



MINUTES

BOARD OF ZOO COMMISSIONERS OF THE CITY OF LOS ANGELES

TUESDAY, MARCH 17, 2026 – 10:00 AM

Los Angeles Zoo
Grand Room
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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

DENISE M. VERRET
Chief Executive Officer
& Zoo Director



AN EQUAL EMPLOYMENT
OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER

MEMBERS PRESENT

Karen Winnick
Bernardo Silva
Justin Mikita - Absent
Daryl Smith
Elnie Vannatim – arrived at 10:02

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 FEBRUARY 17, 2026

Commission President Winnick requested a Motion to approve the minutes of the February 17, 2026 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 – PRESENTATION – L.A. ZOO-DWP PARTNERSHIP PARKING LOT PROJECT

Dr. Carol Armstrong, Director of Sustainability and Capitol Projects and Sustainability, provided the following presentation:

Dr. Armstrong opened by explaining that the project is a five-year collaboration between the Zoo and Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP), which is fully funding and managing the construction process. She highlighted that this will be the largest municipal solar installation in Los Angeles, serving as a major step toward the Zoo’s sustainability and grid reliability goals.

Regarding the technical specifications, Dr. Armstrong detailed that the solar carport will feature roughly 6,300 panels across 995 stalls, generating over 8,000 megawatt hours annually. She also noted the inclusion of a Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) near the LAUSD magnet school, which will replace an old fuel cell to protect the campus against brownouts.

Dr. Armstrong pointed out the significant transportation upgrades, including 20 DC fast chargers and infrastructure for Level 2 chargers that could generate future revenue for the Zoo. She clarified that the carport structures are designed with a 15-foot height clearance, ensuring that school buses and other tall vehicles coming off the freeway can easily fit.

Dr. Armstrong then outlined the construction schedule, which begins this summer and will be executed in two phases to keep at least half of the parking lot open for guests at all times. She mentioned that the logistics are already in motion, with 38 shipping containers of steel beams currently staged nearby at the DWP Headworks facility to avoid site clutter. Looking at the timeline, Dr. Armstrong explained that the goal is to complete the project in time for the 2028 Summer Olympics and which will allow DPW to secure approximately \$40 million in federal tax credits.

Finally, she emphasized the immediate perks for visitors, such as much-needed parking lot repaving, shaded parking, and an environmental impact equal to removing 580 gas-powered cars from the road.

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 presented the monthly report on animal arrivals and departures, specifically highlighting the Lady Ross's Turaco, a striking bird species known for its distinct calls. She explained that these birds are native to the forest canopies of Central and South Africa, where they typically live in family groups and form strong monogamous bonds. Regarding their behavior, Ms. Body noted that they primarily eat fruits and berries and are characterized as "clamberers" rather than strong flyers, preferring to hop and climb through trees.

She discussed their conservation status, stating that while they are currently listed as a species of "Least Concern," their habitat is becoming increasingly vulnerable to agricultural expansion. Ms. Body pointed out that the population within accredited zoos is relatively small, consisting of only about 50 individuals, making local breeding efforts highly important.

She shared the exciting news that the Zoo recently received a young male, who will be paired with the resident single female in hopes of forming a bonded breeding pair. To support this effort, Ms. Body explained that the birds will be kept off-exhibit and out of public view to give them the privacy needed to develop their relationship. Ms. Body concluded by playfully noting that Zoo's role often extends beyond science into "matchmaking," expressing optimism for the future of this species at the facility.

b. Zoo Director Updates

Denise Verret, Zoo Director gave the following updates:

- Community Outreach & Engagement
 - Ms. Verret discussed the "Betty White Zoo Pals" program, noting that the team recently visited six LAUSD Title 1 schools to engage over 300 students in preparation for their upcoming Zoo visits.
 - She highlighted the ongoing partnership with the LA County Office of Education, where the Zoo hosted the second part of a series designed to increase teacher literacy and resources around next-generation science standards.
 - Ms. Verret noted the Zoo's popular presence at the Council District 9 Black History Month celebration and the Firecracker Festival in Chinatown, where staff interacted with over 1,200 community members.
 - She shared an inspiring update regarding a new partnership with Homeboy Industries, where 13 adults visited the Zoo for a career tour; notably, one participant who previously worked in construction was able to revisit the Hornbill exhibit he helped renovate years ago.
 - Ms. Verret also discussed the Zoo's participation in the Students Build National Summit at SoFi Stadium, which focused on biomimicry and highlighted inspirational examples of women in STEM careers at the Zoo.
- Conservation Partnership Engagement
 - Ms. Verret detailed a successful visit from Dr. Greg Rasmussen, founder of the Painted Dog Research Trust, whose keynote presentation saw record-breaking attendance from staff, volunteers, magnet students and Zoo members.
 - She mentioned that Dr. Rasmussen also joined the Zoo Pals program for a classroom visit to bring global conservation into the local community, and she confirmed that the Commission would be invited to attend similar outreach events in the future.
- Academic Partnership & Engagement
 - Ms. Verret reported on the hosting of 19 students from the UC Santa Barbara Strategies for Ecological Education, Diversity, and Sustainability (SEEDS) program, an initiative aimed at diversifying and advancing the ecology profession. She noted a "full circle" moment during this visit, as the group was led by Victor Rodriguez, a former Zoo Magnet student and Conservation intern who is now a university student studying in the field.
 - Ms. Verret also highlighted the work of Chief Veterinarian Dr. Dominique Keller, who recently served as a guest lecturer for a UCLA seminar series, using Zoo medical cases to illustrate the intersection of veterinary and human medicine.
- Special Events
 - Ms. Verret introduced the "Mission Safari Maze," a new interactive walkthrough activity that features bilingual educational graphics and has already hosted nearly 1,400 guests since its February debut.
 - She previewed "LA Zoo Bloom," the upcoming springtime event starting March 27th, which will include live performances, scavenger hunts, and honey tastings. She added that "Big Bunny Weekend" in early April would feature "Instagrammable" photo ops and strolling characters, with festivities continuing through Memorial Day to help drive spring attendance.
- Zoo Data
 - Regarding attendance, Ms. Verret stated that February saw nearly 84,000 guests, bringing the year-to-date total to over 747,000, which currently hits 80% of the annual goal.
 - She reported that year-to-date revenue is over \$11.8 million, or 81% of projections, with membership households currently sitting at 27,247.

- Zoo in the News
 - Ms. Verret highlighted the extensive media coverage for the Zoo's Lunar New Year event, which drew 15,000 guests and was featured on outlets like KTLA, KNBC, and the Daily News.
 - She concluded her report by sharing that the Los Angeles Zoo was recently featured in a KTLA digital story as one of the "15 Best Things to Do in Los Angeles" for 2026, alongside iconic landmarks like the Hollywood Bowl.

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 Vannatim seconded; the motion passed by unanimous vote and the meeting was adjourned at 10:31 AM.

ATTEST:

PRESIDENT

SECRETARY