MINUTES

BOARD OF ZOO COMMISSIONERS
OF THE CITY OF LOS ANGELES

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 20, 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
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

MEMBERS PRESENT
Karen Winnick
Bernardo Silva
Justin Mikita
Daryl Smith
Elnie Vannatim - Absent

VISITORS
Jesse Muller – Perry Becker Design

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 10:02 AM.

AGENDA ITEM 2 - APPROVAL OF MINUTES FOR MEETING OF SEPTEMBER 15, 2026
Commission President Winnick requested a Motion to approve the minutes of the September 15, 2026 meeting. Vice President Silva so moved, Commissioner Mikita seconded. The motion passed by unanimous vote.

AGENDA ITEM 3 - GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT
No Comments

NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL COMMENTS
No Comments

AGENDA ITEM 4 – 2027 ZOO COMMISSION PROPOSED MEETING DATES
Commission President Winnick requested a Motion to approve the 2027 Annual Zoo Commission Meeting Dates. Commissioner Smith so moved, Commission Vice President Silva seconded. The motion passed by unanimous vote.

AGENDA ITEM 5 – PRESENTATION – L.A. ZOO MARKETING PLAN FY 2026/27
Max Pulsinelli, Chief Communications and Marketing Officer, provided updates which included the following:

Mr. Pulsinelli, opened the presentation with an overview of the Zoo's marketing philosophy, reviewing the consumer journey across the standard marketing funnel from

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initial brand impression and consideration, to guest visits, repeat attendance, and long-term donor development.

He emphasized that an integrated marketing ecosystem must unify paid, earned, shared, and owned media—including advertising, PR, third-party press, social partnerships, website, and publications—noting that these channels must operate cohesively to broaden brand reach, maintain messaging consistency, and leverage data metrics for tactical campaign adjustments.

Ms. Alana White, Founder of the Mighty Media Shop, the Zoo's contracted advertising and marketing agency, provided an agency overview, noting that The Mighty Media Shop was founded in 2022, is certified with the City of Los Angeles as a minority-owned, woman-owned, and small business enterprise, and is led by Southern California natives alongside senior strategist Ariana and an in-house creative and strategy team.

She outlined core operational targets, including driving 1.4 million in ticketed attendance across daytime and nighttime programming in close alignment with the SSA Group, while navigating economic headwinds, local free entertainment, competitor offerings, upcoming parking construction, and a pending membership restructuring.

To close the gap between public perception and Zoo impact, she identified four institutional pillars to highlight: active wildlife conservation, education and discovery, exceptional animal welfare and hospital care, and guest experiences, with audience growth strategies focused on multigenerational households, diverse cultural communities, purpose-driven young adults, and lapsed members.

Ms. White introduced the creative concept of "minisodes"—approximately two-minute episodic video segments designed to showcase authentic keeper stories, animal care, behind-the-scenes medical work, and new arrivals such as the recently opened penguin exhibit, before deploying large-scale commercial advertising.

A screening of a "minisode" example was shown documenting Estrella, a newly arrived seven-year-old female jaguar, undergoing a comprehensive health examination and dental work performed by the Zoo's veterinarian team and veterinary dental specialist Dr. Anson prior to exploring her new outdoor habitat.

Mr. Pulsinelli observed that while showcasing clinical procedures establishes institutional transparency, future content will balance medical work with general animal behavior and field conservation—such as Colombian tapir initiatives—to prevent public perception that animals are constantly unwell.

Mr. Pulsinelli responded that strategic planning data from the Canopy Group is actively informing media buys outside the 30-minute geographic radius, detailing that paid social campaigns utilize geofencing, lookalike modeling, and culturally representative Spanish-language creative for campaigns such as L.A. Zoo Lights.

Ms. White outlined the upcoming brand campaign titled "Wonder Awaits," which is currently in concept development to emphasize emotional discovery, nostalgia, and authentic personal moments rather than commercial listings of zoo offerings.

The planned rollout schedule establishes minisode distribution toward the end of the calendar year to build an extensive content library, preceding the debut of the "Wonder Awaits" commercial campaign at the start of the new year.

AGENDA ITEM 6 – GENERAL MANAGER UPDATES
Animal Updates
Rose Legato, Curator of Birds provided updates which included the following:

Ms. Rose Legato, Curator of Birds, presented two animal collection updates to the Commission, opening with the Zoo's first-ever acquisition of plumed whistling ducks.

She reported that six male ducks were acquired from the Sedgwick County Zoo and are already adapting well in their habitat, noting that the species naturally resides in family flocks across Australian grasslands and lagoons.

Transitioning to mammals, Ms. Legato highlighted the Zoo's long-standing leadership in the Chacoan peccary Species Survival Plan (SSP), emphasizing that the facility is one of only 29 institutions worldwide to house the species, all of which remain under the official ownership of the Paraguayan government via Project Taguá.

She reported that after producing more than 15 offspring over a 15-year span followed by a temporary hiatus, the Zoo has received a new male peccary on a breeding recommendation with resident females to resume active breeding efforts.

a. Zoo Director Updates
Denise Verret, Zoo Director gave the following updates:

Community Outreach

- The Learning and Engagement team represented the Zoo at the Griffith Park Boys Camp 100th anniversary celebration, hosting an informational booth to share conservation success stories and promote upcoming Zoo events alongside the Discover & Go free passes program in partnership with the L.A. Public Library.Staff engaged over 500 attendees from a prime booth location near the main stage and Dunbar Hotel during the Central Avenue Jazz Festival in Council District 9.
- The team connected with more than 700 children (pre-K through second grade) and families at the PBS SoCal Dinosaur Train Day hosted by the La Habra Children's Museum, expanding public messaging beyond the core Los Angeles city limits.
- At the Música y Poemas Festival in Council District 1, staff interacted with more than 400 guests, including Councilmember Eunisses Hernandez, who visited the biofact booth and reflected on how engaging with similar Zoo outreach exhibits during her childhood inspired her appreciation for wildlife.
- Despite inclement weather, the team engaged nearly 460 participants at the CicLAvia Heart of LA Chinatown hub, distributing Zoo-branded bike bells and reflective snap wristbands.
- Staff participated in the Arroyo Secco Neighborhood Council celebration in Council District 14, sharing biofacts, California condor puppets, and condor wings while highlighting regional conservation initiatives.

Community Partnership

- The Zoo opened its sixth annual Beloved Pets Ofrenda in collaboration with the Plaza de la Raza Cultural Center for the Arts & Education, which assisted in constructing the community altar honoring deceased pets through Día de los Muertos on November 2.
- For the second consecutive year, the Zoo partnered with the Braille Institute to host the Cane Quest event, providing K–12 visually impaired students real-world orientation and

mobility practice alongside tactile biofact interactions with Zoo staff. Representatives from the LA Galaxy Foundation and nine Guide Dogs of America puppies and their handlers were also in attendance to support this event.

Guest Experiences

- To maintain guest programming while the Bird Show remains on temporary hiatus for staff hiring, training, and backstage facility upgrades, the animal care and learning and engagement teams launched an animal ambassador program across in the picnic area across from the Bird Show and the Children's Zoo amphitheater, engaging nearly 1,000 visitors to date.
- The return of the Mars-sponsored Boo at the Zoo across two weekends—including Halloween weekend— will feature trick-or-treat stations, animal enrichment demonstrations, educational pop-ups, photo stations, and roving character performers.
- Planning was finalized for the upcoming LA Zoo Lights run (November 20 through January 10) under a new production vendor, introducing expanded LED light displays, photo opportunities, s'mores stations, and a new seasonal ice-skating rink located in Keck Plaza.

Zoo Data

- Staff reported that September attendance totaled just over 60,000 visitors, finishing approximately 8% below projections due to adverse weather shifts ranging from extreme heat to heavy rain.
- Total member households reached 21,068 as of October 1, representing the first month-over-month net membership growth since concluding the recent operational restructuring, led predominantly by the family category.
- September operating revenue was reported at just over $1 million (26% below monthly budget targets), bringing year-to-date revenue to 9% below projections, with management expecting autumn and winter seasonal events to narrow the variance.

Zoo in the News

- A social media video showcasing Marshall the greater one-horned rhino eating a watermelon was picked up and broadcast by KTLA as a featured "feel-good" morning segment, demonstrating earned broadcast visibility via organic digital content.
- The inaugural Zootoberfest weekend event (September 19–20) drew nearly 15,000 visitors and secured favorable press coverage for its multi-generational programming, which included craft beer, root beer, traditional foods, and live entertainment.
- Media coverage for the Beloved Pets Ofrenda included a top-two ranking in the *Los Angeles Times* Hispanic Heritage Month feature on September 10, as well as inclusion in the *Times's* October 7 "De Los" directory highlighting top Día de los Muertos events across the city.
- The Zoo officially announced the opening of its new Magellanic penguin habitat in the Rainforest of the Americas—marking the return of penguins to the facility after a 42-year absence—featuring underwater viewing areas and custom retail merchandise developed by the SSA Group.

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 10:58AM

ATTEST:

PRESIDENT SECRETARY