

**Riverbanks Park Commission
Meeting Minutes
16 January 2025**

In accordance with the Freedom of Information Act, a copy of the agenda is available to radio and TV stations, newspapers, and persons requesting notification; was posted in the lobby of Riverbanks' administration building and was uploaded to Riverbanks' webpage.

Attendance Report

Commissioners Present: Cliff Bourke, Bob Davidson, Chip Huggins, Jeff Reeves, Deneen Shockley, Mike Velasco (via phone), Alana Williams.

Commissioners Absent:

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

Call to Order

Commissioner Bourke called the meeting to order at 12:30pm.

Reading of the Minutes

The November 21, 2024, Commission Meeting minutes were approved as distributed.

Davidson motioned to approve the minutes, Shockley seconded, m/c unanimous.

Finance Report:

VP of Finance Ashley Harris provided the following report:

- December Dashboard Report:
 - Through December we are running 15.9% under anticipated attendance and 10.4% below the prior year.
 - With members now paying for Wild Lights, our member visits are now reflected in the current year in paid visits versus membership visits. That shift is reflected in the prior year comparison - paid admissions has increased and member visits have decreased.
 - Exceeding budgeted revenues by \$233K (3%) largely due to the fact that events revenues generated well over budget and prior year.
 - Miscellaneous revenue is exceeding budget by \$238K due to interest income.
 - Received \$1M in State funds in November.
- December Balance Sheet:
 - Cash balance is invested in the local government investment pool (LGIP) with the State Treasurer's Office. The average interest rate for December was 4.74%.
 - Society's Designated for District Capital fund balance of \$8.4M was transferred over to the District in October bringing the District's Committed for Capital Projects fund balance up to \$24.4M.

Davidson motioned to approve the financials, Huggins seconded, m/c unanimous.

President & CEO Report:

President & CEO Tommy Stringfellow provided the following report:

- Issued and discussed the new Commission Handbook. Working on a digital version.
- Suggested forming a committee to revisit the Bylaws
- Two new council members were confirmed in Richland County. Stringfellow and Rebecca Best attended the swearing-in ceremony.
- Three new council members were confirmed in Lexington County. Todd Cullum is now chair and Glen Conwell is vice-chair.
- Meetings with both councils are planned for February
- State is back in session. Working with Lander Hiott to build relationships with new members.

- Met with DOT last week to discuss Carolina Crossroads project. Made contact with group that would oversee Greystone Boulevard's potential redesign.
- Headed to Director's Policy Conference in Santa Barbara, CA with Vondrak next week. Vondrak will be graduating from the Executive Leadership Development Program. Congratulations!

Chief Administrative Officer Report:

Chief Administrative Officer Christie Vondrak provided the following report:

- Dates and Reminders (will provide full list of event dates at next meeting)
 - December 4 - Leadership Holiday Social 6:00-8:00pm.
- Looking forward to Director's Policy Conference and ELDP graduation
- Jordan Ward, our new Director of Construction, will introduce himself at the next meeting
- Leadership Lunch & Learn on AZA Trends Report <https://www.aza.org/trends-report-2033>
 - Climate change
 - Trends in species that guests enjoy visiting in zoos
 - What does Generation Z look for in their employers?
- Admin teams' appreciation recap
- Leadership breakfast recap
- Rivermont open house recap


Chief Operating Officer Report:

Chief Operating Officer Lochlan Wooten provided the following report:

- Welcome Raiden, our new sea lion
- Also welcomed a 2-year-old female giraffe, Tahini. She bonded with Winston, a male in our herd, and is doing well.
- Received a federal grant to conduct research in the southeast community about wildlife trafficking messaging. We are excited that Riverbanks is establishing the baseline for the entire southeast.
- Wild Lights was an incredible experience this year. Exceeded all revenue goals and voted in the top 10 of USA Today's Best Zoo Lights. Sensory Sensitivity Nights were well received by guests and in the media.
- Reviewed 15-month timeline:
 - April 2025 - Spring Break
 - May 2025 - Birdhouse Reopening
 - June 2025 - Groundbreaking for Learning Center
 - July 2025 - Tapir Barn Renovation
 - August 2025 - Saluda Skyride Complete
 - September 2025 - Lego Nature Opens
 - October 2025 - Boo at the Zoo
 - November 2025 - Wild Lights
 - January 2026 - Food and Beverage RFP Awarded
 - March 2026 - AZA Accreditation Application Due
- Reviewed site plans/construction impacts for Saluda Skyride and Learning Center

The meeting was adjourned.

Approved and adopted on the 20 day of March 2025.

 _____, Secretary