



"Creating a just and sustainable world where people and wildlife, thrive, together."

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Karen Bass
Mayor

Nithya Raman
Council Member
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Zoo Commissioners

Karen B. Winnick
President

Bernardo Silva
Vice President

Justin Mikita

Daryl Smith

Elnie Vannatim

Denise M. Verret
Chief Executive Officer
& Zoo Director



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MINUTES

BOARD OF ZOO COMMISSIONERS OF THE CITY OF LOS ANGELES

TUESDAY, JUNE 17, 2025 – 10:00 AM

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

MEMBERS PRESENT

Karen Winnick
Bernardo Silva
Justin Mikita - Absent
Daryl Smith
Elnie Vannatim – Arrived at 10:05

VISITORS

None signed in

COMMISSION STAFF

Denise Verret
Cristina Flores

MEDIA

None signed in

ZOO GENERAL COUNSEL

Steve Houchin

AGENDA ITEM 1

CALL TO ORDER

Commission President Winnick called the meeting to order at 10:03 A.M.

AGENDA ITEM 2

APPROVAL OF MINUTES FOR MEETING OF MAY 20, 2025

Commission President Winnick requested a Motion to approve the minutes of the May 20, 2025 meeting. Commission Vice President Silva so moved, Commissioner Mikita seconded. The motion passed by unanimous vote.

AGENDA ITEM 3

GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT

No Comments

NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL

No Comments

AGENDA ITEM 4

PRESENTATION – ANNUAL BUDGET PRESENTATION

Mei Kwan, Deputy Director of Administration gave the following presentation:

- Ms. Kwan explained that budget planning began in November with a focus on animal care, infrastructure, and program transitions; due to 2025 fire impacts and citywide budget constraints, the adopted budget ultimately resulted in the elimination of 32 vacant positions to avoid cutting filled roles.

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of Zoos and Aquariums

- The Zoo's operating budget remains steady at \$31 million, with:
 - Reduced salary costs due to position eliminations.
 - Increased operating expenses to support essential services and transitions.
- The Zoo also secured \$11.2 million for capital improvements.
- Projected attendance for FY 2025–26 is 1.5 million, a slight decline from last year's 1.6 million.
- A \$5 ticket price increase (the first since 2019) will raise adult admission to \$27 and children to \$22, supporting a projected \$18 million in admissions revenue.
- Funding sources include:
 - \$26.6 million from ticket sales, events, concessions, and memberships.
 - \$3.9 million from camps, rentals, and other programs.
- FY 2025–26 priorities include:
 - Enhancing animal health and care
 - Expanding community outreach and assuming volunteer program oversight
 - Advancing facility repairs and capital projects
 - Developing a strategic marketing plan
 - Completing and evaluating the current five-year conservation strategy
- Offering more vacant positions for elimination prevented staff layoffs and confirmed that fundraising efforts will continue, supported by a consultant to help shape a long-term strategy.

AGENDA ITEM 5

PRESENTATION – L.A. ZOO TEEN COUNCIL FOR CONSERVATION

Anna Becker, Curator of Conservation gave the following presentation:

- Ms. Becker opened the presentation by celebrating the success of the Teen Council for Conservation's third year, highlighting its mission of empowering youth voices through hands-on conservation work and community engagement.
- Since its launch in 2022, the Teen Council has included 91 youth from 14 LA City Council districts, contributing over 6,800 volunteer hours on issues such as biodiversity, climate change, sustainability, and fast fashion.
- Ms. Becker described the Council's hands-on conservation activities, including habitat assessments, species identification, and native plant restoration projects in the Children's Zoo, along with the Oak Woodland Restoration area.
- Beyond technical skills, teens developed personal growth and leadership, and connecting with zoo professionals and conservation organizations.
- The program included transformative field trips, notably to the USC Wrigley Marine Science Center on Catalina Island, providing exposure to marine ecosystems, astronomy, and conservation science—often a first-time experience for many participants.
- Teens also participated in civic engagement, including attending and helping lead the LA Youth Summit at USC, where they joined city-wide youth in policy discussions on mental health, transportation, and public safety.
- Ms. Becker highlighted the second annual Youth Conservation Symposium, led entirely by the Council and funded by a donor. The event, themed "Conservation is MAGIC", drew over 100 young people to explore action-based conservation strategies.
- The acronym MAGIC stood for:
 - **M**indful Choices
 - **A**dvocacy for Nature

- Growing Together
 - Innovative Solutions
 - Collective Impact
- Council members translated ideas from the symposium into an action plan workbook, now being distributed citywide to extend the program's reach and influence.
- Evaluation data showed strong outcomes: nearly 90% of participants rated the program as excellent or outstanding, with high scores on program components and a strong sense of preparedness to act on conservation issues in their communities.
- Soleila Tweduary, a first-year council member, shared her personal growth through the program. She spoke about exploring complex issues like wildlife trafficking and the role of systems like global trade and policy.
 - She highlighted a role-play exercise on building an animal crossing, which taught communication, problem-solving, and balancing different viewpoints.
 - Soleila said the program helped her find purpose and confidence, and that the opportunity to collaborate with diverse peers gave her hope and motivation for lifelong advocacy.
- Shayla Luna Serrano, a second-year peer mentor, reflected on her journey from participant to leader.
 - She explained how mentorship deepened her understanding of conservation and community impact, emphasizing the importance of listening, empathy, and helping others step out of their comfort zones.
 - Shayla said the program shifted her view of conservation into a tool for larger change, connecting it with public health, environmental justice, and public policy.
 - She concluded with a powerful reminder that young people are not just preparing for the future—they are shaping it.

AGENDA ITEM 6

GENERAL MANAGER REPORTS

a. Animal Updates

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

- Ms. Body highlighted the California condor as the featured species in recognition of the end of the 2025 hatching season, celebrating 10 successful hatches this year at the Los Angeles Zoo—an important step in helping save the species from extinction.
- The Zoo continues to play a critical role in condor conservation, including efforts to vaccinate the population against Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI). Chief Veterinarian Dr. Dominique Keller co-authored a recent paper on this innovative vaccination initiative.
- Once reduced to just 22 birds in the 1980s, California condors have now rebounded to over 550 individuals, with more than 60% living in the wild—a success attributed to decades of collaboration, including the Los Angeles Zoo's long-standing leadership in the captive breeding program.
- To date, the Zoo has successfully hatched 259 condor chicks, including:
 - 230 from eggs laid by the Zoo's own condors
 - 20 from partner organizations
 - 9 from wild-collected eggs

- Ms. Body shared facts about the condor: it is North America's largest bird, with a 9.5-foot wingspan, capable of gliding 200 miles per day, feeding exclusively on scavenged meat, from small mammals to whale carcasses.
- She introduced Dominick Dorsa, the new Director of Animal Care, on his 12th day in the role. Dorsa brings over 30 years of experience, previously serving as Executive Vice President of Animal Care and Wellness at the San Francisco Zoo, and has held leadership positions across multiple AZA programs.

b. GLAZA Updates

- Ms. Dawn Petersen-Amend, Interim President of GLAZA, reported that as of April 30, restricted fundraising reached 112% of the annual goal, with notable contributions including \$25,000 for Zoo Camp and \$75,000 for Zoo Pals received in April.
- She commended Janet and Rob for their leadership of the Advancement Department, highlighting a "red-letter year" in fundraising. Since April 30, an additional \$52,000 has been raised for restricted priorities, including \$35,000 more for Zoo Camps.
- All seven of the Zoo Director's restricted funding requests have now been fully funded, bringing total restricted revenue to \$3.218 million, or 114% of the budgeted goal.
- In terms of operations:
 - April membership revenue reached 92.5% of the \$580,800 target.
 - March member households increased by 666, totaling 38,287.
 - March attendance reached 100% of the monthly goal, and admission revenue came in at 96%.
 - GLAZA's March revenue was at 88% of budget.
- GLAZA is preparing the final payment for this year's LA Zoo Lights, pending the last City overtime invoice. The event generated the highest net revenue to date, with a projected transfer of nearly \$1.7 million to the Zoo.
- Ms. Petersen-Amend concluded by noting that this is GLAZA's final report to the Commission, and she extended well wishes as the organization moves on to new opportunities.

c. Zoo Director Updates

- Denise Verret provided a brief update on the Learning and Engagement team's recent community outreach efforts. The team participated in the Descanso Gardens Cultivate event themed around birds and pollinators, engaging over 250 community members with education on being better nature neighbors and land stewardship.
- The team also attended the third annual LA Youth Expo at LA Trade Tech College, sharing conservation success stories focused on the California condor and pronghorn, engaging over 520 attendees.
- At the grand opening of Lopez Canyon Green Space, hosted by Councilwoman Monica Rodriguez, the Zoo team engaged over 175 guests, sharing information about canids and their relation to dogs.
- The Zoo kicked off its summer partnership with the Los Angeles Public Library, visiting five branches so far and engaging 180 participants with programs about

local animals and their urban adaptations. This program will continue throughout the summer across multiple council districts.

- In community engagement, the team hosted a tour for Unearth and Empower Communities, a nonprofit STEAM education group from Compton, for kindergarten to 6th graders. The students came well-prepared with questions and enjoyed keeper talks, a bird show, and animal presentations.
- Earlier this month, the Zoo welcomed State Senator Bob Archuleta and his guest, the Chief of Protocol for West Point Military Academy. Senator Archuleta, visiting the Zoo for the first time, expressed strong appreciation for the Zoo's conservation work and plans to share this with his constituents.
- Finally, Ms. Verret noted the ongoing transition process with the Zoo's new business partners and promised an update at the next Commission meeting.

AGENDA ITEM 7
OLD BUSINESS

None

ADJOURNMENT

There being no more business to come before the Commission, President Winnick requested a motion to adjourn the meeting; Commissioner Vannatim so moved and Commissioner Smith seconded; the motion passed by unanimous vote and the meeting was adjourned at 10:55 AM.

ATTEST:

PRESIDENT

SECRETARY