

NIABI ZOO OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE MINUTES FROM FEBRUARY 23, 2016

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

ABSENT:

ALSO PRESENT: Dan Meates, Interim Zoo Director; Jill Roderick, Education and Conservation Curator; John Ferrell; Niabi Zoological Society; Mr. Biddle, Schultz & Williams(via phone); Catherine Grace, Schultz & Williams(via phone); Hannah Frenell, Field Office Manager; members of zoo keeper staff; Scott Lohman.

Chairman Taylor called the meeting of the Niabi Zoo Committee to order at 5:01 PM on Tuesday, February 23, 2016, in the Education Room of the Administration Building at Niabi Zoo in Coal Valley, Illinois.

Chairman Taylor called the meeting to order.

Roll was called:

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

Total Present 5

Total Absent 0

Chairman Taylor called on Mr. Lohman who had filled out a public speaker form.

Mr. Lohman stated that he had two things he wanted bring up. First, that the agendas of the Oversight Committee should list everything that's going to be discussed at that meeting. The second thing is that people need to stop bringing up the past and blaming each other. There are some people who are bringing up the past in open meetings, and that's how the newspapers can write the negative articles. The Community needs to see a unified front from all parties. The recent article was a great start to helping get the Community back onboard with Niabi Zoo and the changes that the zoo is going through.

Chairman Taylor called for a motion to approve the February 16th Oversight Committee meeting minutes.

MOTION: Mr. Byrne moved to approve the open session February 16th Oversight Committee meeting minutes. Mr. Brahm seconded the motion.

Motion carried.

Chairman Taylor asked if there was a motion to approve the closed session minutes.

MOTION: Mr. Craver moved to keep the closed session minutes closed, until further review from the Civil Division. Mr. Byrne seconded the motion.

Motion carried.

Chairman Taylor asked Mr. Meates about the Mindfire presentation on the agenda.

Mr. Meates stated that Ms. Behning had anticipated conferencing by phone, unfortunately, she is still in transit and unable to call in. However, to give an update on the work plan, as you can see in the handout, things are moving along and many of the objectives have been finished. Mindfire completed its work with the QCCVB, and the support distribution for the media list. The press release for the Quarters for Conservation has gone out. We've developed the signature and statements for the Facebook posts. A story has been placed in Family Focus; that was an interview I did. It was an hour and twenty minute interview, and we're taking some more photos and moving forward with that also. The updates to the current website has been done as well. The final contract edits with WQAD are now being worked on. Working on getting Mindfire access to the social pages. The professional bios are being worked on, and the aging animal press release. Also developing PR key messages for the reopen and the new exhibits, and some have already been completed regarding meerkats and porcupines. Development of a robust media plan, and a one page fact sheet on the Oversight Committee are in the works.

Chairman Taylor called for a motion approving the Code of Conduct for the Oversight Committee.

MOTION: Mr. Craver moved to approve the Code of Conduct for the Oversight Committee. Mr. Jarrett seconded the motion.

Mr. Byrne stated that generally it was fine, but he did have a few questions. Is this the same as the Forest Preserve Commission, or is it modified to be applicable to the Oversight Committee?

Mr. Craver stated that it was modified for the Oversight Committee.

Mr. Byrne suggested changing some of the wording on the second page where it's referring to primary roles and responsibilities of the Oversight Committee; it says oversight of the zoo should not be that we make recommendations to the Forest Preserve regarding the oversight of the zoo.

Chairman Taylor stated that if the Committee wanted to make that adjustment, then that adjustment could be made.

Mr. Byrne also suggested that where it says provide guidance to the Zoological Society it might be better to say provide input instead of guidance.

Chairman Taylor asked Mr. Byrne if he would like to make a motion to amend the Code of Conduct with those two changes.

MOTION: Mr. Byrne moved to amend the Code of Conduct with the discussed changes. Mr. Brahm second the motion.

Motion carried.

Chairman Taylor called for a vote on the motion to approve the Code of Conduct.

Mr. Craver's motion to approve the Code of Conduct was then voted on and carried.

Chairman Taylor called on Mr. Biddle and Ms. Grace for an update on the Director search and the Project Matrix.

Mr. Biddle stated that he would not be able to stay on the call for the whole meeting, but Ms. Grace will take over after he got to go. The search is at the point where starting to bring in the top six candidates to the zoo is a good choice. The Candidates will be able to meet the staff, tour the zoo and meet the Oversight Committee, and we were hoping to begin bringing them in on the next visit which is March 7th, 8th and 9th. Ms. Grace can give more detail on the process of the search so far.

Ms. Grace stated that at the top of the document with the list of top candidates there is a brief overview. Twenty-six applications have been received, and there have been nineteen screening calls made to candidates. There are four more candidates who will be receiving screening calls probably within the next week. Of those, there are twelve strong candidates, and the top six are listed with their experience and education. All of the candidates listed have at least a bachelor's degree on the animal side. Candidates A, B and C are strongest. Ms. Grace then gave a brief description on the three strongest candidates, and stated that candidates B & C are available to visit during that window of the March 7th, 8th and 9th visit and candidate A should be available during the second March Oversight Committee meeting.

Chairman Taylor asked how many people Schultz & Williams is suggesting that they meet with.

Mr. Biddle answered that they would like the Oversight Committee to meet with four to six candidates total.

Chairman Taylor stated that he believed most of the Oversight Committee was prepared for the visit of March 7th, 8th and 9th, but he had a conflict with the second meeting in March.

Ms. Grace stated that the timing is not set in stone, but would like the Oversight Committee to meet the candidates and have the candidates meet the senior staff and see the zoo. Each of the candidates would be on a separate day.

Mr. Byrne asked if it was possible to get those on the 7th and 8th.

Mr. Jarrett stated that those dates would work best for him also.

Mr. Biddle stated that they would try to make those dates work.

Mr. Jarrett asked if candidate A could be scheduled before the next regularly scheduled meeting of the Oversight Committee.

Ms. Grace stated that they would get an updated list to the Oversight Committee once the rest of the screening calls were completed because there may emerge some additional strong candidates, and that they would try and schedule the meetings so they would work best with the Oversight Committee's schedules.

Mr. Craver asked what the candidates had been told in regards to when a decision would be made.

MS. Grace stated that the candidates were told that there may be some time before they are contacted regarding who got the job.

Since there were no other questions, the group moved on to the Project Matrix.

Mr. Biddle stated that the project matrix list that is in front of the Committee members was compiled and categorized with information gotten from Mr. Meates and staff.

Chairman Taylor asked what the evaluation process was, and which high priority project is the highest priority.

Mr. Biddle stated that the list is in priority order. Then the connection became choppy and was lost.

Mr. Craver asked if everyone heard the last thing Mr. Biddle said.

No one had been able to make it out.

Mr. Craver stated that the only thing he wasn't sure about was in regards to the vehicles or other equipment, whether or not one was a higher priority than the other. In conversations with Mr. Biddle it seemed that the projects and the equipment are two different rankings.

Mr. Meates confirmed that was the case. The list was split between two different categories. The list had also been much larger, but it was pared down to the essentials.

Mr. Craver stated that at the last meeting a dollar amount had been thrown out, and these were projects that could potentially fit within that dollar amount.

Mr. Byrne asked to clarify that none of the things listed on the Project Matrix were budgeted for in the District's zoo budget.

Mr. Craver confirmed that none the item on the project matrix were in the District's zoo budget.

Mr. Byrne stated that regarding the train tunnel support which is a safety issue. The list says that it's phased in, does that mean that it's to be done in stages?

Mr. Meates answered that that was correct. There is a part of the tunnel that needs to be done right away, but the other sections can be done a little later. Will be getting an estimate for the project this week.

Mr. Jarrett asked if the phases would be done by the same contractor. It should be asked if it's cheaper to do it all together or in phases.

Mr. Meates stated that he would ask, and that staff always asks that of most contractors when asking for estimates of this nature. This is listed at a priority because it will impact our revenue. If the train has to be shut down at all, that is a big revenue loss.

Mr. Craver stated that it was safety and liability as well, which is why the playground is also listed as a high priority. It needs to be taken down and hopefully replaced with an updated playground that's ADA accessible. The playground is something that has the potential to get a sponsor to pay for it. Mr. Biddle had suggested replacing the playground because it could extend the visitor's stay, and the visitor would be more likely to spend money the longer they stayed. The perimeter fence is also of major importance. It is not USDA compliant.

Mr. Meates stated that the mesh divider in the cat house is a high priority because it is a huge safety issue for both the animals and staff.

Mr. Craver stated that the empty exhibits have also been discussed. The question of whether it's better to spend money on a temporary adjustment, or to save that money for the plan of putting Rhinos in that area. That's going to be a major project, and the costs will only grow bigger as time goes on.

Mr. Meates spoke on the decay of the posts and mesh of the eagle exhibit, and stated that the exhibit needed to be fixed right away. There's no telling exactly how much longer it will last, but it won't be long. It is an animal and visitor safety issue in addition to being an escape issue. There is a shading issue with the Colobus and Gibbons exhibits also. Because there is no shade in the outdoor areas of the exhibits the animals must be given access to the indoor areas. When the animals go indoors on the too hot or too cold days visitors miss out on seeing those animals.

Mr. Byrne asked if it would be better to do the Colobus and Gibbons exhibits first.

Mr. Meates stated that the eagle exhibit is in more need than the Colobus and Gibbons. There are also safety issues in the African exhibit and other exhibits.

Mr. Craver stated that the hay elevator in the red barn is probably something that the zoo can handle buying since it's only a thousand dollars.

Mr. Meates explained that the red barn is where the petting zoo animals are housed during the off season to get them out of the elements. The middle of the barn is where hay has been stored for the animals. The barn has deteriorated to the point where the barn is continually wet. Staff has had to throw out hay because it started to mold and

that's obviously unsafe for the animals to eat or be around. Staff has looked into inexpensive ways to replace the barn structure.

Mr. Craver gave a brief history of the vehicles at the zoo, stating that they were very old and required constant repair.

Mr. Meates stated that Gators, both open and closed, would be preferred by staff due to safety and efficiency on a day to day basis.

Mr. Craver directed Mr. Meates to get together more detail on which models would best serve the zoo.

Mr. Jarrett stated that he would look into possibilities of discounted prices.

Mr. Craver gave a brief explanation of the budget for the 2017 fiscal year, including the increase in director salary and revenue being very weather dependent.

Mr. Ferrell asked if the perimeter fence project will be in phases.

Mr. Meates stated that it would.

Mr. Byrne asked Mr. Ferrell what the Society needed in order to go and fundraise for these projects.

Mr. Ferrell stated that the high priority projects seemed to add up to about \$600,000.00. That should be a reachable goal, but the Society would like a little time to see if it can find some private sponsors. A picture of the designs would be a great tool in this endeavor.

Mr. Brahm asked if the train tunnel project would mean that the train was down during zoo hours for this season.

Mr. Meates stated that it shouldn't have to be down. In the past contractors have been able to work around visiting hours.

Mr. Byrne asked if the tunnel is also where the train is stored.

Mr. Craver stated that it was.

Mr. Ferrell stated that the Society would like to know the timing, order in which the zoo would like projects addressed, and estimates.

Mr. Brahm stated that staff should get good firm numbers for these projects.

Mr. Craver stated that that can be difficult since the District has to go out for bids if projects are of a certain amount. The District has gotten estimates in the past, and then the bids came in significantly higher. The Society does not have to go out for bids, so perhaps that could be looked into.

Mr. Brahm asked who had conducted projects in the past.

Mr. Craver answered that it has been a mix of Society paying contractors directly or the Society reimbursing the District for the construction bills. Then gave a brief history and background with some examples, and stated that communication and chain of command would need to be very clear.

Mr. Meates stated that that's part of the reason the staff is looking for a monthly budget of how much funds the Society is willing/capable of providing for projects.

Mr. Ferrell felt that without a fundraising campaign being in the works that the Society would not be able to provide a monthly budget for staff.

Mr. Craver stated that staff would shop around and get a design to assist the Society in soliciting donors for projects.

Mr. Ferrell stated that a design to show donors would be a great asset.

Chairman Taylor stated that there seemed to be a consensus on the priorities. The playground, the train tunnel and the x-ray machine.

Mr. Brahm asked staff if they had had any ideas of what could be done with the empty exhibits. What is the \$40,000.00 listed on the project matrix for?

Mr. Meates answered that the only thing that could go in that area would be a non-animal experience, and that the price listed is to take down the fencing.

Mr. Byrne asked what could go in the old Elephant exhibit.

Mr. Meates stated that the zoo could not afford to do both the Elephant and Australia exhibits. Unfortunately, the old elephant exhibit is likely going to have to remain as is. With all the projects that there are and it being so close to opening day, there really isn't much that could be accomplished. It's important to just be honest with the public. There are things we could put over in that area to promote the Rhinos and get the public interested in and excited about the Rhinos. Potentially garner donor support and excitement. There are final drawings done; it's a shovel ready exhibit. I think that's the best way to utilize that area. Promote it and get people's interest and excitement for the project to help raise funds for the project.

Chairman Taylor asked if there were physical things that could be put in that area, like Rhino cutouts, to accomplish getting that interest and excitement.

Mr. Meates stated that the zoo has renderings and designs that are up to show the public what the zoo has envisioned for the area. Staff would also like to put in something a little more interactive as well.

Ms. Roderick stated that there could be a life size cutout of a Rhino, something that people could get pictures with. Really enhance why the zoo wants to do this and get people excited about it. The biggest thing in that regard is that we want to make sure that we definitely the direction we are going with that area. To talk about Rhinos and get people excited about them then not do it will send the wrong message to the public. Promoting an area in this way has been done at other zoos I have been at. Kids will get their pictures taken with the cutouts, and they really enjoy it.

Chairman Taylor felt that whatever could be done to promote the future of the zoo would be great. As long as the area doesn't look desolate. Mr. Ferrell can speak on the upcoming zoo visit.

Mr. Ferrell stated that Mr. Biddle had suggested for the Oversight Committee to visit other zoos to help learn how zoos operate. The Society offered to fund those visits. There is a trip to the Columbus Zoo planned for February 25th, and one in April to the Fort Wayne Zoo.

Chairman Taylor asked if Mr. Meates had anything more to discuss with the Committee as far as his Interim Director report.

Mr. Meates stated that he believed everything had been covered.

Chairman Taylor asked if the Society had anything they would like to update the Committee on.

Mr. Ferrell stated that he had the signed MOU, and a copy of the Society's bylaws. Mr. Meates has also been given a copy, so everyone should have a copy now.

Chairman Taylor called the meeting adjourned.

Adjourned the meeting at 6:19 PM.

Submitted by:

Cassie Sullivan, Forest Preserve Administrative Assistant