

Regular Meeting of the Board of Directors Planning Report

Southern California Swimming

28000 S. Western Ave., #226, San Pedro, CA 90732

April 20, 2022, 8:00-9:30pm

Given that the last 30 days included the resignation of our recently elected General Chair, the subsequent written reluctance of the recently elected admin vice chair to assume GC duties, and the hiring of a new Executive Director, I thought the BOD and all of our stakeholders might benefit from a little perspective on how we have arrived at this point....

Recent Events:

Through 2019 SCS was operating financially in a breakeven manner on an annual basis, with an Executive Director in place. Michael Jafari was General Chair, after serving as admin vice chair with Jeri Marshburn as General Chair. USA Swimming revised their governance model, and placed governing documents "Bylaws" on every LSC. These Bylaws can be modified, and were, by many LSC's including ours. Our BOD, and group members, continue to struggle with interpreting what the Bylaws say, and how the Bylaws can best serve us, and areas where they need to be changed. The Bylaws allow for a new election anytime 10 members feel it is necessary or appropriate. Does that make sense? Why do we continually have to "interpret" the Bylaws?

At the same time that the Bylaws were being incorporated into the formal governance process within every LSC, the concept of promotion of Athletes representation in governance of the LSC, and USA Swimming, was continuing to be advanced. Our BOD has struggled to make that happen in an effective manner, so much so that at one of our recent elections, every attending athlete's vote was counted twice, and that was supposed to be the "correct" procedure to obtain athlete representation. Ultimately, it was determined having athletes' votes count twice was in fact not the right answer, but to this day, we still struggle to include athletes in the process, even though most agree that it is an important "advancement."

Michael chose not to run for re-election as GC, Terry Stoddard stepped forward, and was elected at the end of 2019, with Stacy Smith serving as Vice Chair. Shortly thereafter, the Orange Committee resumed their campaign to split from the LSC, and in Feb 2020 a vote occurred on that item, with approximately 1/3 supporting a split, well short of the two-thirds required.

Then in March of 2020 the pandemic arrived. We lost over 30% of our registered athletes and clubs. Today we are still down 5000 athletes from our peak. Those clubs with access to water have returned to normal, while many clubs struggle or are gone, primarily due to losing water as a result of the pandemic.

In October of 2020, our ED resigned, out of the blue. With a lockdown still in place, we did not immediately seek a replacement. The LSC's primary revenue source is splash fees from swim

meets, which were basically banned for months. The zoom era allowed for video meetings, but the face-to-face interaction went away for over a year.

The pandemic restrictions eventually relaxed, and during 2021 the LSC prepped for a new election. The governance committee vetted candidates. On the day of the election, hours before the vote, 2 of the vetted candidates withdrew, while 3 unvetted candidates stepped forward. All of the unvetted candidates were elected. Mitch Gold was elected GC, and James Gallagher was elected Admin VC. They ultimately resigned within weeks of each other, after less than 6 months on the job. They did present a new logo, and vetted a new ED. The BOD, minus Mitch, recently completed the process of hiring a new ED.

To conclude, a lot has occurred on the dry side/governance of SCS over the last 36 months. Basically a “drama sandwich” with a pandemic in the middle. Unfortunately, as we recently had to explain to Mitch, the challenges facing the LSC continue to accrue, regardless of whatever drama occurs around the BOD. Meets still need to be sanctioned. Banquets still need to be held. All star teams need to be supported. Travel reimbursements need to be processed. Serving on the BOD is a sacrifice. Note that the past GC’s have not run for re-election. The Election of the “re-org team” lasted about 4 months, at which point Mitch became interested in something else, and now we have to move forward. Our first attempt to move forward involved rallying behind James, but he decided he did not want to be GC.

Current Events:

This is very bad situation for our LSC, and does not shine a positive light on anyone on our BOD. The past year has been a partisan polarization play between those who feel it is a time for a change, and that we need new voices and shorter meetings, versus those who have served over many years. Today, the vast majority of our current BOD have never been to a convention, nor an in-person BOD meeting in a voting capacity. The leader of the “change committee” has now resigned. We are left to clean up the mess. Mitch’s decision to hide his new job interests for months, and delay his resignation for weeks, isn’t benefitting the LSC now.

Finger-pointing won’t get us anywhere so what should we do next? We are in a crisis-situation, and we need to prioritize tasks that have to be done, create committees to tackle those tasks, get through this tough time, and meet again at the appropriate time to plan for the future. At this time, there is much work to be done, I am not sure we have the luxury to have a philosophical review of how our LSC could be re-organized. We have a new participant in the process (our new ED) and I am confident he will be very helpful in helping us navigate through this difficult time.

I am suggesting 3 immediate needs we have for discussion purposes, as a starting point:

Relationship/Decision-making matrix amongst the stakeholders. The stakeholders are the athletes, parents, officials, clubs, the BOD, and the ED/staff. I would suggest that championship-level facilities should also have a seat at the table. When we lost Belmont, we lost a lot. We need championship level pools for our key events. We need to clarify how decisions are going to be made amongst the various interests of these groups. We need to formalize how the staff and Executive Director are going to be evaluated.

Financial Review: With the hiring of the new director and the pandemic related registrations losses, our LSC will be operating at a 5-figure per month deficit. Past decades of leadership created a multi-million-dollar surplus, which we shouldn't squander away. If we raise the cost to participate (sanction fees) that likely won't help us attract new swimmers.

Prioritizing our Mission and Objectives: We have limited resources, of time, money, and volunteers. Most of the meetings I have attended over the last year offered many new and good ideas, most of which involve spending money. We need to establish the core areas in which the LSC can positively impact the majority of the membership, focus on successfully executing those services, and then expand out from there as appropriate.

Additional discussion topics:

We are a volunteer-based organization. Do we want to head in the direction of hiring more staff at a cost and/or relinquish decision-making to others?

A key component of our future success will be determined by our ability to attract new swimmers (versus transfers). Which clubs within our LSC are having success in that regard? How are they doing it? How can the LSC support/position swimming as a more viable choice for future athletes?

Some people compare other sports to ours when trying to determine how we can better position our sport for growth. Are Soccer or Karate good "comps" for us? Who is our target market?

High performance swimming is a long run, deferred gratification process. The majority of our athletes choose not to follow that path through to its conclusion. Can we have a softer, fresher, simpler version of our sport for that likely large target market, and still support Olympic-level excellence for those who choose that path? USA Swimming has embraced this concept with the Flex memberships, can we do the same with our meets?

We have vacancies on our BOD. Filling those vacancies in the short run is not as important as having a swim banquet this year, or finding ways to attract new swimmers, or finding areas of agreement amongst our current stakeholders as to the areas the LSC can best serve its member clubs. We have had 2 elections and a special house for a split all within the last 36 months. The BOD has almost completely turned over in the past 36 months. We do not need another election tomorrow. We need to identify those tasks that need to get done, create committees or hire staff to get the work done, and out of that work product will emerge our future potential BOD candidates. We need to identify those who are willing to work to help the LSC be better, versus coming to a meeting and complaining, and then leaving others to do the work.