

NIABI ZOO OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE MINUTES FROM JANUARY 9, 2017

PRESENT: Committee members –J. Craver, L. Jackson, T. Brahm, W. Nelson, T. Jarrett, J. Taylor.

ABSENT: M. Byrne.

ALSO PRESENT: Rick Biddle, Schultz & Williams(via phone); Amy Behning, MindFire; Lynsey Engels, Zoological Society; Debbie Shannon, Zoological Society Secretary; Scott Lohman; members of the press.

Chairman Taylor called the meeting of the Niabi Zoo Oversight Committee to order at 4:02 PM on Monday, January 9, 2017, in the Education Room of the Administration Building at Niabi Zoo in Coal Valley, Illinois.

Roll was called:

J. Craver, L. Jackson, T. Brahm, T. Jarrett, W. Nelson, J. Taylor.

Total Present 6

M. Byrne.

Total Absent 1

Chairman Taylor called on Mr. Jackson and Ms. Behning for the presentation of the Strategic Vision Document, and a brief review of 2016.

Mr. Jackson stated that since he began in June of 2016 good progress has been made. Greatly improved park safety for guests, animals and staff. A lot of work has been put in on the buildings to improve safety, and security. Animal's diets have also been a focus and have improved. Some new species have been brought in, and there will be more added before the opening in 2017. It's been a busy six months, but we've got a lot of good basic things started that will serve Niabi well as we work towards reaccreditation.

Chairman Taylor stated that Ms. Behning has a proposed Strategic Vision Document that will be presented to the Society when they are available.

Ms. Behning brought the Committee's attention to the document on the screen, and stated that the document was formed by bringing together all the information that we've had to date. To come up with this document and the rough draft of the brochure we compiled all the documents that have been presented so far and consolidated it into our zoo brand. This will be a great talking tool for us to use to engage the community.

Mr. Jackson added that it concisely presents information on why people should be excited for the future of Niabi.

Ms. Behning stated that some of the design came from the baseline that was created last year. It states all the information clearly. The first draft of the brochure is setup to

give talking points. First there's a letter from Mr. Jackson on modern zoos and their mission. It's really focusing on mission. That we want to educate and provide a family environment. There is "at a glance" information, and some focus being put on the educational opportunities.

Mr. Jackson stated that the zoo is currently seen primary as an entertainment venue. However, that is not the true mission of Niabi, and people do not seem to realize that. The entertainment portion is important, but Niabi does so much more. That will be especially true going into the future.

Ms. Behning stated that Niabi is showing some of that now. Things like the SSP and the Quarters for Conservation. These programs impact the world around us, and they are part of the bigger picture. That's what needs to be emphasized. The next section is "new in 2017." There will also be an updated map in the brochure.

Mr. Jackson stated that staff will be reorganizing some of the exhibits, and adding some new species. This is a small, but important, way to increase the guest experience while also fulfilling Niabi's mission of being more involved in conservation and education work.

Ms. Behning stated that the next section is "helping us build a foundation for the future." Icons give information quickly and effectively. The first is "Staying Strong and Ready for Growth," which is renovating and keeping what Niabi has in good shape. Then there is "Vital to Mission," which is community engagement and improvement, and "New at the Zoo," which is the actual animal activity. Some of the renovations that are planned are the kids' farm, zebra and ostrich exhibit, giraffe exhibit, and phase one of the big cat house.

Mr. Jackson stated that plans for the big cat house are complete. Those plans were completed some time ago, and they are good plans. That project definitely needs to be looked into in the future. In 2017 the bird feeding experience will change from lorikeets to parakeets. The tortoises will also be new in 2017.

Ms. Behning stated that there will also be a "guess the mascot" thing where the guests can guess what the mascot is and win a free train ride. Something else we want to bring attention to is the integration into the Q2030 Regional Action Plan. It's about the interconnectivity of our community, economic vitality, positivity, engagement, and so many other things. As the planning document comes together we really want to take note that that's a huge part of how we want to view Niabi. It's part of the larger picture. The benchmarks that are used for Q2030 will also be used to measure Niabi's success. The next section is about the Zoological Society. It talks about the vitality of Niabi and the community, looking to the future, and engaging so we can continue to develop relationships whether with funders or businesses. This is only a draft. We're still finalizing some content, but wanted to keep everyone in the loop.

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

MOTION: Mr. Nelson 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 December 12, 2016 meeting.

MOTION: Mr. Nelson moved to approve the minutes from the December 12, 2016 meeting. Mr. Craver seconded the motion.

Motion carried.

Chairman Taylor called on Mr. Jackson for an update.

Mr. Jackson stated that staff has been working on safety issues, and I've been working on Coal Valley inclusion for the emergency response procedures. Some of the safety issues that the staff has been working on are electrical. The big focus right now is the Reptile House. Next focus will be the Small Animal Building. The lorikeets are in bad health because of the way the feeding has been done. This is a common problem among the zoos that have had this exhibit, and these kinds of exhibits are being phased out in modern zoos. The remaining lorikeets will be moved to an area where they are not fed by the public. This will allow Niabi staff to more properly manage their nutrition and their health. Budgies, in the U.S. they're known as parakeets, will be the bird for that interactive experience. Two hundred budgies will be purchased for the season. Those will likely be brought in during the next three weeks.

Mr. Jarrett asked in regards to safety, will there be a camera security system in the future.

Mr. Jackson stated that it is a part of the long term plan; both for the perimeter and the public areas. In conservation, Niabi has started to develop some in house conservation initiatives. Niabi has been supportive of outside conservation programs in the past with the quarters for conservation kiosk. In the spring Niabi will continue to support the butterfly and snow leopard programs. The other two programs that will be supported through that kiosk will be in house programs. We've already begun work that's been made possible through a family gift of \$1,000.00. The program is for rare and endangered Asian fresh water fishes. It will be inexpensive to initiate, and inexpensive to manage. Niabi will be the leader in this conservation program. Niabi has already partnered with the Tennessee Aquarium, The Metro Toronto Zoo in Canada, which means that this is a national and international conservation program. We're in talks with the Botanical Center and Western Illinois University to partner with for this. Tammy Schmidt has accepted the Assistant Director position, and should be starting February second. There is a proposed one dollar increase for the train tickets. That takes it from

two dollars to three dollars. The St. Louis Zoo has a train that is double the length of Niabi's, and St. Louis charges seven dollars and fifty cents for their tickets.

Mr. Nelson added that there is a shorter train ride in Geneseo, and they charge three dollars also. The increase seems reasonable.

Mr. Jackson asked if there were any thoughts or concerns with that increase.

No one had any thoughts or questions.

Chairman Taylor called for a motion to accept and recommend the increase to the Forest Preserve Executive Committee.

MOTION: Mr. Brahm moved to accept and recommend the increase to the Forest Preserve Executive Committee. Mr. Craver seconded the motion.

Motion carried.

Chairman Taylor called for a motion to accept Mr. Jackson's report.

MOTION: Mr. Nelson moved to accept Mr. Jackson's report. Mr. Craver seconded the motion.

Motion carried.

Mr. Jackson stated that another proposed change in the fees for the zoo is the parking fee. This was mentioned at previous meetings. Suggesting a fee of three dollars, which would be on the honor system. The guest would be asked at the gate if they drove that day. It is estimated that this fee will bring approximately \$480,000.00 in revenue. This will help Niabi to reach the goals and follow the plan that has been set. Because of the way it is being instituted, there will be no need to spend money on infrastructure.

President Swanson asked what the message to the public would be on the value of the new fee. How can it be marketed?

Mr. Jackson stated that the value is in the improved experience. Staff has been working hard on improving the experience for the guests in 2017, and there are new species that the public will see in the collection when the zoo opens.

Mr. Brahm asked if the parking fee would be included in the membership.

Mr. Jackson stated that the parking fee would be included in the membership.

Mr. Nelson asked if the opportunity for a discount on multiple attraction packages.

Mr. Jackson stated that that is a popular ticket model with amusement parks. Staff can look into those possibilities.

Chairman Taylor called for a motion to accept and recommend to the Forest Preserve Executive Committee the three dollar parking fee, and for staff to look into the package pricing discounts.

MOTION: Mr. Brahm moved to accept and recommend to the Forest Preserve Executive Committee the three dollar parking fee, and for staff to look into the package pricing discounts. Mr. Nelson seconded the motion.

Motion carried.

Mr. Jackson stated that the last change in fees is the discontinuation of discounts on Tuesdays.

Mr. Nelson asked if there would still be the free days.

Mr. Jackson stated that the free days would remain. Those free days are required by law.

There was a brief discussion of the history of the free days and discounts at Niabi.

Chairman Taylor called for a motion to accept and recommend to the Forest Preserve Executive Committee the discontinuation of the discounts on Tuesdays.

MOTION: Mr. Nelson moved to accept and recommend to the Forest Preserve Executive Committee the discontinuation of the discounts on Tuesdays. Mr. Brahm seconded the motion.

Motion carried.

Chairman Taylor called for the task force report on a proposed pathway to the public private partnership.

Mr. Nelson stated that the task force met and looked further into the model of public private partnership that will work for Niabi. Again the advantages and disadvantages that go with each organization we explored. From there we started to sort through the roles and responsibilities of each group, and Niabi's mission and concerns that have been stated from each group were considered. We did rename a few groups in order to help everyone get into the mindsets needed for each group to move forward and look to the future instead of focusing on the past as many people have been. The groups are The Forest Preserve Commission, The Zoo Board (Oversight Committee), and the Foundation (Society). The reasoning behind this is to try and think of ourselves as a different group than we have been in the past.

- The Forest Preserve Commission is charged with providing park services to the residence of Rock Island County. This includes natural resources, camping, boating, golf, the zoo and other outdoor related facilities. They approve all policy, work agreements, hire and fire personnel, and are responsible to the residences within their borders.
- The Zoo Board is an advisory committee tasked with setting procedure and recommending policy to the Forest Preserve Commission that pertains to Niabi. They are responsible for setting short and long term goals, plans for the zoo, and reviewing any capital purchases over a set amount. The Zoo Board would review and recommend a budget to the Forest Preserve Commission. The Zoo Board would request that the Foundation raise funds for specific projects that support Niabi's mission. Foundation fund raisers would be approved by the Zoo Board and recommended to the Forest Preserve Commission.
- The Foundation is a volunteer organization that is an emissary for Niabi and its programs. They would select fund raising projects that the Zoo Board has requested, which support the mission of Niabi. The Foundation would lead a primary fund raising event each year in addition to other seasonal or special event fund raisers that support Niabi's mission. Foundation events that use zoo staff or zoo volunteers would have to be approved by the Zoo Board with a written agreement and may require that staffing costs be offset. Fund raising events that are staffed primarily by foundation volunteers would require approval by zoo staff, with the understanding that the funds and sponsorships raised, go to the foundation for capital improvements to the zoo. The Foundation members would be a support contact, in cooperation with the zoo director or staff, when approaching funders for sizable donations.

In summary, final policy, employee relations, legal requirements and certifications lie with the staff and the Forest Preserve Commission. This wouldn't require special insurance requirements or operational agreements between the Forest Preserve Commission and a separate agency. The Zoo Board would be responsible for helping to set procedures, policy recommendations, operation concerns identified by staff, long and short term plans as identified by the zoo director and the Forest Preserve Commission. The Zoo Board would have a direct link to the Forest Preserve Commission because the Commission selects the Zoo Board members. On the other hand, as a result of the Zoo Board having an operational interest, and working closely with Zoo and Forest Preserve Staff; they become a support group to ensure that operations do not return to non-professional decisions. The Foundation becomes the cheerleaders for the Zoo by raising funds, working with the Zoo Board on long term goals for Niabi, and providing media enticing events that support Niabi's mission. As a result of the actions of the Foundation, meaningful upgrades and additions to Niabi are celebrated because of their community endeavors. If the Oversight Committee feels that this is the right track, then we can start to get this down on paper and look at it in further detail.

Chairman Taylor asked President Swanson how best to communicate this progress to the Commission.

President Swanson stated that it will be important to have details. If looking for endorsement, put in some more details and bring it to the Forest Preserve Executive Committee. The Committee is trying to be very public in its endeavor to remove the Commission from the hiring and firing process and decisions. There is good momentum right now. Will definitely want to see capacity building in the foundation component. The report has a lot of promise.

Mr. Jarrett felt that the report was a huge step forward.

Mr. Brahm stated that the Oversight Committee has finally gotten to a point where this can move forward. We still need to sit down with the Society and put in some more detail.

Chairman Taylor stated that these conversations should happen over the next month, and progress be brought to the February Oversight Committee meeting.

There was a brief discussion on future meeting dates. It was determined to discuss in March.

No one had signed up for public comment.

Chairman Taylor called for a motion to adjourn the meeting.

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

Motion carried.

Adjourned at 5:03 PM.

Submitted by:
Cassie Sullivan
Forest Preserve Administrative Assistant