

Riverbanks Park Commission
Meeting Minutes
20 April 2023

Attendance Report

Commissioners Present: Jan Stamps, Mike Velasco, Cliff Bourke, Jeff Reeves, Deneen Shockley, Bob Davidson

Commissioners Absent: Alana Williams

Staff Present: Tommy Stringfellow, Christie Vondrak, Lochlan Wooten, Ashley Harris

Call to Order

Chairwoman Stamps called the meeting to order.

Reading of the Minutes

The March 16, 2023 Commission Meeting minutes were approved as distributed.

Reeves motioned to approve the minutes, Velasco seconded, m/c unanimous.

Chairman's Remarks

- Chairwoman Stamps noted that the Commission is currently reviewing Stringfellow's compensation and plans to have a suggested salary proposed for consideration by June.
- Stamps shared that Stringfellow just attended the AZA Capitol Hill Advocacy Day conference in Washington, DC earlier this week.

VP of Finance Report:

VP of Finance Ashley Harris provided the following report:

- Harris reviewed the March financial statements:
 - We saw strong attendance in March following the opening of the ARCC. Paid admission is running under budget. We budgeted based on the assumption that 38% of visitors would be paid admission, and closing out the third quarter, 36.6% of total attendance has been paid admission. We're seeing a major uptick in Richland and Lexington County school groups visiting the Zoo. As of March, our Lexington and Richland County school groups have more than doubled in comparison to March of prior year.
 - Our cash investment in the Local Government Investment Pool (LGIP), managed through the SC State Treasurer's Office earned an average interest rate of 4.85% in March.
 - We continue to climb up over budget in Concession & Retail Commissions. In seeing consistent upward trajectory, we plan to bring up the budget in FY24.
 - Total earned revenues are up over budget, as well as prior year, so while total attendance is down compared to FY22, guests are spending more on Concessions, Retail, Rides, and Attractions in FY23.
 - Marketing expenditures spiked in March, mainly due to spending on outdoor advertising grants. Those expended were the SC Parks, Recreation, and Tourism Advertising Grant, a Hospitality tax grant through the City of Columbia, and Accommodations and Hospitality tax grants through Richland County.

Shockley motioned to approve the March financials, Reeves seconded, m/c unanimous.

President & CEO Report:

President & CEO Tommy Stringfellow provided the following report:

- Stringfellow shares he, Secretary Bourke and Rebecca Best, with Best Consulting, met with Derrick Pugh, Richland County representative for District 2, this month to discuss the Zoo's contribution to Richland County and the need for growth and expansion to keep guests coming.

The Economic Impact that the Zoo currently brings totaling \$150M annually is not sustainable without adding new attractions.

- Stringfellow shares that he attended an annual Zoo lobbying day earlier this week, where he met with representatives in Washington to bring awareness of the Zoos & Aquariums South Carolina has to offer.

Chief Administrative Officer Report:

Chief Administrative Officer Christie Vondrak provided the following report:

- Vondrak shared that this is national volunteer appreciation week, sharing that the Zoo is actively recognizing and thanking our many volunteers that support the Zoo with their time and efforts.
- Upcoming Dates –
 - Wine Tasting will fall next Friday, April 28th.
 - The Spring Plant Sale will fall on the following Saturday, April 29th.
 - Midlands Gives – May 2
 - Legislative Family Night – May 3
 - Members Night Out – May 5
 - Riverbanks Run – May 13
- The spring hiring season was very successful. We had over 300 applications received. We are introducing paid internships for animal care for the first time in history. We received 146 internship applications.
- Vondrak shared that several members from the Senior leadership team attended the AZA Mid-year conference in Oklahoma City, OK in late March.
- Spring break had a great turnout and Riverbanks staff rose to the occasion and did a great job keeping up with the high volume of guests in attendance. Riverbanks provided lunch to staff on a couple of days throughout the week by bringing in a Pizza Truck and Chick-fil-A boxed lunches.
- The Strategic Planning Process with Canopy is in motion and is going really well.

Chief Operating Officer Report:

Chief Operating Officer Lochlan Wooten provided the following report:

- Our Blue Billed Curassow had two chicks for the first time ever.
- Recently brought in specialists to trim the hooves of giraffes while under anesthesia, which a requirement to extend their lifespan.
- Wooten shared an image of a plan for the new Komodo Dragon breeding center. The center will have indoor and outdoor space for guests, as well as designated breeding space for the dragons. The Lyles private contribution is funding this renovation project.
- Spring Break brought a record-breaking day for the SSA Group with their highest retail and commission sales seen in one day, in their history.
- Riverbanks is working with DNR to measure conservation impact. An example would be measuring our work towards conservation of the Gopher Frog and Gopher Tortoise.

The meeting was adjourned.

Approved and adopted on the 18 day of May 2023.

, Secretary