
**BUSINESS & RESPONSIVE AGENCY ADVISORY COUNCIL
MEETING MINUTES**

MISSION STATEMENT

This Council advises and makes recommendations to the programs and operations of
Metro Parks Tacoma concerning financial management and business practices.

Metro Parks Tacoma
4702 S 19th Street, Tacoma, WA 98405
May 9, 2017

Present: Su Dowie, Don Golden, Peter Kram, Noreen Plum, Dan Powell
Absent: Jeff Albers, Aaron Blaisdell, Johnny Mojica
Staff: Tara Dunford, Julie Wilfong
Board Liaison: Commissioner Baines
Guest: Alan Varsik

SUMMARY

- A presentation on Northwest Trek Wildlife Parks Business Plan was given.

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 7:40 a.m.

MINUTES

The April 11, 2017 minutes were approved as written.

RECRUITMENT UPDATE

No update was given.

DESTINATION POINT DEFIANCE UPDATE

No update was given.

NORTHWEST TREK WILDLIFE BUSINESS PLAN

Alan Varsik, the Director of the Zoological & Environmental Education Department (ZEED) presented to the council an update of Northwest Trek Wildlife Park (NW Trek). In 2015, NW Trek exceeded its attendance budget by 26,000 visitors. Attendance was budgeted at 189,000 visitors but reached 215,000 by the end of the year. In 2016, it completed its largest capital project called Kids Trek. It is a unique play area where kids can have a safe adventure that inspires a connection to nature and learn about the various animals on exhibit. This has changed the demographic at NW Trek and inspires its visitors to come back and also to become members. The new play area is such a great addition to the park. This brought in some challenges (good challenges) with parking as the average daily attendance saw more than 3000 visitors per day. A new passenger bus was purchased to assist with guest parking in some of the remote lots.

2016 brought a new attendance record for the facility. Attendance exceeded 250,000 visitors and revenue exceeded budget by \$650,000. Expenses were higher than budget by \$470,000 due to more visitors. The facility also had its inspection with the American Zoological Association (AZA) to earn its continued accreditation which is done every five (5) years. NW Trek has been accredited for over 35 years. There are 2500 USDA licensed exhibitors in the United States, and less than 10% are accredited. It was voted as one of the best by Showcase Magazine in 2015 and again in 2016. NW Trek has received a lot of recognition for the experience it provides its guest and for Kids Trek.

Su Dowie asked if NW Trek uses a lot of volunteers and Alan Varsik responded they do. They have hired a new part time volunteer coordinator to assist with volunteer recruitment. In recent years their numbers have declined. NW Trek knows there are opportunities to build partnerships and want to see a growth in this area.

Su Dowie also asked if there was opportunity to build in the park or if it was the right size and Alan stated it is a good size. Over the years NW Trek purchased land to add as a buffer as housing development get closer to the park. They want the tram experience to be as natural as possible for the visitors.

Noreen Plum asked if there were animals they would like to have as part of the collection and Alan Varsik responded having all North American species is different from other zoos. There are not a lot of facilities that exhibit the species that NW Trek has. It is a little more challenging to acquire some of the species. Most animals are received through rehab facilities where animals cannot be released into the wild. Moose orphans are acquired through U.S. Fish & Wildlife either Federal or State.

Top species missing or the Park would like to have would be wolverine, badger and North American river otter. NW Trek only has one wolverine and it will be a challenge to obtain another one. Woodland caribou may also be a challenge to acquire.

Dan Powell asked if bio-diversity was an issue with inbreeding among the various species. Alan stated they are concerned with some species with multi generations especially with some of the longer lived populations such as elk and bison.

Several animal species are collaboratively managed within AZA and are able to receive animal from other zoos. NW Trek has about 35 species that are exhibited throughout the park.

Some of the benefits 2016 has allowed NW Trek to do in 2017 are build a new storage building. Prior to having a new storage building, gift shop merchandise and animal food were stored in cargo containers around the facility. This was not ideal as the potential for mold and mildew could happen and could lead to loss of product. A new animal care office was added through a partnership with Point Defiance Zoo. As the Zoo was clearing the area for the Education Learning Center for SAMI, the modular building used by the Education Department had to be removed. The modular building was relocated to NW Trek and repurposed as new animal care offices. NW Trek now has a full time veterinarian assigned to the park. NW Trek used to share a veterinarian with the Zoo, on a part-time bases. A new bus was purchased to assist with visitor parking especially on days when guest would park further out in the remoted lots and also used to drive guest in for events at the Hellyer Center and make for a better experience in the park. Two (2) new vehicles were purchased and added to the fleet, a Prius and keeper truck and NW Trek was able to hire new staff.

Commissioner Baines asked how NW Trek can expand the experience with the ropes course to bring in more visitors. As part of NW Trek's marketing strategy they are targeting corporations to plan company meetings at the Hellyer Center and utilize the ropes course for team building for the organization. The ropes course was originally setup in 2012 with one course and over the years has expanded to four (4) different courses that range from entry level to challenging

In 2017, NW Trek will be working on several projects:

- Adding buildings for small mammals and carnivore species to be housed behind the scenes for breeding and retirements (aging species).
- Adding a new Commissary building for food preparation and food storage.
- New bear fence to enhance the exhibit
- Work in partnership with the NW Trek Foundation for a new bald eagle exhibit with construction slated to begin in 2017, and the exhibit to open in 2017.

NW Trek will focus efforts on the conservation engagement initiative through story-telling and changing its brand to emphasize awareness and inspire action from visitors and enhance cultural value.

In the future NW Trek will be challenged with the replacement or repair of trams which will be costly. They may look at using Bond dollars to change trams from propane fueled to electric.

FINANCIAL REPORT

Tara Dunford presented an overview of the 2016 year end financials for Metro Parks Tacoma. In 2016, sales tax came in \$90,000 higher than expected, property tax came in on target and programs were very popular in Recreation and camps did well at the centers.

Northwest Trek hit its attendance target on September 1st of last year and very well for the year. The Zoo also did very well. There were some professional services that were budgeted but was not spent and this helped on the expenditure side.

The Boathouse and Meadow Park Golf Course (MPGC) our two smaller Enterprise funds had more of a struggle in 2016. The salmon run was open for seven (7) weeks out of a normal twenty-six (26) weeks for the Boathouse and hurt revenue. MPGC was down on revenue but not by much. Forty (40) new golf carts were purchased for a cost of \$35,000 and impacted their operating budget. They had done more community programming, less paid rounds and more rounds played. In April, Chris Goodman mentioned subsidizing the community element that can be part of the General Fund.

Dan Powell had asked about facility lease rentals being down in 2016 and Tara responded the rentals were up but the lease with the Tacoma Outboard Association (TOA) ended. This provided around \$50,000 - \$60,000 per year for lease revenue. Su Dowie asked if the building was going to be torn-down and mentioned it is seating in a shoreline zone. It would be nice to know what work will is planned and have it be part of the permit.

Noreen Plum asked why the budget was so different from the actuals on the financial report and Tara Dunford responded that Metro Parks budgets conservatively and that budgets often include one-time projects or purchases that may not end up happening during the biennium. We are conservative when we budget, so the variance looks big, but for a government of our size, it is not abnormal.

MEETING SUMMARY AND FOLLOW-UP

The council would like an update on the Tacoma Outboard Association from Debbie Terwilliger.

The council would like an update on the status of the Chief Financial Officer position.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday June 13, 2017, held at Metro Parks Tacoma Headquarters building.

ADJOURNED

The meeting ended at 9:01 a.m.

Approved:

Aaron Blaisdell, Chair

Submitted by: Julie Wilfong