

REAL CHRISTMAS TREE BOARD
IN-PERSON BOARD MEETING
February 15, 2024

Garden ABC – Sheraton Airport
Portland, Oregon

Welcome and Roll Call: The meeting was called to order at 8:00 a.m. Pacific time by Chairman, Derek Ahl.

Board Members in Attendance: Chuck Berry, Bob Schaefer, Renee Beutell, Derek Ahl, Mike Jones, Jane Neubauer, Gary Westlake, Charles Fowler, Larry Downey, Mark Schmidlin, JoLynn Stroda, and Chris Aldrich

USDA Representative in Attendance: Vickie Carpenter

Staff in Attendance: Marsha Gray, Cyndi Knudson, and Jenny Tomaszewski (via Zoom)

Guests in Attendance: Barry Campbell, Jim Rockis, and Beth Bossio

Board Orientation - Vickie Carpenter, USDA

Vickie Carpenter, a USDA representative, led a Board orientation, including an overview of the Act, Order, and AMS guidelines.

- a. **Sign Lobbying Certification and Conflict of Interest Statements:** Marsha Gray provided the Board with an overview of what is included within the two documents. Board members and staff signed Disclosure/Conflict of Interest Statements and Certification Regarding Lobbying Statements.
- b. **Review of CTPB budget, By-Laws, Policies and procedures, and Board Expectations:** Marsha Gray provided the Board with an overview of the RCTB policies and procedures, by-laws, Board expectations, guidelines, and an overview of the RCTB financials.

The Board took a break at 9:36 a.m. and reconvened at 9:50 a.m.

Board members introduced themselves and shared a little about their Christmas tree involvement.

Agenda:

Marsha Gray requested the addition of B under the Governance Committee - "Policy Book Update."

Gray also asked to add B under the Compliance Committee - "letter review."

It was **MOVED** by Chuck Berry and **SECONDED** by Charles Fowler to approve the agenda as corrected.

MOTION APPROVED.

Meeting Minutes:

It was **MOVED** by Jane Neubauer and **SECONDED** by Mark Schmidlin to approve the January 18, 2024, Board meeting minutes as presented. **MOTION APPROVED.**

Nominations Committee and Election of Officers:

Derek Ahl stated that the Nominations Committee of Charles Fowler, Gary Westlake, and Derek Ahl met and is recommending the following slate of officers for 2024: Chairman - Derek Ahl, Vice-Chairman - Chuck Berry, Treasurer - Bob Schaefer, and Secretary - Mike Jones.

Chairperson: The Nomination Committee recommended Derek Ahl. Vickie Carpenter asked Derek Ahl if he would accept this nomination, and Ahl accepted. Carpenter asked for any additional nominations.

There were none.

It was **MOVED** by Bob Schaefer and **SECONDED** by Charles Fowler to close nominations and cast a unanimous ballot for Derek Ahl for the Chairman position. **MOTION APPROVED.**

Vice Chairperson: The Nomination Committee recommended Chuck Berry. Vickie Carpenter asked Chuck Berry if he would accept this nomination, and Berry accepted. Carpenter asked for any additional nominations. There were none.

It was **MOVED** by Renee Beutell and **SECONDED** by Bob Schaefer to close nominations and cast a unanimous ballot for Chuck Berry for the Vice-Chairman position. **MOTION APPROVED.**

Treasurer: The Nomination Committee recommended Bob Schaefer. Vickie Carpenter asked Bob Schaefer if he would accept this nomination, and Schaefer accepted. Carpenter asked for any additional nominations. There were none.

It was **MOVED** by JoLynn Stroda and **SECONDED** by Chuck Berry to close nominations and cast a unanimous ballot for Bob Schaefer for the Treasurer position. **MOTION APPROVED.**

Secretary: The Nomination Committee recommended Mike Jones. Vickie Carpenter asked Mike Jones if he would accept this nomination, and Jones accepted. Carpenter asked for any additional nominations. There were none.

It was **MOVED** by Bob Schaefer and **SECONDED** by JoLynn Stroda to close nominations and cast a unanimous ballot for Mike Jones for the Secretary position. **MOTION APPROVED.**

Appointment of Committee Chairs – Chairman, Derek recommended the following appointments:

- a. **Compliance Committee:** Chair, Renee Beutell
- b. **Governance Committee:** Chair, Charles Fowler
- c. **Promotion Committee:** Chair, Jane Neubauer; Vice-Chair, Chuck Berry
- d. **Industry Relations Committee:** Chair, Gary Westlake
- e. **Finance Committee:** Chair, Bob Schaefer
- f. **Research Committee:** Chair, Mark Schmidlin

It was **MOVED** by Gary Westlake and **SECONDED** by Mike Jones to approve the slate of Committee appointments as they were presented. **MOTION APPROVED.**

Committee Reports

Finance Committee - Bob Schaefer reported.

- a. **January 2024 Financial Statement** - Schaefer provided a detailed overview of the January 2024 financials.

It was **MOVED** by Gary Westlake and **SECONDED** by Chris Aldrich to accept the January 2024 financials as they were presented. **MOTION APPROVED.**

Research Committee - Mark Schmidlin and Cyndi Knudson reported.

- a. **Current Project Status Update** - four new completed reports have been added to the online Research Library, and five additional projects will be added to the library in the next several weeks.
- b. **Seedling Survey Update** - Surveys have been sent to the major seedling and transplant suppliers, and responses have been received.
- c. **2024 RFP Process** - FY 2024-2025 RFP is scheduled to be released at the beginning of May, based on when USDA approves the FY 2024-2025 budget.

Governance Committee - Charles Fowler reported.

- a. **Order Recommendation Status** - Fowler provided an overview of the Order changes to the incoming Board members. Vickie Carpenter will provide more details on where the process on the Order stands under the USDA report.
- b. **Policy and Procedure Book Update** - Marsha Gray shared that within the Policy Book, under refunds (page 32 of the CTPB Policy Book), there is no reference in creating a refund for a clerical error for an Importer. It is recommended that the RCTB include reimbursement for the Importer of Record within the verbiage.

It was **MOVED** by Bob Schaefer and **SECONDED** by Mark Schmidlin to include Importer of Record in the verbiage of the refund policy within the CTPB Policy Book. **MOTION APPROVED.**

Steve Mortimore joined the Board meeting via Zoom.

Special Presentation: Online Reporting and Payment System Demonstration – Steve Mortimore, with Fishhook Development, provided a detailed presentation of the new online reporting and payment system.

An open Board Q&A session followed the presentation.

Steve Mortimore left the meeting following his presentation.

The Board recessed for lunch at 12:30 p.m. and reconvened at 1:28 p.m.

Continuation of Committee Reports

Promotion Committee - Jane Neubauer reported.

Neubauer welcomed and introduced the FleishmanHillard team.

- a. **Presentation of Campaign Results** - John Armato, Jake Ferguson, and Gabby Hawley with FleishmanHillard provided an overview of their agency's work for the 2023 season and entertained questions from the Board.

After their presentation, John Armato, Jake Ferguson, and Gabby Hawley left the meeting.

Compliance Committee - Renee Beutell reported.

- a. **Update** – Renee Beutell and Marsha Gray provided a brief update on compliance.
- b. **Review of Letter** – Staff has recommended sending a letter to producers reminding them who is responsible for payment of the assessment. A suggestion was made to change the letter's last paragraph to include the word harvests in the line “causes the trees to be cut” to “causes the trees to be harvested.”

New Business: (Derek Ahl moved this presentation up in the agenda for the convenience of guests)

- a. **US Capital Tree Presentation** - Presentation by Jim Rockis and Beth Bossio about the U.S. Capitol Christmas Tree Initiative and suggested that the RCTB should be the link to procure the companion trees. Chairman Derek Ahl replied that this would be sent to a committee for further consideration.

Industry Relations Committee - Gary Westlake reported.

- a. **Webinar Results** – Westlake shared the number of attendees for the last two webinars:
 - **September 28th Webinar** - Intentional Communications - 120 attended live, and 67 viewed it later.

- **January 23rd Webinar** - Elongate Hemlock Scale - 135 attended live, and 109 viewed it later.
 - A total of 477 have registered for the Webinar series.
- b. **Grower Engagement** - ideas included sending an “invitation” to growers to attend the Real Christmas Tree Board meetings, continuing to attend State Association meetings, creating social media training, and creating more articles in the Christmas Tree Publications.
 - c. **Winter Meeting Presentations** – RCTB is being represented by Marsha Gray, Cyndi Knudson, and Jane Neubauer at least ten state and regional meetings this winter.
 - d. **Summer Meeting Opportunities** – Marsha Gray is creating a master schedule and will plan what meetings she, Cyndi Knudson, or Board members can attend.

Management Staff Update - Marsha Gray reported.

- a. **Assessment Collection Update:** As of February 13, 2024, we have received a total of 761 payers through the lockbox for \$763,129.50 and Importer Assessment received via US Customs for \$241,472.25, totaling \$1,004,601.75.
- b. **Importer Assessment Collection Process:** The new practice of U.S. Customs collecting the assessment on imported Christmas trees seems to be going well. Still awaiting more information from Customs to clarify the final numbers and individual grower shipments.

Old Business: No new items to report.

USDA - Vickie Carpenter reported.

- a. **Status of Management Review Report** – Carpenter reported that the Management Review letter is being finalized. Marsha Gray received a call from Tarun Harit recently apologizing for the delay in completing this project.
- b. **Status of Order Changes** - Carpenter reported that the request for Order changes is in process. She was not able to provide a timetable for the process.
- c. **Status of Non-Reporting Importer Turned over to USDA** – USDA provided an update that a memo was drafted for Office of General Council (OGC) review along with the case history and is being routed in the Department for review.
- d. **Status of USDA Response to Our Case for “Fake”** – USDA has denied the request to use the word “fake” in a letter received by staff earlier in the week. The letter was distributed to the Board.
- e. **Census of Ag** – Vickie Carpenter announced that the 2022 Census of Ag report came out the day prior.

For the Good of the Order/Announcements:

- As committee chairs organize their committees, it was encouraged to ensure there is good representation from all aspects on your committee. Derek Ahl requested that all committee chairs email him with their committee members.
- There are currently two Christmas tree Extension positions open, one at Oregon State University and the other at North Carolina State University.

Meeting Schedule:

- a. **Future Meeting Schedule** – The Board agreed to schedule meetings for the third Thursday of each month at 11 am Eastern.
- b. **Summer In-Person Meeting** - Board members discussed Summer in-person meeting locations; it was discussed not having a summer meeting due to cost and uncertain fiscal situations.

It was **MOVED** by Bob Schaefer and **SECONDED** by Gary Westlake not to hold a Summer in-person meeting. **MOTION APPROVED.**

Adjourn:

It was **MOVED** by Chuck Berry and **SECONDED** by Larry Downey to adjourn the meeting. **MOTION APPROVED.**

Chairman Derek Ahl adjourned the meeting at 5:15 p.m. Pacific.

Respectfully Submitted,
Mike Jones
Secretary