



MINUTES
BOARD OF ZOO COMMISSIONERS
OF THE CITY OF LOS ANGELES
VIRTUAL MEETING*
TUESDAY, MARCH 16, 2021 – 10:00 AM

* IN CONFORMITY WITH THE GOVERNOR'S EXECUTIVE ORDER N-29-20 (MARCH 17, 2020) AND DUE TO CONCERNS OVER COVID-19, THIS BOARD MEETING WAS HELD ENTIRELY TELEPHONICALLY VIA ZOOM.

“Creating dynamic experiences to connect people and animals”

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Eric Garcetti
Mayor

Nithya Raman
Council Member
4th District

Zoo Commissioners

Karen B. Winnick
President

Bernardo Silva
Vice President

Margot Armbruster

Christopher Hopkins

Daryl Smith

Richard Lichtenstein
ex officio member

Denise M. Verret
Chief Executive Officer
& Zoo Director



An Equal
Employment
Opportunity
Employer

MEMBERS PRESENT

Karen Winnick
Daryl Smith
Bernardo Silva
Christopher Hopkins
Margot Armbruster

VISITORS

No response

EX OFFICIO MEMBER PRESENT

Richard Lichtenstein

COMMISSION STAFF

Denise Verret
Denise Tamura
Lisa Gerencser

MEDIA

No response

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 FEBRUARY 16, 2021**

Commission President Winnick moved to approve February 16, 2021 minutes. Vice President Silva so moved, Commissioner Armbruster seconded, and the motion passed.

**AGENDA ITEM 3
GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT**

No Comments

LOBBYING NOTICE

No Comments

NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL

No Comments

Accredited by the Association
of Zoos and Aquariums

Accredited by the American
Association of Museums

Member of the California
Association of Zoos and Aquarium

**AGENDA ITEM 4
YEAR IN REVIEW PRESENTATION**

Zoo Director Denise Verret provided an overview of the Zoo's accomplishments during this unprecedented year. On March 13, 2020, COVID-19 was declared a global pandemic; the Zoo shut its gates to the public and many staff members were sent home to telecommute. During the Zoo's first closure from March 13 – August 26, 2020, staff continued to provide the highest care to our animals while other staff took on the challenge of working as Disaster Service Workers (DSW). DSWs delivered meals to seniors, assisted with homeless sheltering, conducted contact tracing, and provided additional community outreach needs. When the Zoo reopened with modified operations in August, staff returned to the Zoo to assist with the visitor experience. During the holiday season, Los Angeles hit a virus surge and the Zoo was forced to close again from December 7, 2020 – February 15, 2021.

In the past year, Animal Care has produced over 75 births and hatchlings, some of which are critically endangered. Animal Health conducted over 50 exams, procedures, and provided additional animal health needs with our partners on the Medical Advisory Board (MAB). The Zoo continued its commitment to Conservation with releases of California condors and mountain yellow-legged frogs, as well as continued funding support for partners like Limbe, Equine Unit, GRACE, and addition of Conservation Internships through the Mayor's office.

Learning and Engagement (L&E) staff adapted to online and virtual programming for continued community engagement and assistance with LAUSD programming. Over the summer, L&E hosted Summer Play LA to provide much needed child care. L&E have created virtual field trips, complectes, Nature Tries, and classroom curriculum for LAUSD STEAM program.

Mrs. Verret was able to appoint staff to leadership roles during the past year. Dr. Dominique Keller started in March 2020 as our new Chief Veterinarian, Jess Kohring was named Director of Equity Programs, and Mei Kwan was promoted to Assistant General Manager.

The Zoo has had over 156,000 visitors since it's been allowed to reopen. Looking forward, the City/County goals are to achieve herd immunity through vaccination and people who have recovered. Majority of Zoo staff are already eligible for the vaccine and at least 50 staff members have been vaccinated. Economic recovery will play a role in our budget moving forward and it appears California may fair better than the rest of the nation.

Mrs. Verret thanks staff for the continued dedication to our Mission and Vision.

President Winnick thanked Dan Keeffe and his staff for all the online content they've created. Zoo Director Verret noted that the Zoo will continue with online engagement because it is far reaching and more accessible than Zoo visits.

**AGENDA ITEM 5
GENERAL MANAGER REPORTS**

A. Animal Updates

Beth Schaefer, Director of Animal Programs, gave the following transaction updates:

- Pair of Cape vultures going to Living Desert
- Male roadrunner going to Zoo Atlanta
- Meerkat pup born

Vice President Silva asked about the death of the marmoset. Dr. Keller explained that the marmoset was geriatric and had several health problems including wasting disease. The older male marmoset suffered from the same issues and was humanly euthanized not long before the female's death.

B. GLAZA Update

GLAZA President Tom Jacobson gave the following update:

- Reached 53% of restricted fundraising goal for the year
- Membership is down below 36,000 households
- Have already solicited \$500,000 for Beastly Ball; half way to goal
- Beastly Ball silent auction will include animal themed art
- Feasibility study continues for the Vision Plan
- GLAZA held a retreat where they approved six new board members and continued discussions on the Vision Plan and Conservation Strategic Plan
- The Zoo's website (lazoo.org) has information about "Walk for the Wild" fundraiser

C. Zoo Director Update

Zoo Director Denise Verret discussed the Zoo's current capacity and operational changes. The County has allowed the Zoo 50% maximum attendance capacity; currently at 25% as the Zoo gradually increases capacity. The Zoo will continue to open amenities and add visitor capacity as long as it is safe for our animals, staff and visitors.

Bureau of Engineering is currently responding to comments on the Zoo's EIR draft and they anticipate it being finalized in May. The City of Los Angeles will be receiving over \$1B dollars for economic relief, but we will not know the distribution of those funds until the Mayor releases the budget in April. The Zoo met with the Planning Department to discuss the Zoo becoming its own sign district. This process will take awhile as it needs Council approval before the Zoo can apply.

Communications Director April Spurlock has relocated to Seattle and Carl Myers will be the Acting Communications Director effective immediately.

Ex-Officio member Lichtenstein asked if the Zoo will develop a sign district plan ahead of Council approval. Mrs. Verret noted staff will start working on this when we receive direction from Planning and City Council due to the complicated process. Mr. Lichtenstein asked if the Zoo has met with Councilmembers to brief them and discuss the Vision Plan. Mrs. Verret stated she had met with several already and had no opposition; will continue to meet with additional Councilmembers.

President Winnick asked if the City is in a hiring freeze. Mrs. Verret noted the City is in a hiring freeze and the Zoo has lost over 50 positions due to retirements and vacant positions being removed. Mrs. Verret is hopeful the Zoo will be allowed to hire some staff but no guarantees.

AGENDA ITEM 6

OLD BUSINESS

None

**AGENDA ITEM 7
ADJOURNMENT**

There being no more business to come before, President Winnick motioned to adjourn the meeting; Vice President Silva so moved and Commissioner Smith seconded; the meeting was adjourned at 10:37 AM.

ATTEST:

PRESIDENT

SECRETARY