

# Audubon Commission Minutes

January 26, 2022  
Video Conference

Attending: Kelly Duncan, Gayle Benson, Ashley Francis, Field Ogden, Sally Shushan, Lex Kelso, Bruce Hoefler, Leila Eames, Xavier Angel, Frances Fayard, Jermaine Smith, Danny Conwill, Dolfinette Martin, Minh Thanh Nguyen, Peter Wenstrup

Excused: Coleman Ridley, Emily Vuxton, Catherine Morrell, Victor Jones, Storey Charbonnet

President Kelly Duncan called the meeting order at 4:00 pm. He reminded everyone that the Commission is meeting by video conference consistent with Proclamation Order JBE 2020-30, extended by Proclamation Order 7 JBE 2022. He then asked if there were any members of the public present. Mr. Louis Shepard identified himself for the record and asked if anyone had received his letter. Mr. Duncan affirmed that his public comment letter had been received.

The minutes of the November meeting were unanimously accepted as distributed (Shushan/Fayard).

Mr. Duncan then welcomed the newest Commissioner, Mr. Peter Wenstrup. Mr. Wenstrup is a teacher at the Livingston Collegiate Academy, and a graduate of Brown University. As an educator, he is inspired by Audubon facilities for their educational impact on the community. Mr. Wenstrup is also passionate about the environment, which is another aspect of Audubon's mission. The Commission is thankful for his service and glad to have him on board.

Moving on to public comment, Mr. Duncan asked if Mr. Shepard had any comments to make. Mr. Shepard stated that he had no comment since tennis was not on the agenda. He then proceeded to say that several members of the public wish to keep the clay courts. Mr. Duncan stated that the entire Commission had also received his letter and that his feedback is being considered along with all public feedback.

Next, Mr. Duncan introduced Ms. Frances Fayard, Nominating Committee Chair, to give her report. She asked for a motion for elect the following recommended slate of officers for 2022 for a term of one year: Kelly Duncan – President, Dr. Field Ogden – 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President, Gayle Benson – 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President, Ashley Francis – Secretary, Xavier Angel – Treasurer. The motion passed unanimously (Smith/Eames).

Mr. Duncan introduced Ms. Laurie Conkerton, EVP and CAO, to give a finance report. She began with admissions and attendance through the end of 2021. As a reminder, the budget was extremely conservative due to Covid uncertainties. Both the Zoo and Aquarium outperformed in attendance for the year. Overall, there were 737K guests welcomed through both facilities compared to the budgeted 631K. The total admissions revenue for the year was \$13.9M which is 80% higher than the projected \$7.7M. These are very pleasing results given the various restrictions throughout the year and closures from Hurricane Ida.

Through November 2021, overall net was \$4.9M. Final numbers for 2021 are not in yet, but we are projecting a positive net total of about \$3M. Year-end and first quarter of 2022 items of note include strengthening the Institute's balance sheet by repaying \$4M Foundation loan and \$1.2M debt service on

GO Zone bonds; rebalancing the Foundation portfolio; implementing management agreement changes by setting up new bank accounts, financial statements, and accounting system; updating the property schedule of values; preparing for spring break and six-days per week operations; and avoiding the projected early year Aquarium closure due to construction. Mr. Ron Forman, President and CEO, gave a brief city tourism and marketing update.

NOVEMBER YTD 2021 FINANCIAL DASHBOARD (AMOUNTS IN THOUSANDS)							
NET OPERATING RESULTS BY FACILITY:							
FACILITY	YTD ACTUAL 2021	YTD BUDGET 2021	BUDGET VARIANCE	YTD ACTUAL 2020	PRIOR YEAR VARIANCE	TOTAL FORECAST 2021	TOTAL BUDGET 2021
Aquarium	\$6,158	\$591	<b>5,567</b>	\$1,996	<b>4,162</b>	5,908	342
Zoo & Park	(\$642)	(\$2,869)	<b>2,227</b>	(\$6,371)	<b>5,729</b>	(1,317)	(3,543)
Butterfly Garden & Insectarium	(\$13)	\$0	<b>(13)</b>	(\$577)	<b>564</b>	(13)	-
FMASSC	(\$546)	(\$529)	<b>(17)</b>	(\$235)	<b>(311)</b>	(616)	(599)
Louisiana Nature Center	(\$41)	\$10	<b>(51)</b>	(\$215)	<b>174</b>	(51)	-
<b>NET OPERATING RESULTS</b>	<b>\$4,916</b>	<b>(\$2,797)</b>	<b>\$7,713</b>	<b>(\$5,402)</b>	<b>\$10,318</b>	<b>\$3,911</b>	<b>(\$3,800)</b>

Excludes capital revenues and expenses.

Ms. Conkerton asked for a motion to authorize the President of the Audubon Commission or the President/CEO of Audubon Nature Institute to enter into a Cooperative Endeavor Agreement with the State of Louisiana, Division of Administration, to receive a grant through the U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration under the project title “American Rescue Plan Act State Travel, Tourism, and Outdoor Recreation Grants (State Tourism Grants) Supplemental Disaster Recovery and Resiliency Awards. The grant is anticipated to be for \$5 million for Audubon Aquarium of the Americas Renovation. Motion carried (Ogden/Shushan/Unanimous).

Ms. Conkerton then introduced motions that are presented annually related to audit. She requested a motion is to authorize the President of the Audubon Commission to sign an audit engagement letter with LaPorte CPAs & Business Advisors to complete the yearly external audit. Ms. Conkerton stated that this is the last year of our ten-year agreement with LaPorte and Audubon would be going through a review process in 2022. She will share those details with the Commission as the review begins. The motion passed unanimously (Ogden/Shushan).

Finally, Ms. Conkerton asked for a motion for the President, Treasurer, and Secretary of the Audubon Commission to execute the Louisiana Compliance Questionnaire for Audit Engagements Government Agencies as presented to and adopted by the governing body, by request of Louisiana Legislative Auditor, Michael J. Waguespack, CPA. The motion passed unanimously (Shushan/Benson).

Mr. Forman was introduced to give his report. He began by asking Ms. Toni Mobley, EVP and Chief Service and Inclusion Officer, to give an update on Audubon’s Diversity, Equity, Access, and Inclusion (DEAI) committee efforts and transformation strategy. The goal of this strategy is to create a culture of

belonging. Audubon is dynamically diverse group of individuals focused on impacting wildlife and nature in a positive way. DEAI focus areas include attract and hire, humanize experience, and create community. To attract and hire more diverse talent, Audubon will cultivate new sourcing partnerships to create and wider candidate funnel. Another key objective is to implement paid animal staff internships to attract candidates from all socioeconomic circumstances. Non-paid internships exclude many from the community. Within the humanize experience focus area, priorities will be on training current staff and reviewing processes and procedures to ensure inclusive practices. And finally, creating community means continuing to reach marginalized communities and partner with more diverse sponsors and suppliers. Mr. Forman added that the Board and Commission would get quarterly updates on DEAI efforts. He said that the Zoo and Aquarium world is working to increase diversity, especially in animal staff and husbandry. The Association of Zoos and Aquariums now has DEAI benchmarks as part of their accreditation process.

Mr. Forman took a moment to acknowledge Ms. Gayle Benson for all that she does for the community. He then reminded everyone of Audubon's three-year plan for coming back better than ever. Dr. Kyle Burks, EVP and COO, then began his facilities and operations report. Dr. Burks started by updating the group on the Aquarium renovations project. Construction is going very well and progressing smoothly. The project is still on budget and still on target for opening summer of 2023.

Related to the Aquarium, Dr. Burks presented one piece of business on the replacement of some air handling units. He asked for a motion to authorize the President of the Audubon Commission or the CEO of the Audubon Nature Institute to execute a contract with the lowest responsive and responsible bidder, as determined consistent with Louisiana Public Bid Law for replacement of three air handling units at the Aquarium. Scope and specifications are being developed by Moses Engineering. The estimated cost is \$305,000. Scope of work includes materials and installation. This project is being funded by bond sale proceeds. The motion carried (Eames/Benson/Unanimous).

Dr. Burks continued his report with announcement of several new babies at the Species Survival Center. Finally, he gave an update on the orangutan infant born on Christmas eve. Unfortunately, the second of the twins was still born. The staff has done such an amazing job taking care of the surviving infant around the clock. With our team's hard work and the help of partners like Children's Hospital he is getting stronger every day. Mr. Duncan then asked about the lions having Covid. Dr. Burks said that they tested positive for Covid after showing symptoms despite all the precautions taken. Fortunately, they have recovered and do not appear to have any lasting issues.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned shortly before 5:00 pm.