



MINUTES

BOARD OF ZOO COMMISSIONERS OF THE CITY OF LOS ANGELES

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 15, 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

MEMBERS PRESENT

Karen Winnick - Absent
Bernardo Silva
Justin Mikita
Daryl Smith
Elnie Vannatim – Arrived at 10:07 AM

VISITORS

Jesse Muller – Perry Becker Design

COMMISSION STAFF

Misha Body
Cristina Flores

MEDIA

None signed in

ZOO GENERAL COUNSEL

Steve Houchin

AGENDA ITEM 1 - CALL TO ORDER

Commission Vice President Silva called the meeting to order at 10:01 AM.

AGENDA ITEM 2 - APPROVAL OF MINUTES FOR MEETING OF AUGUST 18, 2026

Commission Vice President Silva requested a Motion to approve the minutes of the August 18, 2026 meeting. Commissioner Smith so moved, Commissioner Mikita seconded. The motion passed by unanimous vote.

AGENDA ITEM 3 - GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT

Jesse Muller – Perry Becker Design

NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL COMMENTS

No Comments

AGENDA ITEM 4 – PRESENTATION – CONSTRUCTION AND MAINTENANCE PROGRAM

Dan Benner, Director of Construction and Maintenance provided the following presentation:

Mr. Benner presented an overview of several ongoing and completed construction and maintenance projects across the zoo, highlighting the accomplishments of the in-house maintenance crew and their cross-departmental partnerships.

Upgrades to the giraffe viewing rails, led by Senior Carpenter Armando Cuevas, resolved end-grain rot by pre-sealing materials in-shop and extending horizontal rails over post tops for improved durability and a natural aesthetic.

DENISE M. VERRET
Chief Executive Officer
& Zoo Director



AN EQUAL EMPLOYMENT
OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER

Custom eucalyptus fencing was installed along the Colobus monkey and Pronghorn habitats, replacing aging horizontal rails with natural barriers that soften guest sightlines and obscure required containment fencing.

Addressing the chain-link fencing, he explained that while USDA regulations dictate certain containment structures, a zoo-wide audit by the Learning and Engagement division is guiding efforts to remove or visually soften patron-facing barriers.

Standoff fencing at the flamingo exhibit was installed in phases along the outer curb line to prevent weed growth and streamline maintenance while maintaining a safe distance for visitors.

Underground infrastructure maintenance relied on original 1960s plans alongside modern digital mapping, allowing the crew to use in-house high-pressure jetting equipment to clear tight drain lines without hiring external contractors.

Plumbers and equipment operators excavated and repaired a historical vitrified clay drain line serving the Asia section exhibit ponds, replacing a sagging pipe section with smooth ABS pipe to ensure reliable flow to the separation facility.

Renovations at the Red River hog exhibit included custom-milled barn timber, concrete excavation, a new regulatory shelter, and direct maintenance assistance during the forklift transport of the animals.

Collaboration with Animal Care's enrichment team involved fabricating custom-coated brackets and installing fire hoses in the chimpanzee penthouse, using high-climb access to inspect and document mesh attachment points.

Shop fabrication work completed by Carpenter Mike Royal and the team yielded specialized assets, including a custom cassowary shipping crate, swan feeding tubes, and reinforced gusset brackets for condor scales.

When asked about operational hurdles, he identified responding flexibly to unpredictable animal needs as the primary daily challenge, attributing overall success to strong coordination with Animal Care, Animal Health, and Zoo Administration.

AGENDA ITEM 5 – GENERAL MANAGER UPDATES

Animal Updates

Byron Wusstig, Curator of Ectotherms, provided updates which included the following:

Mr. Wusstig presented an overview of the Los Angeles Zoo's involvement in a new recovery initiative for the New Mexico ridge-nosed rattlesnake. He explained that while the broader ridge-nosed rattlesnake species spans mountain regions across the Southwest and Mexico, the specific New Mexico subspecies is restricted to just three isolated mountain ranges in Arizona, New Mexico, and Northern Mexico.

Residing in the Madrean Sky Islands at high elevations between 5,000 and 8,000 feet, this montane pine-oak woodland species lives in isolated populations separated by uninhabitable lowland desert.

Listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act in 1978, the species was studied extensively in the field starting in the early 1990s, though active hands-on recovery efforts were only initiated recently.

In 2024, the Zoo partnered with the Rattlesnake Conservancy to bring 30 snakes into human care across three institutions—the L.A. Zoo, the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum, and the San Antonio Zoo—to build an active breeding population.

Emphasizing that the program's primary objective is to reintroduce offspring into imperiled wild habitats across Arizona and New Mexico, he announced a major program milestone with the birth of six baby rattlesnakes at the L.A. Zoo in August.

a. Zoo Director Updates

Misha Body, Zoo Deputy Director, gave the following updates:

Community Engagement

- The Zoo's community outreach program participated in the Department of Recreation and Parks' Class Parks Teen Resource Fair, engaging with over 170 guests to highlight citywide youth opportunities and resources.

Special Events

- On October 10, the Zoo will host "Zoo Quest: Dress Code," an upcoming interactive evening event featuring team puzzles that educate visitors on how animal coat patterns, coloration, and plumage aid species survival.
- On September 19 & 20, the Zoo is launching "Zootoberfest," a new family-friendly weekend fall celebration featuring German-inspired food, live bands, specialty drinks, lawn games, and seasonal decor.

Zoo Projects

- Preconstruction activities for the solar parking lot project are underway, with DWP conducting soil sampling in Phase 1 ahead of major construction in January 2027 and project completion targeted for 2028.

Zoo Data

- August attendance reached 43,955—32% below the 65,000 projection—driven by an unprecedented statewide heatwave with temperatures peaking up to 20° above historical averages.
- Monthly revenue across admissions, concessions, and membership totaled nearly \$960,000 (30% below budget), though year-to-date revenue remains resilient at just 6% below projections.
- Active member households stood at 20,923 as of September 1, with a new targeted marketing campaign scheduled to launch in October to boost enrollment in the core family category.

Zoo in the News

- ABC-7 Eyewitness News featured a story on August 19 using Zoo-produced footage to showcase how misting stations, water features, and frozen treats keep animals and guests comfortable during heatwaves.

- Zoo Social media video of a young chimpanzee exploring its habitat was picked up by KTLA 5, reaching over 80,000 local viewers and 600,000 national broadcast viewers.
- Widespread media coverage—including feature stories across local news outlets and Reptiles Magazine—highlighted the birth of six New Mexico ridge-nosed rattlesnakes, establishing the L.A. Zoo as the first Project Obscurus partner to successfully breed the species.
- News outlets covered the release of 653 endangered southern mountain yellow-legged frogs into the San Gabriel Mountains, including 227 raised inside the Zoo's new biosecure breeding facility.
- ABC World News Tonight with David Muir broadcast an exclusive national feature on the one-year milestone of the Zoo's great ape baby boom, airing over 130 times across every U.S. media market to an estimated total audience of 691.5 million viewers.

AGENDA ITEM 6 - OLD BUSINESS

None

ADJOURNMENT

There being no more business to come before the Commission, Vice President Silva requested a motion to adjourn the meeting; Commissioner Vannatim so moved and Commissioner Mikita seconded; the motion passed by unanimous vote and the meeting was adjourned at 10:43AM

ATTEST:

PRESIDENT

SECRETARY