MINUTES
BOARD OF ZOO COMMISSIONERS
OF THE CITY OF LOS ANGELES
VIRTUAL MEETING*
TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 2020 – 10:00 AM

* IN CONFORMITY WITH THE GOVERNOR’S EXECUTIVE ORDER N-29-20 (MARCH 17, 2020) AND DUE TO CONCERNS OVER COVID-19, THIS BOARD MEETING WAS HELD ENTIRELY TELEPHONICALLY VIA ZOOM.

“Creating dynamic experiences to connect people and animals”

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Eric Garcetti
Mayor

David E. Ryu
Council Member
4th District

Zoo Commissioners
Karen B. Winnick
President
Bernardo Silva
Vice President
Margot Armbruster
Christopher Hopkins

EX OFFICIO MEMBER PRESENT
Richard Lichtenstein

COMMISSION STAFF
Denise Verret
Lisa Gerencser

MEDIA
No response

ZOO GENERAL COUNSEL
Ruth Kwon

AGENDA ITEM 1
CALL TO ORDER
Commission President Winnick called the meeting to order at 10:03 AM.

AGENDA ITEM 2
APPROVAL OF MINUTES FOR MEETING OF AUGUST 18, 2020
Commission President Winnick moved to approve August 18, 2020 minutes. Commission Vice President Silva so moved, Commissioner Armbruster seconded, and the motion passed.

AGENDA ITEM 3
GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT
No Comments

LOBBING NOTICE
No Comments

NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL
No Comments

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AGENDA ITEM 4
ANIMAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC
Chief Veterinarian Dr. Dominique Keller provided the Commission with a presentation and discussion on animal health and wellness during the Zoo’s closure and continued pandemic. Highlights of the presentation included:

- Background on coronaviruses including COVID-19
- Coronaviruses are common among varied animal species and usually present no illness to the infected animal
- Discussion regarding felidae and other species that have tested positive for COVID-19 and the precautionary measures staff must take when caring for these animals
- Focus on “One Health” – a methodology of animal, human, and environmental health as being all interconnected
- Details of staff use of various safety measures and improved PPE
- Limited all non-essential animal checks

With “One Health” in mind, Dr. Keller discussed three cases that staff worked on during the Zoo’s closure. Veterinary specialists were brought in for assistance with the following animals:

- Five year old male koala presenting excessive saliva. A consulting veterinarian, along with Zoo staff, has been providing acupuncture in combination with medications which has led to positive results
- Seven and half year old male Sumatran tiger was suffering from GI related issues. Three additional veterinarians were brought in to review the case. With additional supplements and diet change, the tiger is back to his appropriate weight and appetite
- Female harbor seal was showing signs of gingivitis. A dental veterinarian was brought to assess; a deep cleaning and extractions were performed. The harbor seal is back to eating without discomfort

Commission President Winnick thanked Dominique and staff and stated how lucky the Zoo is to have Dr. Keller leading our veterinary division.

AGENDA ITEM 5
GENERAL MANAGER REPORTS
A. Animal Updates
Beth Schaefer, General Curator, gave the following transaction updates:

- Several animals will be going to Hemker Park, including gibbons, grey kangaroo, and crested pheasant
- Red flanked duiker going to Florida
- Incoming animals include river toads and a giant centipede

Vice President Silva asked the age of the tortoise that passed; Dr. Keller stated the female tortoise was 47 years old.

Ms. Schaefer also noted that the recent wildfires have affected both our mountain yellow-legged frog and California condor conservation efforts. The Zoo has assisted with one condor chick, but two chicks perished and nine are still missing in the Ventana/Big Sur area.
B. GLAZA Update

GLAZA President Tom Jacobson gave the following update:

- Restricted fundraising is at 11% of the yearly goal for current year
- Angela Collier Gardens continues to be the fundraising priority
- The family of former Chief Legislative Analyst, Ron Deaton, who passed away has asked that donations be made to the Zoo in memorium
- Continued issues with Membership reservations but staff has been in communication with members to assist as best as possible
- LA County currently reviewing proposal to have drive-in movies in the Zoo’s parking lot after hours

i. Marketing and Events Update

Emily Marrin, GLAZA Marketing and Communications Director, provided the following update:

- Social Media is working with LouAnne Brickhouse as our first Conservation Ambassador; a collaborative outreach plan brought to GLAZA by City Public Relations and Conservation. Ms. Brickhouse is a vulture volunteer and has previous entertainment industry experience. Her large social media presence and unique perspective posts will broaden the Zoo’s reach as well as create content for our own social media pages. Showed highlights of #LA1720 – story that is following a California condor egg from hatching to rearing
- CA Biodiversity Day was September 7. The Zoo celebrated with two weekends of virtual events held on September 5-6 and 12-13.
- Virtual Member Appreciation picnic and other exclusive content was provided for members
- New awareness advertising “LA Zoo Serves the Community and Saves Wildlife Everyday” and continued #LAZOOLOVE

President Winnick suggested continuing with the creative outreach even when things return to “normal”. President Winnick also noted she heard about issues with Membership reservations and noted some expressed appreciation for GLAZA taking responsibility and apologizing for the issues.

Ex-Officio Member Lichtenstein asked about capacity limits and who is responsible for deciding; he noted there is huge demand for people to want to visit the Zoo. It was noted this would be discussed in the Zoo Director’s Update.

C. Zoo Director Update

Zoo Director Denise Verret noted that the Zoo reopened on August 26 and all protocols related to safety and capacity are set by the County of Los Angeles. The Zoo is currently allowed to operate at 25% (2,500 visitors) capacity, but out of abundant safety and caution for our staff, animals, and visitors, the Zoo is doing a phased approach to reach 25%; currently at 1,800 visitors. Director Verret expressed the need to have a quality visitor experience as well as keeping everyone safe under the County mandates before increasing capacity. Face mask enforcement is one safety issue on grounds staff must deal with daily. Staff continues to monitor visitor feedback and make any necessary changes along the way.
Other updates include:
- Utilization of the Zoo’s parking lot by various non-profits for meal distribution
- The EIR continues moving forward; there will be virtual public meetings to share the EIR once completed
- The Mayor issued a memo to all departments about fiscal constraint for the current and upcoming fiscal years. The Zoo has 23 employees participating in the City’s retirement incentive program and those positions cannot be filled once vacated. Additional reductions across all funding sources are required as well as discussions of furloughs and layoffs for City employees.

Ex-Officio Member Lichtenstein again inquired about opening up to the full 25% capacity. Zoo Director Verret expressed the need to gain experience regarding this “new normal” before we increase capacity. Several Commissioners agreed that it is best to be cautious and take a slower approach. Mr. Lichtenstein stated there are people who want to help the Zoo and the Zoo is moving too slowly. Director Verret noted the Zoo is working on getting assistance from volunteers, but again, safety and staff comfort are the priority. Commissioner Armbruster asked why the staff are uncomfortable. Director Verret explained that staff are interacting with the public during this pandemic and there are continuous issues trying to enforce face covering and social distancing rules. President Winnick noted that the loss of 23 positions due to retirements is going to impact Zoo operations; Director Verret concurred there will be operational impacts across the department from retirements to budget reductions and this could affect the entire Zoo experience.

AGENDA ITEM 6
OLD BUSINESS
None

AGENDA ITEM 7
ADJOURNMENT
There being no more business to come before, President Winnick motioned to adjourn the meeting; Vice President Silva so moved and Commissioner Armbruster seconded; the meeting was adjourned at 11:24 AM.

ATTEST:

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PRESIDENT                                                              SECRETARY