

Audubon Commission Aquarium Committee Minutes

November 1, 2016, 6:30 pm

Attending: Kelly Duncan, Commission President, Danny Conwill, Deborah Harkins, Christopher Meeks, Beth Lambert and Field Ogden.

Mr. Duncan thanked everyone for attending the Audubon Commission Aquarium Committee meeting. He reported that this was the first in a series of meetings to gather public input on the future of the Aquarium. He stated that the Commission would not be making any presentations as this meeting is only to receive public input.

Mr. Forman reported on the history of the Aquarium and how it was a part of a strategic plan for family tourism and riverfront development. He stated that the Aquarium has far exceeded all expectations and is looking forward to future. He then reported that this would be the first of three meetings to gather public input on the future of the Aquarium.

Mr. Rich Toth, VP and Managing Director of Downtown Facilities stated that the Aquarium is looking for the public's input on what they would like to see at the Aquarium. He stated that it is important to be a good community partner and he looks forward to continue working with the Aquarium's neighbors.

Ms. Brenda Walkenhorst, Director of Education Projects, reported on trends in conservation and education in the Aquarium world. She stated that exhibits are becoming more immersive with natural sounds, videos and sensory experiences. She further stated that guests are seeking more interactions with animals such as shark touch pools. She then stated that it is important to make sure that the Aquarium reaches out to all audiences including special needs visitors, at risk youth and elderly guests.

Ms. Beth Firchau, Director of Husbandry, reported on trends in exhibitry across the Aquarium industry. She stated that technology is important moving forward to create more interactive exhibits. She further stated that exhibitry should show active conservation initiatives.

Mr. Duncan thanked the speakers and opened the floor up for public input. Miss Olivia Anderson, 5 years old, asked for more mermaids and Mr. Elias McClaran, 6 years old, asked for more sharks and shark video games. There was no other public comment.

Mr. Ron Forman reported that conservation is key to everything for the future of the Aquarium. He stated that Audubon is working towards protecting wetlands through the Gulf for United Lasting Fisheries, a seafood sustainably program. He reported that shark populations are disappearing with a steady decline over the past 25 years. He stated that Audubon is researching how to inform the public about the threat to sharks in an entertaining and meaningful way. He also reported that Audubon would like to continue with its successful penguin breeding plan. He stated that the Amazon exhibit ceiling level is around 100 feet high and currently only the bottom level is in use. Audubon would like to research ways to elevate guests up into tree canopies, add possible bridges and have animal experiences on different levels. He then reported on the

Insectarium and how it was originally supposed to be one of several museums located in the U.S. Custom's House but that changed after Hurricane Katrina. He stated that it might be a possibility to move the Insectarium into existing space at Aquarium. He then stated that there are no plans to increase the building size. He stated that the Aquarium was the leading attraction in the state for 25 years and it is an important recreation and educational resource for the community. He stated that Audubon will continue to gather input at the next public meeting and by the third meeting come back with recommendations on conceptual ideas for the Aquarium's future.