

**Friends of Sausal Creek  
Board of Directors Meeting  
Wednesday, April 14 2021, 7:00 p.m.  
via Zoom**

*Friends of Sausal Creek works to restore, maintain, and protect the Sausal Creek Watershed. We educate future generations, involve the community in local environmental stewardship, and collaborate with agencies and other nonprofits to have a positive impact on the local ecosystem.*

**Present** Richelle Jacobs, Beth Keer, Tim Vendlinski, Jeff Stephens, Carl Kohnert, John Cadiz (Student Board Member), Barry Stenger, Mark Rauzon (Board Member Emeritus), Rob Leidy, Eleanor Dunn, Morgan Capilla

**Absent** Sean Welch, Harry Schrauth (Board Member Emeritus), Steve Ritchie

**Staff Present** Anna Marie Schmidt (Executive Director), Jackie Van Der Hout (Community Education and Restoration Lead), Jay Cassianni (Restoration and Nursery Manager)

**Guest** Nelson Max

**Board Involvement**

**Water Conservation Showcase, Mark Rauzon-** Tuesday, April 20, 11:00 a.m. (Zoom)

**FOSC Community Talk: Reflecting on Stewardship, Yakuta Poonawalla** - Wednesday, April 21, 7:00 p.m. (Zoom).

**Earth Month** - Earth Day weekend (April 24-25); FOSC will sponsor workdays and events, continuing to follow the City's lead in celebrating throughout April.

**Remarks from the President, Jeff Stephens**

Jeff expressed appreciation to everyone for responding to the Conflict of Interest forms.

**Board Member/Staff Discussion: Follow-up from Board/Staff Anti-Oppression Retreat (Small Group Discussion)**

Anna Marie asked for board feedback on the retreat and its theme, Uprooting White Supremacy Culture. Using the metaphor of the rose, its thorn, and its bud, she asked what had resonated for people. Here are just a few of the responses:

For Barry, the rose was that the retreat offered a helpful framework; the thorn was how our mission might fit in with how FOSC needs to be responsible to our community, including the challenge of preservation of the watershed; and the bud was how the creek connects all communities in Oakland.

Carl had some difficulty understanding the connection between the divisiveness he's seen in the country and what he feels about the work of FOSC over the past fourteen years he's been on the board. He feels it's hard to look in the mirror-- especially when you're older. He likes the concept of the continuum of transformation, and thinks of FOSC as an affirming institution. Being transformational comes next. "Sometimes language is your worst enemy. We need humility going into our discussions. Linking to our 25th anniversary, what do we want to see FOSC become over the next five to ten years? We thought we'd been working hard to reach the Fruitvale. But we'll need to look at ourselves. Why aren't we more involved with that community?"

Mark returned to the rose analogy. "I'm seeing the roots. FOSC started in the upper watershed where the creek is accessible, open to public use. People there are privileged with environmental awareness, roaming around there as kids, unafraid of being hurt. This is who started the creek group. The thorn: below 580, the creek is not accessible; the community can't coalesce around the water. We've tried to make inroads there, we have reason to be proud of what we've done, but the space isn't there. Values about the creek can't be expressed in the same way. The bud: I'm thinking of the word *grace*. We need humility for sure. And grace. We've tried to engage diversity board-wise; we've been extremely successful with the youth. As a professor at Laney, I bring a lot of young people to Earth Day. So, let's give grace to efforts we have made in terms of outreach."

Jay agreed with Mark about the work we've done, but feels stuck as to how to help kids engage with the idea of protecting natural spaces when their cultural background doesn't allow them to come here. He feels overwhelmed with how big that issue is.

Tim advocated for a balance between critique and grace. "We're in this miasma together, seeking to fend off deep-seated prejudices. It's daunting. There is the danger of doing the opposite of what we wanted it to do, setting the bar too high."

Eleanor: "School groups are a success for us. We have diversity when kids are young, but lose it as they age. Is there a way to look at that?" She floated the idea of having the same class come back monthly all through the school year, and remembered that some kids from our

programs ended up in jobs that involved environmental work.

Jeff wondered about the possibility of having groups like *Brothers on the Rise* educating us about their priorities.

John reminded the board that mentors are needed throughout the process, that hands-on leadership is required. He wondered about the possibility of our mentoring individual students.

Jackie urged the board to lean into the difficult aspects of the workshop, reminding that self-reflection is crucial to this process. She queried: how does white supremacy manifest in FOSC? "It's not other peoples' fault they don't want to be a part of our organization. It's on us." She invited the board to reflect on how colonization, capitalism, and caring for the creek are embedded in our history. "What role did we play? We need to lean into the things that feel hard."

Anna Maria put up an Idea Board with the captions, *Hiring; Relationship to Community; Decision- Making; Other;* and invited board input. Tim enthusiastically endorsed Eleanor's and John's ideas. Rob wondered why we aren't attending meetings in the Lower Watershed, introducing ourselves to membership there.

### **Endowment and 25th Anniversary Campaign: Making the Case, Carl Kohnert**

Carl opened up the subject of celebrating our 25th anniversary, possibly looking through the lenses of younger folks. He spoke enthusiastically about this being a great opportunity for a capital campaign. He said he was humbled. Endowments are for privileged organizations! "Do we go out to the community, ask if they'd consider investing in our endowment in order to enhance this wonderful green belt we inherited from the First Peoples fifteen thousand years ago? In 2021 this green belt is still visible all the way through Oakland! We want to be stewards, keeping it for future generations. We want to build on what we've done, look into opportunities around us!" He expressed gratitude to Barry for his active board participation and his willingness to share his background and expertise in fundraising for non-profits. "In 2015 we were celebrating our 20th anniversary, and twenty years is a generation. We took that opportunity to begin the endowment. Looking ahead now, what do we want to see?"

Carl also announced he is putting out a survey next week for the board to respond to with the intention of building a Case Statement: *why solicit donations? what do we have that we're offering in return? what are you most proud about? what visions do you have?* He asked the board to give this survey our attention and honest feedback. "We learned

from Barry that you do all the front-end work, you identify 50%-60% of sources of the fundraising campaign and the donors; then you cast the net wider. We need to describe our excitement, passion, and love for this natural gift we all enjoy. For example, we could offer up ideas such as, *my grandchildren come to the creek, enjoy it, and plant a tree with me -- a tree they can visit all their lives!*

"I've watched our money grow...to \$170,000! Amazing! This is thanks largely to our board members. Now we want to reach beyond the board. Plus, we take 4% a year to supplement our working budget! Maybe we hire an intern we couldn't afford to hire before? This is one way we could give back to something we cherish and love."

### **Fundraising Updates: Mid-Year Appeal, Jeff Stephens**

Jeff offered some ideas for both the tone and content of our mid-year appeal letter: *we survived! we documented tree mortality in the watershed; we called out the leaking reservoir, forcing EBMUD to step in; we're on front lines; here's what you're getting when you donate to FOSC.* Jeff asked the board to contribute other ideas, and projected the letter would likely go out before the next board meeting in June.

### **Financial Report, Anna Marie Schmidt**

Anna Marie reviewed the Project Timeline and Cash Flow Chart with the board, and went over grant applications in progress and those on the horizon.

She informed the board that Jackie Van Der Hout, our Community Education and Restoration Lead, will be leaving us in May to go to Duke University for her Masters. And Jay will be returning to the National Park system for the summer, so he will again be with us only parttime through September. FOSC is currently looking to hire a community outreach and environmental justice coordinator, as well as a restoration and stewardship intern. In late summer we will be recruiting an education specialist and another education intern.

Jackie returned to the board meeting (after having left) to announce that this month's community talk, on Wednesday, April 21, will be given by Yakuta Poonawalla from the Golden Gate Park Conservancy, on new ways of engaging with people around the concept of stewardship.

### **Updates**

Following the City's lead, we are again promoting April as "Earth Month". We are promoting specific sites, encouraging volunteers to come out and work during any of our April events. While FOSC is still

not accepting large groups, site leaders are hosting small group workdays. RSVPs are required.

Mark announced that on April 20, he will be a part of a consortium participating in a water conservation showcase. This will include an ongoing suite of conversations highlighting watershed stewardship from "snowflake to Bay". He will talk about FOSC's stewardship, including our use of resources to focus on what the City and County can't do -- erosion control and native plant propagation, for example. Mark will give a history of some of FOSC's big ticket projects such as siltation and trout. He will show slides, and also address the challenges of creek access, dogs, equity, homelessness, and safety.

### **Minutes**

Carl moved to approve the minutes from February. Eleanor seconded the motion, and it was approved unanimously.

### **Staff Report Elaboration and Additional Board Input**

Beth wondered whether we might create a liaison with the Oakland Tech Ecology Club in search of possible youth leaders to connect with. Anna Maria thought perhaps Alexandra Fisk might be a candidate and confirmed there are several other youth groups we might tap as well.

Anna Marie asked for volunteers to join an Ad Hoc Personnel Crew to help with hiring. Beth and John volunteered.

Anna Marie announced that Mike Perlmutter has asked FOSC to weigh in on possible easements and land parcels the City has some funding to purchase. A group will be meeting to assess this.

She also said we are trying to highlight the founding community members of FOSC as a newsletter feature about our 25th anniversary, even as any actual celebration will be pushed to the end of the year. She floated the idea of an historic video created by *YouthBeat* -- costing somewhere between \$1500 and \$5000, as well as ongoing newsletter articles.

For our next meeting, she wondered about an outdoor meeting, in person, at the nursery. There were several enthusiastic Yeses in response to this suggestion.

**Adjournment** The meeting was adjourned at 8:35 p.m.

**Next board meeting:**

June 9, 2021, at 7:00 p.m., in person, (social distancing enforced as needed) at the nursery, weather permitting. If weather looks to be inclement, Anna Marie will send a Zoom link and this meeting will then revert to an on-screen format.

Ricky recommends you bring a folding chair for the nursery meeting. Benches and a few chairs are also available up there.