

**RIVERBANKS PARK COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES
18 August 2016**

Attendance Report

Commissioners Present: Lloyd Liles, Jan Stamps, Alana Williams, Bud Tibshrary, and Jim Smith

Commissioners Absent: Phil Bartlett, Mary Howard

Staff Present: Satch Krantz, Tommy Stringfellow, Breta Rheney

Call to Order

Vice Chair Tibshrary called the meeting to order.

Reading of the Minutes

The June 2016 minutes were approved as distributed.

For the record there was no July 2016 meeting of the Commission.

Chief Finance Officer's Report

Unaudited 2015/2016 Fiscal Year Report -- CFO Breta Smith presented the unaudited 2015/2016 fiscal year-end financial report. She noted that a surplus of approximately \$269,000 is projected as of June 30, 2016. When added to an unrestricted fund balance of slightly over \$900,000, Riverbanks will likely end the year with an estimated \$1.169 million unrestricted fund balance. As in the past, these funds will be used for deferred maintenance and capital purchases. All expenditures from the undesignated surplus account will be approved by the Commission. Other highlights of the report include:

- **Attendance**

We exceeded our budget of 1.1 million visitors with a total headcount of 1,280,924. Approximately 48% of all visitors were Society members.

- **Balance Sheet**

- Assets**

- Reimbursement was requested from Richland County's penny tax fund and was received in August.

- Revenue vs Expense**

- Revenue**

- Total Revenue was approximately \$1,429,173 ahead of budget, mostly from:
 - Admissions \$726,832
 - SSA Commissions \$318,466
 - Attractions/Rides \$214,601

- Richland County tax collections remitted to us this fiscal year exceeded budget by \$111,320.

Expenses

- Department Expense increases include:
 - Consulting & Contracted Services Fees
 - Credit Card Processing Fees*
 - AZA Accreditation Expenses
 - Facilities Contracted Services and Repairs
 - Personnel cost overages for Public Safety and Grounds (directly related to increased attendance)
- Utilities overage is split between electrical & water/sewer – due to new exhibits in the Zoo and Garden.

Breta also noted that July 2016, the first month of the new fiscal year, finished with a deficit of \$110,920, which is slightly higher than budget. July 2016 attendance is 11,545 ahead of July 2015, under budget by 6,729 visitors. This is certainly due to the record-breaking heat.

Destination Riverbanks Update

- **CSX Pedestrian Bridge** – Krantz reported that the CSX pedestrian bridge is nearly complete, with a ribbon cutting ceremony scheduled for 9:00am on Wednesday, September 7.
- **Destination Projects** – Krantz noted that there are two HVAC issues associated with the Phase One (Zoo entry and gift shop) and two (sea lion) projects. These include heat build-up in the ticket booth room and condensation in the sea lion life support building. Both problems are being addressed. Krantz noted that given the size and scope of the Destination projects, it is impressive that these are the only issues.

Chief Operating Officer's Report

COO Stringfellow offered the following report:

- **Brew at the Zoo Recap** – Brew at the Zoo took place on Friday, August 5. The event sold out several days in advance. Stringfellow noted that by all accounts this was one of the smoothest Brew events ever.
- **Movie Night Recap** – Three successful movie nights (Twilight in the Garden) were held this summer in Waterfall Junction. Families could enter Waterfall Junction at 6:00pm and utilize all of the amenities before the movie started at the Garden amphitheater near sunset. Approximately 500 people attended each night. The staff is considering expanding the number of movie nights in 2017.
- **Membership Pricing Proposal** – Stringfellow noted that Society membership dues need to be reviewed in conjunction with the recent increase in Zoo and Garden admission fees. This will occur with input from the Society and Commission.
- **New Radio Station** – Riverbanks has its own radio station, WRBZ. The “station” reaches about one mile out from the Zoo and will be used to direct traffic on I-126 during peak times. This same system is used by many major zoos

and attractions. Ft. Jackson uses a similar system to direct traffic around the Fort on graduation Thursdays.

President and Chief Executive Officers report

- **River Water Quality** – Krantz noted that Zoo and Garden staff were impacted negatively by poor water quality in the Lower Saluda River earlier this summer when an upstream sewer plant discharged polluted wastewater into the river. Water from the river is used to irrigate both the Zoo and Garden, for cleaning a number of animal barns and to fill many of the Zoo's largest animal exhibit pools (i.e., elephant). As a result of poor water quality, Riverbanks curtailed the use of river water during operating hours in all public areas. On Tuesday, August 16, representatives of DHEC held a meeting at 400 Rivermont Drive with a number of river users including Irmo Chapin Recreation Commission, SCDNR, SCE&G, and the Congaree River Keeper. The purpose of the meeting was to review current river conditions and develop a strategy for the future. It was noted that even without the six upstream private sewer treatment plants there will still be times when river conditions will be unsafe. The Zoo's Life Support staff is now monitoring conditions in the river on a weekly basis.
- **Bomb Threat** – At approximately 12:30pm on Thursday, June 23, the Columbia Police Department (CPD) received a call claiming that bombs had been placed inside Riverbanks Zoo and in the Zoo parking lot. CPD informed the Zoo of the threat at 12:47pm. Columbia police and fire departments arrived at the Zoo at approximately 12:49pm and immediately began sweeping the park in conjunction with Zoo staff. The West Columbia Police Department responded at the Garden entrance. Upon arrival CPD blocked the entrance to the Zoo at the railroad tracks. The public was not allowed to enter, but employees were allowed in on foot. Based upon CPD's assessment of the phone call, we were advised not to evacuate the Zoo. Specifically, CPD cited that the caller gave neither a location nor a reason for planting a bomb, both indicators that the threat was not credible. Zoo Public Safety made an "all clear" announcement at 1:40pm and all first responders were off-site by 2pm. There was no media coverage, but all social media outlets began reporting that the Zoo was closed within minutes of CPD's arrival and before we were able to gather all the facts. During this period of uncertainty we were flooded with calls from the parents of Zoo Campers. Elizabeth Clemens personally met each parent/guardian as they arrived to pick up their children at 4:00pm. Each parent was also handed a two paragraph document highlighting the facts of the incident. Elizabeth has since drafted a protocol for crisis communication with camp parents and using the Zoo's text alert system.
- **Columbia Police Department Meeting** – In part prompted by the bomb scare, members of the Riverbanks staff met on Thursday, August 4, with several members of the Columbia Police Department to establish a dialog on public safety. CPD was represented by the region captain and leadership of the SWAT team and bomb squad.
- **Botanical Parkway** – Krantz noted that work has begun on Botanical Parkway. Work crews showed up on Friday, July 29. There has been no communication with Lexington County officials since construction began, but a

newspaper article quoted county officials as saying they are trying to meet an October/November deadline.

- **Service Animals** – Krantz distributed copies of a new “Service Animals for Persons with Disabilities” form as well as a new “Important Service Animal Information” postcard. These documents were discussed at the June meeting and are a reaction to the increase in people entering the Zoo and Garden with “service animals.”

Executive Session

The Commission went into executive session to discuss a personnel matter. No action was taken.

The meeting was adjourned.

Approved and adopted on the 15th day of September 2016.

Jan H. Stamps, Secretary