's efforts to combat racism. Finally, a session entitled *Taking Action at Home* will be held on Oct. 26.

Advocacy Committee Report cont'd

Kathleen has brought to the attention of the Advocacy Committee that a commercial solar farm has been proposed for Mt. Kisco (in the vicinity of the Marsh Sanctuary). The plan calls for clearing several acres of woodlands. We will discuss how to respond in our upcoming Advocacy Committee meeting.

Anne mentioned a recent proposal to build a solar farm on property owned by the Hudson National Golf Course on the side opposite our Brinton Brook Sanctuary. As with the Mt. Kisco plan, this will also result in woodland clearing. Cary will check with her contacts in Village government about the plan's status. The Advocacy Committee will discuss SMRA's response.

Programs and Field Trips—Debbie van Zyl

We reached about 250 people in September through our field trips and Zoom programs. This does not include participants in the Nature Book Club.

Five small group bird walks were fully subscribed with a total of 50 registrants. There were two SMRA Zoom events: A Bird's Eye View of Food (see Advocacy, above) and Lynn's program on Geocaching which had 32 registrants.

Anne presented Birding 101 for the Greenburgh Public Library (55 logged on for the program) and Raptors for Rookies for Mecklenberg (NC) Audubon with 56 viewing the session.

Upcoming Zoom presentations include the virtual tour of the Audubon murals in upper Manhattan (Oct. 6) and our Community Gathering (Oct. 18; see Executive Director's report, above). On Nov. 12 we will feature Jane and Walt Daniels who will discuss the new edition of their book *Walkable Westchester*.

Anne will also be presenting the following programs:

Oct. 7—Muscoot and Croton Point bird walks for the Linnaean Society of New York.

Oct. 15—Raptors for Rookies for Orange County Audubon.

Nov. 18—Birding 101 for Central Westchester Audubon.

Nov. 19—Birding 101 for Bronxville Public Library

We are exploring ideas for Zoom programs for January. One possibility is a discussion of the over-population of deer in our area and the impacts on woodlands and wildlife.

Nature Book Club—Kathleen Williamson

The Nature Book Club will meet Nov. 17 to discuss *Underland* by Robert Macfarlane. Our next book is Michael McCarthy's *The Moth Snowstorm*, which we'll discuss on Jan. 19.

Sanctuaries Committee Report—Michael Madias, Jr.

We are participating in a University of Kentucky project on white oaks. We will provide white oak acorns from our sanctuaries for this study.

Our sanctuary deer hunting program is scheduled to start next month. Michael moved that the board approve the annual deer hunt, which will start Nov. 1 and run through Dec. 31 in Choate, Pruyn and Brinton Brook Sanctuaries. Hunters will be certified by SMRA and they will hunt from designated stands. Bill provided a second for this motion, which passed unanimously.

Anne announced to the board that a new hunter, Sean Camillieri, will participate this year. Sean is one of the top birders in the County.

Newsletter—Anne Swaim

The deadline for the winter issue is Nov. 1. The next issue covers Dec., Jan., and Feb. We are looking for content. Kathleen raised the issue of the impact on birds of domestic cats that are feral or allowed outside by their owners. She suggested Joe Wallace write a piece on keeping cats inside for the website. Richard said he would write an article on cats for the newsletter.

Adjournment—Valerie Lyle

Richard moved that Valerie adjourn the meeting; Kathleen seconded this motion. With all present voting in favor, Valerie adjourned the meeting at 8:52.