

**Riverbanks Park Commission  
Meeting Minutes  
21 September 2017**

**Attendance Report**

Commissioners Present: Mary Howard, Bob Davidson, Jan Stamps, Bud Tibshrary, Alana Williams, Phil Bartlett, and Jim Smith.

Commissioners Absent: None

Staff Present: Tommy Stringfellow, Kathryn Masewicz, Christie Vondrak

**Pre-meeting**

Chairwoman Howard was pleased to issue the Commission's Oath of Office to the City of Columbia's newly appointed Commissioner, Michael Phemister Velasco.

Commissioner Velasco was recently appointed to fill the expired term of Commissioner Jim Smith. Velasco's first term will expire on September, 21, 2023.

**Call to Order**

Chairwoman Howard called the meeting to order.

**Special Presentation**

Christie Vondrak presented Riverbanks' commitment to diversity and inclusion.

**Reading of the Minutes**

The July 2017 minutes were approved as distributed.

**Chief Finance Officer's Report**

Finance Controller Kathryn Masewicz provided the following report:

**Attendance**

As of August 31, Riverbanks was 28,172 visitors ahead of budget and 24,315 ahead of prior year. Overall attendance for August was better than expected with over 8,800 in attendance on the day of the eclipse. Member visits were 52.9% of overall attendance, slightly better than budget but less than the prior year.

**Balance Sheet**

**Assets**

- Cash reserves are good and will be used as we continue to complete projects related to the \$1,700,000 commitment from Society.
- Cash will be drawn down over the next months to help in funding operations, as we transition into our routinely slower months.

## **Revenue vs. Expense**

### **Revenue**

- General admission benefited from the eclipse, with approximately 67% of attendance associated with paid admission.
- Rides and attractions also did well as a result of attendance and revenue from the explorer differential.
- Education had a good turnout for summer camps and ran an additional fee-based camp for the eclipse.

### **Expenses**

- Department expenses were better than budget, mostly as a result of personnel savings from vacant positions. The budget fully funds all full-time and permanent part-time positions.
- Prior year differences were:
  - Timing of similar expenditures paid from one year to the next.
  - Personnel changes approved with the FY2018 Budget, mostly due to merit increases and pay grade changes.
  - Rivermont landscaping improvements not incurred for prior year.
  - Guest Services incurred additional personnel costs for Grounds & Housekeeping and Public Safety, resulting in 78% of increase for current year.

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

COO report was provided by Tommy Stringfellow:

- Farm to Fork - Riverbanks grossed \$3,500 and netted \$1,200 resulting in a margin of nearly 35%, which is excellent for an inaugural event. Our baseline goal for established events in 30%, so this was strong and likely means we will develop a series, bi-annual to start and then possibly quarterly. Look for a Farm to Fork: Sustainable Seafood edition in the spring.
- ZOOofari – To-date, a total of 754 tickets have been sold out of 800, so the event is almost sold out. The live auction will take place in the plaza in front of Sea Lion Landing instead of at Safari Camp. Tickets to attend the event were distributed to the Commission.

## **Chief Executive Officer's Report**

President and CEO Stringfellow provided the following report:

- Elephant – The design firm CLR has completed the initial draft of a proposed expansion and is waiting on survey and soil samples to determine an estimated cost for converting the existing female elephant exhibit into a male elephant exhibit. If reports are complete prior to the October meeting, we will be able to present the options at the meeting.

- Female Lion introductions – Introductions are going as expected. John Davis feels that if the introductions continue as planned then we should see both male and female lions on exhibit together in the near future.
- Hurricane Irma – Power was out for 4 hours, and a lot of small limbs and leaves fell along with a few large trees in non-critical areas. One large tree did fall on one of the zip lines and has since been removed. The zip line vendor will inspect for any damages before re-opening. The backup generator did not operate as expected when power went out; Stringfellow explained that if the power had not come back on when it did, a major portion of the fish collection could have been lost. The backup generator was purchased at the Federal Surplus auction lot over 6 years ago. The used piece of equipment has more than exceeded its recommended operating life. Stringfellow requested permission to purchase a new system not only for the Aquarium-Reptile Complex but also for the Birdhouse. Total costs for both systems would be approximately \$550,000. The Commission unanimously voted to approve the spending.
- AZA Conference – Due to Hurricane Irma, most of our staff was not able to travel and attend, but those who did attend were able to represent Riverbanks well.
- Executive Assistant – Stringfellow announced that Katie McCoy has accepted the position of Executive Assistant and will be transitioning to her new role within the week. Katie is currently the Education Services Assistant, reporting to the Director of Education, and has been with Riverbanks since 2015.
- Sea Turtle Release - Riverbanks' resident green sea turtle, Scute, will be released into the wild next Thursday in the marshes around Hobcaw Barony in Georgetown, SC. Since 1989 Riverbanks has partnered with South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR) to house struggling sea turtle hatchlings in their early years, when they are most vulnerable to predators. The hatchlings serve as ambassadors for their wild counterparts and help educate guests on the threats the turtles face in the wild and how to help. Scute has been with Riverbanks since 2014. Before he is released he will be tagged so that researchers can learn from his movements. Riverbanks' staff will be onsite for the release, and WIS-TV will accompany them.
- Gopher Tortoise Release -Also in reintroduction news, in December of 2016 SCDNR asked Riverbanks to start a head start program for the endangered gopher tortoise. Riverbanks received 27 hatchlings and have been rearing them as part of a survivorship and movement study. They are now ready to be re-released into the wild at the Aiken Gopher Tortoise Heritage Preserve to hopefully establish a viable population.
- Boards Emeritus Lunch is scheduled for noon on Wednesday, Oct 11<sup>th</sup>. Invitations will be mailed to all past and present Commission and Board members.

**Executive Session**

The Commission went into executive session to discuss personnel matters.

The meeting was adjourned.

Approved and adopted on the 19 day of October, 2017.

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, written over a horizontal line.

Vice Chair  
~~Secretary~~

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