



# MINUTES

## BOARD OF ZOO COMMISSIONERS OF THE CITY OF LOS ANGELES

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 2025 – 10:00 AM

Los Angeles Zoo  
Grand Room  
5333 Zoo Drive  
Los Angeles, Ca 90027

*“Creating a just and sustainable world where people and wildlife, thrive, together.”*

Los Angeles Zoo  
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Los Angeles  
California 90027  
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Fax 323/662-9786  
www.lazoo.org

### MEMBERS PRESENT

Karen Winnick  
Justin Mikita  
Daryl Smith  
Elnie Vannatim arrived at 10:03

### VISITORS

None signed in

Karen Bass  
Mayor

### EX OFFICIO MEMBER PRESENT

None

Nithya Raman  
Council Member  
4<sup>th</sup> District

### COMMISSION STAFF

Denise Verret  
Cristina Flores

### MEDIA

None signed in

Zoo Commissioners

Karen B. Winnick  
President

### ZOO GENERAL COUNSEL

Josh Templet

Bernardo Silva  
Vice President

### AGENDA ITEM 1

#### CALL TO ORDER

Commission President Winnick called the meeting to order at 10:00AM.

Justin Mikita

Daryl Smith

### AGENDA ITEM 2

#### APPROVAL OF MINUTES FOR MEETING OF DECEMBER 17, 2024

Commission President Winnick requested a Motion to approve the minutes of the December 17, 2024 meeting. Commissioner Mikita so moved, Commissioner Smith seconded. The motion passed by unanimous vote.

Elnie Vannatim

Richard Lichtenstein  
Ex Officio Member

Denise M. Verret  
Chief Executive Officer  
& Zoo Director

### AGENDA ITEM 3

#### GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT

No Comments

### NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL

No Comments

### AGENDA ITEM 4

#### PRESENTATION – COMMUNITY IMPACT – BETTY WHITE’S ZOO PALS PROGRAM

Dan Keeffe, Director of Learning and Engagement and Renae Cotero, Curator of Education gave the following presentation:



- Mr. Keeffe discussed the Zoo Pals program and how it has evolved since it started in 2009 as a program that offered field trips to Title 1 schools focusing on covering the transportation costs for these schools.
- From 2009 – 2019 the Zoo Pals program had 40,000 participants.
- In 2020 with the pandemic, the program shifted to a virtual learning program due to school closures, offering three virtual visits, this led to a newly structured Zoo Pals program keeping the online curriculum.
- From 2021 – 2022 Zoo Pals evolved into a virtual and onsite program consisting of two virtual visits and concluding with a visit to the Zoo, later evolving to two in classroom visits and a trip to the Zoo.
- The new Zoo Pals model won the AZA Education Award for Innovation in 2021.
- In 2023, the program was able to grow due to a generous donation by the Betty White Foundation, increasing the amount of reach and changing the name of the program to the Betty White Zoo Pals Program.
- Ms. Cotero detailed the program and explained the requirements for teachers and schools who qualify, as well as what is included as part of the program. Participants will receive notebooks, colored pencils, a field trip and a bus scholarship for transportation.
- This year over 400 applications were received for 60 available spots. With the support of the Betty White Foundation, the program was able to offer a teacher workshop to 50 additional teachers.
- Ms. Cotero explained that the students will interact with the same instructors from the Zoo for all of three visits, building a connection with the Zoo team.
- The first visit includes a live virtual observation where students are able to observe a live gharial feeding at the Zoo.
- The second visit, the Zoo instructors will return to the classroom and work with the students to do a hands-on activity.
- The third visit is at the Zoo, where they will have a guided tour by their instructors who will also lead activities such as drawing and writing in notebooks to record observations, in addition students are able to ride the Conservation Carousel.
- Ms. Cotero shared feedback from teachers noting that teachers praised the program for building student's confidence, curiosity and connections with the Zoo. Students expressed excitement about visiting the Zoo and learning in an interactive environment. The addition of the carousel rides was a big hit with students and teachers, with one teacher noting that one of her students had never been on a carousel before.

## **AGENDA ITEM 5**

### **PRESENTATION – L.A. ZOO LIGHTS WRAP UP**

Emily Marrin, GLAZA Director of Marketing and Communications gave the following presentation:

- Ms. Marrin started her presentation with a clip from one of the Spectrum One newscasters, describing 2024's Zoo Lights as the best Zoo Lights ever.
- This year's Zoo Lights had more holidays than ever with some of the most notable installations being:
  - Holiday tree at the entrance and keeping to the conservation theme there was a large scale underwater display featuring sea turtles, jellyfish and stingrays.
  - This year's light tunnel was a unique crocodile-shaped tunnel that guests were able to walk into with the elements around the tunnel adding movement and magical effects.

- There were interactive elements like whack-a-mole, animatronic Peninsula Pronghorn, and talking macaws that mimicked guests' voices.
  - There was also the return of Santa on select nights.
- Community nights, VIP style experiences and member nights continued. Another new addition was Holiday Pajama weekend, where guests were invited to visit in their coziest pajamas.
- Revenue & Attendance
  - This year's revenue came in at a record-breaking total of over \$5.5 million, which was 8% above budget.
  - Attendance came in at 10% above budget, with over 198,000 visitors and ticket sales were 9% above budget, with over 195,000 tickets sold.
  - Ticketing strategy included limiting inventory for premium nights and refining pricing for higher ticket sales.
  - Member sales were 15% of total sales, with a slight return to normal compared to the previous year.
  - There was \$215,000 in sponsorship revenue from sponsors like the Angela Collier Foundation, Port of Long Beach, Amazon, and U.S. Bank.
  - December was the best concessions month ever for SSA Group, with churro and the s'mores kits continuing to be popular with guests. 51,000 churros and 8,000 s'mores kits sold.
- Marketing & Promotions
  - Early sales started with a September 23rd member pre-sale and Groupon flash sales in November, which doubled Groupon sales. While Groupon sales were successful, they were limited
  - Media mix included broadcast TV, radio, digital, and social media, as well as the addition of Spanish-language outreach via Univision and KLOVE.
  - Advertising style included cinematic style key art with the tag line "Bigger and wilder holiday magic" with an advertisement reach of 27 million impressions, 500,000+ website visits.
  - Paid media included a segment on KCBS and KCAL, this year's segment featured Dr. Jake Owens, Director of Conservation who talked about the experience Pollinator Paradise and why Zoo Lights matters and how it inspires the next generation of conservationists.
  - Media Coverage included extensive PR and influencer outreach, including coverage from the City of LA and Mayor Bass.
- Guest Feedback out of almost one thousand guests surveyed:
  - 86% of survey respondents rated the experience as excellent or very good which was up from 80% last year.
  - 83% rated the value as excellent or good, despite the increase in ticket prices.
  - 72% were likely to attend next year, similar to last year.
  - 88% reported a deeper connection with nature after visiting, 75% knew about the Zoo's conservation efforts, and 44% were more likely to visit during the day.

## **AGENDA ITEM 6**

### **GENERAL MANAGER REPORTS**

#### **a. Animal Updates**

Misha Body, Deputy Director of Animal Programs provided updates which included the following:

#### Sales/Loans

- Newborn Vampire Crabs have been born at the Zoo. These crabs can be viewed at The LAIR exhibit alongside Mangrove Pit Vipers. The young crabs will serve as replacements for exhibit specimens and additions to off-exhibit breeding groups.
- Unlike most crabs that go through a larval phase of development, vampire crabs undergo direct development which means they hatch as miniature adults and grow into full-size adults without a larval stage. They do not have fangs but have tooth-like projections in their stomachs to help break down food.
- Vampire crabs are considered scavengers, feeding on various organic materials.

#### b. GLAZA Updates

Dawn Petersen-Amend, GLAZA Interim President gave the following updates:

- Restricted Gifts totaled \$425,000 for the month of December, including \$350,000 for animal conservation programs, \$50,000 from a National Fish and Wildlife Grant benefiting Condors and numerous holiday gift adoptions, generating over \$3,000.
- 105% of the \$2.6 million restricted fundraising goal has been raised in the first six months of the fiscal year
- Membership revenue came in at 94% of budget; household count increased by 673.
- December admissions revenue came in at 106% of budget; year-over-year attendance was at 99% compared to December 2023.
- Admission revenue came in at 83% of budget.
- GLAZA Revenue to the Zoo came in at 86% of budget.

#### c. Zoo Director Updates

Denise Verret, Zoo Director gave the following updates:

- Historic Wind and Fire Disaster
  - The Zoo was closed for 13 days due to the historic wind and fire disaster as well as the Griffith Park closure. During those days no structures, animals, or staff were compromised.
  - Recovery efforts included cleaning debris, fallen trees, and limbs.
  - During the City's recovery efforts, the Zoo was able to support the Department of Recreation and Parks who opened a support camp program for children ages 5 - 17 who were displaced fire victims. The Zoo provided outreach programs and biofacts to lift spirits of displaced children.
  - 33 Zoo staff members worked 36 shifts in disaster recovery centers as part of the City's Disaster Service Worker Program.
- Community Engagement
  - The Zoo hosted Nature for All, a community nonprofit whose mission is to build support to make sure that everyone in Los Angeles has equitable access to nature, for a tour focusing on environmental careers and zoo career opportunities.
  - For the first time, the Zoo partnered with the Braille Institute hosting their program for blind and visually impaired youth helping them to apply skills and providing opportunities for the students to practice skills from their expanded core curriculum skills, offering hands-on experiences with biofacts like skulls and animal skins. The Zoo's Learning and Engagement

team worked with the Braille Institute team to prepare a guided walking tour for 26 students from elementary to high school age.

- New Cape Vulture Exhibit opened to the public with a group of seven vultures also known as a committee of vultures. The exhibit allows guests to view vultures in a naturalistic environment with features like seating and interactive carcass feedings. Funded by the Fritz B. Burns Foundation and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, the exhibit has been very popular.
- In the News:
  - Perentie Lizards Hatching were covered by the Associated Press, increasing the story's national and international reach.
  - Chief Veterinarian Dr. Dominique Keller and Dan Ash (CEO of AZA) discussed the Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza as well as measures taken by zoos to protect bird collections from avian flu on NBC Nightly News.
  - The Zoo's new conservation strategic plan was featured in Daily News, San Gabriel Valley Tribune and SoCal News Group, broadening community awareness.
  - An exclusive with ABC aired that allowed them to tell a long comprehensive story documenting the Cape Vulture exhibit's journey from planning to opening. This story was also picked up by the Associated Press.
- Thank you and farewell to David Keliher, the Zoo's Audio Visual technician who is retiring after twenty years of service.

**AGENDA ITEM 7  
OLD BUSINESS**  
None

**AGENDA ITEM 8  
ADJOURNMENT**

There being no more business to come before the Commission, President Winnick requested a motion to adjourn the meeting; Commissioner Smith so moved and Commissioner Vannatim seconded; the motion passed by unanimous vote and the meeting was adjourned at 10:54 AM.

ATTEST:

  
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PRESIDENT

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
SECRETARY