

NIABI ZOO OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE MINUTES FROM DECEMBER 8, 2015

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

ABSENT:

ALSO PRESENT: Dan Meates, Interim Zoo Director; Jill Roderick, Education and Conservation Curator; Scott Hesselberg, Maintenance Superintendent; Hannah Frenell, Field Office Manager; Scarlet Behrens, Society Business Manager; Scott Lohman, on behalf of the Zoological Society; Mr. Rick Biddle, Schultz & Williams (via phone); several animal handlers.

Mr. Craver called the meeting of the Niabi Zoo Committee to order at 5:00 PM on Tuesday, December 8, 2015, in the Education Room of the Administration Building at Niabi Zoo in Coal Valley, Illinois.

Roll was called:

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

Total Present 4

Mr. Craver asked if the Committee would like him to run the meeting as he did last time.

There was a general consensus that Mr. Craver should run this meeting as he did last time.

Mr. Craver introduced Mr. Scott Hesselberg the zoo's Maintenance Superintendent.

Mr. Hesselberg gave a brief description of his duties in the position.

Mr. Craver called for a motion to approve the November 23rd Oversight Committee meeting minutes.

MOTION: Mr. Taylor moved to approve the November 23rd Oversight Committee meeting minutes. Mr. Byrne seconded the motion.

Motion carried.

Mr. Craver stated that the only other old business item is the Guidance Proposal from Schultz & Williams. Dan had a conversation with Mr. Biddle today, and I had a conversation with Mr. Biddle also regarding the questions from the last meeting. It would be a three month proposal. If we say yes to the director search, then once the director is found this Committee will be at its full capacity, and Mr. Biddle's role would not be as prominent. Mr. Biddle is out of town with a client, but he agreed to meet via phone. We arranged to call Mr. Biddle at 5:30pm so that he could answer any questions that you may have.

Mr. Craver stated that in regards to the 2016 visitor/animal experience, I believe Mr. Meates has been trying to setup tours. I think Mr. Meates mentioned that those would be happening next week. There's not really anything more to say on that until those tours take place, so we'll move on to the three marketing proposals. Last month you had the proposals for Mindfire and Riffle, and Pear Marketing managed to get one in to us before this meeting. Mr. Meates, is there anything you'd like to elaborate on with the proposals?

Mr. Meates stated that he felt that this may be something that we could benefit discussing further with Mr. Biddle. I wasn't sure if everyone had the chance to glance over these proposals. Is there any comments on the proposals?

Mr. Byrne asked how long the zoo had been working with Pear.

Ms. Behrens answered that they began working with Pear in 2003.

Mr. Byrne asked if staff has been satisfied with the work that Pear has been doing.

Ms. Roderick stated that staff has been very dissatisfied and frustrated with Pear. In the two years that I've been at Niabi, the meetings that I've been at with Pear it is clear that they have their own opinions on what the zoo should do. When staff has had opinions on things, Pear has actually told us, No, we're not going to do that. We've wanted to freshen things up and make it look a little cleaner, and put in more substance in the marketing.

Mr. Brahm asked to confirm that staff has not been happy with the brochures or posters.

Ms. Roderick confirmed that staff is very unhappy with the service and product that we've received from Pear. Pear's mentality is, Well this is what we've always done. They seem incapable of thinking outside of what they've done in the past.

Mr. Meates agreed and added that there are also issues with the supply and product arrival. Usually it's not within an adequate time frame or necessarily what we needed. With them being a small firm, I'm not sure they're going to be able to keep up or deliver what we need. Also, as Ms. Roderick stated, the mind set of Pear is stuck in the past and we're supposed to be refreshing the zoo's image and looking to the future.

Mr. Brahm stated that with all three of these proposals it's tough to look at and make a decision solely based on pieces of paper. I'm not comfortable doing business that way. Ideally, these companies would all come in on the same day and give us a presentation. What are getting here? I don't know any of these companies.

Mr. Meates stated that these companies have come in and given presentations to the management staff. They've gone through the packets with us and told us how they see things and how things could move forward.

Mr. Brahm stated, Then why are we here?

Mr. Meates stated that staff is happy to answer any questions as to insight into the proposal and what we think of what these companies can do for the zoo and what the zoo actually needs. So, we're looking for the ok to do what is best for the zoo.

Mr. Brahm stated that what he was hearing was that Pear has been in here since 2003 and that staff is not happy with what they've done. The next question I have is, do the numbers in these packets include the new signage and brochures, or is that an additional cost?

Mr. Meates answered that those things would be an additional cost. These proposals are on developing the new storyline for the zoo, and the rebranding for the zoo.

Mr. Brahm asked what that additional cost would be. Presumably, there are brochures out there in hotel rooms and public areas.

Mr. Meates stated that yes the zoo has things like that out there. Those costs would be determined when the marketing team has developed the story and rebrand, and is ready to take it to the next step. What we're looking for right now is the new storyline for 2016, and once we have that we can get the advertising launched. With the Schultz & Williams plan we're looking at the first stage and 2016 and getting that done in three monthly increments. So we develop what the storyline is and what the future's going to be with the zoo, then take it to the next step from there. That's when we'll be able to start getting more of a fixed figure.

Mr. Brahm felt we were getting the cart before the horse. We've got to hire a new zoo director, and then we go to the new director and say here's the marketing plan? Or rather hire a director that's got some experience, so we can get some direction as to how to move this forward.

Mr. Meates stated that the director's input would be further down the line. We would have the storyline for the zoo, and then the director would have say in the rebranding of the logo and would be here to help us take it to that next step. We can't move the zoo forward right now without the new marketing and advertising. If we put that on hold, it's going to put the whole zoo on hold. Right now we don't have an exact date on when we're going to get a new director in the seat. It will put a break in the whole process.

Mr. Brahm stated that these proposals are to come up with the new look and new storyline. What do you mean when you say new storyline?

Mr. Meates answered that it's the future of the zoo, the way the zoo is going to go, the way that we want to educate the public, the way we want to move the zoo forward.

Mr. Brahm asked shouldn't a new director be involved in that?

Mr. Meates answered that at the next step, yes. Once we have the marketing team.

Mr. Byrne asked how you develop the theme if we haven't set the course? It sounds like you're saying that we need to move forward with some marketing now, but then we hire a new zoo director and they come in and say, This is how I think the zoo should go. Is that right?

Ms. Roderick answered yes.

Mr. Byrne asked how we balance those two ideas.

Mr. Meates stated that as he said, if you look at it right now, you could be looking at not getting anyone into the director's seat until a year from now. In that time the zoo still has to open and hold the scheduled events. The zoo still needs an advertising team for that.

Mr. Byrne stated that when he read Mindfire's proposal and the others also, they break it down into different categories. Is each category ala carte, or is it all or nothing?

Mr. Meates stated that the Committee could look at it as ala carte when considering proposals.

Mr. Byrne asked Mr. Craver if there was a line item in the budget for this.

Mr. Craver answered that, due to the budgets being set nearly a full year in advance, no this was not in the budget.

Mr. Byrne pointed out that when he was adding all these services up it was \$50,000.00 without the hard costs of materials. That is a lot of money to spend when it wasn't budgeted for.

Ms. Behrens stated that the zoo needed to gain its credibility back with the public. Perhaps Mr. Biddle could help answer these questions for the Committee.

Mr. Craver stated that in regards to the budget, the options were to ask the Society for the money, or do a budget adjustment for the zoo fund.

Mr. Byrne asked to confirm that Mr. Meates believed this needed to be done sooner rather than later.

Mr. Meates confirmed that he did believe it needed to be done quickly in accordance with the Schultz & Williams plan. The zoo has to start planning and gearing up for the 2016 season.

Mr. Byrne stated that the community members on this Committee don't know these companies. Evidently staff has seen them. Are we then going to listen to your recommendation and then approve a recommendation? Because other than reading what these have, and I've had some input about people who were happy with various providers. Do you have a recommendation?

Mr. Meates stated that one option could be that we look at these in the beginning of January and get the companies in to give a presentation if that would make the Committee more comfortable. I would not want to go any later than that because that's really putting a crunch on getting things ready for the 2016 season.

Mr. Taylor stated that the Committee shouldn't withhold marketing, however, doing it in the short term could be an option. I think what we need to do is use the logo have for the short term instead of having them work on a new design right now without a director's input. It would be nice to have a presentation, so the Committee can get a sense of the people who would be developing the new look and story for Niabi.

MOTION: Mr. Taylor moved that the Committee talk to the firms and get in person presentations/interviews with each of the companies who have put in proposals. Mr. Byrne seconded the motion.

Motion carried.

Mr. Byrne asked Ms. Behrens how much the retainer is for Pear.

Ms. Behrens stated that it was approximately \$1,000.00 per month.

Mr. Craver moved on to reports, and discussed briefly the financial reports in the packets. Then asked if there were any questions.

Mr. Byrne asked if there was anything out of the ordinary.

Mr. Craver answered that there was nothing out of the ordinary other than expenses being less in the salaries line item because of the director position not being filled at this time. At this time of year revenue slow down, and typically doesn't pick up until the parks open and good weather is here.

MOTION: Mr. Byrne moved to approve the two budget reports included in the packet. Mr. Taylor seconded the motion.

Motion carried.

Mr. Craver asked if there were any questions on the animal inventory report.

There were no questions on the animal inventory report.

Mr. Craver asked for a motion to approve the animal inventory report.

MOTION: Mr. Byrne moved to approve the animal inventory report. Mr. Brahm seconded the motion.

Motion carried.

Mr. Craver called on Mr. Meates for his report.

Mr. Meates reported that the press release for the giraffes went very well with the public. There was excellent response, and the public seemed very happy that staff was on top of the issue and sharing the news. The new wi-fi system project for the zoo is starting to come underway. The construction of the gift shop inside the small animal house has started.

Mr. Craver called on Ms. Roderick for her report.

Ms. Roderick reported that there were forty people at the Breakfast with Santa event, and if there had been more spots there would have been more people. I've been working on increasing our social media presence and our Facebook page. All press releases are now available on our website. The zoo will be at all three days of the Bald Eagle Days event in early January.

Mr. Craver called on Mr. Hesselberg for his report.

Mr. Hesselberg reported that his staff has been working on the gift shop in the small animal house, and has installed cameras in the Red Wolf exhibit. There has been lots of winterizing in exhibits and vehicle maintenance. There's also been some painting and refurbishing of the maintenance building.

Mr. Craver brought up the well system repairs that are in the budget for the 2017 fiscal year, and briefly explained to the Committee the reasons for replacing the tanks. The zoo will also hopefully be getting a back-up generator system in the coming fiscal year.

Mr. Hesselberg finished his report by talking about working with a lighting company and taking advantage of a MidAmerican rebate program. It will be a savings of over \$1,600.00 per year. The zoo should recoup the money spent on the project in two years, and it will be a big improvement for lighting at the zoo.

At this time it was time to call Mr. Biddle. Mr. Biddle joined the meeting via phone.

Mr. Biddle introduced himself and gave a brief history of himself, Schultz & Williams and what he's done for the zoo so far. We're here to help cultural attractions realize their visions, and we give honest feedback without sugar coating. In the strategic guidance proposal you'd note that it would be me and three project managers.

Mr. Taylor asked that since he didn't know much about this process yet, what are some of the pitfalls that the Oversight Committee should try and avoid?

Mr. Biddle stated that the Committee needed to avoid going into the weeds. You have good people on staff, knowledgeable people. The role of the Oversight Committee is to lead, to be strategic, to know when to ask those tough questions. Learn how zoos run and keep learning. Zoo business is based on people. Another piece of advice would be to go look at zoos when you're out and about. Look at similar zoos, and see what they're doing and how they operate. It's about the experience. You're selling an

experience, so remember to keep your eyes open and see what's out there. Zoos are always evolving. Find the right model for your zoo.

Mr. Byrne asked Mr. Biddle would recommend prioritizing as far as what the Oversight Committee needs to do.

Mr. Biddle answered that the zoo needs a roadmap to follow in order to reach its goals. Get together a roadmap of the goals you have for the zoo. It should be clear and the goals should be timed out in three months, six months, maybe a year. Figure out when you need to have certain things done, when you need to go out and ask for money. Know where you want to be and where you can get to in those time frames. Too many times people do the easy things as opposed to the right things. Get the roadmap down on paper. In regards to marketing, you need a concept plan in order to start to plan the 2016 zoo experience. I did talk to John Ferrell earlier this morning, and told him you're not ready to go out and raise money. You could probably raise a little, but if you try to do it prematurely, you're going to fail in the long-term expectations.

Mr. Byrne stated that we've talked about marketing companies and can we do something in the interim. You addressed that. We're starting our director search, which you're going to help with, and then we've got to setup this new organization.

Mr. Biddle stated that was correct, and you're also going to have to plan for the 2016 season. So there's at least three things that you're got to be doing, and probably five more that you haven't thought about yet. Then you have sit down and say, What do we do first? You've got some things already that are moving forward. In the report we gave over a year we suggested getting all the operations of the zoo under the zoo, instead of under the Society. I'm under the impression that that is nearly done. You've got to find short-term and long-term goals.

Mr. Byrne asked when the Committee would be meeting with Mr. Biddle.

Mr. Biddle answered that he should be available in early January. During that time we'll talk and have conversations with staff to make some decisions on the zoo opening. Between now and January be making a plan, and listing all the things that need to get done. I think a lot can be accomplished in the next three months. Then you'll be on your way to the PPP. In my mind these things can be done in three months, and then we can discuss what happens with my involvement because the scope will change.

Mr. Taylor stated that sometimes what makes people skittish about working with a consultant is that it isn't always clear when the clock is running. What's billable?

Mr. Biddle stated that the reason the proposal is a flat monthly fee is to avoid confusion on what and when things are billable. This isn't a 40 hour a week, Monday through Friday job. The flat rate listed in the proposal is it.

Mr. Brahm stated that he felt it is important to get some dates for a face to face.

Mr. Biddle stated that at the moment I think I have some time the 11th, 12th and 13th. I'd send an email tomorrow, or by Thursday, with some dates for sure.

Mr. Taylor offered to find some complimentary hotels rooms for Mr. Biddle, so that we could keep some of the expense costs down for everyone.

Mr. Biddle expressed his preference not to stay in any hotel that had a number in it.

Mr. Carver asked Mr. Biddle if he could touch base on the director search.

Mr. Biddle stated that he'd be working on a profile and will get a timeline together. Then briefly explained that the zoo world was going through a big transition at this time due to lots of positions coming open with CEOs retiring. I'm accessible by email for any questions that the Committee should have.

Mr. Lohman stated that the Society had a question for Mr. Biddle. How is communication going to work with the Society now reporting to the Oversight Committee? How can we streamline communications for this group?

Mr. Biddle answered that we'd need to get a weekly dial-up to check-in in order to make sure everyone is on the same page. I'd suggest getting some dates in January and figure out how to facilitate that with Mr. Craver as the point person.

The Oversight Committee thanked Mr. Biddle for his time. Mr. Biddle left the meeting.

Mr. Craver stated that the Society had offered to fund the Strategic Guidance Proposal. Need a motion to approve the Strategic Guidance Proposal.

MOTION: Mr. Brahm moved to approve the three months, as discussed, of the Strategic Guidance Proposal from Schultz & Williams. Mr. Taylor seconded the motion.

Motion carried.

Mr. Craver called on Mr. Lohman for the Society report.

Mr. Lohman stated that he was filling in for Lisa who had a last minute emergency and couldn't make the meeting. The Society had a few questions. Mr. Biddle answered the first one. The Society is not renewing any contracts. The Society is under the impression that their role is that they report to and get instructions from this Oversight Committee. Is that correct? They want to make sure they are understanding things correctly due to some misunderstanding in the past.

Mr. Meates asked if it would be possible to get the Society minutes from their meetings.

Mr. Lohman stated that it was his understanding that the Society already forwarded on the minutes from their meetings to the zoo director, but that he would bring it up with them.

Mr. Taylor asked Mr. Lohman to communicate that it is the intention of this Oversight Committee to lead the zoo and the entities associate with it, not to control or dictate to anyone. We want to work together to better the zoo.

Mr. Brahm asked to confirm that the Society meets monthly.

Mr. Lohman confirmed that the Society meets monthly. In regards to moving the operations over the Society was wanting to know if anything has happened with Lancer yet. They have history with concessions and could assist if needed. The biggest thing was the communication.

Mr. Craver stated that the communication is important, and we definitely want to continue having the Society have someone at these meetings. The weekly check-in that Mr. Biddle suggested sounds like a good idea also.

Mr. Meates answered that Lancer has been informed that we were rejecting their proposal. Then Lancer proposed something else that would not work for the zoo.

Mr. Brahm asked if Lancer needed a termination letter.

Mr. Craver stated that they would, and he'd be working with the Civil Division to ensure things are done correctly. In the meantime staff will work on putting together a RFP. The concessions last year were a big scramble to get someone in in time to open the zoo also. Hopefully the proposals will be in by the middle of January.

Mr. Byrne asked if the Society had been asked for input into to this issue.

Mr. Meates answered that they were.

Mr. Craver asked if the Committee would like to see the RFP before it goes out.

There was a consensus of the Committee that they would simply like to see a copy when the RFP goes out.

Mr. Craver stated that January 4th would be when Ms. Behrens transferred over to the District from the Society. Mr. Ferrell indicated that the Society would be ready to hand the operations to the zoo on January 1st. Then called on Ms. Behrens for her report.

Ms. Behrens reported that the major thing that she's been working on is the gift shop inventory. Shipments will be arriving soon. The biggest thing with the gift shop at the moment is the point of sale/inventory system and getting it updated. The zoo has lost money because of this system being so out of date. There is a quote for the needed software and equipment from Gateway and Counterpoint.

Mr. Craver stated that this upgrade was not specifically budgeted for, but there is money available in the budget for these needed updates.

Mr. Byrne asked how much the update would cost.

Ms. Behrens stated that the cost was \$19,131.70. Both the hardware and the software need updating because they need to be able to talk to each other. This upgrade will serve for years to come.

Mr. Lohman asked if the software would also work with the admissions system.

Ms. Behrens stated that Gateway would work throughout the zoo, and will be able to do concessions as well once that piece is known.

Mr. Brahm asked to confirm that the stated price was for just this and did not include concessions.

Ms. Behrens confirmed that was correct.

Mr. Byrne asked if any alternatives had been considered.

Ms. Behrens answered that there were alternatives, but this system is the best.

Mr. Taylor added that Counterpoint is a good system. Our shop uses Counterpoint and it's able to tie together several locations. The benefit of an inventory system is auditing and tracking stock. It's definitely worth the money.

Mr. Brahm asked if Gateway was going to last. Is this a company that is going to be around years from now?

Ms. Behrens stated that this company has been around for a long time and continues to be an excellent company and puts out great products that can be upgraded throughout the years. It's a very dependable system.

MOTION: Mr. Byrne moved to approve the point of sale/inventory update. Mr. Taylor seconded the motion.

Motion carried.

Mr. Craver called for a motion to approve the staff reports and the Society report.

MOTION: Mr. Brahm moved to approve the staff reports and the Society report. Mr. Taylor seconded the motion.

Motion carried.

Mr. Craver stated that on Tuesday night at the full Commission meeting Mr. Thomas Jarrett would be appointed. Do we want to schedule a meeting shortly thereafter to vote on a chairperson?

Mr. Taylor felt that was a good idea.

After a brief discussion the next meeting was scheduled for Monday, December 21, 2015 at 5:00pm.

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

The Committee did not.

Mr. Craver called for a motion to adjourn the meeting.

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

Motion carried.

Adjourned the meeting at 6:41 PM.

Submitted by:

Cassie Sullivan, Forest Preserve Administrative Assistant