

**Friends of Sausal Creek
Board of Directors Meeting
Wednesday, June 18, 2025, 7:00 p.m.
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, Eleanor Dunn, Barry Stenger, Russ Huddleston, Rob Leidy, Kristy Brady, Maria Katticaran, Mark Rauzon (Board Member Emeritus)

Absent Sean Welch, Harry Schrauth (Board Member Emeritus), Tim Vendlinski, Vick Argarwal (Student Board Member), Laila Robinson (Student Board Member)

Staff Present Nicki Alexander (Executive Director), Kate Berlin (Outgoing Interim Executive Director)

Guests Renata Robles, invited guest

Remarks from the President, Rob Leidy

- On behalf of himself and the rest of the Board, Rob heartily welcomed Nicki Alexander back to FOSC.
- Guest Renata Robles introduced herself to the Board, and Board members to her. Renata was a FOSC intern with Nursery Manager Megan Hess in the summer of 2012. In 2024 she attended Wood Park meetings and gave feedback on the engagement process. For the past year-and-a-half she has worked with WRA as a public access planner, working on restoration, and on bringing people outdoors.
- Rob acknowledged that this meeting was taking place on unceded Huichin (alternatively spelled Huchiun) Ohlone territory.

Committee and Other Related Updates

Restoration

- Russ updated the Board on the following:
 - The Restoration Committee ("The RC") is looking at the possibility of doing limited plantings where trees have been removed by CalFire.
 - The RC will need to deal with some acacia resprouting.
 - The RC will work with the City to set up a MOA about these tree removal areas.
 - Rob and Kate Berlin are engaging with the City on permitting for the work at Fern Ravine.
 - The RC would like to do a long-term forestry inventory.
 - The RC is looking at potentially partnering with East Bay Parks and incorporating some of the work they are doing on a redwood forest management plan. We will likely reach out to the City's arborist consultant.

- Nicki reported that she and Ella Matsuda met with the City's Trees Services. They are onboarding an open space person in the parks. At this point it appears that their increased funding will go for goats (mechanical fire prevention). Their plan is to continue removing trees along Skyline and Joaquin Miller Road if CalFire grant requirements are being met. They are uncertain how much longer CalFire crews will be in the parks because fire season is starting.
- On Monday FOSC will meet with a forester who does forest management plans and inventory projects. We will continue to talk with the City and Jacob about pursuing a larger forest management plan and think about next steps and funding. Kate reported that prairie restoration near the nursery tree removal area is on hold because currently there is no funding available.

Permit Update

- City Council will be voting on some amendments to permits at their next meeting in July. On that agenda is a discussion about a process for the City administrators to waive or reduce fees and to waive or expedite review.
- Rob gave a shout out to Kristen Hathaway, the Assistant Director of Public Works, who got her boss to bring this amendment to the City Council. We feel confident the City Council will support it.

Nursery and Plant Sale

- Our 20th annual plant sale will take place on Saturday, October 25, from 10:00 to 3:00, followed by an online sale with plant pickup and a volunteer appreciation potluck on Saturday, November 15. There is an inventory of about 6000 plants right now.
- Ella is leaving town for her three-week vacation, so our intern Robert Williamson will be running the nursery workdays in her absence.

Lower Watershed and Education Committees

- Nicki reported that we are trying to start both a Lower Watershed Committee and an Education Committee. Elena Stenger, who is interested in heading both of them, will begin recruitment for the Lower Watershed Committee at the Barry Place Potluck on Saturday.
- There was a discussion about the interrelationship between the Restoration and the Lower Watershed committees. Dividing the Watershed committees in two - Upper Watershed Restoration and Lower Watershed Restoration -- was discussed.

30th Anniversary

- Nicki sought to recruit a committee to plan a 30th anniversary celebration slated for Fall, 2026. The tentative plan is to have quarterly or monthly rolling events throughout the year. Such events have not yet been budgeted. Rob suggested we seek sponsorships.

Hiring Committee

- Nicki reported that the hiring committee for a Restoration Ecologist should reach a decision this week and that the new hire will be on board by mid-July.

Executive Report - Comments and Questions, Kate Berlin

- Kate enthusiastically announced that Elena, in her second year with FOSC, has hit her groove. With her help we reached about 1900 students through our education program this school year. We changed some of the lessons to align with OUSD learning standards. Kristy suggested we get brief statements from some of the teachers to use in future appeals. Mark built on this idea, suggesting we promote the fact that we're meeting state standards.
- Spring Stream Team is over and Team Oakland will start next week.

Finances

Budget/Actual Comparison

- Kate reported that things are looking good for the period ending in April. Realistically, we'll get to about \$275,000 in grants.
- Individual contributions are doing well -- we are at about \$160,000 for the year. Program services are also looking good.

Project Timeline and Cash Flow

- Kate announced that we have received the \$40,000 grant from the Rose Foundation for work at Wood Park, Barry Place, and Austin Square. This funding will support native revegetation, water quality improvement measures, develop long-term community stewardship, and implement the community-designed plans at Barry Place developed in 2024.

2026 FYE Budget Proposal and Board Discussion

- Income Projections - As per Kate, the grants section includes only what we have secured. Individual contributions are also conservative at \$150,000, plus \$6000 in employer match. The program service shows some small growth. She estimates that plant sale revenue will likely be in line with last year's. FOSC's gross profit is projected to be \$603,330.
- Expenses -The cost of supplies, especially for field and nursery, are considerably higher than last year because they include items that are part of grants we've received and therefore will be offset by grant income.
- Staffing Changes - The proposal is to move away from an intern model, since it doesn't offer enough support for our field staff.
- Communications Associate - We hired a parttime Communications Associate, Eliana Thompson. We are looking to bring her on for thirty hours a week, where she would support communications and outreach, as well as Elena with field trips and Team Oakland. She has outdoor education experience.
- Dividing Development and E.D. Roles - The plan is to tease apart the development role from the Executive Director's role. The ED's role historically encompassed both high-level organizational leadership and intensive day-to-day development and administrative work. This breadth of responsibilities created an unsustainable workload that led to ED burnout, therefore limiting FOSC's ability to excel in all critical areas simultaneously. The proposed solution is to distribute responsibilities to enable both strategic excellence and development specialization, allowing each role to have deeper

focus. The staff is proposing that Kate move into the development role, handling grants, reporting, invoicing, fundraising campaigns, and donor stewardship.

Board Discussion on Budget

- There was excitement about this new structure, which has been a long-term goal for the Board.
- A concern was raised about the size of the budget increase. The salary increase is because we're adding the new Restoration Ecologist, projecting Eliana to full time in the upcoming fiscal year, and building in 4% annual increases for all staff.
- Barry shared concerns about whether we are getting too big, and if this growth is sustainable given the economic climate and increased competition for funding. It was argued that having a dedicated professional staff that stays long term is more efficient and reduces costs associated with turnover and the learning curve for new hires. FOSC is doing more important work and growing to meet that demand. The new structure is designed to better support the work we are already doing, not adding new programs.
- The development strategy will be to seek funding for our current operations and go after larger, more sustainable grants which in turn would streamline reporting.
- Rob brought up that we must agree to these positions and to vote on the budget tonight and asked if the Board needed more time.
- Rob suggested we vote on the proposed budget with the caveat that in three months we revisit it after seeing how things are working. (The Budget Proposal is attached to these Minutes.) This proposed budget also includes increases in honoraria, various office, legal/accounting, and contract services, and miscellaneous expenditures. Eleanor moved to accept the budget proposal for 2026 with the caveat that we review it in three months and to make any adjustments as needed. Ricky seconded the motion, which was then passed unanimously.

Fundraising

Q2 Grant Horizon, Kate Berlin

- Kate said the redwood log benches were delivered today.
- The Wood Park project is stuck because the City needs to guide implementation, but they don't have the capacity.
- We are looking for a home for the forest inventory and a long-term forest management plan.

Mid-Year Appeal

- Kate reported our stretch goal was \$20,000. So far, we have raised \$15,667, which is 78% of Kate's specified goal. The appeal closes on July 31. She said she will send out another set of emails and social media blasts.

Administration

Retreat

- Rob announced that our Staff/Board Retreat will take place on Saturday, July 26, from 10:00 to 3:00 at the nursery. The schedule is to work there for half the day, and then for the second half of the day to talk about our 30th anniversary.

Leave Policy

- Nicki noticed some contradictions in the paid time-off (PTO) policy. In *Gusto*, staff accrue PTO hourly, but the handbook states they are given a lump sum (80 or 120 hours per year). She proposed the handbook be corrected to reflect the equivalent of two weeks (80 hours) PTO for staff who may work different full-time schedules. A discussion ensued about varying hours and the accrual of PTO. The Board agreed with Nicki that the handbook must reflect equivalency.

Minutes

- Barry pointed out the minutes from the April meeting lacked specificity about the budget shifts. He suggested an Amendment to the minutes that would include a detailed list. Also, Tim Vendlinski erroneously was listed as absent, and the minutes should be amended to indicate that he was present. Barry moved that those minutes be approved with those Amendments. Eleanor seconded the motion, which was then approved unanimously.

Adjournment

- The meeting adjourned at 8:23 p.m.
- A closed session followed this meeting.
- The next meeting will be held at 7:00 p.m. on Wednesday, **August 20**, 2025, at St. Paul Lutheran Church, 1658 Excelsior Avenue (at Woodruff), Oakland, CA 94602.