

# Audubon Commission Minutes

November 19, 2020

4:00 PM

Video Conference

Attending: Kelly Duncan, Bruce Hofer, Field Ogden, Sally Shushan, Brent Wood, Ashley Francis, Lex Kelso, Gayle Benson, Storey Charbonnet, Frances Fayard, Daniel Conwill, Charles Teamer, Xavier Angel, Norma Jane Sabiston, Dolfinette Martin, Victor Jones, Freddie King, Leila Eames, Emily Vuxton, Jermaine Smith

Excused: Coleman Ridley, Catherine Morrell, Minh Nguyen, Charles Teamer

Commission President Kelly Duncan called the meeting to order at 4:00 PM. He explained that in response to the public health emergency declared for COVID-19, executive orders of the Mayor and the Governor limit gatherings of groups, which would otherwise prohibit the Audubon Commission from meeting in person. Section 4 of the Governor's [Proclamation 30 JBE 2020](#) and Section 4(E) of [Proclamation 41 JBE 2020](#), however, allow public boards and commissions to provide for attendance at meetings via video conference. Notice requirements must still be met, and Audubon posted notice of the meeting on its website, the City's calendar, and on the door of the Zoo Thursday, November 12. We also allowed for public comment via email.

Mr. Duncan began the meeting by introducing two new Commissioners, Emily Vuxton and Jermaine Smith.

The minutes of the previous meeting were distributed for review prior to the video conference. A motion to approve the minutes passed unanimously (Wood/Eames).

There were members of the public present and none had any comments.

## **Budget Presentation**

Mr. Duncan then introduced Ms. Laurie Conkerton, Executive Vice President and Chief Administrative Officer for Audubon Nature Institute, to present the proposed 2021 budget. Ms. Conkerton introduced Mr. Brent Wood, the Commission Treasurer to give some background. He reminded everyone that the pandemic closed the facilities during the busiest time of the year. Audubon was forced to cut positions and expenses to the most essential in order to minimize the revenue loss. Given the uncertainty of the future, the budget was created with some flexibility. And it will be reviewed at different times of the year for possible adjustments. Despite financial challenges, Audubon is still committed to ensuring that all employees make a living wage and some positions will see a pay increase. Mr. Wood also reminded that animal welfare and guest and staff safety remain the highest priorities.

Ms. Conkerton then started the presentation of the budget. During the presentation, she explained that a hybrid version of zero-based budgeting was used. Back in April, the budget was cut by over 50%. That got us down to the most essential expenses. Current operating trends to be considered were smaller footprint, 5-days/week operations, capacity limitations for facilities and private events, no groups or field trips. We made the decision to keep Community Connect and Taylor programs active.

Another goal for the future is build back better using purpose-driven budgeting. A more detailed presentation on Audubon's purpose will be presented at a later meeting but budget planning incorporated principles developed through the purpose design process. Living wage implementation was also taken into consideration, with \$370k

included in the salary budget to ensure all positions pay a living wage for Orleans Parish (Audubon currently exceeds State and Federal minimum wage standards). Diversity and inclusion initiatives are also a top priority for 2021. Staff was asked to rethink everything when putting together their team's budgets. The Aquarium/BGI construction project was also a consideration when developing the budget.

Guiding principles for 2021 include Louisiana being in phase III until a vaccine is widely available, having a conservative baseline budget with target dates for revisions, flexibility, and managing financing options for long-term viability.

Audubon's 2021 budget revenue is based on 71% being from earned revenue generated by operations. The other 29% is from non-operating revenue such as fundraising, endowment distribution and millage. This budget relies more heavily on the non-operating revenue than in years past. Using only Aquarium and Zoo, attendance is conservatively projected to be 45% lower in 2021 than in 2019, with 53% of the 2021 budgeted revenue coming from attendance-related activities.

Admissions revenue from only the Aquarium and Zoo is projected to be down 45% from 2019. Admissions and membership pricing will not change for 2021. If timed-ticketing ends, combo tickets can be added. If groups are allowed there will be discounts for bulk tickets. Budgeted total net loss for 2021 is \$3.8M, with earned revenue down 52%, non-salary expenses down 33% and salaries down 39% from 2019. Ms. Conkerton then explained that Audubon usually operates on only 5 months (March through July) of positive net. 2021 will continue to track that trend line. Ms. Conkerton then briefly mentioned expected capital assets for upcoming projects. After Board and Commission approval, the budget is submitted to the Mayor and City Council by December 1. Budget will then be rolled out to staff in December.

<b>2021 BUDGET (AMOUNTS IN THOUSANDS) PROPOSED</b>				
<b>NET OPERATING RESULTS BY FACILITY:</b>				
<b>FACILITY</b>	<b>BUDGET 2021</b>	<b>BUDGET 2020</b>	<b>BUDGET VARIANCE</b>	<b>ACTUAL 2019</b>
Aquarium	334	7,492	<i>(7,158)</i>	7,493
Zoo & Park	(3,535)	(6,344)	<b>2,809</b>	(6,726)
Butterfly Garden & Insectarium	0	368	<i>(368)</i>	523
FMASSC	(599)	(615)	<b>16</b>	(594)
Louisiana Nature Center	0	(551)	<b>551</b>	(335)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>(\$3,800)</b>	<b>\$350</b>	<b>(\$4,150)</b>	<b>\$361</b>
Excludes capital revenues and expenses.				

There being no questions, Mr. Duncan asked for a motion to approve the proposed 2021 budget. Motion carried (Conwill/Benson/unanimous).

### **President's Report**

Mr. Ron Forman, President and CEO of Audubon Nature Institute, was introduced to give his report. He welcomed the new Commissioners and hopes we will all be able to meet in person again soon. He also used his time to remind everyone to stay vigilant in their efforts to reduce the spread of COVID. Mr. Forman then talked about the budget and the steps taken by the organization to continue operating during these unprecedented times. He briefly updated on the status of borrowing money from the wharf project's escrow account. He also added that although Audubon is struggling financially in operations, our capital funding is doing very well and Audubon's conservation efforts have never stopped.

### **Public Affairs and Development Update**

Mr. Duncan introduced Ms. Rebecca Dietz, Executive Vice President of Public Affairs and General Counsel, to give a public affairs and development report. She began by giving a fundraising update, thanking everyone who has contributed to our recovery fund. To date, we have raised over \$675K new dollars, and \$1.2M that has been redirected from other pledges or sponsorships. The year-end giving campaign is underway. The goal is to have 100% giving by board and commission members. Membership is very strong this year. On the advocacy front, we continue to work daily on federal relief legislation with hopes of seeing more traction in early 2021.

Ms. Dietz gave some background on the long-standing relationship between Carrollton Boosters and Audubon. Their CEA is up for renewal. She then highlighted some of the key changes to the terms of the agreement. Primarily, Carrollton will be paying Audubon for use of the facilities and will continue to maintain the facilities. Carrollton will also include a recycling program and assist with tree root protection. She introduced Sandy Villere and Pablo Gonzales of Carrollton Boosters to give an overview of their youth programming throughout the city.

Mr. Villere said that there are over five thousand youth that participate in Carrollton Boosters programs. They also offer about \$30K a year in scholarships, available to anyone that wishes to participate but can't afford it. They have never turned anyone down for their inability to pay. He then let Mr. Gonzales talk about the relationship with NORD. He also said that there are children from 139 different public and charter schools in the city that participate in Carrollton Boosters programs. They are also a non-profit entity that puts all money back into the facilities.

Mr. Bruce Hoefler then asked Mr. Villere to repeat for the record, that Carrollton Boosters has never denied participation to any children. Ms. Dolfinette Martin then asked if there is data showing the racial breakdown of youth participants. Mr. Villere stated that they do not ask about race when signing up, so it would be difficult to generate that information. Storey Charbonnet recused himself from the vote given that he is a past Carrollton Boosters president.

Mr. Duncan asked for a motion to approve the renewal of the Carrollton Boosters agreement. Motion carried (Benson/Sabiston/unanimous).

## **Facilities Update**

Dr. Kyle Burks, Executive Vice President & Chief Operating Officer, gave a brief update on facilities and operations. Despite the ongoing pandemic, Audubon's conservation work continues. One of the biggest successes of the year has been the Coastal Wildlife Network. Audubon has taken over marine mammal rescue along the Louisiana coast. This has been a busy year for the team given the large number of storms that have hit the region. This is also a very busy time for sea turtles. They just received word yesterday that over 30 sea turtles stunned by cold water need to be rehabilitated. They will be temporarily cared for in our Aquatic Center and released back into the wild once waters warm back up. Education has also been able to quickly pivot to interactive virtual programming and workshops to schools all over the region. In the Park, all the facilities are finally reopened after storm clean up. The Species Survival Center on the Westbank was hit the hardest by hurricane Zeta. A tornado is suspected of causing the large amount of damage to trees and fences. They are still working to remove debris. Despite the storm challenges, a giraffe calf was born there on Halloween and no animals were injured or escaped. Mr. Duncan thanked the staff for all they do especially during these difficult times.

There being no further business, Mr. Duncan adjourned the meeting at 5:00 PM.