



MINUTES

BOARD OF ZOO COMMISSIONERS OF THE CITY OF LOS ANGELES

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 21, 2025 – 10:00 AM

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

LOS ANGELES ZOO
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KAREN BASS
Mayor

NITHYA RAMAN
Council Member
4th District

ZOO COMMISSIONERS

KAREN B. WINNICK
President

BERNARDO SILVA
Vice President

JUSTIN MIKITA

DARYL SMITH

ELNIE VANNATIM

MEMBERS PRESENT

Karen Winnick
Bernardo Silva
Justin Mikita
Daryl Smith
Elnie Vannatim - absent

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 10:00AM.

AGENDA ITEM 2 - APPROVAL OF MINUTES FOR MEETING OF SEPTEMBER 9, 2025

Commission President Winnick requested a Motion to approve the minutes of the September 9, 2025 meeting. Commission Vice President Silva so moved, Commissioner Smith seconded. The motion passed by unanimous vote.

AGENDA ITEM 3 - GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT

No Comments

NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL COMMENTS

No Comments

AGENDA ITEM 4 – 2026 ANNUAL ZOO COMMISSION MEETING DATES

Commission President Winnick requested a Motion to approve the 2026 Annual Zoo Commission Meeting Dates. Commissioner Mikita so moved, Commission Vice President Silva seconded. The motion passed by unanimous vote.

AGENDA ITEM 5 - PRESENTATION – L.A. ZOO SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

Kyle Canter, Chief Operating Officer and Sean Kaine, Senior Director of Corporate Partnerships, The Superlative Group gave the following presentation:

DENISE M. VERRET
Chief Executive Officer
& Zoo Director



AN EQUAL EMPLOYMENT
OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER

Saving Wildlife. Enriching Our Communities. Creating Connections to Nature.

Mr. Canter noted that The Superlative Group, based in Cleveland, has been around for over 30 years and works with organizations across the U.S., Canada, Ireland, and the UK, specializing in sponsorship and naming rights.

Their approach follows two phases: first, identifying and valuing potential sponsorship assets, and second, going to market to secure and manage those partnerships. To illustrate their experience, Mr. Canter and Mr. Kaine highlighted work with the Roger Williams Park Zoo, which generated over \$1 million in sponsorship revenue, and a valuation project with the Columbus Zoo supporting expansion planning. Mr. Canter then explained their valuation process—a collaborative effort with Zoo staff to identify every potential asset and exposure point, using impression-based data to determine fair market value and build customized sponsorship packages. He emphasized that once sales begin, their focus is on understanding brand objectives and creating tailored partnerships rather than preset “gold or silver” packages.

Mr. Kaine walked through the LA Zoo timeline, noting the engagement began in March 2025, with a site visit in April, contract finalized in August, and valuation completed by mid-September. Since then, the team has been actively pursuing new partners. Early results include Skechers as presenting sponsor for LA Zoo Lights: Nights of Glow in a six-figure deal, and Disney joining as a Zoo Lights partner with a Zootopia 2 activation.

Mr. Canter closed by stressing that this is just the start of a long-term, mission-aligned program focused on attracting quality partners who share the Zoo’s values of conservation, education, and community engagement.

AGENDA ITEM 6 - PRESENTATION – CONSERVATION STRATEGIC PLAN ANNUAL UPDATE

Dr. Jake Owens, Director of Conservation gave the following presentation:

Dr. Owens, started by highlighting how far the L.A. Zoo’s Conservation Strategic Plan has come since its launch in 2021. This year’s theme, “Reaching New Heights,” reflects the Zoo’s growing conservation impact locally and globally.

He highlighted local efforts like the Oak Woodland Restoration and Career Pathways Program with Outward Bound Adventures, where participants gained paid conservation experience while restoring six acres of habitat on Zoo grounds.

The Project Pollinator initiative has transformed nearly 60,000 square feet of turf into pollinator gardens, engaging community partners such as the Xerces Society and the Zoo Magnet school. The Zoo’s bat monitoring project also produced landmark data, identifying nine species in Griffith Park, including two previously undocumented.

On social and environmental justice, Dr. Owens shared updates on the paid Conservation Internship Program with USC and the Teen Council for Conservation, which has seen 91 youth from across Los Angeles participating in this program.

Internationally, the Zoo’s work in Uganda continues to link human health and wildlife protection, reducing illness in schoolchildren and helping protect chimpanzees. Addressing the illegal wildlife trade, the Zoo supports macaw conservation in Costa Rica and Bolivia and has cared for over 120 confiscated animals through the Wildlife Confiscations Network.

Under human–wildlife coexistence, he noted leadership mountain tapir conservation in Colombia and Ecuador, continued support for Asian elephant programs in Cambodia, and innovative projects like replanting seeds found in elephant dung for reforestation.

For species recovery, the Zoo has released nearly 7,000 mountain yellow-legged frogs, hatched and released California condors, and supported the recovery of gharial crocodiles in India with record survival rates.

Dr. Owens closed by emphasizing the Zoo’s commitment to evidence-based conservation, noting 11 new grants funded this year and ongoing research on local wildlife.

AGENDA ITEM 7 - PRESENTATION – LA. ZOO LIGHTS PRESENTATION

Robert Monell, Assistant General Manager of Extended Services, SSA gave the following presentation:

Mr. Monell, expressed excitement about welcoming guests back for another festive Zoo Lights season produced with the SSA team. The event will highlight the weird and wonderful world of plants and pollinators, with glowing lanterns of birds, butterflies, and flowers, plus themed areas celebrating Southeast Asia and Africa’s diverse wildlife. New lanterns and displays will join returning favorites like the walk-in kaleidoscope, photo ops, and seasonal treats and cocktails throughout the Zoo.

Zoo Lights runs November 13–January 11, with Sensory Night on December 9 and Pride Night on January 8. The Zoo will be closed most Mondays and Tuesdays, except during the holiday weeks and on major holidays.

Guests can explore four themed zones, ending with a colorful pyramids of Giza finale. Festive food offerings include churros, hot chocolate, weekend bars, and new seasonal dishes at Zoo Grill, with nightly service from Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf. Exclusive Zoo Lights apparel and interactive experiences such as s’mores, cookie decorating, photos with Santa, and holiday carolers will also add to the fun.

AGENDA ITEM 8 - GENERAL MANAGER REPORTS

a. Animal Updates

Dominick Dorsa, Director of Animal Care provided updates which included the following:

Mr. Dorsa, introduced himself and shared that he joined the LA Zoo and the City of Los Angeles four months ago. Originally from New York City, Mr. Dorsa came from the San Francisco Zoo, where he worked for over 12 years, and brings more than 30 years of zoo experience.

He discussed ongoing efforts to improve animal welfare and well-being while enhancing the guest experience, focusing on creating environments where animals feel safe, comfortable, and engaged. Mr. Dorsa emphasized that when animals voluntarily choose to spend time outdoors and remain calm indoors, it reflects true well-being and positive habitat design.

As an example, he highlighted a recent project expanding the peccary habitat, where a previously unused area next to the existing space was incorporated, doubling the enclosure to 5,000 square feet. The expansion provides more diverse terrain and sun–shade options for the Zoo’s herd of 12 peccaries, while also reactivating an

unused exhibit area for guests to enjoy. The species is part of a Species Survival Plan, and this improved environment may help support future breeding efforts to strengthen the population in human care.

b. Zoo Director Updates

Denise Verret, Zoo Director gave the following updates:

- Community Engagement
 - Ms. Verret highlighted the Zoo's continued commitment to engaging the community and inspiring future generations of zoo professionals.
 - Curator of Education Rosalio Rubio spoke to students at Moorpark College's Exotic Animal Training and Management Program, sharing his career journey and encouraging careers in the zoo profession. Many students said their inspiration came from zoo visits and camps.
- Community Outreach
 - The Zoo participated in several major outreach events, including the Central Avenue Jazz Festival, Autry Museum, and CicLAvia Chinatown, connecting with over 2,000 community members across Los Angeles. Attendees expressed excitement about seeing the Zoo represented and encouraged its continued involvement at community events.
- Community Partnerships
 - The Zoo continued its long-standing partnership with Plaza de la Raza for the fifth annual Beloved Pet Ofrenda, celebrating Día de los Muertos and honoring beloved pets, with nearly 1,900 guests participating so far.
 - The Zoo also deepened its collaboration with the Braille Institute, hosting the Cane Quest mobility event for students with low or no vision, the first time it was held in a public venue. Over 220 attendees participated, more than double the usual turnout.
- Enhanced Guest Experience
 - The Zoo reopened Muriel's Ranch within the Winnick Family Children's Zoo, allowing guests to interact with goats in a calm, choice-based environment. Since reopening, more than 9,000 guests have participated.
 - To further activate the area, the Zoo installed five life-size "wings" photo opportunities, including butterflies, bats, and condors which have been popular with both children and adults.
- L.A. City Department Partnerships
 - The Zoo partnered with the LA Civil Rights Department on the award-winning "LA for All" campaign, lighting the front entrance in campaign colors to promote inclusivity and community pride.
- Special Events
 - Boo at the Zoo drew over 18,000 guests during its first weekend, featuring costumed visitors, pumpkin enrichment for animals, trick-or-treating, and educational "spooky science" stations.
 - The Zoo anticipates strong attendance through the event's final weekend and expects Zoo Lights to further boost fall and winter visitation.
- Monthly Data
 - Attendance: 217,000 year-to-date (18% below projections).
 - Membership: approximately 31,000 member households; minor dip in September but recovery underway.

- Revenue: \$3.8 million across admissions, concessions, and memberships (14% below projections); total Zoo revenue is only 5% below target.
- Optimism remains high for a rebound as attendance strengthens in October and through upcoming events.
- Zoo in the News
 - Media coverage surged following the birth of two chimpanzees, the first in 11 years — featured nationally on the Today Show and CBS News, with over 1.2 million views on social media.
 - The Zoo's Braille Institute partnership, Boo at the Zoo, and Dodgers blue Zoo sign lighting were also highlighted by local outlets, including KTLA and CBS Los Angeles.

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 Smith so moved and Commission Vice President Silva seconded; the motion passed by unanimous vote and the meeting was adjourned at 11:34 AM.

ATTEST:

PRESIDENT

SECRETARY