



Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes

Tuesday May 20, 8:00 AM Central Time, Wright Service Corporation

Board Members Attending:

Rachel Barker-Chair
David Gorden-Chair Elect
Sam VanMaanen-Vice Chair
Jon Hicks-Treasurer
Patrick Franklin-Past Chair
Anne Beard-Trustee
Asia Dowtin-Trustee, PhD
Megan Fielding-Trustee
Kyle McCann-Trustee
Cindy Schwab-Trustee

Staff Attending:

Paul Putman-President and CEO, PhD
Heath Hupke-Grants and Development Manager

Board Members Attending Virtually:

Lori Brockelbank-Trustee
Dan Herms-Trustee, PhD
Andrew Koeser-Trustee, PhD
De'Etra Young-Trustee, PhD

Staff Members Attending Virtually:

Jonathan Cain-Communications and Engagement Manager
Suzette Guzman-Brown-Operations and Governance Coordinator

Absent:

None

The meeting was called to order at 8:03 AM Central Time by Board Chair Barker.

- Treasurer John Hicks, CFO of Wright Service Corp, welcomed attendees and provided a brief history and overview of the host facility.
- Dr. Putman, TREE Fund President and CEO, thanked Wright Service Corp for hosting and introduced the meeting agenda.
- Attendees introduced themselves, including new board members and online participants.

Consent Agenda

- Trustee Dowtin made a motion to approve the consent agenda with the following change:
 - Review of 2024 Motions and Votes: correct link under item "2023 Audit". Previously was "Executive Compensation Policy."

The motion was seconded by Chair Elect Gorden. With no objections or abstentions, carried.



Financial Report – Treasurer Hicks, Dr. Putman

- Treasurer Hicks presented 2024 Closing Financial Report, which was discussed by the Board.
 - Transitioned from Charity CFO to a new accountant/Finance Director, Elizabeth Honold, due to cost and service concerns. Overall results have been positive.
 - Improved financial reporting clarity by separating restricted vs. unrestricted funds.
 - Restricted Funds: ~\$525K in CDs, ~\$210K in money market accounts
 - Unrestricted Funds: ~\$309K (with ~\$226K needing reclassification)
 - Treasurer Hicks also highlighted the following concerns:
 - 2024 ended with a ~\$75K operational deficit.
 - 2025 budget projects a ~\$43K operational shortfall.
 - The focus going forward will be on increasing unrestricted fundraising.
- Dr. Putman gave an update of the 2024 Audit.
 - To date, there have been no red flags.
 - There is some small issue with the way the State Gamelands grant is reported, and Finance Director Honold is working with the auditors to address it.
 - 403(b) contributions from 2022–2023 were missed but are now corrected. Contributions have been fully restored.
- Dr Putman also gave an update on funds held by Chicago Community Trust (CCT).
 - Holds ~\$5.3M in TREE Fund endowments.
 - The distribution rate was reduced from 4.5% to 4.25%, impacting annual funding, which is budgeted at 5%.
 - TREE Fund leadership to meet with CCT to discuss implications and expectations between CCT and TREE Fund.
- Treasurer Hicks covered the financials for Q1 2025, which was discussed by the Board.
 - As of the end of 2024 TREE Fund has \$524,655 in restricted funds with Wheaton Bank, with all restricted funds going forward being put into the Wheaton account.
 - As of May, unrestricted funds total \$309,000, \$226,952 of which will be moved into Chicago Community Trust, as they were combined with unrestricted by The Charity CFO.
 - After the transfer and fees owed, the balance for unrestricted funds is \$67,469, which is below the minimum “comfort level” for operating.
 - A shortfall of about \$43,000 in operating is predicted, while the programmatic budget is expected to break even. He went on to explain and show via the PowerPoint graphics a breakdown of funding sources and expenses.
 - The first quarter of 2025 has been strong as far as income, but a lot of the expenses are expected to come in later in the year.
 - Negative numbers due to investment volatility have not made it into TREE Funds books as of yet, due to a lag in investment reporting.
 - The budget includes a \$192,000 transfer from Chicago Community Trust that was counted incorrectly as income.



President/CEO's Report – President/CEO Putman

Dr. Putman presented his report, which was discussed by the Board. He began by thanking Wright Tree Service for hosting the meeting, and congratulating Trustee Dowtin on achieving Tenure.

- 2025 Goals Dashboard
 - Under Staff Goals, Dr. Putman highlighted his goal of visiting all of Chapters and states. To date, he has visited around 40% of chapters.
 - The Development Committee is working on fostering deep relationships with some of the bigger companies in the industry. Dr. Putman and some of the board members have met with executives from Vermeer and Wright with positive results.
 - Charity Navigator rating improved to 3 out of 4 stars; the goal is 4 stars.
 - As a way to acknowledge TREE Fund's partners and further engage people, an electronic badge was created for sponsors to put on their websites and social media. It has been highly successful with current sponsors, and a similar badge may be created for Board members.
- Giving USA Report
 - Giving decreased by 2.1% in 2023 when adjusted for inflation nationally.
 - Most gifts to organizations are non-monetary, such as property, stock, etc. TREE Fund is working on mechanisms to accept more of those types of gifts.
 - In 2024, TREE Fund received \$222,000 from ISA Chapters. Individual gifts amounted to \$100,000.

During Dr. Putman's presentation, Member Brockelbank shared that long-time supporter and Tour des Trees rider Rex Weber had passed away.

- Board of Trustees Giving
 - TREE Fund has no requirement for Board of Trustees Giving.
 - In 2024, the Board gave 100%.
 - TREE Fund's recommendation is that the Board consider them as one of the top three philanthropic gifts of the year.
 - The preferred way to give is to set up a recurring gift.
 - Gifts from Board Members are tracked.
- Other items
 - Dr. Putman presented a slide showing chat comments from the webinars, which are overwhelmingly positive.
 - A Discussion revealed confusion between Candid (Guidestar) and Charity Navigator regarding program-specific impact reporting. TREE Fund chose to highlight webinars, suggesting a follow-up opportunity with attendees.
 - The Board suggested printing the slide to showcase TREE Fund's industry impact.
 - There was an inquiry regarding Beau Brodbeck's hosting arrangement. Dr. Putman confirmed there is no formal contract, and there was a suggestion to evaluate the sustainability of his continued involvement.
 - There was a discussion surrounding exploring ways to monetize the large webinar audience. Member Schwab recalled successful donation appeals during COVID-era webinars. A matching funds challenge was also discussed.



Research, Education, and Scholarships

- Spring 2025 Grant & Scholarship Awards
 - Grants and Development Manager Hupke presented his update on spring scholarship awards.
 - Scholarships Awarded: 10 total
 - Included were Larry Hall, Fran Ward, John Wright, Bonnie Appleton, Will Nutter, and five Felix Memorial Scholarships
 - Ohio Chapter Education Grant: \$5,000
 - Utility Arborist Research Fund: \$50,000
 - Davey Tree Education Grants (2): \$5,000 each
 - Chair Herms noted that in all cases, the recommendations made by the ad-hoc review committees were unanimous.

Member and Committee Chair Herms called for a motion to accept the slate of grant and scholarship awardees as presented. The motion was made by Member Beard and seconded by Past Chair Franklin. With no objections or abstentions, the motion carried.

Chair Barker announced that Member Herms is stepping down as Chair of the Education and Research Committee but has agreed to stay on for the remainder of the year to ensure a smooth transition. She also acknowledged him for his five years of service on the Board. Member

Strategic Planning I

Dr. Putman began reviewing the results of the Board survey and past strategic plans.

- Allocation of Resources
 - Getting proposals for grants and scholarships rated high in the survey.
 - Managing non-event fundraising activities rated low. This may be due to lack of clarity in the way the question was worded.
 - The lowest on the list was managing community engagement or education programs.
- Past Visions and Priorities, Mission Statement
 - There was a shift in the mission statement in 2023, when the Board voted to broaden the mission. This was met with pushback in that it left out the tree care industry and urban forestry sectors, and arboriculture specifically.
 - Dr. Putman noted that he has heard from people in the tree care industry that TREE Fund is not meeting their needs with respect to the industry as a whole and safety because we are not being explicit enough about it.

Strategic Planning II

Dr. Putman facilitated a break-out session with attendees forming 3 groups to address questions surrounding the future strategy of TREE Fund. The groups reported out later during the meeting.



Urban & Community Forestry Society (UCFS) Presentation

Dr. Putman introduced Executive Director Leslie Berkes, who gave a brief overview of the organization and mission.

- Executive Director Berkes discussed exploring a partnership with TREE Fund to manage the Urban Forest Foundation (UFF), a 501(c)(3) supporting urban forestry education and scholarships.
- There was a discussion on potential fund management, alignment with TREE Fund’s mission, and next steps for a formal agreement.

The Board Meeting then adjourned for photographs and lunch.

Strategic Planning Report-Out

Break-out Groups reported on their discussions.

- Group A reported strengths and weaknesses.
 - Strengths include recognition by long-term partners in the industry, as eye on long-term investment. Additionally, TREE Fund’s leadership has a willingness to grow.
 - Weaknesses included the need to grow awareness of TREE Fund outside of long-term partnerships, and the storytelling aspect and what TREE Fund money actually does. Another weakness is the lack of data and analytics.
 - A potential threat was identified as competing with local organizations for funding. TREE Fund also has the opportunity to work with other state and local chapters on joint funding opportunities.
- Group B reported on threats and opportunities.
 - The group identified the need for clear and concise messaging in fundraising, and the possibility of getting corporate sponsorship to support TREE Fund’s operating budget.
 - A threat that was identified was economic sustainability, particularly on the operational side. There is a need to diversify the funding group to cover funding needs.
- Group C reported on partnerships that should be prioritized and how to better align with TREE Fund’s vision and values.
 - Partnerships priorities included growing the relationship with Davey. Also mentioned were TCIA and ISA and helping them understand how TREE Fund’s efforts impact them. SavATree, SAF, and Arbor Day were also mentioned. Bicycle companies were also identified, such as Back Roads, as well as National Geographic. Also, chemical companies such as DuPont, Monsanto, and Bayer.
 - The group identified a need to come up with a simple, consistent message so that when speaking about TREE Fund people have a clear vision of what the mission and values are. Also, more use of “Tree Research and Education Endowment” Fund to help people understand what TREE Fund is and does.
 - Further discussion included working with local ISA Chapters to see what is working best and come up with a consistent fundraising model to introduce to other chapters.



Old Business

- Endowed Training Grant Funds
 - Norm Hall Memorial Fund for Education and Training
 - The Audit and Finance Committee recommended that the fund agreement be approved, with the adjustment to include a three-year trial run period.

A motion was made by Treasurer Hicks to accept the endowment and seconded by Member Schwab. With no objections or abstentions, the motion carried.

New Business

- Policies Review
 - Credit Card Policy

A motion was made by Chair Elect Gorden and seconded by Member Fielding to accept the updated Credit Card Policy as presented by Dr. Putman. With no objections or abstentions, the motion carried.

- Record Retention Policy

A motion to accept the updated Records Retention Policy as presented by Dr. Putman was made by Member Fielding and seconded by Vice Chair Van Maanen. With no objections or abstentions, the motion carried.

- Research and Education Committee Chair

A motion was made to accept the nomination of member Andrew Koeser to replace Member Herms and the Chair of the Research and Education Committee when he steps down at the end of the year was made by Past Chair Franklin and seconded by Chair Elect Gorden. With Member Koeser abstaining and no objections, the motion carried.

- Draft ISA Memorandum of Understanding – Feedback
 - ISA Component Council and Board Member Dowtin presented the MOU, and asked for feedback from the Board, noting that some changes had been made to the original MOU.
 - The goal is to have a finalized version by the end of June and then begin signing.
 - The deadline for feedback is June 30th. MOU is due to be signed by January 1st. After submitting feedback and once agreed to, TREE Fund will have the opportunity to sign the final MOU.
- Tour des Trees
 - Communications and Engagement Manager Cain gave an update on the 2026 Tour des Trees.
 - 2025 Tour: Scheduled for August in Michigan with strong rider and sponsor participation. To date, 49 riders and 12 virtual participants have registered.
 - 2026 Tour: Planned for North Carolina, which is the home of the outgoing Tour Director Wood. Dates approved for further planning: Sept 11–20 or Sept 26–Oct 3.



A motion was made to accept the 2026 Tour des Trees timeframes as presented by Member Fielding and seconded by Vice Chair Van Maanen. After some discussion regarding scheduling around the Trees and Utilities conference and with no objections or abstentions, the motion was approved.

- There was a discussion around allowing minors to ride in the Tour. Current language allows for minors 14 and up to participate, which is unusual for bike tours. The Board decided to change language to allow for participants 18 years old and up only. If a minor wants to participate, they must:
 - Be accompanied by a parent who is also riding.
 - Raise the full amount, the same as adult riders.
 - Be approved to participate by the President/CEO, Board Chair, and Tour Director

A motion was made to approve changes to the language of the Tour des Trees policy regarding minors by Chair Elect Gorden, and Member Schwab seconded. With no objections or abstentions, the motion passed.

- Dr. Putman explained that the current Tour Director, Paul Wood, announced that he will be retiring in three years. A committee was formed of previous riders to recruit and vet replacements. Thom Kraak was the only respondent, who had been working closely with Paul Wood for years. The committee was in favor of having Thom Kraak as a replacement for Paul Wood as Director.

A motion was made to approve Thom Kraak as The Tour des Trees Director beginning in 2027 contingent on contract negotiations by Chair Elect Gorden and seconded by Member Downtin. With no objections or abstentions, the motion passed.

- New and Revised Fund Agreements
 - Asplundh – Hyland Johns Research Grant
 - Dr. Putman gave a brief history of the grant. Asplundh has agreed to endow the fund at \$500,000 over the next 2 years.
 - The name of the grant will change to the Asplundh and Highland R. Johns Endowed Research Fund.
 - This may be the largest single gift received in the history of TREE Fund.

A motion was made to approve the fund agreement as presented by member Beard and seconded by Treasurer Hicks. With no objections or abstentions, the motion passed.

- New Research fund
 - Dr. Putman gave an overview of the agreement. A new partner would like to set up a \$500,000 endowed research fund to be announced in May, 2026. Dr. Putman requested a motion to approve the agreement, and that any minor changes (spelling, etc.) would not need approval by the Board.



A motion was made to accept the fund agreement, with minor changes allowable without Board approval by Vice Chair Van Maanen and seconded by Past Chair Franklin. With no objections or abstentions, the motion carried.

- Dr. Putman gave updates on the following fund agreements:
 - Utility Arborist Research Fund (UARF): The agreement is set to expire this year after 15 years, at which time the agreement states that UARF and the TREE Fund Board would decide if it should continue indefinitely or for another period of time. Dr. Putman will work with UARF on putting together a small committee consisting of the Chairs of the Utility Arborist Association and TREE Fund, himself and Dennis to draft a new agreement. Dr. Putman is hoping that a revised agreement will be available in September.
 - Urban and Community Forestry Society (UCFS): Dr. Putman has spoken to Lesle of UCFS, and they do not have a lot of money in the fund at this point. He is recommending lowering the activation amount to \$50,000. UCFS would be managing the scholarship application process, requesting funds from TREE Fund once a year for educational programming. The fee to TREE Fund would be 1.5%.

Member Beard made the motion to continue the conversation with UCFS, which was seconded by Member Schwab. With no objections or abstentions, the motion carried.

- Bonnie Appleton Scholarship: Dr. Putman gave a brief history and overview. There is no fund agreement for it, so Dr. Putman will be working with the ISA Mid-Atlantic Chapter to draft one. The hope is to have it ready before the September or December Board meeting.
- McClure: Dr. Putman gave a brief history and overview of the fund. The Board voted in 2023 to connect the fund to Hyland Johns. Dr Putman requested a vote to uncouple the funds and send the matter to the Research and Education committee for discussion on which fund to connect it to.

A motion was made to uncouple the McClure fund from the Hyland Johns fund by Treasurer Hicks, with Member Downtin seconding. With no objections or abstentions, the motion carried.

- Collier Fund: Dr. Putman gave a brief history of the fund, which was never fully endowed and has been idle. Dr. Putman has a plan to connect with the widow of the person who created the fund to discuss the next steps. He is hoping to give an update in the fall. This is the only fund that could be spent down potentially, but the language is very specific. It also has an advisory Board, which will need to be consulted.
- TCIA Foundation: Dr. Putman gave a brief history of TCIA and TREE Fund's relationship with the organization. Staff has been having conversations about how to improve and expand the relationship with TCIA.



2025-2025 Strategic Plan

Dr. Putman began by saying that part of the Board's duty is to guide the organization, and his and the staff's duty is to implement the vision created by the Board. The Board engaged in a discussion to review the organization's mission, vision, and values. Emphasis was placed on the importance of unrestricted funding and enhancing TREE Fund's educational outreach.

Simulated Cybersecurity Breach

- Dr. Putman introduced Brian Dehlinger, Cybersecurity and Incident Response Specialist with RD Cutting Edge Tech Solutions, who attended remotely.
- A cybersecurity tabletop exercise facilitated by Brian Dehlinger was conducted to evaluate the organization's preparation for potential cyber threats. The session included scenario-based discussions and response planning. Key takeaways included the need for updated protocols, staff training, and regular system audits.

At 4:55 PM Central Time, the General Session of the Board meeting adjourned. TREE Fund Staff were dismissed, and the Board of Directors convened the Executive Session.

At 5:09 PM Central, a motion was made by Treasurer Hicks to adjourn and was seconded by Vice Chair Van Maanen. With no objections or abstentions, the motion carried.

Minutes prepared by SGB
Approved 09.04.25