

**Saw Mill River Audubon**  
**October 21, 2024 Board Meeting Minutes (taken by William Kellner)**  
**Meeting held at Croton Free Library, Croton-on-Hudson, NY**

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

Absent: Cary, Steve, Lynn, Richard, Kathleen

Meeting started at 7:06 PM.

**President's Report—Erik Andersen**

Erik, noting that a quorum was present, began the meeting and called for a motion to approve the minutes of the June board meeting as circulated.

Motion: To approve the minutes of the board of directors meeting held on September 16, 2024 and as circulated. Motion by: Valerie Lyle. Seconded by: Suzanne Kavic. Mark requested that the following sentence in the September 16 minutes, "Our native plantings have not required weeding or watering and appear to be in very good health" be modified as follows: "Our native plantings have not required watering and appear to be in very good health." Motion as amended carried (all present voted affirmatively).

Erik called attention to the dates for future meetings of the board of directors listed at the bottom of tonight's meeting agenda. The last board meeting of the calendar year will be a Zoom gathering on Dec. 9. Board committees meet in November but there is no full board meeting that month.

Erik called for continuing the discussion begun at the September 16 board meeting of the need to set a charge for the 2025 Annual Dinner scheduled for April 6. He proposed setting a price of \$150 per person, noting that this would allow us to raise some funds assuming a break-even price point of \$125 to cover expenses and comps. Setting a significantly higher price as some board members advocated would change the tenor of the event and require extensive planning. Val commented that there is a price point above which attendance would suffer, saying she supports the original proposal of a \$125 charge but would not oppose \$150. Ken noted that \$150 is a reasonable price and still well below what other charitable organizations charge for similar events. Kara said \$150 is a reasonable charge and would support raising it from \$125. Rik noted that the charge is \$300 per couple and speculated that some potential attendees would rather donate that amount in lieu of attending. Tom McE. replied that our dinner is a friendly gathering of members and supporters and that our Annual Fund Drive is where we focus our fundraising efforts. Erik commented that, as we alternate potluck Annual Dinners having a nominal charge with our higher-cost venue dinners, those who would rather not spend \$150 per person would be able to attend the gathering for minimal cost the following year.

Motion: To approve setting the per person charge for the 2025 Annual Dinner at \$150. Motion by: Erik Andersen. Seconded by: Ken Novenster. Motion carried (all present voted affirmatively).

Erik called on Anne who asked Jean to show the quilt she is working on that will be used for the fundraising raffle at the Annual Dinner. As Erik held up the quilt, several board members commented on how the quilt beautifully displays a rich diversity of bird life.

Erik called on Tom McE. to discuss the possible dissolution of a NAS chapter in our region and transfer of the relevant zip codes and member list to SMRA. Tom said that not much has happened since the September 16 board meeting. We've received a third draft from our lawyers of the non-binding memorandum of understanding (MOU) that outlines the steps involved in the chapter dissolution and transfer of assets and liabilities to SMRA. The committee is currently reviewing this draft. The chapter in question has not set a date for the membership meeting, in which members will be asked to approve the plans for dissolution and transfer. Anne said the chapter is planning to hold this meeting via Zoom. Tom noted that they are probably waiting for the MOU to be finalized.

### **Fundraising and Development Committee Report—Suzanne Kavic**

[Reference Membership Report as of October 18, 2024.]

With the current 613 SMRA chapter member households and 453 joint NAS/SMRA member households, total membership stands at 1,066. Revenue from membership dues for chapter memberships so far in 2024 stands at \$9,843.

Erik asked whether any trends are discernible in the membership numbers, which appear to be slightly down. Anne said that our end-of-year follow-up fund drive should help us increase the number of chapter member households. The follow-up goes out to non-respondents to the initial drive. Those who donate at or above the \$35 level are added or renewed as chapter members.

### **Finance Committee—Phil Heidelberger**

For our official quarterly report, as of October 1, 2024, the endowment portfolio balance was \$1,501,977 a 10.6% (\$143,923) increase above the January 1, 2024 balance of \$1,358,054. As of October 1, the YTD, one-year, three-year, five-year and ten-year investment rates of return were 13.2%, 21.9%, 5.2%, 8.6% and 7.4%, respectively, compared to our Morningstar Allocation Fund Index benchmark returns of 9.6%, 16.4%, 4.0%, 6.3% and 5.3% for the same periods. As of October 21, there have been \$62,093 in withdrawals from and \$0 in additions to the portfolio during the year. As of October 1, 2024, we are 15.1% (\$25,089) 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 Operating Revenues and Expenses, Year-to-Date 1/1/2024–10/17/2024]

Fund Raising revenues remain higher than budgeted thanks in part to higher numbers for matching grants and memorial and trip donations.

Seed sale revenue remains low but should pick up when it gets colder (see Seed Sale Report, below). All other revenues appear in line with expected values.

Expenses remain as expected. Mark Magel is doing a re-Mark-able job keeping the Arboretum and Garden expenses well under budget. Advocacy expenses are also well under budget for the year.

All committee chairs should have received annual budget worksheets to prepare for the 2025 Budget. Please get those back to Lynn by November 25.

### **Executive Director's Report—Anne Swaim**

Anne thanked Larry and Ginger and Kevin McGrath for leading walks during her recent illness. Also, Larry will fill in for Anne on the walk that is scheduled for Lyndhurst during the Panama trip (Nov. 15–23).

Anne updated the board on the issue of the Pruyn Sanctuary neighbor who was prosecuted by the Town of New Castle for various environmental law violations. In response to a board member's question, Larry said that the defendant has paid the \$42,000 fine levied against them following their guilty plea to criminal violations of New Castle's environmental statutes. They are also required to do soil tests and prepare and install a replanting plan.

SMRA's civil action is proceeding despite delaying tactics on the part of the defendants. Although the defendants' motion for dismissal was denied, they have filed another motion since they missed a previous deadline – by three months – that the court gave them to submit their response to the court's denial of the motion to dismiss. SMRA's attorney, Perry Freedman, has filed for a default judgment in SMRA's favor.

Ken commented that the ad hoc committee dealing with this issue is working on determining a settlement demand to be presented to the defendants. We had assistance from Mark Magel on determining the replacement costs for the damaged and bulldozed trees that were on our property.

Anne offered an update on SMRA education programs. On October 24 and October 29, we will host eighth grade classes from a Bronx school at Rockefeller State Park Preserve. In total, 100 students will be served.

The SMRA Nature Book Club will meet by Zoom on the evening of election day (Nov. 5) at 7:00 PM. Book club chair Kathleen Williamson will lead a discussion of *The Cloud Spotter's Guide*.

### **Bird Seed Sale—Tom McEnerney**

Volunteers are needed for the November sale day (Nov. 17). Sales are picking up after the slow start to the seed sale season and we're on track with previous years' sales. Gross receipts from the October sale day were approximately \$1,200. Thank you, Kara and Rik, for volunteering.

### **Sanctuaries Committee Report—Michael Madias, Jr.**

We are planning to resume our annual deer management program for Choate, Pruyn and Brinton Brook Sanctuaries in 2024. We have approved five vetted hunters for participation in this program to be held November 1 through December 31. Note that in Brinton Brook, our vetted hunters will only operate in the portion of the sanctuary outside the Village of Croton-on-Hudson.

Motion: To approve the annual deer management program for Choate, Pruyn and Brinton Brook Sanctuaries from November 1 through December 31, 2024. Motion by: Michael Madias, Jr. Seconded by: Mark Magel. Motion carried (all present voted affirmatively).

We held a volunteer workday yesterday at Brinton Brook where a group from Temple Israel of Northern Westchester laid wood chips in various locations, including the red trail and sanctuary entrance.

Phil reported on two Eagle Scout projects making improvements at Pruyn Sanctuary. In one of these a Scout mentored by Jane and Walt Daniels of the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference built and placed two puncheon walkways. The second, later Eagle Scout project will also involve building and installing a puncheon walkway at the base of the hill below Pruyn House, as well as a new kiosk at the Seven Bridges Road entrance.

### **Pruyn Garden Update—Mark Magel**

As the garden season is ending things are looking good. Our newly planted oaks are going into their annual dormant period. Fortunately, oak wilt, which has spread through the Midwest and parts of the south, is not (yet) a problem in our region.

Garden expenses year-to-date have been well under budget. It had been decided earlier that funds budgeted for the Butterfly and Hummingbird Garden could be used for Pruy House foundation plantings. Mark received a very favorable quote from Rosedale Nursery and purchased a broad array of native pollinator- and bird-friendly plants for only \$1,640. We've scheduled a volunteer workday on October 23 to get these plants in the ground. Mark is writing an article for the upcoming newsletter that will provide details and go over the benefits of doing this type of planting.

### **Newsletter—Jenni Stern**

Winter issue deadline is November 1. Please get submissions to Jenni by this date.

### **New Business—Erik Andersen**

Kara raised the question of whether the newsletter going mostly digital had impacted membership numbers. She said there are benefits to having a print newsletter in hand, especially with our demographic. Val and Rik concurred, saying that a print newsletter is more likely to be read thoroughly if at all. Suzanne commented that while people may disregard email notifications that the newsletter PDF is available, they also tend to throw out junk mail and that some quantity of our print and mail newsletters probably end up in the recycling bin without being read.

Tom McE asked whether members had been given sufficient opportunity to continue getting a print version of the newsletter. Anne said, yes, everyone was given multiple chances to opt out of the digital version and get a hardcopy newsletter. Ken asked whether it might make sense to do a full print-and-mail issue once a year. Erik responded that this might make sense if SMRA goes forward with incorporating the members of the chapter that is looking to liquidate. A print-and-mail issue might be a good way to make initial contact with these new members. Ginger said she thought that this was a good idea.

Anne reminded the board that there are significant cost savings by digitally distributing the newsletter vs traditional print and mail. If we are to resume full printing and mailing of one or more issues, the 2025 budget will need to reflect this expense increase.

It was decided to do one print issue in 2025 and also add an ongoing notice in the digital issues that there is an option to receive print copies upon request.

Ken asked that we consider honoring Assemblyman Chris Burdick in addition to State Senator Pete Harckham at our 2025 Annual Dinner. Anne said our programming has tight time constraints, so time spent honoring local politicians might be limited. Ken noted that Assemblyman Burdick has been very responsive to the issues put forward by the Advocacy Committee, especially with support of legislation to regulate the harvesting of horseshoe crab.

Finally, Tom R. invited all board members to participate in the November 7 meeting (to be held on Zoom) of the Advocacy Committee. Governor Hochul has yet to sign the horseshoe crab bill that was passed by the State Legislature; the Committee will continue its efforts to have her sign the bill.

**Adjournment—Erik Andersen**

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

Erik adjourned the meeting at 8:20 PM.