

Saw Mill River Audubon
December 9, 2024 Board Meeting Minutes (taken by William Kellner)
Meeting held via 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: Rik, Kara, Richard

Meeting started at 7:04 PM.

President's Report—Suzanne Kavic for Erik Andersen

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

Motion: To approve the minutes of the board of directors meeting held on October 21, 2024 and as circulated.
Motion by: William Kellner. Seconded by: Lynn Salmon. Motion carried (all present voted affirmatively).

Suzanne said the main focus of tonight's meeting is the board's consideration of the proposed 2025 budget. Lynn thanked the Budget Committee for their efforts and committee chairs for their timely submission of budget worksheets.

Fundraising and Development Committee Report—Suzanne Kavic

[Reference Membership Report as of December 6, 2024.]

With the current 619 SMRA chapter member households and 449 joint NAS/SMRA member households, total membership stands at 1,068. Revenue from membership dues for chapter memberships so far in 2024 stands at \$11,529.

Finance Committee—Phil Heidelberger

As of December 1, 2024, the endowment portfolio balance was \$1,505,111, a 4.7% (\$67,725) increase for the month of November and a 10.8% (\$147,057) increase above the January 1, 2024 balance of \$1,358,054. There have been no additions to, and \$83,093 of withdrawals from, the endowment so far during 2024. As of December 1, 2024, we are 32.5% (\$54,701) above our guideline to maintain two years of budgeted withdrawals in highly liquid assets such as checking account, short-term CDs and money market funds.

Treasurer's Report—Lynn Salmon

[Reference report: SMRA 2025 Budget]

Lynn referred to the net loss (\$78,289) in the proposed 2025 budget, pointing out that it is slightly below the 2024 budget amount. She reminded the board that the first \$35 of a donation to SMRA is categorized as membership revenue.

Mark asked whether the proposed Garden & Arboretum budget line includes Danny's work in the Pruyn gardens. Lynn responded that Danny's Arboretum and Garden work, along with plants purchased for the garden, comes out of the restricted "Garden Fund" endowment. There is approximately \$2,800 (5% annual withdrawal) from the restricted Garden Fund endowment available for Mark's use.

In addition, the 2025 Budget presented here includes \$3,000 for the Arboretum & Garden which will come out of the “unrestricted” Endowment. Mowing is included in this portion of the budget. Thus, Mark’s total budget is approximately \$5,800, the same as last year.

Tom McE. asked whether the proposed litigation expenses is included in the budget. This is expected to be \$7,500 in attorney fees for the civil action SMRA is pursuing for the neighbor damage to Pruyn Sanctuary. Lynn replied that this \$7,500 is not included in the 2025 budgeted expenses of \$78,289. Larry noted that this expense may be offset should the court award damages to SMRA. Anne said a hearing is scheduled for Dec. 17 on SMRA’s motion for a default judgement. Larry pointed out that should there be a default judgment in SMRA’s favor the next step would be a hearing about awarding damages to SMRA.

Larry asked where in the budget profits from SMRA trip show up. Lynn replied that these amounts are part of the PR & Fundraising line. Anne noted that we’ve been including a donation of \$200 in trip costs and that this amount is being raised to \$250 for upcoming trips. Lynn said that 2024 revenues include \$9,600 received in donations for four trips. This is separate from the positive trip net of \$2,563 shown in Unbudgeted Items in the 2024 column on the budget sheet.

Suzanne said the next topic for discussion in the proposed 2024 budget would be the amounts for Salaries and Benefits for SMRA employees, including Executive Director Anne Swaim. Accordingly Anne logged out of the Zoom meeting.

The board discussed compensation for Anne as well as Office Manager Barbara Daniel and Sanctuary Caretaker Danny Ferguson. Lynn pointed out that Danny and Barbara have been receiving \$1.00 per hour raises on alternate years. Thus, in 2025, the proposed budget gives Danny a \$1.00 per hour raise and keeps Barbara at her 2024 salary.

Following the board’s discussion of Salaries and Benefits, Suzanne asked for a motion to approve the 2025 budget as prepared by the SMRA Budget Committee. Motion: To approve the 2025 budget as submitted by the Budget Committee. Motion by: Lynn Salmon. Seconded by: Valerie Lyle. Motion carried (all present voted affirmatively).

Suzanne notified Anne by text that she should rejoin the meeting and Anne logged back in. Suzanne again thanked the members of the Budget Committee for their good work in preparing the budget.

Executive Director’s Report—Anne Swaim

Anne updated the board about the civil action filed by SMRA to recover damages to SMRA property. Phil, referring to the hearing scheduled for Dec. 17 that Anne mentioned in the budget discussion, above, asked what a finding that the defendant was in default would mean. Larry repeated his previous comment that a separate hearing on damages would be scheduled as, should there be a finding of default, a dollar amount of damages would need to be determined. Anne said that the committee dealing with SMRA’s civil action would meet in the coming days with the focus on valuing the amount of damage to SMRA property.

Programs and Field Trips—Anne Swaim

The Panama trip was a great success. Things went very smoothly, our guide was excellent as were the accommodations and we got to see a wonderful array of birds. We are considering repeating the trip in the fall of 2025 to give more of our members and friends the opportunity to experience what Panama has to offer.

We have eight signups so far for the Alaska trip scheduled for June 15–24 (with an optional three-day extension to Denali National Park). We can accommodate as many as 15 on the trip. We expect these slots to fill up quickly. As the Alaska trip will have a fairly high price tag, we are looking at offering shorter, reasonably priced birding trip in Spring 2025, likely to Minnesota in mid-May to catch the northward migration to the boreal forest.

Check the SMRA calendar on our website for upcoming programs. Note that our Members Best evening where members share their best birding photos of the year (with an array of sweet holiday treats) will be held this year at the Chappaqua Library on Dec. 19 at 7:00 PM. We also have an online workshop scheduled for Jan. 9, which will be an introduction and review of winter waterfowl identification; we'll also learn about the Jan. 17 NYS waterfowl count.

The compilation dinner for the Peekskill Christmas Bird Count will be held after the count on the evening of Saturday, December 14 at Teatown Lake Reservation. SMRA will help underwrite the food for this event (up to \$200).

On Saturday, January 11, Charlie Roberto will lead a morning Eagle walk, starting at the boat launch ramp beyond the Croton-Harmon Station and continuing with a car caravan to Croton Point Park where the walk will continue. Following the walk, we'll hold our 10th annual Soup Gathering at the park's Nature Center from noon to 2:00 PM. This is always a popular event. We're asking for board member volunteers to help. Watch for an email for volunteer signups.

Anne thanked Val for reactivating SMRA's participation in Project FeederWatch. Board members can join Val at the Croton Point Nature Center every Sunday from 10:00 AM–noon where birds at the feeders can be observed from inside the building.

Our 2025 SMRA calendars are selling well; we expect to sell out our inventory. If you didn't get one yet, don't delay. We'll have calendars for sale at our upcoming programs.

Advocacy Committee—Tom Ruth

Governor Hochul has yet to sign the horseshoe crab protection bill that was passed by the state legislature; the Committee will continue its efforts to have her sign the bill as the signing deadline approaches. Carl Safina and Jane Goodall have urged the governor to sign the bill. Ken said the governor has to affirmatively veto the bill by the end of the signing period; otherwise, it will become law. Anne mentioned that there is significant opposition to expanding horseshoe crab protection, including from the NYS Dept. of Environmental Protection.

The New York Packaging Reduction and Recycling Infrastructure Act did not pass in the recently ended legislative session. The law aims to reduce single use plastics and other packaging materials. Its stated goal is to reduce packaging waste in New York by 50% over a 12-year period. The plastics industry is actively opposing the measure. We expect the bill to be resubmitted to the legislature in the upcoming session.

As a follow-up to the Advocacy Committee's work on the Birds and Bees Protection Act, which Governor Hochul signed into law one year ago, Committee members Patricia Watson and Kara are planning a webinar for March 27 that will promote environmentally friendly garden practices, especially ways to eliminate use of harmful neonicotinoid pesticides. The Birds and Bees Act will reduce but not eliminate use of neonicotinoids; implementation will be a multi-year process.

Ken reported that, although the NYS legislature passed the Wildlife Crossings Act, Governor Hochul has vetoed the bill. Cary informed the board about Westchester Community College's efforts to reduce bird strikes on

campus buildings. Anne noted that the Town of New Castle Conservation Board is urging the Town Board to regulate window installations in new construction with the aim of increasing the use of bird-safe glass.

Kathleen said one more issue that the Advocacy Committee is looking at is how to work with owners of larger parcels that have multi-acre grassland or meadow habitat to reduce mortality of declining grassland bird species like Bobolinks. Board members interested in this issue can watch the SMRA Zoom program that was held last month, "Grassland Habitats for Birds and Pollinators," which is available on the SMRA YouTube site. Anne noted that Westchester County has proposed \$100,000 for invasive plant removal on the Croton Point landfill with the goal of improving grassland bird and pollinator habitat.

Bird Seed Sale—Tom McEnerney

One more volunteer is needed for the December sale day (Dec. 17) to assist Michael. Tom said he will fill the slot if needed. Although seed sale revenue has declined, seed costs have come down significantly; we are anticipating a net profit from seed sales of \$7,500 for 2024.

Sanctuaries Committee Report—Michael Madias, Jr.

We are planning to resume our sanctuary boundary walks in 2025 starting next month. Walks take place at 9:00 AM on Fridays. See the agenda for tonight's meeting for the full schedule.

The SMRA deer management program will continue through the end of the month. Although anecdotal, deer numbers seem to be down based on observations in our sanctuaries. To date, only four deer have been taken, all in Brinton Brook.

A Brinton Brook Sanctuary visitor is donating a bench to honor a late family member who enjoyed spending time in the sanctuary. Plans call for installing the new bench near the existing memorial bench.

Newsletter—Jenni Stern

Spring issue deadline is February 1. Based on discussion at the previous board meeting, we are planning to resume printing and mailing to the full membership list one of our four annual newsletter issues. Anne suggested that the fall issue would make the most sense for printing and mailing.

New Business—Suzanne Kavic for Erik Andersen

Kathleen noted that the SMRA Nature Book Club will meet on Zoom on January 7 at 7:00 PM. We'll discuss *The Darkness Manifesto* by Johan Eklöf.

Larry said he will lead annual New Years Day walk at Rockwood Hall.

Suzanne called attention to upcoming dates for board of directors' meetings at the bottom of the agenda for tonight's meeting.

Adjournment—Suzanne Kavic for Erik Andersen

Motion: Suzanne shall adjourn the meeting. Motion by: Cary Andrews. Seconded by: Ginger Bernardin. Motion carried (all present voted affirmatively).

Suzanne adjourned the meeting at 8:09 PM.