

Audubon Commission Minutes

March 25, 2021

A video conference meeting of the Audubon Commission was called to order on Thursday, March 25, 2021 at 12:00 p.m. by President Duncan.

Attending were: Kelly Duncan, Gayle Benson, Xavier Angel, Storey Charbonnet, Frances Fayard, Troy Glover, Bruce Hofer, Victor Jones, Lex Kelso, Diedre Kelly, Freddie King, Dolfinette Martin, Catherine Morrell, Field Ogden, Sally Shushan, Jermaine Smith, Charles Teamer, Emily Vuxton

Excused were: Coleman Ridley, Daniel Conwill, Minh Nguyen, Brent Wood, Ashley Francis, Leila Eames

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. Mr. Duncan then introduced and welcomed two new Commissioners, Diedre Kelly and Troy Glover.

The minutes of the previous meeting were unanimously accepted as distributed (Benson/Ogden). There was one member of the public present and no public comment.

Mission Moment

Mr. Rich Toth, Vice President & Managing Director of Downtown Facilities, gave an update on Audubon's Coastal Wildlife Network and their recent efforts to rehab and release of sea turtles. In November 2020, the team took in 30 cold stunned sea turtles from New England. The first 13 of those were released off Grand Isle last week. The next release is targeted for April pending final health checks. The future of the Coastal Wildlife Network is a five-year project with NOAA to begin increasing marine mammal stranding capacity in Louisiana, expanding the volunteer corps and outreach to coastal communities, and enhance rehab capabilities through supplies and infrastructure improvements. If you see an injured or sick marine mammal or sea turtle call 504-235-3005. During questions, Ms. Emily Vuxton asked about possible funding from proposed dolphin stranding mitigation. Mr. Toth said that they are looking at that.

Finance Report

Ms. Laurie Conkerton, Executive Vice President and Chief Administrative Officer, was introduced to give a quick financial update. The January dashboard below was shared with the board before the meeting. Earned income through January of this year is up 48% over what was budgeted, and operating expenses are 12% below what was budgeted. She reminded everyone of our usual budget trend of having positive net months in the spring and net loss the rest of the year. And the start of COVID was right at the beginning of our busy season last year. Attendance for 2021 through March 21 is at 154,300 which is 47% higher than budget. Admissions revenue through March 21 is \$2.9M and 129% higher than budget. Admissions per cap for the first quarter is \$19.02. Some of the second quarter opportunities are the Shuttered Venue Operating Grant, potential CARES act funds submitted last year, renewing lines of credit, hiring seasonal staff, and implementing key recommendations from Living HR.

JANUARY 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 BUDGET 2021
Aquarium/EGST	(\$129)	(\$442)	313	\$186	(315)	342
Zoo & Park	(\$550)	(\$1,026)	476	(\$1,088)	538	(3,543)
Butterfly Garden & Insectarium	(\$5)	50	(5)	(\$70)	65	-
FMASSC	\$8	(\$13)	21	(\$16)	24	(599)
Louisiana Nature Center	(\$23)	(\$12)	(11)	(\$37)	14	-
NET OPERATING RESULTS	(\$699)	(\$1,493)	\$794	(\$1,025)	\$326	(\$3,800)
Excludes capital revenues and expenses.						

Mr. Ron Forman, President and CEO, reminded everyone that although the numbers for the year are better than budgeted, Audubon is still far behind where they need to be and will continue working to increase revenue while staying safe and focusing on the future.

President's Reports

Mr. Ron Forman, President and CEO, then began his report by introducing Ms. Rebecca Dietz, EVP of Public Affairs and General Counsel. Ms. Dietz asked for motion to authorize the President of the Audubon Commission or the CEO of the Audubon Nature Institute to execute a contract for Direct Administrative Costs/Project Management Services for FEMA Reimbursement. The company is unknown at this time and would be selected through an RFP Process. Award would be a pre-disaster contract for 5 years based on actual hours worked not to exceed \$250,000 per year. This is a FEMA reimbursable expense which is allowable up to 5% of the cost of declared damages. Motion passed unanimously (Kelso/Benson).

Mr. Forman then gave some background on the next motion. Audubon has a cooperative endeavor agreement (CEA) with the City for development of a riverfront park on the Governor Nicholls/Esplanade wharves. This is a very important project that would link the Moonwalk to Crescent City Park. Due to COVID this project has been put on hold. The city is requesting we extend the CEA for three more years.

Ms. Dietz stated that the motion requested would authorize the President of the Audubon Commission to execute a Second Amendment to Cooperative Endeavor Agreement between Audubon Commission and the City of New Orleans for the development and operation of the Governor Nicholls and Esplanade Wharves as a public park. This Amendment extends all obligations under the Agreement by three years.

Mr. Kelso asked about the escrow funds for the project, and Mr. Forman stated that money would stay in the account unused while the project is on hold. Mr. Hoefler asked about the downside of voting against the motion.

Mr. Forman stated that this is partnership with the City, and that this is not a priority right now because of COVID. After that discussion the motion carried (Ogden/Benson/unanimous).

Next, Mr. Forman reminded the group of previous public meetings on tennis. This project was put on hold with COVID and we are starting to move forward with this again. Ms. Dietz elaborated by explaining that back in 2019, Audubon engaged with key stakeholders to discuss the need for upgrades to Audubon Tennis facilities. The goal of the meetings was to engage a wide variety of groups to develop a vision for tennis that reflected the needs of the community. Through this input, the highest priorities identified were lighting (but low impact on neighbors), maintain a set of clay courts while adding some hard courts, improve the clubhouse facilities and amenities, create an online reservation system, increase opportunities for youth and greater diversity, and allow for some courts to host pickleball. For all this, funding is needed but is not available and community partnerships are key to improving outreach goals. As one of the key stakeholders, Audubon has been in preliminary discussions with Tulane University. Through a generous donation, Tulane has access to funding for use in tennis programming. The proposal and discussions are in the very early stages. But there are some specific parameters that have been put in place. First and foremost is that Audubon will always remain an open and public community facility. It will not be privatized or used by Tulane exclusively at any time. Audubon is looking to explore a formal contract with Tulane that would outline the obligations of both parties. Audubon anticipates sharing the courts with Tulane. But Tulane usage generally would not conflict with normal community usage times and they only use hard courts. Tulane will also commit to youth outreach and programs for the community.

Ms. Dietz then asked for a motion to approve Audubon Nature Institute entering into negotiations with Tulane University regarding the funding of upgrades to Audubon community tennis, the terms of which will ensure that Audubon tennis remains a tennis facility open to the New Orleans metro community. Any final agreement with Tulane will come back to the Audubon Commission for approval.

During discussion, Ms. Frances Fayard expressed her support for this partnership commenting that Tulane does not have a tennis facility of their own, and this would be helpful in recruiting players and hosting matches.

Ms. Dolfinette Martin then commented that she wanted to make sure that Tulane did not take over the facilities and that they remain open to the public and community especially as Audubon is working to improve diversity. She is in favor of having discussions but wants to be certain that they do not become a Tulane University facility. Mr. Forman assured they would remain an Audubon facility.

Mr. Charles Teamer also commented with his support of the Tulane tennis partnership. Ms. Catherine Morrell asked about how crowds or matches would affect the traffic and parking in the area. Mr. Forman said this will be considered and discussed. He then went on say that the hope is to also partner with and include Children's Hospital and their patients the outreach efforts.

After discussion, the requested motion passed unanimously (Fayard/Benson).

Mr. Duncan then introduced Ms. Toni Mobley, EVP and Chief Service and Inclusion Officer, to give an update on diversity initiatives. She began by giving a brief overview of her updates from the last meeting for the new Commissioners and others who may not have been present. Audubon has decided to use the help of an outside expert consultant to assist in advancing DEAI (diversity equity access and inclusion) efforts in the workplace. This has freed up time to develop a DEAI Committee that will be tasked with assisting Audubon leadership in implementing our business diversity plan and ensure that it is sustainable. They will also be providing a safe space for our employees to discuss issues related to diversity and identity. A survey was already sent out to staff

to gauge current sentiment of staff. Once data is collected, the DEAI committee will work with Audubon leadership and Living HR to set 4-6 goals to accomplish in the next year, and 2-3 goals to accomplish in the next 2-3 years. Once we are in the phase of defining our goals, we will be identifying engagement opportunities for board and commission members. Mr. Victor Jones then asked the name of the consulting partner. Ms. Mobley stated that Living HR, who has a team of DEAI experts to work with us.

Dr. Kyle Burks, EVP and Chief Operating Officer, was introduced to present two motions. The first was for the replacement of an air handling unit the Amazon exhibit at the Aquarium. He requested motion to authorize the President of the Audubon Commission or the CEO of the Audubon Nature Institute to enter into a contract with the lowest responsive and responsible bidder, as determined consistent with Louisiana Public Bid Law, for replacement of the air handling unit in the Aquarium's Amazon exhibit. Estimated cost is \$350K and is being funded with bond money. The motion carried (Smith/Benson/unanimous).

Dr. Burks then requested a motion to authorize the President of the Audubon Commission or the President of Audubon Nature Institute to execute a contract with Wells Fargo Equipment Finance for the lease purchase of 60 2021 EZ Go Golf Carts at Audubon Golf Clubhouse in the amount of \$383,483.00 over 61 months, monthly payments of \$6,303.00 beginning June 2021. The motion passed unanimously (Ogden/Benson).

Finally, Mr. Forman briefly presented some renderings of the Aquarium renovation project ahead of a public information session. The Aquarium was opened in 1990 and in need of updating. The purpose of the project is to move the Audubon Butterfly Garden and Insectarium to the Aquarium and have one centralized lobby. The project is also part of a greater effort to improve downtown riverfront economic development.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 1:13 PM.