

NIABI ZOO OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE MINUTES FROM FEBRUARY 13, 2017

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

ABSENT:

ALSO PRESENT: Tammy Schmidt, Assistant Zoo Director; Debbie Shannon, Zoological Society Secretary; Scott Lohman.

Chairman Taylor called the meeting of the Niabi Zoo Oversight Committee to order at 4:04 PM on Monday, February 13, 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(via phone), W. Nelson(via phone), J. Taylor, M. Byrne.

Total Present 7

Total Absent 0

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 January 9, 2017 meeting.

MOTION: Mr. Craver moved to approve the minutes from the January 9, 2017 meeting. Mr. Brahm seconded the motion.

Motion carried.

Chairman Taylor called on Mr. Jackson for an update on the vision document.

Mr. Jackson stated that there have been some edits, but no substantial changes. It should be ready in a few weeks. Would also like to introduce the new assistant zoo director Tammy Schmidt. She is head of animal care, and has been with Niabi for ten days now. Ms. Schmidt has jumped in with both feet, and we are really excited to have her here. The 200 budgies have arrived. The reptile house is nearly complete, and the building to receive some needed attention will be the small animal building. There are a couple of new species lined up. As the committee can see, deconstruction of the Rain Forest Trek has begun. The target for completion of the Ocean's Exhibit is opening day.

Mr. Craver asked if the exhibit would be loud.

Mr. Jackson stated that it would not be loud. The largest piece of equipment will be a chiller, and that will be placed outside.

Chairman Taylor called for a motion to accept and recommend the proposed 2017 schedule to the Forest Preserve Executive Committee.

MOTION: Mr. Byrne moved to accept and recommend the proposed 2017 schedule to the Forest Preserve Executive Committee. Mr. Brahm seconded the motion.

Motion carried.

Mr. Jackson concluded the update, stating that the visitor packages were still in the works, and each package would be give a ten percent discount.

Chairman Taylor asked President Swanson if there was anything from the Forest Preserve Commission that the Oversight Committee should be aware of or updated on.

President Swanson stated that there were two things to share. [Handed out two documents]. These policies have been passed, and signal a change in governance. There will be a few more to go to the Commission this month. The two most notable changes are that the hiring decisions will rest with the director, not the elected officials, and the management policies will also be determined by management and not elected officials. Everyone has been concerned with the governance, and the District is committed to best practices. The wording for the Commissioner Creed was gotten from the Illinois Association of Park Districts' website. Would like to ask for this committee's support for these documents.

Chairman Taylor asked if these documents would apply to the Oversight Committee as well.

President Swanson stated that the documents do not affect the Oversight Committee at this time.

Mr. Nelson stated that he is familiar with the Creed document, and will be excited to see it accepted by the Commission.

Chairman Taylor called for discussion on the Memorandum of Understanding being presented.

Mr. Craver stated that he felt the forward needed rewritten, but that the document could serve as a jumping off point. Mr. Jackson and I have done some editing of the language, but this will need some detail work and input from the Oversight Committee. The changes that were made reflect what the Task Force has brought to the Committee

so far. Again, this is not a final document, but is supposed to serve as a base to work from.

Mr. Jackson stated that this document will need a lot more work before it can be presented as final.

Chairman Taylor, President Swanson, Mr. Jackson and Mr. Craver volunteered to review the document and come back with suggestions.

Mr. Brahm brought attention to a typo in section 4.3.

Mr. Byrne expressed some concerns with some of the terminology in the document.

Chairman Taylor stated that the document will be discussed further at next month's meeting after the committee has had a chance to review the document and give it some real thought.

The Oversight Committee then moved on to discuss the meeting schedule for the remainder of 2017. It was decided that the meeting day should remain the second Monday of the month, and that since the zoo will be open in April, the time for the meeting should be moved to 5:00pm starting in April.

[No one signed up for public comment.]

Chairman Taylor stated that if there were no other updates regarding task force reports, then the meeting could adjourn.

Mr. Byrne asked where the committee was on the Oversight Committee proposal. Where does it go from here?

Mr. Jackson stated that it was only the first draft. There's a lot of work to be done on the document still.

Mr. Byrne stated that, with regard to the Oversight Committee proposal, two things come to mind. One, what does the Society think of this? Two, what will the donors think of this? When I read it, I interpret it to say that we're going to have an Oversight Board that's going to meet, Mr. Jackson is going to be the "executive director" and give his recommendations for the zoo. The Oversight Board will look at the budget, and all those things, as if it were a private organization, and the Oversight Board will give recommendations to the Commission, who will retain the final say. Ideally the Commission will develop trust in the Board, and it will approve the Oversight Board's recommendations. Is that what everyone else is thinking?

President Swanson stated that Mr. Byrne was correct in that trust needed to be built over time. I'm aware of the fact that there is a lot of distrust in the Commission and the Committee, but I think as long as we're clear on our roles, vis-a-vis Mr. Jackson and his leadership, then that would be a good path to follow.

Mr. Byrne stated that his next thought was, will the donors like this model? Initially when this was started it was believed that there was hesitancy with big dollars coming in. Is

there a way to test this, and see if this is something that the donating community will give to?

President Swanson stated that it comes back to a trusting relationship. The one thing that hasn't been done lately is to "make a solid ask." We've talked to potential donors about potential philosophies and structures, but that's not a true indication of whether or not they'll donate. When people start to see what Mr. Jackson is doing in relation to, not only improvements to Niabi, but also in conservation efforts, education and science efforts, then there will be more favorable talk and opinions of Niabi and its direction. There has to be some trust built, and that will come from proving ground. It's naïve to assume that just giving the reins to an untested group will get the donors to automatically start donating lots of money. In my thirty years in the non-profit world, that doesn't work. If we can grow trust then I think we'll be in a good place to make a request, but that will take some time.

Mr. Jackson repeated that he felt very strongly that the Oversight Committee needed to come up with a plan that it believed in, that it could stand behind and support completely. Once that happens the people will support you. However, I am really uncomfortable with shopping this around and seeing if people like it, and I realize that that isn't what Mr. Byrne is suggesting, but I will once again caution against that.

President Swanson agreed, stating that performance drives philanthropy, philanthropy does not drive performance.

Mr. Byrne stated that his concern was whether or not the Oversight Committee was making enough of a change that people would come onboard with the plan. Does Mr. Jarrett think that this is enough of a change?

Mr. Jarrett stated that he felt that the document discussed tonight was a well-written base. It's a good starting point.

Mr. Byrne stated that he felt the Society's input was important. I don't think it's out of the realm of possibility to have something viable put together by next meeting.

Chairman Taylor stated that looking at the progress of the MOU would be an agenda item in March.

President Swanson stated that it would be a short turn around to the next meeting, and he would be happy to provide any help that the Committee would like.

Mr. Nelson pointed out that if the goal was to get something to present to the Forest Preserve Executive Committee by March, then it will be important to get input and feedback to Mr. Jackson and Mr. Craver as soon as possible.

Chairman Taylor called the meeting adjourned.

Adjourned at 4:42 PM.

Submitted by:
Cassie Sullivan, Forest Preserve Administrative Assistant