

**Friends of Sausal Creek
Board of Directors Meeting
Wednesday, August 20, 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, Renata Robles, Laila Robinson (Outgoing Student Board Member), Tim Vendlinski via phone, Sean Welch

Absent Harry Schrauth (Board Member Emeritus), Maria Katticaran, Mark Rauzon (Board Member Emeritus), Vick Argarwal (Outgoing Student Board Member)

Staff Present Nicki Alexander (Executive Director), Noé Romo Loera (Restoration Manager)

Remarks from Board President, Rob Leidy and E.D., Nicki Alexander

- At 7:04 pm, FOSC Board President, Rob Leidy, called the meeting to order.
- Rob acknowledged that this meeting was taking place on unceded Huichin (alternatively spelled Huchiun) Ohlone territory.
- Nicki heartily welcomed Noé Romo Loera to FOSC as our new Restoration Manager. Noé graduated from UC Santa Cruz in 2020 and has a background in habitat restoration, including forest and grassland restoration, ecological monitoring, trail maintenance, and public engagement.

Committee Updates

- Restoration
 - Russ Huddleston, chair of the Restoration Committee, brought the Board up to date on various projects in the works, including permits for Fern Ravine, cost estimates for a forestry plan proposal, signs for restoration sites (involving Noé's reviewing their translation into Spanish), and volunteer Karen Paulsell's mapping of the watershed.
 - Tim informed the Board that a new population of Tiburon buckwheat has been discovered at the intersection of Skyline and Joaquin Miller Road, which includes approximately 400 plants.

- This has been submitted to the California Natural Diversity database.
- Lower Watershed and Education Committees
 - Kristy reported that this committee will be meeting the first week in September. Also, there is a workday at Barry Place on August 30.
- 30th Anniversary Committee
 - Nicki reported that the first meeting of this committee will take place next Wednesday at Ricky's house.
- Rainmaker Committee
 - This committee will meet in October to strategize the End-of-Year appeal.

Executive Report

- Nicki reported that she, Kate, and Rob will meet on Friday with Mayor Barbara Lee to discuss funding. Additionally, she updated the Board about the status of our creek protection permit, which had been returned to us as incomplete. Kristen Hathaway and Terry Sears, our usual City representative contacts, are out of the office until the end of August. At Eleanor's suggestion, Kate will call Harry Strauth for advice.
 - A fact sheet detailing the labyrinth we've gone through for this permit has been created and distributed to the mayor's chief of staff ahead of the Friday meeting.

Finances, Nicki Alexander

- Budget/Actual Comparison
 - Nicki reported that the confusion regarding grant reimbursements this fiscal year, but applied to last year, have been corrected. Our net income is positive.
 - Telecommunication: We are transferring to *Google Voice*, which should lower overall cost. We will need to keep one Verizon line for security platforms that do not accept *Google Voice* numbers.
 - She also reviewed Workers' Comp for which we have a \$7000 credit, Payroll Taxes, which were lower than anticipated, as well as the budget for hospitality, which she suggests raising due to inflation.
 - She and Kate will sort through the FY26 budget and present a revised version at the October meeting.
 - There was a discussion about tracking our grant success rate for future budgeting purposes. Kate has created a new grant dashboard for this.

- Project Timeline and Cash Flow
 - Our current grants and contracts are looking good, as is our total projected income. Our core expenses will be going up primarily now that Noé and Eliana are on board.
 - We've increased withholding for the operating reserve because our operating costs are growing, but our financial health is looking good for the next quarter and beyond. Barry wondered whether we should have more operating expenses available. He strongly recommended that Kate keep track of her time preparing each grant proposal, so we might ascertain whether her efforts make fiscal sense given the size of the grant.

Fundraising

- Q3/Q4 Grant Horizon
 - Nicki reviewed the grant horizon with the Board. As per Russ, we are looking into funding from Prop 68 for a forest management plan for the entire watershed. We expect a proposal from Jacob Harrower, a forester, in about two weeks. FOSC's role would be to contract with him. The grant would fund his work as well as our staff time for community engagement around the plan. Among other things, this plan would include CEQA and permitting to make future projects "shovel ready."
 - Tim wondered what exactly this forester has in mind. Nicki said EBRPD has contracted with him for an overall report of the health of the forested areas.
- New Grant Analysis Dashboard
 - Kate has put together a grant management dashboard to track grants over time -- their prospects, those awarded, and those denied. Barry urged that we keep track of which grants support which staff person's time. Additionally, as for the environmental education program, he urged that we also keep track of what the grants do and do not cover. Nicki said Kate and Eliana are working to improve that process.
 - Sean suggested we consider switching to a CRM platform such as *Instrumental*, which focuses specifically on helping non-profits find and manage grants. Barry reminded folks that we currently use *Salesforce*, but not to its full potential. It may be that the issue is a lack of staff training and time to maximize its use. The Board discussed having Kate, now in her new role, invest time in training or exploring options, with the goal of condensing the platforms we use and improving our data tracking for donors, volunteers, and grants. Nicki said she and Kate

will explore whether to maximize *Salesforce*, potentially with an add-on, before switching platforms.

- Renata mentioned a program that would take a lot of the legwork out of finding grants. She said she loves the tedium intrinsic to these kinds of tasks and volunteered to be an active participant in the process.

Education Program Strategy

- Nicki reported that Kate created a separate strategy sheet for education programming to show which programs are supported by which grants, and to identify any funding gaps.

Administration

- Plant Sale and Oktoberfest
 - Nicki asked for ideas about sponsorship for the plant sale on October 25 and said sign-up sheets will be sent around soon.
 - Oktoberfest will take place October 4-5th. Volunteers were sought.
- Discussion and Vote on FOSC Video Project
 - A lengthy discussion transpired about the pros and cons of spending \$3000 for a 3 - 5 minute video about FOSC. The Board felt perhaps shorter clips (5 - 20 seconds each) could be useful, and turned that decision over to the 30th Anniversary Committee for consideration.
 - Barry reminded the Board that there is no allocation for that expense in the current budget.
- Statement of Support for Immigrant Communities
 - Nicki proposed that we think about creating a statement in support of immigrant communities. Rob pointed out there is a fine line between support and political statements. He advocated we focus on the people in the watershed and suggested this might be a good topic for the lower watershed committee.
 - Latino Conservation Week is coming up, and our bioblitz with *El Timpano* is scheduled for September 13. A concern was expressed about singling out one issue when so many other issues are also pressing. Russ volunteered to be in touch with another organization which grappled with this question to help inform us. There was consensus for creating a general diversity statement for the website representing the organization's values; we would then make more specific targeted posts on social media, to highlight our support for the broader community.

- Tim urged that ours be an action-oriented statement. He made the point that we're about our day-to-day outreach to various communities and the way they invest in helping restore the watershed.
- Staff Benefits
 - Nicki presented an in-depth review of the current health plan for staff, pointing out that there are no tax benefits from *Covered California*, and several staff are paying high premiums. She advocated that in the new year the Board consider switching to *Take Command*, the *Gusto* group plan where we would pay up to 75% of the premium. She then gave details about that plan.
 - Sean urged us to consider this change very carefully because once made, there is no backtracking. Nicki offered another option – that we raise annually the amount we give staff for insurance. She urged the Board to think about all the options.
 - Nicki also asked the Board to consider additional benefits for Eliana, who is the only staff person working fewer than 40 hours per week. She suggested a few options for the Board to think about.

Commitments and Minutes Review

- Barry had pointed out that the public should not be privy to information about staff salaries. Since at times those are the subject of discussion at Board meetings, Nicki proposed that there be two sets of minutes, public and internal. The Board was in agreement with this solution.
- Eleanor moved to approve the public minutes from the June meeting. Kristy seconded the motion, which was then passed unanimously.

Adjournment

- The meeting adjourned at 8:44 p.m.
- A closed session followed this meeting to discuss health insurance and benefits.
- The next meeting will be held at 7:00 p.m. on Wednesday, **October 15, 2025**, at St. Paul Lutheran Church, 1658 Excelsior Avenue (at Woodruff), Oakland, CA 94602.