Friends of Sausal Creek
Board of Directors Meeting
Wednesday, May 20, 2026
St. Paul Lutheran Church
1658 Excelsior Ave., Oakland, CA 94602

Our mission is to conserve, restore, and enhance the Sausal Creek Watershed by educating future generations, involving the community in environmental stewardship, and collaborating with agencies and nonprofits. We support Oakland's biodiversity and are working toward a climate-resilient future.

Present Richelle Jacobs, Barry Stenger, Russ Huddleston, Rob Leidy, Kristy Brady, Tim Vendlinski, Dee Rosario, Renata Robles, Laila Robinson (Dale Bowyer Fellow)

Absent Eleanor Dunn, Oliver Hopkins (Student Board Member),

Staff Present Nicki Alexander (Executive Director), Ella Matsuda (Nursery Manager)

Guests Volunteers Alan Tong and Justin Tungate

- At 7:01 p.m. FOSC President Rob Leidy called the meeting to order.
- Rob acknowledged that this meeting was taking place on unceded Huichin (alternatively spelled Huchiun) Ohlone territory.

Committee Updates

Endowment, Barry Stenger

- On the recommendation of the Endowment Committee, in light of the present well-funded three month operating reserve moving into FY 26-27, Barry moved that the organization forego its normal 4% draw on the *For the Future Fund* for the coming fiscal year, and that those funds ($8,690) be left in the *FTFF* to garner interest. Kristy seconded the motion, which then passed unanimously.
- He reported that our endowment currently has $293,800, with $27,150 pledged or donated by those who received our specialized appeal letter.

Nursery, Ella Matsuda

- Ella reported a robust Earth Day volunteer turnout, which she attributed to the increased visibility of social media, word of mouth, and our newsletter. There are currently about 6,000 plants in the nursery's inventory, with a goal of 8,000 or 9,000 plants for the October plant sale (compared to 7,000 last year).
- She listed several of the many additions to the nursery (with thanks to the Schwemm grant and volunteer labor), such as new work benches, shade cloths, stools, picnic tables, and hoop houses. The pot washing station now has a tin roof, and there is a welcome kiosk at the entrance. There is a plan to build retaining walls for gravel and mulch, with Barry's help. We currently need a concrete soil bin. Tim offered to approach someone he knows about the possibility of his creating the bin for us. Rob expressed concern about a cement truck in the park, but Ella thought since this is for a repair as opposed to a new structure, it would

be acceptable to the City. Rob added that we need to find a solution to the junk pile.

Restoration, Russ Huddleston

- Russ shared that fences are going up, there is a possibility of an expansion to the native plant garden in Dimond Park, and a robust transformation is under way at the Wellington gateway to the park. A donor is considering giving up to $200,000 for trail upgrades.

Rainmakers, Barry Stenger

- Barry moved, "In light of our present bylaws that require the Board to appoint members of any Board committee (Art. V sec.1), I move that the Board approve the inclusion of Carl Kohnert to the Rainmaker Committee." Rob seconded the motion, which was then passed unanimously.
- Barry also said the appeal letters will likely be sent this week via U.S.P.S. since not everyone is on email these days.

30th Anniversary

- Ricky and Nicki updated the Board about having chosen a caterer for the Sunset Soirée in September, a birthday cake for the fair in July, and an opening ceremony for the fair.

Lower Watershed

- Ella reported that groups are coming to Wood Park to try to eliminate the French Broom.
- Barry Place is now officially renamed the Sausal Creek Preserve. A sign will soon be erected there.

Executive Report

- Tim commented enthusiastically on the amount and quality of the work FOSC is doing, as described by Nicki in the Executive Report.

In Memoriam

- Nicki reported that Karen Paulsell, our decades-long committed and deeply engaged volunteer, died last weekend. For most of FOSC's existence, Karen worked extensively on volunteer projects, including mapping the watershed, overseeing the printing of those maps, developing a plant list, and so very much more. There will be a tribute to her in the next newsletter and a memorial event in June.

February Minutes

- Barry pointed out that since Emeritus members aren't expected to attend meetings, their absence from Board meetings should not be noted in the Minutes. With the inclusion of that adjustment Rob moved to approve the February minutes, and Russ seconded the motion. This motion was then unanimously approved.

Finance, Nicki Alexander

Cash Savings Account Update

- Nicki announced that our new cash savings account has accrued $1,700 in interest since February.
- She and Barry are working on updating the balance sheet.

Budget vs. Actual Comparison

- Nicki reported that we are in a strong financial position. Government grants are on track and expenses are within a 70% range. We are looking closely at merchant charges and hope to reduce the amount spent at the plant sale for merchant fees.

Administration

Master Calendar - Upcoming Events

- A sign-up sheet for the 30th anniversary events will be passed around at the retreat on June 13. Also at the retreat we will be tie-dyeing t-shirts for everyone to wear to the July 25th fair. This way FOSC personnel will be recognizable in the crowd for questions or comments by attendees.

EBMUD Tour at the Dimond Park Demonstration Garden,

- Michael Thilgen will lead this tour on June 5th. Laila, Nicki, and Kristy plan to attend.

Plant Sale

- Nicki asked the Board to consider whether we should re-up for a band at this year's plant sale. The Board decided to table this decision until the next meeting.

FOSC Name Change

- Nicki reintroduced the idea of considering a name change for FOSC. Nicki distributed a sheet listing purpose, background information, the case for a name change, various considerations, a proposed timeline, preliminary name ideas, and questions for the Board to consider. The timing of this decision is relevant now because:
    - evidence is accumulating which indicates we might be contenders for grants from funders who would otherwise disregard FOSC, making the assumption a "Friends of" organization lacks the heft of competing applicants;
    - the public frequently mistakes Staff for volunteers, which the "friends" name tends to imply. Staff finds this quite demoralizing. They rightly see themselves as professionals in their jobs at FOSC.
- Renata would like to gather input from organizations that have gone through a name change, including unforeseen consequences. She will talk with someone on the staff at *All Hands* to pose those questions.
    - Barry said we should also consult the community. He wonders whether approval this year with a 2027 launch might be too short a time frame. Kristy wondered what a reasonable timeline might be.

    - In the ensuing discussion Tim suggested instead of consulting the general community that we create a focus group among our volunteers.
    - He also wondered about the possibility of becoming an accredited land trust.
    - Tim went on to offer up the names of a few other organizations to confer with who have changed their names.
    - Barry added that we would have to register as a "DBA" (Doing Business As).
- Nicki felt there would be a way to incorporate Friends of Sausal Creek within the new name. The decision was made to take this issue up at the retreat in June.

Fundraising and Budget

Q4 Grant Horizon

- Nicki reviewed grants on the horizon.
- She appreciated Fern Ravine volunteer Caitlin Boise who nominated FOSC for a $5000 EcoGuardian award through her employer, Resource Environmental Solutions.
- Tim proposed reenvisioning the El Centro crossing, giving details as to why that would be an excellent idea.
- Nicki said that right now we likely only have capacity for two state grants at a time. Renata suggested that *Salesforce* could help us with that. Barry said we need to get to a point where we're doing what we want to do, not what others want us to do. Nicki replied that she feels we are already doing just that.
- Dee reminded the Board that we'll need permits for some of our current projects, including some trail projects he has in mind, yet to be officially proposed.

FY27 Budget

- The proposed FY27 Budget was approved by the Board pending its decision in a closed session dealing with Staff raises.

Ella's Appreciation

- Ella thanked everyone for their support during her illness. The Board gave her an enthusiastic round of applause and appreciation.

Adjournment

- The meeting ended at 8:18 p.m. followed by a semi-closed session, which then was followed by a closed session.
- Our next Board meeting will be held at 7:00 p.m. on Wednesday, August 19, 2026, at St. Paul Lutheran Church, 1658 Excelsior Avenue, Oakland, CA 94602. (Enter on Woodruff.)