



## Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes

**Date & time of meeting:** December 10, 2024, at 12:00 PM Central Time at ISA Offices in Atlanta, GA

**Board Members Attending:** Chair Patrick Franklin, Chair Elect Rachel Barker, Vice Chair David Gorden, Secretary/Treasurer Jacques Brunswick, Trustees: Lori Brockelbank, Beau Brodbeck, Asia Downtin, Dan Herms, Jon Hicks, Pete Smith, Sam VanMaanen

**Staff Attending:** President/CEO Paul Putman, Communications and Engagement Manager Jonathan Cain and Executive and Governance Coordinator Suzette Guzman-Brown

**Attending Virtually:** Trustee De'Etra Young, Grants and Development Manager Heath Hupke

**Absent:** None

Chair Franklin called the meeting to order at 12:05 PM. He acknowledged that 2024 has been a building year and thanked the Trustees and Staff for their contributions.

### Consent Agenda

- Trustee Brodbeck made a motion to approve the consent agenda with the following change:
  - Executive and Governance Meeting Minutes: The Utility Arborist Research Fund will continue to function.

Motion was seconded by Trustee VanMaanen. Motion carried.

- Treasurer's Report and Financials
  - Chair Brunswick presented the Treasurer's Report and Financials, which were reviewed and approved by the Board.

### President/CEO's Report – President/CEO Putman

Dr. Putman presented his report, which was discussed by the Board.

- New grant management software Foundant has been purchased and is being implemented.
- The clearing of the storage unit is ongoing. Some documents will need to be saved, but the hope is that the storage can be downsized to save cost.
- 2025 Fundraising: Dr. Putman also presented the Fundraising Prospect List for 2025, which is much more robust than in previous years at 70 prospects to date versus 20 in previous years. Efforts to cultivate new prospects are continuing, with focus on planned and corporate giving.
  - Focus for 2025 will be on planned and corporate giving
  - A new campaign has been launched targeting lapsed donors.
  - The planned giving campaign will be focused on the Sustainability (Bristlecone) Fund.
  - Vice Chair Gorden asked about the Heritage Oaks Society. Dr. Putman explained that they are a group of donors that have included TREE Fund in their estate plans.
  - Chemical Containers, Inc. has already pledged to become a Silver Sponsor at \$5,000.
  - Chair Franklin suggested having the Bartlett Purchasing Manager leverage their contacts to help connect TREE fund to helpful contacts at prospective companies.



- Dr. Putman will also be issuing a challenge campaign focusing on small gifts during the upcoming webinar.
- Dr. Putman also reviewed his travel for 2024. While in 2024 his goal was to travel 25% of the time, his actual travel time was 35%. He also identified 25 travel priorities for the coming year, although he acknowledged that he will not be able to attend all of them.
- Trustee Smith discussed a “cross pollination” opportunity for the American Society of Consulting Arborists, the Society of American Foresters, the American Society of Landscape Architects, and the Arbor Day Foundation event in Nebraska.
- Chair Elect Barker asked if Dr. Putman had had any contact with the Society of American Foresters. Dr. Putman said that he has had some contact.
- Trustee Brockelbank asked about travel to the Long Island Arboriculturist Association, noting that they were on Dr. Putman’s list of travel priorities. Dr. Putman noted that although they have not donated or fundraised for TREE Fund yet, there is high-income potential in the area.
- Dr. Putman presented a review of the past 15 years of TREE Fund’s partnership with the Utility Arborist Research Foundation.
  - Trustee Smith suggested that TREE Fund hold a panel explaining what UARF Funding means and its importance to TREE Fund.

Also discussed where changes to insurance with regards to for the Tour des Trees event and cybersecurity. It has been noted that TREE Fund’s general insurance policy will no longer include cyber security. Efforts are being made to improve our cybersecurity program with support from our local IT/cyber security contractor.

Secretary/Treasurer Brunswick posed a question regarding the server that TREE Fund uses. Dr. Putman pointed out that TREE Fund uses cloud servers administered by Microsoft, so that security is handled by Microsoft.

### **Budget 2025 Presentation and Vote – President/CEO Putman**

Dr. Putman presented a draft of the 2025 budget, which was reviewed and discussed by the Board.

- There is expected to be an increase in spending for personnel and technology primarily.
- 2025 is projected to require an increase in \$75,000 in unrestricted funds.
- Top Level Summary
  - The budget reports are going to be reformatted in 2025 to more closely reflect the actual breakdown of the budget and the way TREE Fund operates. This is due to the transition of accounting from The Charity CFO to Elizabeth Honold.
  - Secretary/Treasurer Brunswick requested that a column be added at the end of the budget sheet to show restricted versus unrestricted funds.
- Unrestricted Operating
  - Board Giving amount shows as \$0 because the total is currently included in the Tour des Trees amount.
  - A large change in sponsorship anticipated due to the large number of prospective sponsorships being pursued in 2025.
  - A goal for 2025 is to implement a unified investment strategy.
- Research and Education
  - Recommendations include:
    - Duling: Keeping grant at \$25,000 using unrestricted funds.
    - Safe Arborist Techniques Fund: Increasing grant amount from \$10,000 to \$15,000, since the endowment fund has over \$300,000.



- Tree & Soil Research Fund: The original plan was for the grant to be funded every odd year at \$10,000. No grant was awarded in 2023, and it was funded at \$10,000 in 2024. Recommendation was made to award a grant in 2025 since Barborinas is granted in even years and this would keep odd years balanced, as well as alleviate heavy grantmaking in even years.
- The Felix Endowment: This has grown to approximately \$800,000. Staff recommends giving the scholarship selection committee the option to award 2 – 5 Felix Scholarships next year if they have more than two applications that really rise to the top of their lists.
- The Barborinas Grant is not included because it is given out every other year.
- The Hyland Johns Grant is not included and per the Board's vote in May 2023, is being suspended until it is fully endowed.
- The John P. White Fund is not shown in the budget because it's listed as "Skiera Building Bridges Fund (incl White)". That grant program should be referred to as the "Bob Skiera Memorial Fund Building Bridges Initiative and John P. White Grant Program" to acknowledge both funds.

At this point a motion was made to accept the 2025 Budget with Research and Education recommendations as presented with the following correction:

- The Tree and Soil Research Grant will be given out in the amount of \$10,000, not \$5,000.

The motion was made by Secretary/Treasurer Brunswick and seconded by Trustee Herms. Motion was carried.

#### **Research and Education Report – Committee Chair Herms and Grants and Development Manager Heath Hupke**

Trustee Herms and Grants and Development Manager Hupke presented the Research and Education Committee Report, which was reviewed and discussed by the Board.

- An overview of the process was presented. Grants and Development Manager Hupke prescreens Letters of Intent (LOI). Projects which may qualify, are sent an application. Completed applications are compiled and organized, then presented to Ad Hoc Review Committee to review and score, for each grant. Each Ad Hoc Review Committee meets together to discuss and make a recommendation to fund. The Board of Trustees is not involved in the grant review process.
- Trustee Smith asked if Committee Chair Herms gives any feedback on applications. He does give feedback if asked by the Review Committee.
- Larry Hall Fund – Norm Hall (Larry's son) passed away last year, and TREE Fund is working with Illinois Arborist Association Leadership and his widow to build a new Norm Hall Fund. Money received has been put into the Larry Hall Fund for now but will be tracked separately and put into the new fund when approved. President/CEO Putman asked if the Board would approve creation of a new training fund with a \$50,000 endowment. Applications would be reviewed by IAA and not TREE Fund, but TREE Fund would charge a 1.5% fee for administration.
  - Secretary/Treasurer Brunswick asked if the fund would be better set up as a spend-down instead of an endowment.
  - Trustee Brodbeck pointed out that the Southern Chapter is getting a small number of scholarship applicants, and that this may be a way to get more. He also stated that the fee is small but would be a way for more chapters to get involved.
  - Chair Elect Barker asked if the goal is to host funds from other chapters.



- After receiving this feedback, Dr. Putman stated that the Fund will be discussed with the Audit and Finance Committee. The matter was tabled for further discussion.

### **Research Grants Vote**

Committee Chair Herms presented a slate of recommendations for Grant Funding. Committee Chair Herms recused himself from voting as a Trustee due to his employment with Davey Tree Experts, who sponsor the Davey Fund. A motion was made by Trustee Brodbeck to accept the Funding as presented. Motion was seconded by Vice Chair Gorden. Motion carried.

- Committee Chair Herms noted that there is an imbalance of workload owing to the amount of Grants and Scholarships from Spring to Fall, and that the number of scholarship applications has increased dramatically, and that reviewers should be given smaller workloads. Dr. Putman pointed out that Grants and Development Manager Hupke is working on qualifying questions to streamline the prescreen process, and that the new Grant Management Software is expected to further streamline the process.
- Trustee Smith asked how many applications a manageable number would be to be evaluated by each Reviewer. Committee Chair Herms put the number at twenty.

### **Elections of Trustees and Officers, and Confirmation of Committee Chair Appointments**

Board Chair Franklin recognized outgoing Trustees Beau Brodbeck, Jacques Brunswick, and Pete Smith, thanking them for their service.

Chair Franklin then presented the Board of Directors with the slate of Trustees, Officers, and Committee Chairs as follows:

- Trustee Renewals (two-year terms)
  - Rachel Barker
  - Patrick Franklin
  - Dan Herms
  - Sam VanMaanen
- New Trustees (two-year terms)
  - Anne Beard
  - Megan Fielding
  - Andrew Koeser
  - Kyle McCann
  - Cindy Schwab
- Slate of Officers (one-year terms):
  - Chair – Rachel Barker
  - Chair Elect – David Gorden
  - Vice Chair – Sam VanMaanen
  - Treasurer – Jon Hicks
  - Past Chair – Patrick Franklin
- Vote on Committee Chair Appointments (one-year terms):
  - Audit and Finance Committee – Jon Hicks
  - Communications Committee – Asia Downtin
  - Research and Education Committee – Dan Herms
  - Development Committee – Sam VanMaanen



- Liaison Committee – will be elected at the Liaisons’ meeting to take place on December 11
- External Appointments
  - ISA Component Council – Asia Dowtin (year 2 of 2-year term)

A motion was made to approve the slate of nominations by Trustee Brodbeck and was seconded by Chair Elect Barker. Motion carried.

### **Old Business**

- Davey Tree Community Education Fund – Chair Franklin
  - The goal is to launch the grant in the Spring of 2025, with two grants being awarded at \$5,000 each.
  - A list of eligibility requirements was included in Board materials. Trustee Herms stated that he felt that a better approach would be to give examples of projects that are eligible versus what is not.
- TCIA Foundation Update – President/CEO Putman
  - Dr. Putman gave an update status of TREE Fund relationship with the TCIA Foundation, noting that conversations are still taking place
- Tour des Trees Transition Process - Communications and Engagement Manager Cain
  - Communications and Engagement Manager Cain presented a recap of the 2024 Tour des Trees, and the plans for transition from Paul Wood as the contracted Tour Director, who is retiring in two years.
    - The Transition Committee will consist of approximately 12 members.
    - Secretary/Treasurer Brunswick recommended Thom Kraak as a volunteer representative.
- Past Strategic Plans and Conversation – President/CEO Putman
- Dr. Putman laid out an overview of past strategic goals in advance of the Board’s strategic planning conversation to take place December 11.

### **New Business**

- I. AI Applications – Trustee Herms
  - Trustee Herms led a discussion on the use of AI with a focus on its use in grant and scholarship applications, pointing out that expert scholars would be able to know immediately if it was being used to plagiarize letters of intent and applications.
- II. Accounting Update - President/CEO Putman
  - Dr. Putman gave an overview of the transition from the current accounting contractor, The Charity CFO, to Elizabeth Honold and the reasons for the transition, which were the cost of renewing The Charity CFO contract and that Elizabeth Honold would be willing to create budget reports that were more closely aligned with TREE Fund’s accounting practices, as well as assistance with Human Resource functions.
- III. Review of 2025 TREE Fund Calendar – Executive and Governance Coordinator Guzman-Brown
  - Executive and Governance Coordinator Guzman-Brown reviewed the calendar for 2025, focusing on dates for Board Meetings and the Tour des Trees.

### **2024 Committee Goals Report-Out - President/CEO Putman**



Committee Chairs reviewed 2024 goals that they had adopted during the May 2024 Board Meeting and progress made during 2024. Goals drafted by Board committees were presented as detailed below. Audit & Finance Committee will establish goals during its first 2025 meeting.

- Executive and Governance Committee Goals
  - Refine Review Process for President/CEO
  - Establish employee review process
  - Grants pass-through options
  - Implementation of capital funds
- Development Committee Goals
  - Increase in number of individual gifts/amounts of individual gifts
  - Increase in number of corporate gifts/sponsors/partners
  - Heritage Oaks Planned Giving Program: Connect with all listed participants, update webpage, create flyer/pamphlet. Identify high potential candidates
  - Explore capacity/potential for 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary endowment campaign
  - Continue exploration of deep partner collaborations
  - Explore expansion of funding mechanisms
- Communication Committee Goals
  - Intertwine fundraising campaigns and communication in more streamlined manner
  - Build out communication calendar
  - Use data from social media and email services to guide efforts
  - Find new avenues to promote webinars and completed research
  - Support website overhaul
- Research and Education Committee Goals
  - Implement Foundant Grant Management Software
  - Create video or video series describing application process
  - Launch new Davey Community Education Grant Program
  - Work with Illinois on Norm Hall and Larry Hall Scholarships
- Liaison Committee Goals
  - Financial goals from the committee as a whole – monetary goal and/or number of chapters giving
  - Provide liaisons with more information to help explain what TREE Fund does
  - Fill final domestic liaison spots and create document to help chapters recruit new liaisons
  - Strengthen liaisons' knowledge of their role

A motion was made by Chair Elect Barker to adjourn and was seconded by Trustee Brodbeck. Motion carried.

Meeting adjourned at 5:02 PM Central Time

Minutes prepared by SGB