

Riverbanks Park Commission
Meeting Minutes
21 January 2021

Attendance Report

Commissioners Present: Bob Davidson, Mike Velasco, Deneen Shockley, Phil Bartlett, Jan Stamps, Mary Howard (Zoom), Alana Williams (Zoom),

Commissioners Absent: None

Staff Present: Tommy Stringfellow, Christie Vondrak, Lochlan Wooten, Katie Eaton

Call to Order

Chairman Davidson called the meeting to order.

Reading of the Minutes

The November 19, 2020 commission minutes were approved as distributed.

Chairman's Remarks

Alana William's has been re-appointed by the City of Columbia for another six-year term on the Riverbanks Parks Commission. Phil Bartlett's second and final term ends next month, but he has been permitted and has agreed to stay on as interim until Richland County appoints a new Commissioner. President Tommy Stringfellow was once again named to the Columbia Business magazine's "50 influential list." Congratulations to our animal team on the birth of the porcupette, and condolences on their loss of Lottie the koala.

President & Chief Executive Officer's Report

President and CEO Tommy Stringfellow provided the following report:

- New county council members have been elected to the Richland and Lexington County Councils. Their terms begin this month. We will begin to reach out to them and welcome them to their new roles.
- December Financials
 - Entering our slow season until spring but feel confident in the reserve funds we have been able to save. The \$1.5M from PRT is very helpful.
 - Society has been holding to their budget. Revenue is up due to shifting between membership categories. We have seen an increase in family and grandparent memberships and decrease in individual membership and family explorer levels.
 - Earned revenue is up, even though attendance is down the attendance that is coming in is paying at the gate and in the park.
 - The savings seen this month is generated from less staff needed in the park right now, and continued deferred maintenance etc.
 - Velasco motioned to approve the financials; Shockley seconded; m/c unanimous.
- Director's Policy Conference- Stringfellow virtually attended the annual AZA Director's Policy Conference last week. It was evident that all Zoos and Aquariums are in similar financial and recovery situations. Many organizations are even still closed or had to re-close. Estimate is that up to 20% of zoos will not make it through this time.

- Procurement manager (Ray Brindle) has been working with an attorney to make a few changes to our procurement policy to update it to reflect policies at the state level. Stringfellow shared the updated portions of the procurement policy suggested to amend.
 - Stamps motioned to accept the changes Velasco second, m/c unanimous.

Chief Administrative Officer's Report:

CAO Christie Vondrak provided the following report:

- Continuing to look for ways to connect with and show appreciation to our staff. In December we hosted weekly free lunches for our teams. Thanks to a private donation, we were also able to host a leadership breakfast and open it up to all staff. Both were very well received.
- Virtual Town Halls continue to be received well with staff. We have seen an increased participation from staff on the virtual format. The overall feel of culture is improving, and staff are settling into the new Riverbanks.
- Working through spring hiring. Will hire about 45 new staff members to get prepared for spring. SSA is in about the same position with their hiring effort and needs.
- Have begun the process of bringing back volunteers, ZooTeens, and interns safely.
- Every week at director's meeting we report the number of confirmed and pending covid cases. Currently have 1 positive case and 4 pending
- Continued focus on safety best practices around the park. With the addition of our Safety and Risk Manager position, we have put together job hazard assessments for positions to individualize safety. We are also expanding the orange to black program to all staff. All new hires will start in an orange lanyard/name badge until they fulfill the necessary safety and job-related trainings and then they will graduate to black lanyards/badge holders.

Chief Operating Officer's Report

COO Lochlan Wooten provided the following report:

- Animal updates
 - Unfortunately, Koala Lottie passed away last week. She was an incredible ambassador for her species and for Riverbanks. She made a significant impact of 11 children, 15 grandchildren, 7 great grands and 3 great great grandchildren. She will be dearly missed at Riverbanks.
 - Prehensile porcupines had a baby (porcupette). It is doing well and on exhibit. This offspring has the potential to be an animal ambassador pending its personality.
 - Male rhino Bill has had increased exposure to the two female rhinos. Will likely be an additional 4-6 weeks before they are fully allowed access to each other
- Lights Before Christmas wrapped up really well. Revenue in commission F&B, sponsorship and ticket revenue were increased and expenses were decreased in staff. Kudos to all staff who contributed to this well-done event.
- Making baseline assumptions for spring. By June we would like to have all attractions open. Remaining flexible and open to adapting.
- Adjusted timeline- The aquarium renovation and opening have remained on track. Would like to propose a \$2.04 increase at the gate this spring. When the aquarium opens in 2022, we would make an additional gate increase to reflect the increased value of the park. The commission appreciated this proposed plan.

- SSA General Manager, Emma Blackman will be moving to Denver, Colorado. We will be sad to see her go. Wooten and Stringfellow will begin working with SSA to hire for her replacement.
- SKCF funded 8 projects last year despite covid. From Uganda to South Carolina we are still supporting felid work that is protecting wildlife and wild places. \$35K total
- Welcomed new Society Board Members, Richard Slater, Sheila Willis, and Denise Hudson.
- New Society Board of Executive Officers- Stuart Moore (President), Tristan Weinkle (Vice President), Stephanie Jones (Treasurer), and Jeff Reeves (Secretary).
- Society Update- Revenue trends for the society are normalizing and revenue is on budget

At the conclusion of the meeting, President Stringfellow and Chairman Davidson presented a plaque to Commissioner Phil Bartlett for his two terms (12 years) of service.

The meeting was adjourned.

Approved and adopted on the 15 day of March 2021.

Jan H. Atkinson, Vice Chair