MINUTES
BOARD OF ZOO COMMISSIONERS
OF THE CITY OF LOS ANGELES
VIRTUAL MEETING*
TUESDAY, DECEMBER 15, 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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Members present
Karen Winnick
Daryl Smith
Bernardo Silva
Christopher Hopkins

Members absent
Margot Armbruster

Ex officio member present
Richard Lichtenstein

Commission President Winnick called the meeting to order at 10:04 AM.

Agenda Item 1
Call to Order
Commission President Winnick moved to approve November 17, 2020 minutes. Vice President Silva so moved, Commissioner Hopkins seconded, and the motion passed.

Agenda Item 2
Approval of Minutes for Meeting of November 17, 2020
Commission President Winnick moved to approve November 17, 2020 minutes. Vice President Silva so moved, Commissioner Hopkins seconded, and the motion passed.

Agenda Item 3
General Public Comment
No Comments

Lobbying Notice
No Comments

Neighborhood Council
No Comments

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AGENDA ITEM 4
PRESENTATION – Ornato Grant - Talarak Foundation Visayan Warty Pigs in Philippines

Animal Keeper Mallory Peebles, a recipient of the 2019 Ornato grant, discussed her travels to the Philippines to study Visayan warty pigs with the Talarak Foundation on Negros Island. Visayan warty pigs are a critically endangered species of swine only found in the Philippines. Out of 6 islands, the Visayan warty pig is now extinct on 4 of them. The Talarak Foundation began working with the Negros Forest Ecological Foundation in 2010. In 2019, the group relaunched with other foundations to open the Negros Forest Park (Living Museum).

The group focuses on five animals specific to the region: bleeding heart pigeon, Philippine spotted deer, two different hornbills, and the Visayan warty pig. Ms. Peebles assisted with educational outreach and her husbandry skills were utilized to help with the introduction of ambassador animals. Much of her time was spent GPS tracking, installing camera traps and preparation of animals for release into the wild. Ms. Peebles thanked Mr. Ornato, GLAZA, and the LA Zoo for providing her with such invaluable and memorable working experience.

Mr. Ornato noted it was his pleasure to provide these grants to further the Zoo’s mission and allow the staff to have these experiences that will only better the staff and the Zoo.

AGENDA ITEM 5
PRESENTATION – ZOO VISION PLAN EIR STATUS UPDATE

Jan Green Rebstock from Department of Public Works – Bureau of Engineering (BOE) gave an overview of the Environment Impact Report (EIR) draft for the Zoo’s Vision Plan. After over a year of review, scoping, meeting with participating agencies, BOE will be releasing the DRAFT EIR on Thursday, December 16, 2020. From December through February 2021, BOE will receive feedback from the community, stakeholders, and any other groups interested in the EIR impacts moving forward. There will be a virtual public meeting held on January 13, 2021 at 5:30 PM.

The Zoo’s Vision Plan is to be completed in 7 phases of the next 20 years. Ms. Green Rebstock discussed the ‘Unavoidable Impacts” and what the Zoo is doing to mitigate these impacts. Unavoidable Impacts include increased traffic, parking needs, and public transportation. There are also concerns related to the flora and fauna of Griffith Park as the Zoo builds out into non-developed areas; already working with Department of Recreation and Parks and other organizations to minimize any impacts to the park.

All documents are available online and links will be shared directly with the Commission. Ms. Green Rebstock asked that everyone read the “Executive Summary” initially then review other documents as needed.

Vice President Silva asked if the unavoidable impacts would affect the success of the EIR being accepted by the public and City Council. Ex-Officio Member Lichtenstein stated from his experience there is nothing that should impede this process.

AGENDA ITEM 6
GENERAL MANAGER REPORTS
A. Animal Updates
Beth Schaefer, Director of Animal Programs, gave the following transaction updates:
- Two male gerenuk are going to Hemker Park
- Most transactions are for record-cleaning purposes regarding loaned animals at other institutions
B. GLAZA Update

GLAZA President Tom Jacobson gave the following update:

- Received six gifts totaling $253,000 for various programs
- Hosting Selig Society events this week; Selig Society is GLAZA’s planned estate giving group. Mr. Jacobson thanked Genie Vasels for becoming a new member
- Currently have just over 42,000 household memberships. Noted that Members are not renewing their memberships as they have limited or no access to the Zoo during the pandemic; true for most cultural institutions this year
- Continuing to meet with potential board members and hosting ZOOm to You events for donors.

Vice President Silva asked how the concessionaire is managing during this pandemic. Mr. Jacobson noted they are not doing well but GLAZA will continue to support them as best as possible to retain their business.

C. Zoo Director Update

Zoo Director, Denise Verret noted the Zoo closed to the public on December 7 as instructed by the State’s Updated Regional COVID-19 Orders. The new orders are reflective of the diminished ICU capacity during the most recent surge of the COVID-19 virus. The Zoo is anticipated to be closed at least through December 27; currently only essential staff are on-site everyone else is working from home. Ms. Verret noted new City councilmembers began their terms this week and the Zoo hopes to build relationships with new members. Mrs. Verret also discussed the latest City Financial Status Report that shows the initially budgetary hole of $400 million has grown to over $600 million. The City has already implemented a hiring freeze, created the Separation Incentive Program for early retirements (Zoo to lose 24 staff members to retirements), furloughs are anticipated to start in January and the City has set in motion layoffs beginning in May 2021.

Zoo Director Verret noted that she and Dr. Jake Owens, Zoo Conservation Director, were able to go to Bitter Creek National Refuge to watch the release of California condors into the wild. This was one of the most memorable experiences she has had at her time with the Zoo and will be exploring how to provide this opportunity for staff and other Zoo stakeholders to expand on the appreciation and understanding of the amazing work done by LA Zoo staff. Ms. Verret wished everyone a safe and healthy holiday season.

AGENDA ITEM 7
OLD BUSINESS
None

AGENDA ITEM 8
ADJOURNMENT
There being no more business to come before, President Winnick motioned to adjourn the meeting; Vice President Silva so moved and Commissioner Hopkins seconded; the meeting was adjourned at 11:22 AM.

ATTEST:

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PRESIDENT                                                              SECRETARY