

## NIABI ZOO OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE MINUTES FROM JANUARY 12, 2016

**PRESENT:** Committee members . T. Brahm, M. Byrne, J. Craver, T. Jarrett, J. Taylor.

**ABSENT:**

**ALSO PRESENT:** Steve Ballard, President Forest Preserve; Dan Meates, Interim Zoo Director; Jill Roderick, Education and Conservation Curator; Scott Hesselberg, Maintenance Superintendent; Scarlet Behrens, Guest Services Manager; John Ferrell; Niabi Zoological Society; Rick Biddle, Schultz & Williams; Catherine Grace, Schultz & Williams; Amy Behning, MindFire Communications; Lynn Manternach, MindFire Communications; Melanie Shields, Pear Advertising; Molly Fuller, Pear Advertising; the zoo keeper staff; Scott Lohman.

Mr. Craver called the meeting of the Niabi Zoo Committee to order at 5:00 PM on Tuesday, January 12, 2016, in the Education Room of the Administration Building at Niabi Zoo in Coal Valley, Illinois.

Roll was called:

T. Brahm, M. Byrne, J. Craver, T. Jarrett, J. Taylor.

**Total Present        4**

**Total Absent        0**

Mr. Craver called the meeting to order, and asked for nominations for Oversight Committee Chairman.

**MOTION:** Mr. Brahm nominated Mr. Taylor because of his experience with the Quad Cities Convention and Visitors Bureau, and connections in the community. Mr. Byrne seconded the nomination.

Motion carried.

Chairman Taylor called for nominations for Vice Chair.

**MOTION:** Mr. Brahm nominated Mr. Byrne for Vice Chair. Mr. Craver seconded the nomination.

Motion carried.

Chairman Taylor thanked the Committee and stated that his intention is to listen and learn. I've learned that there's a lot more that goes into running a zoo than I ever thought possible. Then called for a motion to approve the December 21<sup>st</sup> Oversight Committee meeting minutes.

**MOTION:** Mr. Brahm moved to approve the December 21<sup>st</sup> Oversight Committee meeting minutes. Mr. Byrne seconded the motion.

Motion carried.

Chairman Taylor stated that in the interest of full disclosure, Quad City Visitors Bureau does have a relationship with MindFire. Then called on Ms. Behning and Ms. Manternach of MindFire Communications for their marketing proposal.

Ms. Behning introduced herself as a Brand Arsonist and co-owner. Mainly my role is with strategy and implementation. The Quad Cities Convention and Visitors Bureau, Metrolink and Putnam museum are some of our clients that are related to the zoo entity.

Ms. Manternach introduced herself as one of the founders of MindFire. MindFire was founded about eight years ago. We will walk you through the proposal that is in front of the Committee members, and we are happy to answer any questions you have on that proposal. We are here to help the zoo really understand their target market. A brand isn't what you say it is, it's what your consumers say it is. We want to understand what your consumers or potential zoo goers, board members and leadership, the people who are stakeholders in your organization think about the zoo. Then we use that information to help you tell your story in the most interesting, relevant and engaging way. MindFire is a full service team, offering interactive web development, brand development, research, metrics and analytics. Anything that you need to help develop your brand is something that MindFire can do for you. What MindFire looks for in the research is relevance. Relevance is somewhere in between the message that the zoo wants to get out and what people are actually interested in. That's where the fire is, and that's where you will connect with your target market. Let's talk about our branding approach. MindFire uses the Fire Brand Process. It's a five step process. First will be the brand discovery workshop. That will include interviewing eight to ten people who are key stakeholders, and finding out what is most important to them about the zoo. What are they looking for in the zoo experience? What are the key attributes they use to describe the zoo experience? MindFire uses that information to develop the brand research to talk to consumers to see how well they agree with those brand perceptions. We will take a look at what makes you special, what attracts those visitors to the zoo, and what are the biggest benefits for the visitors as well as the community. The next phase of the research is to understand and begin that engagement process with the top stakeholders. Then there will be an online survey with members that we can get information for lots of statistical analysis that is both qualitative and quantitative. From this we will find the emotional connection with the consumers and that is a very important part of developing the story for the zoo. That story is what will engage the zoo goer and connect them with the zoo. Find out what experience they want and what experience will make them recommend the zoo to others. We will use advanced statistical analysis to look deeply under the surface. That will help us develop some personas that will help tell the story for the zoo. Also how to target certain types of zoo goers to help increase fund raising and membership.

Ms. Behning stated that in early conversations with Mr. Meates, Ms. Behrens and Ms. Roderick, among a few others, on the importance of the timing because of changes that are being implemented. Because of the changes a high importance was placed on developing a marketing strategy instead of implementing a series of marketing tactics. So the questions are: %What do we do first, and to whom?+and %What do we say?+The brand research, which is really about understanding what's in the hearts and minds of those consumers and prioritizing your messages in a relevant way. That what the first part is about. That information moves us forward to brand development, brand position and brand promise, which is different from your mission statement. That brand position is a statement that we %lug+around that says "This is what we offer, and this is why it matters to whom.qWe all remember facts and figures about half as long as we remember how something made us feel. That's why it's so important to find that emotional connection with the zoo goer. Then comes the brand promise, and think of that as how you deliver the brand position every day. It's also important to get continuity into the branding and brand graphics. The research and planning are very important to your long term marketing strategy, but there are things that we can help clean up and get some continuity into in the short term also. Brand planning and implementation, it's important to keep it simple. First build the plan, then work the plan. Public relations is very important topic, and I think there is a lot of room to get proactive. We'd like to help you build a media plan that helps you look at things from a cause marketing stand point not from a media investment stand point. The marketing plan will go into that in more detail. It'd be based on the research and based on the budget. It's great to do everything, but it's better to do a few things really, really well.

Ms. Manternach stated that the fifth step is brand measurement. We monitor progress over time and continually fine-tune the marketing programs to reach your marketing goals. The best brands tell a story, and MindFire can help the zoo develop and tell the story.

Ms. Manternach and Ms. Behning gave a few examples of work done for previous/other clients, and empowering the clients to use the developed branding themselves. Then asked if there were any questions.

Mr. Byrne asked, what do you see as the timeline for when you would start and when you would have something in place?

Ms. Behning answered that the research would take around ten to eleven weeks. After the research is done things do move pretty quickly. After the research is done it would be around four to six weeks maximum.

Mr. Biddle stated that the zoo was opening in about ninety days, is there something that could be done in the short term to get word out and build some interest?

Ms. Behning suggested looking at some short term guidelines. See what is currently being used and use early research to improve on those things that are already in place.

Mr. Biddle asked how important the new logo is.

Ms. Behning answered that she felt it was not wise to judge at the moment. The logo and visual identity could be freshened up and streamlined a bit, but as far as the naming convention goes, there's no way to answer that question right now.

Mr. Byrne asked what the estimated cost in the first year might be. Just the initial research and implementation is about \$50,000.00. What would we likely be spending beyond that?

Ms. Behning stated that it greatly depends on what the zoo's budget is. It's not necessarily what you spend, but how you spend it. We've worked with clients whose budget was \$25,000.00, and we've worked with clients whose budgets were millions of dollars. It's not about doing everything that's out there, it's about doing a few things really well when you're talking about the small budgets of non-profits.

Mr. Byrne asked if the MindFire retained ownership and intellectual property of the work.

Ms. Behning answered yes. There is a contract that we'd share with you, and you'd go over.

Mr. Jarrett asked who MindFire would be looking at as the target audience.

Ms. Manternach stated that the research would start with people who already had a relationship with the zoo because we're looking for what they like about it, what they don't like about it, and what their concerns are.

Ms. Behning stated that as we look at the first ninety days, we know that there are needs in the first ninety, but we need a deeper connection to the consumer.

Mr. Brahm asked how big a part do they see mass media playing a role?

Ms. Behning stated that mass media is probably not a good idea right now. It's not targeted. Online strategies would be better right now.

Mr. Ferrell asked if they could use the current logos and looks.

Ms. Behning stated that they could.

Mr. Biddle asked to clarify that this proposal was very customizable.

Ms. Manternach confirmed that yes it is very customizable.

The Committee thanked Ms. Manternach and Ms. Behning for their time.

Chairman Taylor stated that he felt the marketing proposals would be best to make a decision at the meeting on January 26<sup>th</sup>. Then called on Mr. Ferrell for the Society report.

Mr. Ferrell reported that Monday night would be the monthly meeting for the Society. At the meeting the Society would be handed over the gift shop assets and the concession assets to the District. Getting really close on the MOU. Mr. Biddle and I met today and went over it. There are only a few minor edits, and the Society hopes to have that to Mr. Craver by Friday.

Ms. Melanie Shields, Director of Marketing, and Ms. Molly Fuller, Creative Director, of Pear Advertising introduced themselves.

Ms. Shields stated that twelve years ago she and Ms. Fuller started Pear Advertising, and have been handling the zoo for that entire time. Over those twelve years there has been over \$200,000.00 worth of service donated to the zoo. Feel that there is no need to do much market research, because with twelve years of servicing the zoo, they know what people want. I write copy and manage the projects and would be the first point of contact. We estimate that being a strategic marketing partner for the zoo would increase our hours worked to six hundred per year. That would be approximately \$30,000.00 per year. Since we've been doing this for so long we can give a firmer estimate than the others because we know the scope of the work that has been done in the past. The costs are broken out in short term, mini plan, and a long term plan. There are estimated costs for media both locally and regionally. Ms. Shields then passed around examples of their past work both for the zoo and for other companies, then called for questions.

Chairman Taylor asked who was usually the contact for the zoo, and how Ms. Shields saw working with the Oversight Committee and with the big changes happening at the zoo.

Ms. Shields answered that Ms. Behrens had been the main contact for the zoo, though Pear had also spoken to Mr. Heinzman and Ms. Roderick before. Typically what is done is that Pear makes a list of everything that has to get done and starts on those projects.

Chairman Taylor asked, in regards to the unflattering article in the QC Times a couple weeks ago, is public relations something that your firm can do, and how would you have handled that situation?

Ms. Shields stated that public relations is definitely something that Pear can do. We'd like to have more control over the media aspect of the marketing for the zoo. It's important to feed the media good stories about the zoo out there, and stay ahead of bad PR.

Mr. Byrne asked, with the opening about ninety days away, how do you see the timing for marketing?

Ms. Shields stated that Pear already knew what needed to be done for the zoo for the beginning of the season, and things are actually ahead of schedule.

Mr. Byrne asked if Pear had any other entertainment or education clients.

Ms. Shields stated that Pear only takes on one client of each industry. Some of their other clients are JFK Catholic School and University of Dubuque.

Mr. Jarret asked if Ms. Shields believed that social media should be more closely monitored than it currently is.

Ms. Shields felt that there could be more graphics provided in regards to social media.

Mr. Biddle asked what the challenges were in working with the zoo.

Ms. Shields stated that the current challenge is public perception. The most important thing is to get out ahead of bad PR, and getting some positive stories out in the media.

Mr. Byrne asked if Ms. Shields had any experience with correctly bad PR.

Ms. Shields answered that they hadn't had clients who've had that problem, but it is certainly something that Pear can do.

Chairman Taylor asked what Ms. Shields thought was the cause of the negative image of the zoo.

Ms. Shields answered that it's the association with the County and the County Board. Pear does have some good contacts in the local media that could be worked with to try and get the negative perception of the zoo turned to positive.

Mr. Meates asked what Pear could do that is new and fresh.

Ms. Shields felt that speaking with staff about opinions was a good place to start. The zoo could use a fun-er image. Can start with eye catching photos to grab people's attention. Would love to do a video series, like keeper chat. Focus on the key exhibits and what's new and go from there.

Chairman Taylor thanked Ms. Shields and Ms. Fuller for their presentation. Then stated that he felt the Oversight Committee should take some time to think on these presentations, and make a decision next meeting.

Mr. Biddle reminded the Committee that the marketing strategy is a very important part of getting the zoo back on track, and the sooner a decision is made the better.

Chairman Taylor asked Mr. Biddle for a preliminary update.

Mr. Biddle stated that he had met with zoo staff, the Oversight Committee members and a few Society members including Mr. Ferrell. Everyone seems in agreement that some of the items are getting ticked off the list, and things are moving forward. The staff here has excellent passion and energy. There is a five page director profile in your packet. There has been lots of visibility for the Niabi Zoo Director position. We've heard from a few people even though it's not been officially opened. There is an Organizational

Model on the last page of your packet. Also included in the packet is the Operational Plan for 2016, as you can see it starts with the Meerkat and Leopard and outlines what the zoo is doing for the 2016 season. Need to create a plan together for the empty exhibits. It doesn't necessarily have to be animals in those areas, and the Society is aware that a funding request is coming for that. The Bald Eagle renovation should be prioritized. It an animal management issue as well as having a positive impact on the visitor experience. Want to reiterate that becoming more proactive with getting a new story for the zoo is extremely important. In the coming months staff will work on the plan for 2017 and 2018, though the new director is needed in that process as well. We encourage you to get these meetings down to one hour; some of this information should really be consent and approval, not necessarily a lot of discussion. There are written reports, and given that the Committee meets every two weeks that keeps everyone informed. The role of the Committee is to advise and guide, but it's very important that the Committee members not get caught in the details.

Chairman Taylor stated that he felt that sound advice, and he would work with Mr. Craver and Ms. Sullivan to get agenda items finalized by noon on the Friday before the meeting. Then asked Ms. Behrens about the contracts that were listed on the agenda tonight.

Ms. Behrens stated that she was asked to pass those onto the Committee for their information.

Mr. Craver asked if the Pitney Bowes stamp machine contract was really necessary.

Mr. Meates stated that he did not feel it was necessary, and that there was a more cost efficient way to mail the few items that needed mailed from the zoo.

Mr. Craver directed staff to inform the Society that the zoo did not want that contract. Usually the Forest Preserve needs to review and approve entering into contracts. Are any of the companies will to transfer the current contracts to the Forest Preserve?

Ms. Behrens stated that she had contacted the companies regarding the possibility of transferring those contracts and is awaiting a response.

Chairman Taylor asked Mr. Meates for some of the highlights from his report on what staff has been doing.

Mr. Meates reported that the Meerkats are settling in well, and once they've settled in sufficiently will be introduced to the African Crested Porcupine. The checkups for Jackson the Jaguar and Mufasa the Lion have been performed. Both cats are very old. Jackson is twenty, which would be the equivalent of ninety years old for a human, and Mufasa is twenty-one years old. Jackson's arthritis has increased slightly, and Mufasa has lost about 70% of his vision and also has arthritis. Staff continues to monitor these animals very closely. I'm very proud of the staff, and how well they did with these procedures and all their work.

Chairman Taylor asked if the Committee had any other questions or things that they would like to discuss.

The Committee did not.

Chairman Taylor called for a motion to adjourn the meeting.

**MOTION:** Mr. Brahm moved to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Byrne seconded the motion.

Motion carried.

Adjourned the meeting at 6:38 PM.

Submitted by:

Cassie Sullivan, Forest Preserve Administrative Assistant