

NIABI ZOO OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE MINUTES FROM SEPTEMBER 13, 2016

PRESENT: Committee members . J. Taylor, T. Brahm, T. Jarrett, L. Jackson, M. Byrne, W. Nelson (via phone).

ABSENT: J. Craver.

ALSO PRESENT: Dan Meates, Assistant Zoo Director; various members of zoo staff; Rick Biddle, Schultz & Williams (via phone); Catherine Grace, Schultz & Williams (via phone); John Ferrell, Zoological Society President; Scott Lohman.

Chairman Taylor called the meeting of the Niabi Zoo Oversight Committee to order at 5:08 PM on Monday, September 13, 2016, in the Education Room of the Administration Building at Niabi Zoo in Coal Valley, Illinois.

Roll was called:

T. Brahm, L. Jackson, T. Jarrett, J. Taylor, M. Byrne, W. Nelson.

Total Present 6

J. Craver.

Total Absent 1

Chairman Taylor called for a motion to approve the consent agenda items.

MOTION: Mr. Byrne moved to approve the consent agenda items. Mr. Brahm seconded the motion.

Motion carried.

Chairman Taylor called for a motion approving the minutes from the August 8, 2016 and August 29, 2016 meetings.

MOTION: Mr. Byrne moved to approve the minutes from the August 8, 2016 and August 29, 2016 meetings. Mr. Brahm seconded the motion.

Motion carried.

Chairman Taylor asked if the Committee would agree to adding an update from Mindfire to the agenda.

There was consensus to hear an update from Mindfire.

Chairman Taylor called on Ms. Behning from Mindfire for an update.

Ms. Behning stated that Mindfire has continued to work with staff on the public image. Niabi is now Facebook certified, which means that now the zoo shows up in search engine optimization. Continue to monitor social signage, and various activities throughout as the next large event is prepared for. That is Boo at the Zoo. With some

of the shifts in the staff at the zoo, we've remanaged a few items. Been looking at comments and they are trending to positive feedback. Working with Mr. Jackson on messaging around long term and short term planning.

Chairman Taylor called on Mr. Biddle from Schultz & Williams to comment on his Next Steps Memo.

Mr. Biddle stated that he and Mr. Jackson have had conversations about the Case for Support. The other big thing is that we had a discussion with Dr. Rod Simmer and Mr. Kai Swanson along with Mr. Jackson and Mr. Craver. We talked about the Next Steps Memo, and the current status of the zoo. They asked good questions and we talked about how best to move forward. If the Oversight Committee has any questions regarding the memo, we can discuss those. Both of the Commissioners want to get involved and help move this process forward.

Chairman Taylor stated that, under section 2A of the Next Steps Memo, the goal is to add five members to the Society by the end of the year.

Mr. Biddle stated that the Society and the Oversight Committee will work with Mr. Jackson to identify new members who can serve in the Public Private partnership.

Chairman Taylor stated that he planned on attending the Forest Preserve Committee meeting, and is working to keep the lines of communication open.

Mr. Biddle stated that he had met with the director of the Brookfield zoo and the director of the Lincoln Park Zoo, and asked for copies of their current agreements. They have said that they will share those. Once I get those copies, I will forward them on.

Mr. Brahm asked to confirm that those agreements will be shared with the legal counsel as well.

Mr. Biddle confirmed those agreements would also be shared with the legal counsel.

Mr. Byrne stated that he was looking at the next steps we need to go forward and felt we've got to get something out to the public that we're moving forward with this. When I went back to the resolution for this Committee, one of the things we're supposed to do is create an organizational business plan for the operation and management of the zoo. We've been making some of the decisions, or recommendations for decisions, on operating the zoo, but I think our committee now should operate as if we were the PPP knowing that the recommendations are going to go to the Forest Preserve. We should start, in the near future, as if we were operating the zoo. Have the questions come through this committee, and then our recommendations go to the Forest Preserve. It seems like now some decisions come through us and some don't. One example is the budget. We should develop that budget and make a recommendation if that is what a PPP is going to do next year. We've had other decisions that have been made that haven't come through here necessarily. And I think if we do that we can put out something to the public that we're operating this as if we were a PPP and this is where we're headed.

Mr. Biddle asked if there were specific plans/issues that Mr. Byrne felt should come through this committee other than the budget. Let's just get the list of those things, so we can work towards it. Some of the management controls should be put into the zoo director's responsibilities. There are a couple of moving pieces, and remember this isn't a linear process. This is a process where we have a good idea of what the budget is. The organization needs to be established because, as I noted in my document, we're going to need between \$200,000.00 and \$400,000.00 of new sources coming from somewhere. The business plan won't be worth anything if we don't know who is behind the entity.

Mr. Byrne stated that he agreed, but his point was that we need to be able to go out to the donors and say that we're moving to the PPP, we want to get there next year and this is what it's going to look like and how it will operate. We'll actually be doing it. I think we need to put the Forest Preserve on the side, Mr. Jackson comes to the Oversight Committee, gives his report to the Oversight Committee as if we were a private organization and we in turn pass that recommendation on to the Forest Preserve Committee. What's your reaction, Mr. Jackson?

Mr. Jackson stated that his first reaction was that it was a bit confusing since he wasn't sure exactly what the Oversight Committee was wanting from him as far as what to bring to them. Earlier you mentioned that some things were coming to you and some things weren't. One of the first things we need to do is nail down the details so there are no misunderstandings.

Mr. Byrne stated that he agreed. If we jump forward a year and there's a Private entity running the zoo, Mr. Jackson would have things that were wholly his decision, but there would be things that he would need to come to this group to get approval for. Things like new exhibits, which we would then turn to the Society for the money. The Forest Preserve hired Mindfire, and in the future PPP that type of decision would fall to the managing entity.

Mr. Jackson asked why Mr. Byrne felt that hiring Mindfire would rise to the managing entity for approval.

Mr. Byrne stated that if it was within the budget, then Mr. Jackson could just make that decision, but if we were going to spend millions on a new exhibit, that would come from here. You're wanting to remodel the Jungle Trek exhibit, and that's another example of something that should come through this Committee.

Mr. Jackson stated that he understood what Mr. Byrne was saying, but that there seemed to be a differing idea of what typically comes to a board. In my experience redoing a room would require that I inform you, but would not require a discussion or approval from a board. What we need to do is to sit down and discuss specifics.

Mr. Byrne felt that the idea of acting as the PPP before truly making the transition was possible. All the Oversight Committee is doing right now is making recommendations.

We have no power. The only thing we're doing is saying that we talked this over and here's our recommendation.

Mr. Jackson asked if the group had an idea of what operating decisions the Forest Preserve actually wants the Oversight Committee to discuss.

Mr. Byrne paraphrased from the resolution that formed the Oversight Committee, stating, "Make recommendations and advise on all available best practices to move the Commission and the zoo through the transition to a PPP. Provide guidance to the Society, and strengthen the board. Create an organizational business plan for the operations and management of the zoo under one entity."

Mr. Jackson pointed out that that was incredibly vague and broad.

Mr. Byrne stated that what he was getting at was that we need to get something out to the public that states that we're moving towards that PPP. This could be the thing that we're going to put out to the public; that we're going to operate as if we're a PPP. It can give the Forest Preserve an opportunity to see what they would be agreeing to, and get comfortable with the model. It also gives the donors some insight into how things will run once the PPP is signed, and they might be willing to support the zoo at that point. Mr. Biddle, does that make sense?

Mr. Biddle stated that what we're trying to do is get the entity moving in the right direction faster, so you can make the shift and raise money. In theory the Oversight Committee is here to help transition to the new PPP, but the Society isn't ready to be that entity yet.

Mr. Jarrett stated that things were left very vague so that this group could fill in the details. From my stand point, the District's tax dollars come into this organization to run it. I'm not sure how they come up with the dollars or what they want them spent on, but that money probably won't be allotted towards new exhibits or remodels. The question becomes what do we need to look at, what are the tax dollars are going to cover and what costs are the private entity going to have to fund? That's a discussion we need to have. I doubt the tax dollars are going to cover much more than salaries and keeping the lights on.

Mr. Biddle stated that for that reason the private side needs to be strong and have the ability to raise dollars. It all comes back to the money. I'm not worried about the public side, I'm worried about the contributed money and I'm worried about the \$1.7 million goal that's been set. The things that are being asked for are all good, but we've got to get the private piece of the equation going.

Chairman Taylor stated that he had been thinking on how to facilitate this process. We have three entities, the District, the Oversight Committee and the Society. Joint meetings is one way we could try to move this along and get everyone communicating. Another option would be to have a go-between to go around and pass the information from one body to the other.

Mr. Biddle brought the Committee's attention to the Next Step Memo. The steps outlined in the memo are what needs to be done. Find a way to check them off and move on to the next one. The agreements from Lincoln Park and Brookfield are number one under the zoo side. The number two would be to make a statement on the public private partnership, and I believe that is in the process. Don't be surprised to hear that they want to see new leadership, they want to see community stakeholders and they want to see the funding commitment from the private side. It's the \$1.7million, it's the \$200,000.00 to \$400,000.00 per year to help run Niabi, because as Mr. Jarrett stated we're not going to be able to completely run the zoo off the tax dollars and admissions. The document lays out the process, and we need to tick these steps off and move on. The bottom line is that we need the new leadership, the board and the new money.

Mr. Byrne stated that he did not think that we were putting out to the public what the Society needs in order to go out and raise money and get new board members. When the Society asks the potential donors and new board members, they need to be able to say that this is what we're doing, and we are going to move forward.

Mr. Nelson stated that one of the things that stands out to him with this is that there are some people on the Commission, from both sides of the aisle that have an interest in seeing this move forward. It seems the District is committed to moving forward. The Oversight Committee needs to take a look at the agreement for the Brookfield Zoo, and carve out the pieces that will work at Niabi also.

Mr. Jarrett stated that it seemed everyone was on the same page. The key question is, what does the public know about what's been going on? I think we need to get word out of what we've done this year. What the Society has contributed, and ask what people want the zoo to look like in five years? The public has to buy into funding and the future of Niabi as well.

Mr. Jackson stated that it is very dangerous putting the zoo out for a vote as to what they want to see. I know what's going to be on that list. It will be elephants, it will be penguins, it will be other things that the zoo cannot afford to do. We would be setting ourselves up for disappointing a lot of people. The best practice is to come out and present ideas to the public.

Mr. Jarrett stated that there still needs to be some kind of public communication in order to raise money. Communicate what we have done and what we want to do.

Mr. Brahm stated that presenting a plan for what the zoo wants to do both short and long term is important.

Mr. Biddle stated that the Case for Support has been updated. We'll finish up some language and get it out through Mindfire.

Several members agreed that that was a good idea.

Mr. Jackson stated that a lot of that has already been done.

Ms. Behning added that that is in line with the discussion that Mindfire has been a part of. When defining external communications we tend to say %public+, but to be really affective in that communication we want to break those strategies down. There's a difference between the communication that is for fundraising, and what we're currently tasked with which is the communication with the %stroller+public that would include the actual visitor. When you say public, to me that's the person walking through the gate. What I think this group is more interested in is to find those core constituencies in the public, which might be potential funders or others. We've already discussed options for the issues that have been talked about during the meeting. When it comes to communicating to a core constituency of business owners or stakeholders in the community there are communication tools that create a sense of purpose and open the door slightly for input that allows people to %host it without actually building the cake.+ We can't make a promise that the zoo won't be able to keep. Putting those pieces together from the plan in a unique way for the core constituents, then bridge that into speaking points. Each individual person working for the betterment of Niabi needs to be telling the same story.

Chairman Taylor asked if Ms. Behning saw the timing of the zoo closing for the season soon as an issue in effectively getting the message to that core constituency.

Ms. Behning stated that the zoo closing for the season in less than two months was not an issue. What is important is the message.

Mr. Biddle stated that he would work with Mr. Jackson and Ms. Behning on that message and present it to the Oversight Committee.

Chairman Taylor called on Mr. Jackson for an update on the zoo.

Mr. Jackson stated that the report in the packet is pretty standard, but the more important thing is that Mr. Meates has resigned his position as Assistant Director and Curator of Animals effective September 24th. Mr. Meates has been with Niabi since 2012. He has been critical in the development of our programs and raising the level of professionalism and staff development at Niabi. We would not be where we're at today, and we're not where we should be, but we wouldn't be anywhere close today without the experience and hard work of Mr. Meates. On behalf of myself, and the Oversight Committee, we're glad you were here, and we're sorry to see you go.

Chairman Taylor called on Mr. Ferrell for an update from the Society.

Mr. Ferrell stated that the Society was still looking to the Oversight Committee for a plan. The Schultz & Williams Next Steps Memo is heavy with things for the Society to do, but I think if we don't communicate our directive then we won't get the leadership that you want to replace the Society with. The community is looking for some sort of statement from this group. We were asked about joint meetings. Our next meeting is on September 19th.

Chairman Taylor felt that the joint meeting would be best in October.

Mr. Ferrell went on to state that the Society received a spreadsheet on a \$360,000.00 budget for small projects. That is what the meeting on the 19th will center around. The Society needs the plan to fund raise. People don't believe that the shift of governance is going to happen. They won't believe it until it's announced from this group.

Chairman Taylor stated that he believed they were close to being ready to make that statement, and called for discussion on coordinating the schedules of the Oversight Committee and Society meetings.

After a brief discussion about future meetings for the Oversight Committee it was decided to work with the Society to schedule a joint meeting in October.

Chairman Taylor called the meeting adjourned.

Adjourned at 6:01 PM.

Submitted by:
Cassie Sullivan
Forest Preserve Administrative Assistant