

1. Call to Order

Meeting called to order at 5:01 pm.

2. Roll Call

PRESENT: Commissioners Tom Albright, Tjaard Breeuwer, Patrick Contardo, Amanda Crosby, Tiersa Dodge, Ed Hall, Andy Holak, John Schmidt, Michael Schraepfer, Erik Torch and Jon Welles

3. Presentations – Fairmount Park and Zoo Planning

A. President Hall began with opening remarks outlining work to date and a process to determine the future uses of Fairmount Park/Lake Superior Zoo.

B. Jim Filby Williams, Director of Public Administration

Mr. Filby Williams gave an overview of the planning process to determine the future of Fairmount Park/Lake Superior Zoo including the two options developed with the Facility Planning Group (developed with ConsultEcon) and the City's considerations for option three (developed with Hoisington Koegler Group, Inc).

C. Bryan Harjes, Hoisington Koegler Group, Inc.

Mr. Harjes gave a presentation option three.

The presentations can be found on the City of Duluth web page at: <http://duluthmn.gov/st-louis-river-corridor/fairmount-park-and-zoo-planning/>

Commissioner Questions:

Commissioner Albright commended the efforts of City staff and participants in the planning process.

Commissioner Dodge questioned if costs include demolishing the Polar Shores Exhibit.

Mr. Filby Williams said all demolition work is included in costs.

Commissioner Schmidt expressed concerns about the third option and its focus on nature play. He feels it may be changing the Zoo's mission. He also questioned whether or not space is an issue and voiced concern over the nature play scape and potential competition with Hartley. He also had additional concerns about demands on the Park Maintenance budget that is already stretched thin.

Mr. Filby Williams stated the City is strongly committed to supporting Hartley's continued viability and will not pursue a course that will undermine it. Maintenance costs would be vastly decreased with the proposed plan. The City is already fully on the hook with the facility. There is significant demolition of exhibits in the plan reducing liability dramatically. One potential use of ongoing subsidy savings is to dedicate that to ongoing maintenance.

Commissioner Schmidt requested more financial data for the third option.

Mr. Filby Williams wanted input on this process first and will then have financial modeling completed.

Commissioner Contardo commended the public for their engagement on this project.

Commissioner Crosby is pleased to have ADA design built in to the plan.

Commissioner Albright noted the Animal Care Center is outside Zoo boundaries. His understanding is that it needs to be within the boundary to be accredited. He also noted some improvement costs were not included in the third option and questioned the rationale.

Mr. Filby Williams stated in order to maintain consistency across the options those elements needed to be excluded. He also affirmed the Animal Care Center is allowable outside the parameters. The Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) gathered information from other zoos and offers guidance on this issue.

Commissioner Breeuwer pointed out the City receives \$160,000 of State Zoo funds. Will this remain the same with each of the three options?

Mr. Filby Williams expects this to continue with all three options. The third may be questionable but he believes the state will like it.

Commissioner Breeuwer asked if the \$500,000 in capital investments per year is in addition to operating subsidy.

Mr. Filby Williams reports operating subsidy is not needed if capital investment continues.

Commissioner Breeuwer questioned why the contingency amount is inconsistent between plans.

Mr. Filby Williams said the inconsistency is to be rectified. Two different consultants, using two different methodologies, produced the varying results.

D. Diana Bouschor Dodge, First Vice-President, Lake Superior Zoological Society

Ms. Bouschor Dodge reported Lake Superior Zoological Society (LSZS) has existed since 1959 to support the Zoo. In 2009, LSZS agreed to operate the Zoo. LSZS has been engaged with City Administration regarding the future of the Zoo and understands the need for change. LSZS believes there is great value in having a zoo with a strong animal component.

Ms. Bouschor Dodge thanked the City for their efforts and sees potential for collaborative solutions for the future. LSZS understands the need to keep the Zoo fresh and financially viable.

Commissioner Questions:

Commissioner Schmidt asked Ms. Bouschor Dodge if she was feeling optimistic being able to work with the City at this point.

Ms. Bouschor Dodge said LSZS is absolutely committed to working with the City to come up with a viable option and believes the process can work.

Councilor Sipress thanked LSZS and Mr. Filby Williams for being at the meeting.

4. Public Comments

Claire Jasper (Zoo Volunteer) spoke of her childhood memories of the Zoo and the importance of the experiences to her. She feels the Zoo provides lasting memories and if made smaller, it won't be remembered. She believes the Zoo to be a teaching source to every age. Emphasizing people love the Zoo because they (the Zoo) travel to them (Wisconsin, International Falls, UMD). She also feels the Zoo creates a desire in children to have pets.

Commissioner Albright addressed the issue of educational impact and questioned whether option three will have a negative impact on this component of the mission?

Mr. Filby Williams acknowledged the intent is to intensify education. Although the Zoo's boundary will shrink, the entirety of the remaining park grounds will be educational.

Carole Newkumet (River Corridor Coalition - RCC) stated she served on the nine-person Zoo Facility Planning Group, is a Zoo Board member, the Chair of the RCC, and a former Parks Commissioner. She fully believes in the public engagement process and commends the Parks and Recreation Commission for embracing it. The RCC has not taken a position on what the Zoo should or should not be. However, they will host an open forum on the Zoo's future on June 25.

Kathy Dockter (resident) spoke and professed a long family tradition of visiting the Zoo. She believes the third option would be closing the Zoo and she would be devastated if that happened. She hopes this is the beginning of the process as she feels more compromise is needed. She feels there is no similar experience nearby and believes the Zoo's work with schools to be significant.

Donna Andrews (Bears Interest Group) said she plans to participate in the process. She suggested a low cost tunnel be built to the nocturnal building so people don't have to go outside. She also suggested more focus on endangered species and native animals. She believes those are the animals people want to see and zoos play a big part in caring for them. She feels people want more interaction between animals and to see animals being natural. Ms. Andrews feels option three is disconnecting us more from animals not easily seen. She does not want fewer attractions.

Commissioner Albright asked if the Zoo considered closing during winter months to cut expenses.

Ms. Bouschor Dodge said there was a reduction in hours during winter. The LSZS is excited about an option to make the Zoo more of a year-round draw.

Shawn Dixon (resident), originally from Brainerd, vacationed here regularly and decided to move here. After the flooding in 2012, he began volunteering with flood recovery. He cannot imagine the Zoo closing after seeing the outpouring of support. His wife worked very hard to get a job at the Zoo and is now a fulltime employee. He doesn't understand how the third option will benefit the community and feels it is closing the Zoo. He believes taking away the primarily animal element takes away from Duluth and from the State.

Bryan Bongey (resident) has possessed a Zoo membership since 1991. He favors keeping the Zoo intact and focusing on animals from around the world. He feels immensely privileged to have grown up in a town with a zoo. He believes he would not be working in the environmental education field without having the privilege. He wants to keep the Zoo intact in its entirety.

Brandy Worthing (Duluth Kids Club Foundation) maintained the Zoo offers a lot for children, but is lacking on seasonal aspects. Doesn't see how an indoor play experience connects people with animals. Her preference is the Zoo in its current format, but renovated.

Julie O'Conner (Director of Guest Services at the Zoo) began working at the Zoo a year ago. Every day she has the opportunity to see the Zoo's impact on visitors. She sees a society that is sadly out of touch with nature. The Zoo provides opportunity for individuals to get close to animals and she is able to witness kids and families experience this daily. Zoo experiences inspire kids and families into action to play a part in conservation. She feels confident the team is working toward common goals and has a mission that people will be proud of.

Tammy Marotta (resident) proposed the City's interest is in option three, due to the amount of time spent on it. She would like to see the presentation broken into two parts. What's included, but also what excluded elements would cost.

Tonya Borgeson (business owner/resident) encouraged positive changes at the Zoo. Her business is being torn down for the new Zoo entrance. Ms. Borgeson holds the opinion the Zoo is animals and it is important it have exotic and endangered animals.

Commissioner Hall thanked everyone for attending and reminded attendees there is a public input option at the next Parks and Recreation Commission meeting on June 10.

Mr. Filby Williams offered the next steps in the process. Thursday, June 11, 2015, he will be engaging partners for the June 15 presentation to City Council. He will also request to have fully open meetings discussing the Zoo options.

Mr. Filby Williams also addressed the following:

- The exhibits on the western side of the creek need to be replaced.
- The best way to improve the Zoo is to locate new and improved exhibits in a core area, for a better experience.
- Full Zoo renovation to contemporary standards would cost upward of \$40 million.
- \$40 million is not available.
- Providing neighborhood access adds value.

President Hall stressed the importance and difficulty of making a decision that closely balances all needs and interests.

5. Adjournment:

Meeting adjourned at 7:20 pm.

6. Next meeting

The next meeting will be held 5 pm, Wednesday, June 10, at Central Hillside Center.