

Audubon Commission Minutes

January 28, 2021

A video conference meeting of the Audubon Commission was called to order on Thursday, January 28, 2021 at 4:00 p.m. by President Duncan.

Attending were: Kelly Duncan, Bruce Hoefler, Minh Nguyen, Field Ogden, Sally Shushan, Brent Wood, Ashley Francis, Lex Kelso, Gayle Benson, Storey Charbonnet, Leila Eames, Frances Fayard, Victor Jones, Dolfinette Martin, Catherine Morrell, Jermaine Smith

Excused were: Xavier Angel, Coleman Ridley, Daniel Conwill, Charles Teamer, Freddie King, Emily Vuxton

President Duncan opened the meeting with a reminder that it is being held by video conference due to pandemic regulations and proclamation JBE 2020-30. There were no members of the public present and no public comment. The minutes of the previous meeting were unanimously accepted as distributed (Benson/Smith).

Mr. Duncan then presented a resolution in honor the late Norma Jane Sabiston. Ms. Sabiston was a member of the Audubon Commission from 2017 until her passing in December 2020. She will forever be known for service to Audubon and the community. The proclamation was unanimously ratified (Fayard/Wood).

Nominating Committee Report

Frances Fayard, Nominating Committee Chair, reported that the Nominating Committee met the previous week and recommends the following slate for officers in 2021: President – Kelly Duncan, 1st Vice President – Danny Conwill, 2nd Vice President – Gayle Benson, Secretary – Ashley Francis, Treasurer – Brent Wood. The motion was considered and approved unanimously by the Commission. (Ogden/Eames)

Finance Report

| NOVEMBER YTD 2020 FINANCIAL DASHBOARD (AMOUNTS IN THOUSANDS) | | | | | | |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|
| NET OPERATING RESULTS BY FACILITY: | | | | | | |
| FACILITY | YTD ACTUAL 2020 | YTD BUDGET 2020 | BUDGET VARIANCE | YTD ACTUAL 2019 | PRIOR YEAR VARIANCE | TOTAL BUDGET 2020 |
| Aquarium/EGST | \$1,919 | \$7,587 | (5,668) | \$6,796 | (4,877) | 7,492 |
| Zoo & Park | (\$6,500) | (\$5,376) | (1,124) | (\$6,078) | (422) | (6,344) |
| Butterfly Garden & Insectarium | (\$583) | \$337 | (920) | \$483 | (1,066) | 368 |
| FMASSC | (\$246) | (\$590) | 344 | (\$730) | 484 | (615) |
| Louisiana Nature Center | (\$216) | (\$511) | 295 | (\$297) | 81 | (551) |
| NET OPERATING RESULTS | (\$5,626) | \$1,447 | (\$7,073) | \$174 | (\$5,800) | \$350 |
| Excludes capital revenues and expenses. | | | | | | |

Ms. Laurie Conkerton, EVP and CAO, was introduced to give a finance update. She presented a high-level overview comparing 2020 original budget, revised budget, and 2021 budget and opportunities. The 2020 original budget included \$57M in total revenues and a \$350K net income. When facilities were forced to close, drastic changes were made to match cash availability; Audubon furloughed or laid off over 500 employees, applied pay cuts to most positions, cut operating budget to essential needs only, kept lines of credit intact, made Foundation draw downs, launched a recovery campaign, and deferred major payments when possible. The post-COVID budget estimated a \$9.8 M loss for the year. The forecast loss for 2020 is \$6.6M based on actuals through November and revised budget for December. Total attendance was 500K, 2% below revised projections, with the Aquarium significantly outperforming the revised projection. The 2021 budget is anticipating a \$3.8M loss with a slightly higher total attendance of 630K. Admissions per cap for 2020 was \$13.61 with an original budget of \$9.53. This is largely because of fewer discounts than normal. Possible financial opportunities for 2021 include eligibility for up to \$10M from the Shuttered Venue Operators Grant, the employee retention tax credit, and renewing lines of credit. Ms. Ashley Francis asked if the budget included rehiring some staff members, Ms. Conkerton explained that there is some money budgeted to hire staff and increase pay for some of the current employees.

Mr. Duncan asked for a motion 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. The motion was unanimously approved. (Kelso/Benson)

Mr. Duncan asked for a motion authorizing the President, Treasurer, and Secretary of the Audubon Commission to execute the Louisiana Compliance Questionnaire for Audit Engagements of Government Agencies as presented to and adopted by the governing body, by request of Louisiana Legislative Auditor, Daryl G. Pupera, CPA, CFE. The motion was unanimously approved. (Benson/Wood)

Staff Reports

Mr. Ron Forman, President and CEO, gave a brief update to the group. He explained the three-part operating strategy adopted by Audubon at the start of the pandemic. The first being 2020 and functioning in crisis mode. Unfortunately, we are not out of the crisis yet. 2021 will be much like last year. We still have 500 fewer employees and COVID numbers are unpredictable. However, as the second part of the strategy, the team will continue to move forward in 2021 with a focus on planning for the future of the organization. The hope is to come out of this better and stronger. Finally, the third part of the strategy is for 2022 and beyond. Using capital funding, the Aquarium and Insectarium will soon undergo a major upgrade. The downtown facilities will be transformed and part of the rebirth of tourism and that area of the city. This is a great way for Audubon to come back better than ever. We will also be revisiting tennis improvements and park drainage. Audubon also hopes to restart the Governor Nicholls Riverfront project and public input process. Mr. Forman then shared the story of Bella, a little girl who was a terminally ill cancer patient. She was able to have a special visit at the Aquarium, calling it “the best day ever”, before unfortunately passing away. He thanked Commissioner Catherine Morrell for helping to coordinate the visit for her. He told the story as a reminder of the importance of Audubon to our community.

He then introduced Ms. Rebecca Dietz, EVP of Public Affairs and General Counsel, to give her report on development and advocacy. Since launching the recovery fund back in March, Audubon has accepted over \$900K in new gifts. This doesn't include other redirected gifts. \$200K of that total came from the year-end campaign, including 71% of board and commission giving. We will have a re-imagined Zoo-To-Do. Audubon will also be continuing the recovery fund campaign through the spring and looking for new corporate partnerships through 2021. She and others advocated very hard to have zoos and aquariums added to the Shuttered Venue Operators Grant. They will continue to work with officials to ensure such facilities are included to receive any future assistance. She further reported that Mr. Forman met with the Congressional Problems Solvers Caucus yesterday to thank them for passing the grant and to ask them to continue to support zoos and

aquariums.

Ms. Toni Mobley, EVP and Chief Service Officer, was introduced to give an update on diversity and inclusion initiatives. She reported that organizations have recently focused on self-reflection, particularly as it relates to diversity and inclusion. Audubon is no different and has been looking at ways to improve as a leader in our community. The Audubon team will be creating and implementing a plan for recognizable change regarding our diversity and inclusion efforts. Some of the areas for improvement include greater participation by minority owned businesses in Audubon contracts, and also increase our efforts to recruit and hire more diverse talent across all departments. We also want to actively participate in community efforts to eradicate social and racial injustice through our education and programming. Audubon will continue to take quick action when any inequalities are reported within the organization and begin training staff on unconscious bias. As we begin to design the plan, we will need to create clear strategies to move us from our current state to our desired improved state. There will be a lot more details to come and we will work with the board and commission to implement this plan.

Dr. Kyle Burks, EVP and COO, began his report by asking for a motion to authorize the President of the Audubon Commission or the CEO of the Audubon Nature Institute to execute a contract with CM Combs. The scope of this contract is to remove all the major exhibitry pieces from the Audubon Butterfly Garden and Insectarium. This includes demo and structural infill to take place where the koi pond and scorpion pits currently exist. Total amount of the contract is \$171,000 and is being funded by bond money. The motion was unanimously approved (Ogden/Fayard).

Dr. Burks then gave an update on our education and volunteers department. They have continued to educate and do outreach through the entire year by pivoting and quickly evolving to virtual programming. They have been working with Title I schools and looking to branch out to libraries and hospitals. The teen volunteers are very passionate and have taken the initiative to educate themselves on specific topics and educate others. The Survival Center is still caring for 30 cold-stunned turtles in hopes of releasing them as it gets warmer. Through some hard work from the development and animal team, we have secured a grant of \$1M for whooping crane conservation. We have some new babies including a giraffe. The tropical bird house is still under construction and expected to be complete by the end of the year. The lion cubs just celebrated their first birthday. One of the female orangutans is also pregnant and expecting this summer. He further reported that the Nature Center recently had one of their largest attendance days on MLK Jr. Day.

Having completed the staff reports, Mr. Duncan moved on to old business. Commissioner Dolfinette Martin wanted to discuss with the group her disappointment with respect to Carrollton Boosters (with whom Audubon recently renewed a contract for use of space on the Riverview) and the lack of participation by minority children in their programs. She cited their high registration fees (having not seen more than three minority children participating on two separate occasions). She believes that Carrollton Boosters needs to do more community outreach. As Audubon is working to improve their diversity and inclusion efforts, Ms. Martin wants to make sure this extends to those with whom Audubon contracts. Mr. Forman commented that Audubon wants to be a leader in diversity, and this is an area for improvement. Ms. Mobley said this will be part of the diversity initiatives conversation when we look to identify areas of improvement. Finally, Mr. Duncan thanked Ms. Martin for her comments and agreed this is something Audubon will address.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 5:30 p.m.