



# MINUTES

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

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 2026 – 10:00 AM

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

LOS ANGELES ZOO  
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Los Angeles, CA 90027

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KAREN BASS  
Mayor

NITHYA RAMAN  
Council Member  
4<sup>th</sup> District

ZOO  
COMMISSIONERS

KAREN B. WINNICK  
President

BERNARDO SILVA  
Vice President

JUSTIN MIKITA

DARYL SMITH

ELNIE VANNATIM

DENISE M. VERRET  
Chief Executive Officer  
& Zoo Director

### MEMBERS PRESENT

Karen Winnick  
Bernardo Silva  
Justin Mikita  
Daryl Smith  
Elnie Vannatim – arrived at 10:06

### 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 JANUARY 20, 2026

Commission President Winnick requested a Motion to approve the minutes of the January 20, 2026 meeting. Commissioner Smith so moved, Commission Vice President Silva seconded. The motion passed by unanimous vote.

### AGENDA ITEM 3 - GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT

No Comments

### NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL COMMENTS

No Comments

### AGENDA ITEM 4 – PRESENTATION – L.A. ZOO LIGHTS PROGRAM WRAP UP

Max Pulsinelli, Chief Communications and Marketing Officer and Robert Monell, SSA Assistant General Manager, provided the following presentation:

#### Program Highlights & Operations

Mr. Pulsinelli opened by highlighting the visual success of the 2025–2026 season, specifically noting the popularity of the large animal cake in the Entry Plaza and the giant swans in the Rose Garden.

The animal lanterns were designed to enhance the guest experience both day and night, with a specific focus on displays that highlighted the importance of plants and pollinators.



AN EQUAL EMPLOYMENT  
OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER

The "walk-in kaleidoscope" was the most popular interactive display, noting that its consistent lines have prompted plans to incorporate more interactive elements in future programs.

New themed experiences, included the Nile River Basin finale—where guests walked through Egyptian scenery and pyramids—and new amenities like dedicated cookie-decorating stations.

Successful community engagement efforts included a sensory-inclusive night featured on Good Day LA and a Pride Night held in partnership with LA Pride.

#### Attendance & Revenue

Mr. Monell detailed the attendance figures, noting that despite significant weather challenges, the Zoo sold over 142,000 tickets.

A total seasonal revenue of just over \$3.7 million, with an additional \$1 million generated through food, retail, and private events.

Mr. Monell shared "fun facts" regarding concessions, noting that the Zoo sold over 36,000 churros and 2,000 gallons of hot chocolate during the run.

#### Marketing Strategy & Media

Mr. Pulsinelli explained the "PESO" marketing framework (Paid, Earned, Shared, and Owned media) used to ensure consistent messaging across all audience segments. He highlighted a record-breaking year for earned media with 425 total stories, noting that a surprise visit from celebrities Machine Gun Kelly and Megan Fox contributed significantly to broadcast coverage.

The "always on" paid media approach targeted high-traffic communities like Tarzana and Woodland Hills within a 60-minute drive of the Zoo.

The promotional ticket phases included a 10% Black Friday sale and a 20% "Last Chance" discount in January to drive attendance during the typical post-holiday lull.

A partnership with Pepsi contributed \$25,000 in additional advertising support via streaming radio.

#### Challenges & Guest Feedback

Mr. Monell addressed the season's primary challenge: the weather. It was noted that November 2025 was the wettest since 1985, which "washed out" the opening weeks and impacted the busy stretch between Christmas and New Year's.

Mr. Pulsinelli presented findings from a survey of 1,300 guests, showing that 76% of respondents would recommend Zoo Lights and 71% of the audience consisted of families.

While 64% of guests felt the event provided strong value, there is room for improvement in managing lines and guest flow on peak nights.

### **AGENDA ITEM 5 - GENERAL MANAGER REPORTS**

#### a. Animal Updates

Misha Body, Deputy Director of Animals and Experiences provided updates which included the following:

Ms. Body opened the update by announcing a significant donation from the Fresno Chaffee Zoo: three female yellow-naped Amazon parrots.

The presentation described these parrots as smart, social, bright green bird's native to the forests of Mexico and Central America, easily identified by the yellow patch on their necks.

Ms. Body shared a sobering conservation update, noting the species is now critically endangered following a dramatic 92% population decline over just three generations.

This decline is primarily attributed to habitat loss and the illegal pet trade, emphasizing that active conservation is now vital for the species' survival.

Ms. Body outlined the integration plan for the new arrivals, noting that while one male is already part of the World of Birds Show, one of the new females—who is particularly friendly and hand-reared—may join him as a new ambassador animal.

The remaining two females are slated for the aviary exhibit as part of a Taxon Advisory Group (TAG) monitored program to help build a sustainable, cooperatively managed population among zoos.

The update concluded by clarifying that while there are no immediate breeding plans, these new additions provide a critical foundation for potential breeding efforts in the future.

b. Zoo Director Updates

Denise Verret, Zoo Director gave the following updates:

- Partnerships and Community Outreach
  - The Zoo recently collaborated with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) to provide emergency medical care and temporary housing for an injured mountain lion cub rescued from Castaic.
  - The Learning Engagement Outreach team joined the Department of Recreation and Parks' (RAP) Air, Land, and Sea Program at the Lemon Grove Recreation Center to facilitate an interactive lesson for students focused on animal adaptations. This is the third year in a row that the Zoo partnered with RAP on this program, and it continues to be a successful partnership, with nearly 40 teens engaged, learning about the adaptations of local animals through interactive activities, inquiry, discussions and shared experiences.
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- Special Events
  - The Zoo is celebrating Lunar New Year February 21 and 22, marking the Year of the Horse with traditional Asian cultural programming and activities.
  - A new feature for this year's celebration is "Ordinary Beauty: The Art of Fruit, Vegetable, and Floral Arrangement," a specialized demonstration sponsored by the partnership with the Los Angeles Guangzhou Sister City Association.
  - Designer Tony Lu will lead the new floral and centerpiece demonstrations, utilizing everyday items from gardens and supermarkets to create artistic displays.
- Monthly Data
  - January attendance exceeded projections with over 101,000 guests, bringing the year-to-date total to more than 663,000 visitors.
  - Year-to-date revenue across admissions, concessions, and membership stands at \$8.7 million, which currently represents 80% of the budgeted projections.
  - Membership levels are holding steady at 28,440 households, with the Family and Family Deluxe tiers remaining the most prominent categories.
  - While weekend attendance remains strong, as seen with a recent 14,000-guest turnout, overall projections continue to be heavily impacted by rain and economic trends.
- Zoo In the News
  - The rescue and temporary housing of the mountain lion cub received television and print coverage in the media from outlets including KTLA-5 and KCBS/KCAL TV news and KNX and KFI AM 640 News Radio.

- A social media video showcasing a major milestone for the baby orangutan—climbing independently away from its mother—went viral and was picked up by several local media outlets. Social media reach and engagement for this video was high and continues to grow over time.
- The Daily News featured a story on the Angela Collier World of Birds Show, focusing on the talented staff and the way free-flighted birds help connect the public to the Zoo's conservation mission.

**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; Commission Vice President Silva so moved and Commissioner Mikita seconded; the motion passed by unanimous vote and the meeting was adjourned at 10:42 AM.

ATTEST:

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PRESIDENT

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SECRETARY