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# **FRIENDS OF BELLE ISLE AQUARIUM**

## **STRATEGIC PLAN**

### **2005**

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## INTRODUCTION

Friends of Belle Isle Aquarium (“FOBIA”) was formed in 2005 out of the fear that Detroit would lose a prized possession, the Belle Isle Aquarium (the “Aquarium”). When the AQUARIUM closed, concerned citizens decided that they would work together to bring the necessary financial resources and expertise to reopen this hen which should be a key part of Detroit’s cultural tourism.

Since it’s inception, FOBIA has garnered strong community support for its mission of reopening the Belle Isle Aquarium. This community support resulted in a vote by the City of Detroit residents which evidence the interest in reopening and maintaining the Belle Isle Aquarium by an 88% approval. With over \_\_\_\_\_ general members, the organization has raised funds and developed relationships with community leaders to determine the feasibility and resources necessary to reopen the Aquarium. In September 2005, FOBIA’s leadership determined that it was necessary to use all of its passion and community support to develop a strategic action plan to achieve its mission. The determination resulted in a six month strategic planning process.

The strategic planning was a six-step process which included:

1. Reviewing FOBIA’s mission, vision and values;
2. Analyzing the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats facing the FOBIA;
3. Determining the critical issues that the FOBIA must address;
4. Communicating with key stakeholders to gain insight regarding the feasibility of reopening the Aquarium;
5. Developing objectives, goals, and action steps for strategically moving forward; and
6. Board approval and creation of subcommittees to commence action steps.

The final result is the following plan which will guide FOBIA’s internal and external direction over the next two years.



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## MISSION

The mission statement of an organization is broad and should reflect the organization's purpose to the community. FOBIA's new mission statement does not change the organization's purpose, but more clearly articulates the organization's current direction:

### Mission Statement

***FOBIA exists to reopen, operate, and improve the Belle Isle Aquarium as a premier, unique cultural destination promoting education, scientific research, preserving the ecological integrity of aquatic life in the Great Lakes and serving as a recreational center engaging people of all ages.***

## VISION

A vision statement is an articulation of the ideal, preferred future of an organization. It provides a guide for what the organization will become as a result of achieving its goals and strategies. The vision statement provides inspiration to the organization's board, volunteers and the community

### Vision Statement

***The Belle Isle Aquarium will be a world class historic site promoting cultural tourism in the state of Michigan and providing a state of the art education resource center in an intimate setting that will offer wonder and enjoyment to visitors and that will be a source of pride for Detroit area residents.***



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## CORE VALUES

Core values are those essential tenets which are important to serve as internal timeless guiding principles. They define what employees, volunteers and those serving on the Board collectively represent.

### Values Statement

***FOBIA'S Board and volunteers are dedicated to reopening the Belle Isle Aquarium because they value:***

- ❖ ***The City of Detroit and Belle Isle as a tourist destination;***
- ❖ ***Education;***
- ❖ ***Preservation of aquatic life in Michigan's living lakes;***
- ❖ ***Financial viability of historical cultural sites;***
- ❖ ***Preservation of aquatic life; and***
- ❖ ***Creation of an intimate setting which provides wonder and enjoyment for visitors of all ages.***



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## KEY STAKEHOLDERS

Determining the organization's key stakeholders was key to informing the strategic planning process and developing necessary action steps. The following is a list of key stakeholders with whom the organization hopes to develop relationships and which are key to the reopening of the Aquarium:

- ◆ City of Detroit (Kwame Kilpatrick)
- ◆ Detroit City Council
- ◆ City of Detroit Department of Recreation
- ◆ Detroit Zoological Society
- ◆ Belle Isle Interest Groups and organizations including Belle Isle Women's Committee, Detroit Yacht Club, BIBBS, FOBI, Friend of Detroit River, Detroit Riverfront Conservancy
- ◆ Foundations and other funding organizations

Several of the organization's key stakeholders were interviewed by the strategic planning committee. While the general consensus was that the Aquarium is an asset to the City, concerns regarding funding, building infrastructure, the state of Belle Isle and its infrastructure were dominant issues that were discussed.

The overall outcome of the key stakeholder interviews was that:

- The current state of the City's finances was the motivating factor for closing the Aquarium;
- The City of Detroit may be interested in a partnership with a nonprofit organization to reopen the Aquarium;
- FOBI needs to perform a feasibility study in order to determine the full extent of the infrastructure needs of the Aquarium; and



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- Considerable support and commitment from the funding community is necessary to FOBIA's success.

### **STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS (SWOT)**

FOBIA conducted an analysis of the organization's SWOT. This analysis included a review of the organization's external and internal SWOT.



## External

<u>Strengths</u> City of Detroit voter support Positive relationships with City leadership Need for the Aquarium Aquarium's historical background Historic Building Location of Aquarium – only metro Detroit area Aquarium	<u>Weaknesses</u> Lack of funding Aquarium is currently closed – have to start all over Negative perception of Belle Isle
<u>Opportunities</u> Relationships building with Belle Isle organizations, City of Detroit Dept of Recreation, Detroit Zoological Society Potential funding stream for City of Detroit ad Belle Isle Clean slate for the Aquarium – ability to renovate the building	<u>Threats</u> Aquarium infrastructure Belle Isle Infrastructure Current Michigan economy Expense to renovate Potential alternative use for building Other City priorities

## Internal

<u>Strengths</u> Large volunteer base (Dedicated volunteers) Board is well educated Current financial support Ability to organize rapidly Web site Volunteer talent	<u>Weaknesses</u> No full time staff Board expertise Ability to raise large funds New organization No feasibility study Current budgeting priorities
<u>Opportunities</u> Marketing expertise Community level fundraising Informal networking	<u>Threats</u> Absence of City leadership on Board Lack of relationship with funders Plans for new aquarium Time – slow progress may affect volunteer participation Perception of FOIA



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## STRATEGIC PLAN

### Critical Issues

Based on the SWPT analysis, key stakeholder interviews and a review of the Hamilton Anderson Belle Isle Plan, FOBIA determined that the following issues were most critical to address in order to reopen the Aquarium:

- City of Detroit Proposal
- Post approval action committee
- Partnership Building
- Board Development
- Organizational Finance Priorities

These critical issues were the guiding force for the strategic plan. They were the framework for development of the objectives, goals and action steps that will guide the organization over the next two years.

### City of Detroit Proposal

**Objective:** Advance a proposal to the City of Detroit for the reopening and operation of the Belle Isle Aquarium.

**Goal 1:** Establish FOBIA's credibility as an organization capable of Aquarium stewardship.

#### **Action Steps:**

- Secure 501(c) (3) status
- Create an information package about FOBIA and request letters of support from key stakeholders
- Revise content on FOBIA web site





- Select consultant to perform feasibility study

**Goal 2:** Present letter of intent and request an option agreement from the City of Detroit.

**Action Steps:**

- Identify appropriate City of Detroit point of contact and schedule formal meeting and presentation
- Submit letter of intent and request for an option agreement to allow FOBIA the opportunity to complete its feasibility study and business plan
- Prepare presentation and identify FOBIA representative to present to City of Detroit

**Goal 3:** Complete Plan for reopening and present to City of Detroit within six months

**Action Steps:**

- Determine City requirements and interest in partnership options
- Work closely with the City to meet their Needs
- Complete feasibility study, as necessary, based upon Hamilton Anders Belle Isle Plan
- Meet with potential funders and secure funding commitments for reopening
- Develop relationships with other Belle Isle organizations

Post Approval Action Steps

**Objective:** Take the steps necessary to reopen the Belle Isle Aquarium

**Goal 1:** Develop and implement business plan

**Action Steps:**

- Develop business plan based on feasibility study
- Determine aquatic inventory
- Develop budget for reopening



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- Prepare contractual agreement with the City of Detroit
  - Commence fundraising efforts / follow up with any funding commitments

**Goal 2:** Building Renovation

**Action Steps:**

- Prepare timeline
- Determine ADA compliance issues
- Develop contractor hiring guidelines and hire contractors
- Restore exhibits

**Goal 3:** Implement marketing plan

**Action Steps:**

- Make contacts with local businesses, corporations and supporters
- Obtain media coverage
- Secure web site support
- Plan major benefit event

Partnership Building

**Objective:** Build strategic partnerships with organizations / individuals who will assist in reopening the Aquarium

**Goal 1:** Make strategic contacts

**Action Steps:**

- Review key stakeholders and determine appropriate relationship building efforts of each stakeholder
- Contact stakeholders to apprise them of FOBIA's strategic plan and progress
- Develop timeline and plan for meetings and follow up
- Determine whether partnership or joint ventures are appropriate



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**Goal 2:** Develop presentation for key stakeholders

**Action Steps:**

- Gather information and letters of support and develop marketing materials
- Involve volunteers in assisting with making contact
- Schedule meetings, garner community support and build resources based on meetings

Organizational Finance Priorities

**Objective:** Allocate FOBIA's current funds for the most effective use to assist with efforts to reopen the Aquarium

**Goal 1:** Determine the most appropriate allocation of funds

**Action Steps:**

- Review existing submitted budgets
- Determine funding priorities based upon the strategic plan
- Reallocate new budget based upon reductions
- Notify committee chairs with 30 days

**Goal 2:** Fund feasibility study

**Action Steps:**

- Determine need for additional information based upon Hamilton Anderson Belle Isle Plan and other City departments
- Identify consultant to complete study and develop scope of services
- Determine cost for study
- Raise additional funds, if necessary
- Determine whether to hire a full time fundraiser



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## Board Development

**Objective:** Develop a committed, knowledgeable, working Board that can assist with the acquisition, reopening and operations of the Aquarium

**Goal 1:** Add well connected, knowledgeable Board members and / or develop an advisory committee

**Action Steps:**

- Review bylaws to determine whether Board members should be added or advisory committee should be created
- Review key stakeholders and develop a list of potential Board members
- Contact potential Board members to provide information about the organization
- Determine interest of potential Board / Advisory committee members and conduct interviews

**Goal 2:** Strengthen the Board's knowledge base and ability to effectively operate the organization

**Action Steps:**

- Gather information about available Board training
- Train all current board members by June 2006

**Goal 3:** Form appropriate subcommittees on the Board in accordance with Strategic Plan

**Action Steps:**

- Vote on objectives, goals and action steps determined in the strategic planning process
- Develop subcommittee to address each objective and begin actions steps
- Determine system of accountability and communication for subcommittees