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# MEMORANDUM

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Date: October 10, 2014

To: Chairman and Members  
Pima County Bond Advisory Committee

From: C.H. Huckelbery  
County Administrator

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "CHH", is written over the printed name "C.H. Huckelbery".

Re: **Reid Park Zoo African Expansion Phase II**

Attached is a letter from the Reid Park Zoological Foundation submitting a modified bond proposal. The former proposal was for \$3.75 million for a new hippo exhibit. At the time of submittal, planning for the project was in its infancy.

Since then, as detailed in the attached letter, the Foundation retained a nationally renowned zoo designer and surveyed zoo members, resulting in a modified project. The request is now for \$10 million in bond funding, to be matched with \$10 million in private fundraising, for a significant expansion to the African exhibits area of the Zoo, including a large indoor facility modeled after an African safari lodge that would include multiple revenue-generating opportunities to be reinvested in the Zoo long-term. The project would now include pigmy hippos, instead of the larger Nile River hippos, due to significant cost saving on filtration systems. The project would also include several other flagship African animals and new exhibits.

This \$10 million bond request is in line with the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum's request for \$10.2 million. According to the Zoological Foundation, the Zoo receives over 500,000 visitors annually, which makes it the highest attended gated attraction in southern Arizona, surpassing even the Desert Museum.

I believe this project has evolved into one that is much better planned; both from a capital perspective, as well as from an operating and revenue generation perspective. It is part of a comprehensive plan that reflects long-term planning for the Zoo for this project and other future projects. It would be a unique attraction for those visiting the region, as well as the many families that already visit the Zoo throughout the year.

I recommend the Committee support this revised project as part of a 2015 bond election.

CHH/dr

## Attachments

c: The Honorable Chair and Members, Pima County Board of Supervisors  
Nicole Fyffe, Executive Assistant to the County Administrator  
Diana Durazo, Special Staff Assistant to the County Administrator



October 9, 2014

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ACCREDITED BY THE  
ASSOCIATION  
OF ZOOS &  
AQUARIUMS



Mr. Chuck Huckelberry  
Pima County Administrator  
130 W Congress, 10th Floor  
Tucson, AZ 85701

Dear Chuck,

I want to express our thanks to you and the County's Bond Committee for the important work you are doing to advance major investments for our community. As we have discussed, we are resubmitting Reid Park Zoo's project as *African Expansion Phase II* in place of the formerly submitted *Hippo Exhibit*. I appreciate you sharing this explanation of the change with Chairman Hecker and the members of the Bond Advisory Committee.

Since 2008 Reid Park Zoological Society has been collaborating with the City of Tucson and Pima County to seek bond funding for major improvements and enhancements to Reid Park Zoo. Over the intervening years, the purposes for which bond funds are needed have shifted as the Zoo has moved forward, projects have been completed, and new needs and priorities have emerged. I hope that this letter will help to clarify why these changes have occurred, and reassure you that our current request is for an extraordinary plan that will make Reid Park Zoo one of the best-of-class zoos in America for years to come!

**Background**

In 2000, Reid Park Zoological Society commissioned a Master Plan to guide the Zoo's development over the next 15 years. One of the innovations proposed in the Master Plan was a new architectural footprint based on geographic regions that would better balance the Zoo's recreational, entertainment and educational purposes – including a major *African Expansion* to provide improved accommodations for African elephants. The Master Plan was to be implemented in two phases, coinciding with two anticipated bond election cycles. The first phase was completed in 2006. The second phase, including the Zoo's Conservation Learning Center and Elephant Habitat/African Zoo Expansion on the property's south edge, was



County Administrator Chuck Huckelberry

10/9/2014

Page 2

to be completed at a cost of \$12.5 million, to be shared equally by the Society and the City of Tucson.

To fulfill its part, the City intended to include \$3.75 million for the African Zoo Expansion in the 2008 Pima County bond package. However, due to the economic downturn, the bond election did not take place and was postponed indefinitely. In 2010, having successfully raised its half of the funds, the Society increased its fundraising efforts while the City searched for funds from other sources. In 2011, sufficient financing had been secured to complete the project. *Expedition Tanzania*, an expansive African elephant habitat, opened in March of 2012, resulting in record-breaking attendance of more than 600,000 visitors to the Zoo that year.

In 2013, the Society's Board of Directors and Zoo administrators began to consider next steps – particularly to repurpose the now-empty former elephant enclosure located at the center of the Zoo. To guide decision-making, the Society commissioned a Master Plan Update integrating two priorities: 1) an enhanced Animal Health Center to better meet the medical needs of the Zoo's expanding collection; and 2) a Hippopotamus Exhibit in the former elephant area, to fill the empty space with another African species. The Society's Board committed to raising 100% of the funds for the Health Center project and helping with a portion of the cost of the Hippo Exhibit. Since the hippo project was estimated at a total \$7 million cost, a revised request for \$3.75 million for the Hippo Exhibit was submitted for the upcoming bond election.

Earlier this year, both the Society and the Bond Committee began to question the sufficiency of the \$7 million budget for the hippo project, particularly with regard to the operation and maintenance (O&M) expenses. After consulting with other zoos and experts in the field, it was determined that a more realistic cost was \$12-14 million to accommodate two animals. Faced with a revised estimate that was roughly twice the originally anticipated cost, the Society decided to go back to the drawing board and seek alternative, more cost-effective solutions.

Last summer, the Society retained L. Azeo "Ace" Torre of Torre Design Consortium, Ltd., an award-winning, internationally renowned architectural planning and landscape design firm, to develop a more workable Central Zoo Plan. Torre was asked not only to consider how best to use the vacated elephant space, but also how to maximize revenue generation opportunities to help cover O&M costs. In addition, he was asked to address the top priorities identified through a March 2014 survey of 2,750 Zoo visitors: 1) more indoor space for respite from the weather; 2) more interactive exhibits; and 3) more play areas for children. Through intensive collaboration with the Society and Zoo, Torre Design produced a proposed Central Zoo Master Plan in September 2014.

### **The Central Zoo Plan & African Expansion Phase II**

The new Central Zoo Plan is a fresh, bold approach that looks comprehensively at the physical design of the Zoo, and incorporates the needs of Zoo visitors along with revenue enhancement to help cover O&M costs. Highlights of the Plan related to ***African Expansion Phase II*** include:

- In the former elephant site, construction of an “African Safari Lodge” that would serve as a rest-and-play space for visitors during regular Zoo hours, and a unique rentable venue for weddings, parties and other private events.
- Surrounding and viewable from inside and outside the Lodge, habitats will be created for various smaller African species such as meerkats, rock hyrax, fennec fox, African lizards and/or African pythons. These exhibits will include education animals that, under the supervision of Zoo staff, can be brought out for interactive experiences with visitors.
- New exhibits will incorporate up-close, underwater viewing of several semi-aquatic African species such as pygmy hippos, Nile crocodiles, and otters. Selection of this smaller endangered species of hippo will reduce construction and operating costs while still providing the exciting experience of encountering these exotic creatures face-to-face.

The Central Zoo Plan also includes several other innovative features designed to create more diverse childplay and revenue generation options, and increase the Zoo’s attraction and retention of visitors. These include: a carousel featuring assorted wildlife (instead of horses); an expanded splash park with shallow wading pool for respite from the heat; improvements to the initial entry area to provide a more green, shaded and inviting space; and a more visible and exciting entryway to the Zoo’s South American collection. **Please note that these items are not included in our bond funding request.** Rather they will be financed by the Society through other sources, with anticipated completion in the next several years. These enhancements will then generate revenues that can contribute toward the O&M expenses associated with the bond project.

The cost to complete the ***African Expansion Phase II*** project is estimated at \$20 million. Reid Park Zoological Society’s board is excited about the concept and has committed to raise \$10 million, with the intention of initiating construction in 2018-2020. We are requesting the remainder of \$10 million to be included in the 2015 bond package.

Reid Park Zoo is the highest attended gated attraction in Southern Arizona. Serving more than half a million people each year, the Zoo is a recognized and valued institution to many Pima County residents. As the support organization for the Zoo, Reid Park Zoological Society has a strong development base for raising funds, including both major donors and a large number of community supporters. The Society is financially strong and has already identified resources to provide bridge financing for multi-year pledges from our major supporters.

*County Administrator Chuck Huckelberry*

*10/9/2014*

*Page 4*

The Society's 22-member board enthusiastically supports this request and is poised to aggressively advocate passage of the bond package. Under the leadership of the board's Government Relations Committee, we intend to "get out the vote" among our constituency, which includes more than 500,000 visitors, over 14,000 member households, and hundreds of dedicated staff and volunteers. As a beloved institution for generations of Pima County residents of all ages and backgrounds, the Zoo has the ability to mobilize the passion and support among our local electorate to get the bond package passed in 2015.

We are grateful for your support of Reid Park Zoo and this important project.

Sincerely,

Nancy Schlegel  
President

attachments

## CURRENT ZOO LAYOUT



## PROPOSED ZOO LAYOUT



## AFRICAN SAFARI LODGE



## UNDERWATER PYGMY HIPPO EXHIBIT



**Requestor: City of Tucson Parks and Recreation Department & Reid Park Zoological Society**

**Date: October 9, 2014**

**Future Pima County Bond Election Proposed Project**

**Project Name: Reid Park Zoo African Expansion Phase II**

**Location:** Reid Park Zoo, 3400 E Zoo Court, Tucson, AZ 85716

**Scope:** In accordance with the Zoo's Master Plan, this project includes new exhibits and public spaces to repurpose the now-empty former elephant enclosure located at the heart of the Zoo. The project addresses priorities identified in a recent visitors' survey, including the desire for more indoor space, interactive exhibits and play opportunities for children. Highlights include:

- *Safari Lodge* - In the former elephant site, construction of an "African Safari Lodge" that would serve as a rest-and-play space for visitors during regular Zoo hours, and a unique rentable venue for weddings, parties and other private events.
- *Interactive Animal Exhibits* - Surrounding and viewable from inside and outside the Lodge, habitats will be created for various smaller African species such as meerkats, rock hyrax, fennec fox, African lizards and/or African pythons. These exhibits will include education animals that, under the supervision of Zoo staff, can be brought out for interactive experiences with visitors.
- *Interactive underwater viewing exhibits* – New exhibits will incorporate up-close, underwater viewing of several semi-aquatic African species such as pygmy hippos, Nile crocodiles, and otters. This smaller endangered species of hippo will reduce construction and operating costs while still providing the exciting experience of encountering these exotic creatures offer face-to-face.

**Benefits:** Reid Park Zoo is the largest attended gated tourist attraction in southern Arizona with more than one-half million visitors annually. This project will take a current eyesore within the Zoo and turn it into numerous exhibits and venues that will attract more visitors, provide enhanced learning and recreational experiences, and generate more revenue to support Zoo operations into the future.

**Costs:** Total capital costs are estimated at \$20 million.

**Bond Funding:** Bond funding request is \$10 million.

**Other Funding:** Reid Park Zoological Society is committed to raising the remaining funds for this exhibit. The Society exists solely to support the development of Reid Park Zoo. This funding will be secured through a combination of major gifts, a public campaign, grants and other fundraising activities. Reid Park Zoological Society has a proven fundraising track record and a financial plan to be able to fund multi-year pledges.

**Fiscal Year Project Start and Finish Date:** It is estimated that fundraising will be complete between 2018 and 2020. Detailed design and construction would then take an estimated 18 months to complete.

**Project Management Jurisdiction:** The City of Tucson will have project management jurisdiction of this project.

**Future Operating and Maintenance Costs:** The City of Tucson will be responsible for future Operating and Maintenance costs, with financial support from Reid Park Zoological Society. O&M costs are broadly estimated at \$300,000 annually, to be covered by additional revenue-generating sources. These sources include: event rental of the African Safari Lodge; admission to a “wildlife carousel” to be built by the Zoological Society (not part of the bond request); and increased ticket sales, food concession utilization, and gift shop purchases as a result of increased visitorship.

**Regional Benefits:** Reid Park Zoo is a unique and highly popular regional facility that attracts residents and visitors alike. Ongoing enhancements to the Zoo experience will bring additional visitors to this regional facility which already attracts over one-half million guests annually. Visitors include residents from throughout Pima County as well as from throughout the United States and Mexico. In addition to the local construction jobs and long term technical Zoo staff positions supported by this improvement, increasing visitor stay time and extending after-hours use of the Zoo will positively influence local economic development.

**Supervisor District of Project Location:** District 2 – Supervisor Ramón Valadez