



**MINUTES OF COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE
BOARD OF PARK COMMISSIONERS
MARCH 3, 2025**

PRESENT: Andrea Smith, President
Matthew Mauer, Vice President
REMOTE: Carla Santorno

IN THE CHAIR: Andrea Smith

PLACE: MPT Headquarters 4702 S. 19th St.

The meeting was called to order by President Smith at 5:30pm

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

November 18, 2024 COW Minutes

It was moved and seconded that the minutes be approved as presented; seconded and passed unanimously.

SUPPORTING FOUNDATION & SOCIETY OPERATING AGREEMENTS

The meeting began with a discussion regarding the timing of bringing forward operating agreements. This was emphasized as an important annual task for the organization. The group also focused on the goal of educating new board members during tonight's meeting, providing them with background information and key organizational details.

Alan Vasik then shared the history of the Zoo Society, dating back to its founding in 1951, and highlighted that this year marks the 50th anniversary of NW Trek. He explained the different governance models utilized by zoos across the country, particularly focusing on the relationships these zoos maintain with their supporting organizations. It was noted that ZEED does not have any operating commitments within the agreements involving the Zoo Society or the NW Trek Foundation.

The meeting then shifted to a brief discussion of the operating agreement and Exhibit A. Alan Varsik pointed out that this is a two-year agreement with consistent language maintained over the past decade. The Board was informed that Exhibit A specifically outlines the financial expectations. Mr. Varsik also emphasized the strong communication between staff, the society, and the foundation, noting that it plays a critical role in ensuring alignment on various issues.

Alan Varsik further elaborated on the role of the liaison committee, which includes Board members. The committee serves as a formal check-in point and provides an opportunity to address more in-depth issues. In addition to formal meetings, Alan Varsik highlighted the importance of regular communication outside of these times to ensure ongoing alignment between the groups.

Mr. Varsik commented that Exhibit A is built during the budget development process when needs are presented to the society. The agreements also cover several key aspects, including office space at both locations, donor development opportunities, capital funding, programmatic support, enrichment for feeding, and operational funding. Staff also noted that insurance coverage by the District is also embedded in the agreements.

Lori Price, the Board President for the NW Trek Foundation, was introduced and provided an update on the foundation's activities. She shared that the foundation recently received a \$277K grant for the Nisqually Fellowship Program. Lori Price explained that the foundation's funding comes from monthly sustaining donors, mini fundraising events, and the annual auction. Founded in 1975, the foundation has been instrumental in raising funds for past projects such as the Eagle Passage exhibit and Kids Trek. She also commented that the foundation is currently working on a new animal commissary, for which they have already raised \$500K. Lori Price also mentioned other conservation projects and the online education academy, as well as the field trip financial assistance program and staff salaries during COVID.

Looking ahead to the new biennium, Lori Price outlined upcoming projects including the purchase of a new truck, a porcupine habitat, and various conservation initiatives. Additionally, the foundation will fund internship stipends for veterinarians and keepers.

Alan Varsik returned to discuss the intentional language used within the agreements to address their dynamic nature. He explained that needs and fundraising opportunities change, and the language in the agreements is crafted to reflect this flexibility.

Ruthann Howell then provided a historical overview of the society, noting its focus on philanthropy for the Zoo. The society has supported various initiatives, including capital improvement projects, staff salaries during COVID, and conservation partnerships. Ruthann Howell also mentioned the society's role in supporting education access through school field trips, internships, and youth volunteer programs. Capital support has included projects like the Penguin Exhibit and feasibility studies for a healthcare facility. Ms. Howell emphasized that the society is continuing to diversify its board and add new members.

The society has experienced a significant reduction in administrative support from the zoo. As a result, Ruthann Howell noted that the society is looking for new funding sources this year, with more details to come.

Ruthann Howell also mentioned the possibility of a bond campaign to support future initiatives. She shared a pie chart illustrating where the society's revenue comes from and noted that decisions made by the Park Board have an impact on the society's operations. The typical two-year agreement aligns with the budget cycle.

Commissioner Mauer raised questions regarding the reduction in administrative support from the zoo. Ruthann Howell expressed her hope to eliminate this support entirely by 2027.

Mark Knowlden then gave overview of the agreement with the Tacoma Parks Foundation (TPF). He clarified that the structure of this agreement differs slightly from the ZEED agreements, particularly in its early stages. Over the past year, efforts have focused on building a productive relationship with the new Executive Director (ED) of TPF. In addition to its primary role, the TPF serves as a fiscal agent for the District, supporting grant work and providing assistance with exhibits for other foundations. The current one-year term agreement allows for a degree of flexibility, with the ultimate goal of transitioning to a two-year agreement. However, Mr. Knowlden noted that the return of proceeds would not carry the same multiplier as the ZEED agreement, and a more realistic approach has been adopted.

Beth Boggs, the new Executive Director of TPF, was then introduced. She presented an overview of the TPF team, highlighting the roles of the team members. The foundation's board members were introduced, and Beth expressed gratitude to the Zoo Society ED and her team for their continued support. Commissioner Smith was identified as the Board member liaison to the TPF. Beth Boggs proceeded with a brief history of the foundation, and shared the foundation's mission statement and guiding principles. She emphasized the TPF's support of the Fort Nisqually Foundation and the Conservatory fundraising efforts, noting that each has its own separate board.

The Tacoma Parks Foundation, led by Executive Director Beth Boggs, presented an overview of its 2024 activities, emphasizing organizational development, community presence, fiscal sponsorship, and future funding priorities. Boggs highlighted the Foundation's mission, partnerships, achievements, and future plans, emphasizing TPF's commitment to equitable access and community well-being.

Beth Boggs introduced the TPF team, which includes Associate Director Erin Hill, Director of Corporate Philanthropy Keysha-Rae Cooper, Manager of Communications & Operations Quinn Bartholomew, and Administrative Specialist Claire Williams. Beth Boggs explained that TPF was established in 1991 as Parks Tacoma's charitable partner and became independent in 2021 while maintaining its collaborative relationship. The Foundation's mission is to ensure equitable access to nature, play, and recreation across Tacoma through fundraising for various programs and projects. Core values include Equity, Access, Collaboration, Youth Development, and Thriving Communities.

Ms. Boggs described TPF's support for the Fort Nisqually Foundation's restoration, preservation, historical interpretation, and educational efforts. Key projects include restoring historical structures, providing student scholarships, supporting volunteer guilds, and fundraising for museum restoration. She also noted that TPF continues to support the W.W. Seymour Botanical Conservatory Foundation, which was founded in 1996 to promote advocacy and community partnerships. TPF funding has enabled environmental improvements, including adding a rainforest vivarium and supporting horticulture, wellness, and cultural programming. The Foundation's vision emphasizes accessibility, community engagement, and environmental stewardship.

Ms. Boggs outlined TPF's 2024 organizational priorities, which included enhancing fiscal sponsorships, developing the board, refining donor strategies, expanding the major gifts pipeline, and improving cost accounting for programs like Beyond the Bell, Club B, and Summer Teen Late Nights. According to Boggs, community engagement initiatives in 2024 included the dedication of Melanie Jan LaPlant Dressel Park, the Rainiers Jersey Auction Fundraiser for Beyond the Bell, and the renovation of People's Center Teen/Senior Space.

Beth Boggs reported that TPF distributed \$2,930,592 to Anchor Agencies, including \$300,000 raised by TPF, to support essential projects and programs. TPF's total contribution to Parks Tacoma in 2024 was \$1,922,364.34, which includes funds from the Eastside Endowment, Beyond the Bell, PGA grants, memorial benches, the Jack Wilson Active Kids Fund, and other projects.

Ms. Boggs concluded by highlighting TPF's funding priorities for 2025-2026, focusing on Whole Child/Whole Community initiatives, Conservation & Preservation, Community Spaces, and Inclusive Workforce development. Planned projects include Afterschool Clubs, Parks Tacoma Late Night, Adaptive/Unified Sports, School Sports Leagues, and infrastructure improvements such as Titlow Park Reservoir Culvert and Swan Creek Bridge. The presentation ended with expressions of gratitude for ongoing support and collaboration.

OTHER

ADJOURNMENT

Being no further business, Commissioner Smith adjourned the meeting at 7:02 p.m.

APPROVED:

President

Clerk

Submitted by:
Jennifer Bowman, Secretary