

**Riverbanks Park Commission**  
**Meeting Minutes**  
**15 October 2020**

**Attendance Report**

Commissioners Present: Bob Davidson, Alana Williams, Mike Velasco, Jan Stamps, Deneen Shockley, Mary Howard, Phil Bartlett

Commissioners Absent:

Staff Present: Tommy Stringfellow, Christie Vondrak, Lochlan Wooten, Katie Eaton

**Call to Order**

Chairman Davidson called the meeting to order.

**Reading of the Minutes**

The September 17, 2020 commission minutes were approved as distributed.

**Chairman's Remarks**

Chairman Davidson remarked that the Hoppy Hour event last week was very impressive and was a great time. Financials are improving, and the high per cap is a positive sign. Chairman Davidson extends his appreciation to the staff for their continued diligence and hard work.

**President & Chief Executive Officer's Report**

President and CEO Tommy Stringfellow provided the following report:

- September Financials:
  - Membership saw a positive trend in membership sales, though revenue is still down.
  - Budgeted to pull \$300,000 from society to support commission, but only pulled \$200,000 which is a good indicator of improvement in financials in the month of September
  - Attendance year to date have seen 172,000 visitors which is down 54,000 in budgeted attendance. September helped to chip away at the deficit
  - Revenue was down \$484,000 at the end of August, but end of September showed down \$274,000, which is also a positive indicator
  - Next quarterly payment from Lexington should be received in October
  - Expenditures- saved about \$526,000. Staff are still only doing necessary spending only, without sacrificing animal welfare or staff/guest safety
  - Bottom line is still down about \$320,000 in revenue
  - A little less than \$2 million left between commission and society reserves
    - Howard motion to approve financials, Stamps second, m/c unanimous
- Federal delegation still has not made a decision on releasing support funds, and likely will not until after the election
- Still no movement on state level funding either. The House and Senate have not released any further funds; however they gave PRT \$20M designated to advertising.
- On the local council level, Lexington County has opted not to give us any advance in their funding. Richland County has approved a vote to advance but is deciding on how much and when.

- The Emeritus Discussion Committee (Bartlett, Stamps, Howard) met prior to the full Commission meeting to discuss creating an emeritus position. The committee chair (Bartlett) shared that the committee's recommendation is to not appoint an Emeritus status. However, there was a unanimous agreement to pursue an alternative way to honor and respect board members for distinguished service.
  - Bartlett motioned to not create an emeritus position for the Riverbanks Commission, Stamps second, m/c unanimous.

### **Chief Administrative Officer's Report:**

CAO Christie Vondrak provided the following report:

- We are continuing to do virtual Town Halls and encouraging staff feedback and questions. The virtual format has continued to be successful
- Continuing to see trends of staff turnover which is consistent with what other organizations are seeing. Keeper staff have more opportunities with open positions at other organizations, moving closer to home, etc.
- Our safety manager has been sending out self-care emails to all staff to encourage them to take care of their mental wellbeing in addition to their physical health
- Starting to bring volunteers back. As departments want to bring volunteers back, they must submit a plan on how they will use them and continue to implement social distance
- Scott Pfaff has retired from Riverbanks and we have been able to promote Sean Foley as Curator of Herpetology
- ZooCare is continuing to go well and support our staff's children with their education. The program is currently in its second session and has very positive feedback. Education will continue to offer this program as long as there is still need for it
- Guest Services Appreciation Week was earlier this month. The team found small and impactful ways to recognize and appreciate those staff members
- Vondrak shared the horticulture restructure organizational chart. The botanical and habitat horticulture staff were combined into one team with one director (Andy Cabe), and one lead staff was promoted into a supervisor role. They have been meeting and working to create new project plans and goals as a team.
- A couple of weeks ago a staff suffered an accident. Thankfully he will be okay, but we have taken this time to internally evaluate all our safety efforts and practices. Two years ago we added a Safety and Risk Manager to Riverbanks, and she is working to assess job safety hazards, trainings and protocols.

### **Chief Operating Officer's Report**

COO Lochlan Wooten provided the following report:

- Animal update-
  - The herpetology team had 28 rhino viper hatchlings. We have had these animals in our collection for more than 38 years with no success with breeding until this hatching.
  - Sean, John and Lochlan had a meeting to discussion expanding partnership with DNR. Intend to expand and make that relationship more institutional from a communication and awareness standpoint
  - Last week received our 3<sup>rd</sup> rhino, male Bill. He is getting acclimated to his new home and companions. Visual introductions have started and are going well.

- Currently in quarantine; Bill the rhino, a turkey, and additional kangaroos
- Hospital report: end of this month doing a hoof procedure on 3 of our giraffes
- Hoppy Hour was very well attended. The event had a record breaking per cap of over \$14.00. Next time we will bring in additional beer trucks and food options and clearer map to allow for guests to spread out more. The next Hoppy Hour will be November 12
- Boo at the Zoo tickets are on sale now. The press release will go out tomorrow. This year will be open 5:00-9:00pm for 8 nights (Oct.23-30)
- October 31 is not a Boo day, but we will be taking the general admission price up by \$5 and increase the experience with festive activities, staff in costumes, pumpkin smash, animal enrichment, special activities, etc.
- The virtual Zoofari event in September went really well.
- Membership revenue trends are consistent with the normal ebbs and flows for seasons. We expect the fall and winter gifting season will see an increase and then a dip again after the holidays
- Aquarium roof repair is moving forward and is a crucial step before ARC renovations can begin

The meeting was adjourned.

Approved and adopted on the 19 day of November 2020.

 \_\_\_\_\_, Secretary