

2023 Annual Meeting Minutes

December 7, 2023

Sally Rubin convened the in-person Annual Meeting at 5:10PM. Board members present include Reed Auerbach, Jordan Glatt, Co-Chair, Carolyn Dempsey, Sue Kessel, Charlie Apt, Lisa Stevens, Lydia Chambers, Eric Inglis, Kate Barry, Clark Wagner, David Naidu, Co-Chair, David Robinson, Stacey Valentine. Advisory council present include Thelma Achenbach, Jeff Grayzel, and John Neale. Members in attendance included Elaine Hoffman, Neale Ullman, Lorraine Sing, Gene Cass, Joseph Harkins, and Meraj Islania. Staff included Sally Rubin, Sue Levine, Hazel England, Wade Kirby, Lynne Applebaum, Val Thorpe, Nancy Rago, Ginger Van Ryzin, Sarah Hunt, Sandra LaVigne, and Melanie Hertgen.

Sally Rubin initiated the meeting by providing an overview of GSWA's engagement in land preservation and advocacy in 2023.

- GSWA acquired a new property, a 2.5-acre easement in late 2022 in Bernards Twp.
- GSWA was reaccredited as a land trust.
- Advocacy efforts
 - Proposed Mt. Kemble development plan - GSWA's took a strong role leading for a better plan. The current plan could severely impact local water quality and the Conservation Management Area (CMA). No updates yet from the NJDEP.
 - Rolling Knolls superfund site in Chatham - GSWA has been actively advocating for remediation and restoration.
 - Save Drew Forest - GSWA continues to attend their meetings and actively advocating for its preservation.

Hazel England discussed the success of the education and programming in the past year offering more upstream and downstream programs and opportunities. Many hikes, paddles, virtual events were offered with many in attendance. The education team is focusing more on quality over quantity, with ~4000 students educated in 2023. Spanish learning through babble has been a success, as they were able to communicate better with Spanish speaking students. Lastly, the "Plants for Pollinators" program will expand the plant sale by 15% in 2024, and all webinar speakers are lined up. Hazel encouraged everyone to visit the CMA with the addition of new boardwalks, maps and trails.

Sue Levine reviewed the finance report, where she provided more detail in the board meeting.

Year End Fiscal Year 2023:

GSWA's fiscal year ended June 30, 2023, and although we had a slow start at the annual gala in 2022, we successfully offset the short fall thanks to robust individual support, particularly our Major Donors, a highly successful Native Pollinator Plant Program, and slightly better than budgeted support from a committed group of corporations and foundations.

We ended the year with operational revenues of \$1.1M. Our operational expenses were also just over \$1.1M resulting in breakeven results, which were in line with our annual budget.

Our Board Designed Reserve was up for the fiscal year ending 06/30/2023 by \$0.3M. The Finance Committee that oversees our investment portfolio have continued the trend to invest in funds that are assessed based on Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG), provided the funds track with market. The Committee has also reviewed funds that are more mission based with the same investment strategy and requirements as other holdings. The team identified a fund at the end of the fiscal year and after considerable discussion and review, we have added to the investment portfolio First Trust Water ETF; FTW focuses on water and water infrastructure. We now have roughly 10% invested in mission/ESG funds.

Actuals YTD v Budget and v Prior Year:

For Fiscal Year 2024 October year to date we are tracking on or ahead of budget and slightly ahead of the prior fiscal year. With revenue at \$458K and expenses at \$333K.

Sandra LaVigne provided updates on the latest downstream expansion, which involves water quality data collection through Dundee Dam. Sandra is employing kayaks for downstream sampling. Additionally, she highlighted the success of the "Art on the Passaic" initiative. Sandra then spoke about the proposed Mt. Kemble Ave. construction plan and our advocacy efforts, emphasizing the community's active engagement to express water quality-related concerns to the DEP. She also shared her participation in the Northeast Regional Waterkeeper conference, where she exchanged ideas and discussed projects with other waterkeeper organizations. Sandra reviewed the launch of the "Adopt a Catch Basin" program in collaboration with The Nature Conservancy. The initiative saw a successful launch with Green Acre Community Garden, distributing 30 kits, with follow-up events scheduled for the next few weeks. The discussion then shifted to the Loantaka Headwaters Project, identified as the most impaired stream. Sandra reported ongoing collaboration with interested stakeholders, including Morris County Parks and Morris Township Environmental Commission. The project is commencing with the development of a restoration plan to address issues related to bacteria and nutrient loading.

Lynne Applebaum reviewed the new grants she received from five new sources in 2023. These included John Ben Snow Trust, Morris/Sussex/Warren Workforce Development Board, Mimi Washington Starrett Foundation, the William L. Gibson Foundation and Blue Foundry Bank. Lynne concluded by asking if any more board/advisory council members would like to join the Thank-a-thon.

Wade Kirby encouraged the board to introduce any potential funders, such as Carolyn Dempsey connecting GSWA with Blue Foundry Bank.

Val Thorpe covered various aspects of program promotion, including the scheduling of three annual appeals: Earth Day in April, the Chair appeal in June, and the current Year-End appeal in November, in addition to participating in GivingTuesday. The GivingTuesday campaign involved sending four emails and utilizing social media efforts, resulting in approximately \$1000 in contributions. The theme for the year-end campaign centered on the connection between open space and our health, and a letter was mailed to ~1600 residents. Val spoke about the use of eNewsletters, press releases, and a plan to refresh acknowledgment letters. She also discussed the Gala in detail during the board meeting and concluded by noting that GSWA exceeded the net budget by \$11,000.

Nancy Rago reviewed her focus on member retention as a primary goal. Plans were outlined to surpass this goal by incorporating more member-only events and fundraisers in the future, emphasizing the importance of achieving growth. Nancy then talked about upcoming events and open spots, encouraging the Board and Advisory Council to actively promote these events among their friends and networks. Her social media growth statistics revealed a notable 44% increase in growth on LinkedIn. The engagement strategy was discussed, highlighting the emphasis on creating compelling content to enhance organic reach. Lastly, Nancy ended with a call to action, stressing the significance of algorithms in increasing content visibility on social media. Everyone was encouraged to follow, like, and share content to enhance visibility and engagement.

The meeting adjourned at 5:45PM.