

Saw Mill River Audubon
December 6, 2021 Board Meeting Minutes (taken by Bill Kellner)
Meeting conducted via Zoom

Present (in bold type): **Erik Andersen, Cary Andrews, Ginger Bernardin, Earl DePass, Louisa Gagliardi, Phil Heidelberger, Rik Kaufman, Suzanne Kavic, Bill Kellner, Valerie Lyle, Michael Madias, Jr., Tom McEnerney, Ken Novenstern, Steve Rappaport, Tom Ruth, Lynn Salmon, Richard Saravay, Jean Sparacin, Jenni Stern, Larry Trachtenberg, Debbie van Zyl, Kathleen Williamson.** Executive Director Anne Swaim was also present.
Absent: Rik, Debbie

Meeting started at 7:00 pm.

President's Report—Valerie Lyle

It was noted that a quorum was present.

Louisa moved that the board of directors approve the minutes for the board of directors meeting held on October 4, 2021. Kathleen seconded this motion. The motion approving the minutes was adopted unanimously.

All board members have been sent follow-up fund drive packets with letters to PS. Please make sure to mail your follow-up fund drive letters ASAP. Also, board members who have not yet contributed to this year's annual fund drive are urged to do so.

Ellen is planning to retire from the position of Office Manager in the spring of 2022. She has been a key part of SMRA's day-to-day operations; she will be missed! A search for a replacement candidate will begin in January. The goal is to make a selection in time to allow Ellen to provide training to the new hire. The Personnel Committee is doing preliminary work on coming up with a list of possible candidates. The committee, with Ellen's help, is updating a job description of the position. This will be distributed to the full board of directors. Note that the position is for approximately 15 hours per week (roughly 5 hours a day for 3 days). This 15 hours is an average; some periods (e.g., during fund drive packet preparation) require more hours.

Development Committee Report—Valerie Lyle

[Reference report Membership and Donation Report as of December 1, 2021]

With the current 593 SMRA chapter member households and 488 joint NAS/SMRA member households, total membership stands at 1,081.

Annual Fund donations year-to-date are at \$48,313. Annual Fund donations totaled \$63,351 in 2020.

Lynn reported on her donation of a corporate sponsorship on behalf of SMRA for the Ardsley Curling Club. A banner with the SMRA logo is currently on display at the club. Board members are invited to visit the club and try out this exciting sport on one of three possible dates in January. Anne will send out an email notice to all board members with the dates and information on how to sign up.

Lynn also reported on the SMRA photo exhibition scheduled for February 2022 at the Hendrick Hudson Free Library in Montrose. The submission deadline has passed. We are in the process of making final selections; photographers whose work is selected will be notified by December 15.

Fundraising Committee Report—Louisa Gagliardi

Our fundraising silent auction will be "live" on the website for 10 more days. Bidding has been active; all items have a least a minimum bid.

The 2022 calendar has been selling well—around 100 of the print run of 150 have been sold so far. We have netted over \$300 in this fundraising effort and expect to see further sales.

Finance Committee—Phil Heidelberger

[Reference report: Saw Mill River Audubon Investment Portfolio Report for Period Ending September 30, 2021]
For our official quarterly report, as of October 1, 2021, the portfolio balance was \$1,389,065, an \$84,282 (6.5%) increase above the January 1, 2021 balance of \$1,304,783. The year-to-date, one-year, three-year and five-year investment rates of return were 9.0%, 20.1%, 10.6% and 10.3% respectively, compared to our Morningstar Allocation Fund Index benchmark returns of 6.6%, 15.7%, 7.8% and 7.5% for the same periods.

The balance as of December 1, 2021 was \$1,417,915 which is a \$28,850 (2.1%) increase above the October 1st balance and a \$113,132 (8.7%) increase for the year. There have been \$9,500 in additions to and \$43,975 in withdrawals from the portfolio so far during 2021. As of December 1, 2021, we are \$113,562 (86.1%) above our guideline to maintain two years of budgeted withdrawals in highly liquid assets such as checking and money market funds. This includes the re-sults of selling \$70,000 of stock mutual funds at the beginning of November, which was done because the stock percentage of the portfolio had increased due to strong market returns this year.

Treasurer's Report—Tom McEnerney

[Reference Report: SMRA 2022 Budget (12-2-21)]

Anne put Tom's handout on the screen which showed budgeted Revenues and Expenses for 2021 through the end of November, estimated results for the full year, the 2021 budget and the proposed budget for 2022. Tom then reviewed each line item in the proposed budget. For Revenues, Donations are budgeted about the same as 2021 and, due to rising bird seed costs, both Seed Sale revenue and costs are higher in the 2022 budget. Strong membership renewals in 2021 resulted in an increase in budgeted Membership revenue for 2022 and the increase in 2022 budgeted Education revenues assumes no resumption of the Covid-19 shutdown.

For Expenses, the 2022 budget for the Office is being increased due to higher website and copier lease costs. The Pruyn House budget increased due to higher utilities and snow plowing expense. As a result of Donna Lassiter's retirement from the Garden Committee and the board, the Garden budget is being increased to cover some paid maintenance work. Fundraising costs are budgeted higher in 2022 because of the inclusion of the cost of printing calendars.

As proposed, the budgeted net deficit would result in a 6.5% withdrawal from the endowment, 1.5% in excess of the target of 5%. At this point, Anne Swaim left the meeting. Tom stated that the 2022 budget included a \$5,000 (10%) raise for the Executive Director. An extensive discussion followed concerning the compensation of the ED, including salary paid over the last several years, 403b contributions made and the value of the housing provided to the ED. The Board also discussed the ED's cost of health care under the ACA and the pros and cons of establishing a Health Reimbursement Account plan. Several directors expressed the view that the ED has been undercompensated in the past, especially because of her importance to the development of the organization over her years of service.

After further discussion and with a motion by Louisa and a second by Kathleen, the Board voted unanimously to increase the ED's salary by \$8,000, to \$58,000, for 2022. Phil noted that this would increase the 2022 budgeted deficit, resulting in a budgeted withdrawal of 6.8% from the endowment.

The board, after a motion by Tom M. and a second by Phil, unanimously approved the proposed 2022 budget, as amended by the increase in the ED's salary. At this point, Anne returned to the meeting and was informed of her 2022 salary.

Pruyn House Report—Ginger Bernardin

The Pruyn House Committee did a walk-through of the attic. No signs of major leaks or water damage were seen.

The kitchen floor is in bad shape. A simple upgrade will be done with peel-and-stick tiles.

Danny cleaned the lower gutter on the building. A contractor will be used to clean out the harder-to-reach upper gutter. Ginger said the gutters are in poor condition. Bill asked if replacing the gutters is being considered. Ginger said yes in that gutter replacement will be a line-item on the upcoming proposal to be submitted to the board on roof repair. Anne noted that the roof and gutters were last replaced in 1988. Phil asked if an energy audit would be part of the upcoming assessments. Ginger replied that an audit is not indicated as the deficiencies are fairly obvious, including total lack of attic insulation and ancient single-pane windows.

Bird Seed Sale—Ken Novenstern

Our December third Saturday seed sale is scheduled for the 18th. We need one more person for the 11:00–12:30 shift. Erik generously offered extend his early shift to provide the needed coverage. Our November sale grossed about \$750.

Executive Director's Report—Anne Swaim

Steve and Earl have been moving forward on the project to set up a live-streaming wildlife camera in the Pruyne Sanctuary. The webcam has been ordered and received. After Steve completes preliminary preparation with the camera to enable the live video feed, the unit will be installed in the sanctuary and the video will be viewable on the SMRA YouTube channel. This project has been funded with a \$3,000 grant from Con Edison.

The 2021 deer management program for our Pruyne, Brinton Brook and Choate Sanctuaries (approved by the board of directors on Sept. 13, 2021) is ongoing. Four deer have been taken at Pruyne and two at Brinton. One of the Brinton deer was found to be infected with epizootic hemorrhagic disease. The carcass was turned over to the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. The deer hunting season ends on Dec. 31.

All 18 5th grade classes in the Ossining school district had outdoor classes this fall at Rockefeller State Park Preserve. SMRA educator Pete Salmansohn led these classes. The SMRA education program fee is paid through the school district from funds received under the New York State Connect Kids to Parks program.

The Rewilding School's Forest Preschool program continues at our Brinton Brook Sanctuary. The program will not continue at Pruyne as there have not been enough families signing up.

Two additional Explorer Bags under the Mr. Lunetta's Explorer Bag program have been delivered to the Greenburgh Public Library. Bronx River-Sound Shore Audubon and Central Westchester Audubon each funded one of these new Explorer Bags. Twelve libraries in total now offer the Explorer Bags.

Education Committee—Valerie Lyle

Reaffirming the goals established at the SMRA retreat held last August, Nature Explorer Walks will continue with funding provided by the Mertz bequest as will the Young Birder Walks. We are also hoping to offer activities for Girl Scout troops. This is a part of the committee's focus on youth education outreach beyond our traditional school programs. Board member input on this goal would be most welcome.

Advocacy Committee Report—Tom Ruth

The Committee met on Nov. 8 with the focus on implementing goals established at the board retreat. Bob DeAngelis of Yorktown Cure100 joined the meeting. We discussed ways SMRA could partner with Yorktown Cure100, including our efforts to calculate our organizational carbon footprint, while continuing our relationship with Croton Cure100.

We are continuing to work on plans for outreach to owners of corporate office parks as well as private owners of larger non-forested parcels, with the goal of more environmentally sensitive property management and improving wildlife habitat.

A number of large-scale, commercial solar farms have been proposed for several communities in northern Westchester. We are looking at these proposals and are working to educate ourselves on how to evaluate the tradeoffs of increasing the supply of green energy versus the negative impacts on local habitats because of woodland clearing and other issues. We are planning a site visit for the spring to a working, multi-acre solar farm. We hope to get a sense of the efficacy of pollinator plantings and other mitigation efforts.

One current proposal in which we have taken an active interest is the Hudson National Golf Course's plan for a large-scale solar array, which would require removing more than 500 trees of 8" diameter or larger. The proposed site is primarily on steep slopes, which could exacerbate negative impacts of woodland clearing. We have sent a letter to the Village of Croton on Hudson's Board of Trustees advocating a full Environmental Impact Statement for this project. We have also have emailed our Croton membership to alert them to our concerns. Anne mentioned the issue of viewshed impacts that needs to be considered. She also noted that the parcel on which the solar array would be built had been

Advocacy Committee Report—Tom Ruth cont'd

designated as open space to be preserved in perpetuity when the golf course was approved. Anne will send to the full board a copy of our letter to the Village Trustees as well as the Advocacy Committee statement on solar siting and Scenic Hudson's document that provides guidelines for building solar projects in an environmentally sensitive way.

Ken joined Tom for an informative discussion with Peter McCartt, Director of Energy Conservation and Sustainability for Westchester County. The topic covered was the County's efforts to improve recycling. The Advocacy Committee is looking to plan one or more webinars on recycling.

The Audubon New York/Connecticut Council Meeting took place at the end of October. Val, Richard and Tom attended. National Audubon's new Vice President for Diversity and Inclusion hosted a session. Another focus of the meeting was the call for each local chapter to identify at least one building in its territory to make improvements that would reduce bird mortality from collisions. Richard suggested that the Advocacy Committee plan a webinar on the issue of bird-safe buildings.

The Advocacy Committee is planning to meet again in January.

Sanctuaries Committee Report—Michael Madias, Jr.

Boy Scout Troop 2 of Chappaqua has completed a project to add native plants to one of the Pruyn Sanctuary deer enclosures. We are looking to plan additional projects with the scouts that will help with needed maintenance at Pruyn.

Phil and Anne have submitted an application for an Audubon New York/NAS collaborative grant for \$1,000 to cover costs for materials (\$1,400) for installation of a boardwalk on the east side of the Brinton Brook pond.

Our Thanksgiving weekend hike to the summit of Turkey Mountain was not well-attended but those who did come had an enjoyable time.

Programs and Field Trips—Anne Swaim for Debbie Van Zyl

Our recent Cape May weekend was a success. Those on the trip got to enjoy several informative outings in and around this east coast birding hotspot. Scheduling of overnight trips for this winter and spring is pending.

In addition to the small-group bird walks requiring pre-registration that we have been offering throughout the pandemic, we have scheduled one open walk per month (no registration required) in December, January, and February. We will evaluate how this works.

SMRA Members' Best night featuring photo submissions from our members is Dec. 16. This will be a virtual gathering using Zoom.

Let us know if you would like to join one of the upcoming Christmas Bird Counts. Dates include Dec. 18 (Peekskill), Dec. 19 (Greenwich-Stamford), Dec. 26 (Bronx-Westchester), and Jan. 2 (Putnam).

Benjamin Van Doren, PhD, will present a special program, *Migration from a Bird's Eye View* on Jan. 27 via Zoom. This should be a well-attended event; be sure register on the SMRA website. Ben began birding as a teen among the Audubon chapters of Westchester County. He is currently a postdoctoral associate at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. This program is cosponsored by all five Westchester County Audubon chapters.

Newsletter—Anne Swaim

Jenni has taken over as newsletter editor; her editorial talents are on display in the current issue—Winter 2021–22. (The issue was mailed the same day as this board meeting.)

Feb. 1 is the deadline for the Spring (Mar., Apr., May) issue.

Adjournment—Valerie Lyle

Ken moved that Valerie adjourn the meeting. Cary seconded the motion. With all present voting in favor, Valerie adjourned the meeting at 8:48 pm.