

Saw Mill River Audubon
December 4, 2023, Board Meeting Minutes (taken by William Kellner)
Meeting was held on Zoom

Present (in **bold** type): **Erik Andersen, Cary Andrews, Ginger Bernardin, Mitchell Goldfarb, Philip Heidelberger, Rik Kaufman, Suzanne Kavic, William Kellner, Valerie Lyle, Tom McEnerney, Michael Madias, Jr., Mark Magel, Kara Mason, Kenneth Novenstern, Steve Rappaport, Tom Ruth, Lynn Salmon, Richard Saravay, Jean Sparacin, Jennifer Stern, Larry Trachtenberg, Kathleen Williamson.** Executive Director **Anne Swaim** was also present.

Absent: Mark Magel

Meeting started at 7:00 PM.

President's Report—Erik Andersen

Anne noted that a quorum was present and Erik began the meeting.

Motion: To approve the minutes of the board of directors meetings held on October 2, 2023 and November 20, 2023 as circulated. Motion by: Larry Trachtenberg. Seconded by: Lynn Salmon. Motion carried (all present voted affirmatively).

Erik informed the board that, due to increased family obligations, Louisa Gagliardi has resigned from the board of directors. Louisa indicated that she would like to remain an active SMRA member and continue some of her volunteer efforts. On behalf of the board, Erik expressed his thanks to Louisa for her years of service to SMRA.

Erik called on Anne who reported on the upcoming fundraising quilt raffle for 2024. The beautiful quilt, designed and made by Patricia Loquet, was displayed on Zoom screen share. Board members will be supplied with raffle tickets to sell; these will be included with the follow-up fundraising packets that will be distributed this month. This end-of-year fundraising effort targets supporters who have made larger-than-average donations in the past.

Sandy Morrissey of Bronx River-Sound Shore Audubon is looking to donate several Eastern Bluebird boxes. Anne expressed interest in acquiring these boxes for use in the SMRA sanctuaries.

Development Committee Report—Erik Andersen

[Reference Membership and Donation Report as of December 1, 2023.]

With the current 661 SMRA chapter member households and 464 joint NAS/SMRA member households, the total membership stands at 1,125. Erik noted that there has been a slight decline in both categories of membership. Anne said that the overall trend has been a slow increase in chapter memberships; we are hopeful that we will see this number go up during December. Year-to-date dues payments received for chapter memberships are at \$6,256. The budgeted goal for 2023 is \$8,400 for dues payments. Anne noted that the number of SMRA area NAS members reported to SMRA by National Audubon has been declining.

Finance Committee—Phil Heidelberger

[Reference reports: SMRA Investment Portfolio and Asset Allocation Mix, October 1, 2023; SMRA Investment Portfolio Performance for Period Ending September 30, 2023]

For our official quarterly report, as of October 1, 2023, the endowment portfolio balance was \$1,308,456, a 4.7% (\$56,531) increase above the January 1, 2023 balance of \$1,249,925. As of October 1, the year-to-date, one-year, three-year, five-year, and ten-year investment rates of return were 6.1%, 12.3%, 5.1%, 5.4%, and 6.5% respectively, compared to our Morningstar Allocation Fund Index benchmark returns of 4.3%, 9.4%, 3.4%, 3.6% and 4.4% for the same periods. More recently, the balance as of December 1, 2023 was \$1,302,285 which is a 0.5% (\$6,171) decrease since October 1st and a 4.2% (\$52,360) increase YTD. As of December 1, 2023, there were \$65,035 in withdrawals from and \$0 in additions to the portfolio YTD. As of December 1, 2023, we are 53.4% (\$84,922) above our guideline to maintain two years of budgeted withdrawals in highly liquid assets such as checking short-term CDs and money market funds.

Treasurer's Report—Lynn Salmon

[Reference report: SMRA 2024 Budget]

The 2024 Budget was reviewed by Lynn Salmon and approved by the board with the change noted below. The endowment amount used to calculate the 5% annual withdrawal will be adjusted to reflect the average of the three most recent endowment balances on September 30 of the year, reflecting our ongoing policy. This will increase the endowment withdrawal percentage for 2024. The revised budget will be circulated to the board after the meeting and filed with these minutes. The budget discussion is summarized below.

The Budget Committee met in November and reviewed expected Revenues and Expenses for the 2024 year.

The Membership Revenue category has been adjusted going forward to include the first \$35 of donations in the Membership category to more accurately reflect the number of paid chapter members belonging to SMRA. This change shifts some portion of expected revenue out of the PR and Fund Raising Category and increases the expected revenue in the Membership category by that amount.

The Educational Programs budget now includes the Forest Preschool programs.

Seed Sale Revenues have been a bit down this year, but seed expenses have also been under budget.

Most expenses for 2024 are to be similar to those incurred in 2023. Exceptions: increase in Salaries and Benefits to reflect the raise given to the Executive Director and decrease in Bulletin expenses due to the switch from print to digital distribution for most copies, which will reduce printing and postage costs.

The separate Contributions and Dues category has been eliminated. It is now a sub-category included in the Administration Budget.

Additional unbudgeted items are shown for reference at the bottom of the page. These include revenues from the NYSOA Conference and net proceeds from the Ohio and Trinidad trips. Unbudgeted expenses in 2023 include a new roof for Pruyn House and the initial legal expenses arising from the Pruyn boundary issue, which is expected to continue with additional expenses next year.

Motion: To approve the 2024 budget as modified to reflect the average of the three most recent endowment balances on September 30 of the year to calculate a value for the 5% endowment transfer formula. Motion by: Erik Andersen. Seconded by: Valerie Lyle.

Before calling for a vote, Erik requested that Executive Director Anne Swaim temporarily leave the meeting to allow the board to discuss the compensation package for the Executive Director. Anne left the meeting and Lynn described the Budget Committee's proposal for Executive Director Compensation. Following the board's discussion of the proposal outlined by the Budget Committee, Erik moved that the board approve the proposed Executive Director compensation package, which would increase the annual salary to \$70,000 per annum. Seconded by: Tom McEnerney. Motion carried (all present voted affirmatively).

Erik then called for a vote to approve the 2024 budget. Motion carried (all present voted affirmatively).

Erik notified Anne by text that the closed session to discuss Executive Director compensation was completed and that she should rejoin the meeting, which she did.

Pruyn House Committee—Ginger Bernardin

Following board approval at the special board meeting of November 20, SMRA hired Perry Verrone Roofing to replace the roof of Pruy House. The board authorized an expenditure of up to \$25,000 for the roof, which had not been replaced for 35 years. The vendor did an excellent job, completing the pitched roof in one day and completing the flat roof and gutter/edge work the next day. Total costs have come in under \$16,000.

Erik and Ginger installed a new vanity, donated by Erik, in the upstairs bathroom at Pruy House. They also installed new tiling in the bathroom. Anne complimented them for their outstanding work.

Executive Director's Report—Anne Swaim

Anne updated the board on the issue of the Pruy Sanctuary neighbor who is being prosecuted by the Town of New Castle for various environmental law violations. Soil testing has been completed; no contaminated materials were found in the debris illegally dumped on SMRA property. We are getting quotes from arborists to obtain a professional assessment of damage to trees on SMRA sanctuary property.

The Executive Committee approved the following actions during the interval between the October 2 meeting of the board of directors and tonight:

1. Authorized use of Brinton Brook Sanctuary by the Rewilding School for the period January 2024–June 2025. The Rewilding School will donate \$1,000 per month to SMRA during months when the preschool is active.
2. Authorized expenditures of up to \$3,500 to purchase a new laptop and projector. The purchases have been completed; we are very pleased with the new items. Anne thanked Steve for his assistance.
3. Authorized payment of an initial retainer of \$5,000 to attorney Perry Freedman for representing SMRA in the matter of damages to Pruy Sanctuary property caused by illegal activities of an adjacent property owner.
4. Authorized SMRA to join the Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge Coalition. The Coalition will work with the National Park Service to provide guidance for the management of the public lands at the Wildlife Refuge and around Jamaica Bay, for the benefit of the urban wildlife, the habitat, and wildlife viewing there.

SMRA's Annual Dinner will be held on March 24. We'll have a presentation from our Larry Light Scholarship student. Our keynote speaker will be Heather Wolf of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Heather will be discussing her book *Find More Birds: 111 Surprising Ways to Spot Birds Wherever You Are*.

Program's and Field Trips—Anne Swaim

Anne thanked Suzanne for her assistance with program planning.

Our recent trip to Trinidad was a great success. We stayed at the Asa Wright Nature Centre, a truly special place to see tropical bird life.

We've scheduled a winter trip to see owls and more in northern Minnesota. Dates are February 15–20.

We're planning a birding trip to south Texas. Our guide will be Tiffany Kersten, who is well-known in the Rio Grande Valley. Dates are March 11–15. This trip is fully subscribed.

We still have space available on our spring trip to Yellowstone National Park, May 15–22. We've reserved an entire lodge for our group, just outside the park's north gate.

We're looking to combine birding and history as we plan a visit to southeast England in 2025. SMRA member Rebecca Bell who is from England will be assisting in planning and be a co-leader.

Finally, make plans to attend SMRA's Members' Best event at the Croton Free Library on December 21. Enjoy holiday desserts while being treated to a slide show of our members' outstanding nature photography. The photo submission deadline is December 15.

Advocacy Committee Report—Tom Ruth

Our November 9 Zoom webinar about neonicotinoid pesticides was well-attended and well-received. Dan Raichel of the Natural Resources Defense Council discussed the environmental damage caused by these chemicals. Dan focused on the Birds and Bees Protection Act, which would regulate these pesticides in New York State, banning their use in residential landscaping and limiting agricultural applications. The legislature has passed the bill, but, so far, the Governor has withheld her signature. Kara reminded board members that the webinar has been posted on the SMRA YouTube channel so that those who missed the Nov. 9 Zoom have an opportunity to watch it. She also asked everyone to call Governor Hochul and urge her to sign the bill into law.

As discussed in the Executive Director's report, the Executive Committee has authorized SMRA to join the Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge Coalition. Anne described the ongoing habitat degradation that has plagued this critical refuge in recent years. It is hoped that the Audubon groups and other organizations in the Coalition will provide needed guidance to the National Park Service, manager of the refuge, which is part of the Gateway National Recreation Area.

We're planning a special trip to Jamaica Bay on June 21 to participate in the census of horseshoe crabs on the night of the full moon. We're also looking to schedule a Zoom program with author Deborah Cramer, who will discuss her book *The Narrow Edge: A Tiny Bird, An Ancient Crab & An Epic Journey*. The theme is how the Red Knots are dependent on the spring spawning of the horseshoe crab to

fuel their long-distance migration and how over-harvesting of the crabs has had a devastating impact on these birds.

Motion: To affirm the Executive Committee's approval to authorize SMRA to join the Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge Coalition. Motion by: Tom Ruth. Seconded by: Cary Andrews. Motion carried (all present voted affirmatively).

The next Advocacy Committee meeting is scheduled for January 11.

Bird Seed Sale—Ken Novenster

Anne noted that we have two unfilled volunteer slots for our upcoming seed sale on Dec. 16 (10:00 AM–noon). Ken and Michael agreed to fill these slots.

Sanctuaries Committee Report—Michael Madias, Jr.

Our yearly deer management program is ongoing using vetted bowhunters in Brinton Brook, Choate, and Pruyn Sanctuaries (Nov. 1 through Dec. 31, 2023). To date, five deer have been harvested, three at Brinton Brook and two at Pruyn.

Only one person joined Michael for Friday after Thanksgiving hike at Turkey Mountain. This was former SMRA board member Sarah Hansen. Michael and Sarah enjoyed their walk.

Newsletter—Jenni Stern

The deadline for the spring issue is Feb. 1. This will be the first issue produced for primary distribution as a digital file. SMRA members will have the option to opt in to continue to receive a printed copy. Up to 300 paper copies will be produced in the office. This change is expected to result in significant cost savings.

New Business—Erik Andersen

Anne called attention to the upcoming Christmas Bird Counts and urged those interested in participating to consult the SMRA Google calendar for the various regional count circle schedules.

Kathleen reminded board members that the SMRA Nature Book Club will meet on Zoom on December 5 to discuss *Birdgirl* by Mya-Rose Craig. In February we'll also gather on Zoom to discuss Deborah Cramer's *The Narrow Edge* (see Advocacy Committee report, above).

Adjournment—Erik Andersen

Motion: Erik shall adjourn the meeting. Motion by: Cary Andrews. Seconded by: Bill Kellner. Motion carried (all present voted affirmatively).

Erik adjourned the meeting at 8:35 PM.