

CITY OF EL PASO, TEXAS
AGENDA ITEM DEPARTMENT HEAD'S SUMMARY FORM

DEPARTMENT: El Paso Zoo

AGENDA DATE: March 27, 2007

CONTACT PERSON/PHONE: Steve Marshall, Zoo Director 521-1855

DISTRICT(S) AFFECTED: All

SUBJECT:

Zoo Director's report on recommendations regarding the El Paso Zoo Elephant program.

BACKGROUND / DISCUSSION:

City Council February 6, 2007, Item 18A

PRIOR COUNCIL ACTION:

Has the Council previously considered this item or a closely related one?

Yes.

AMOUNT AND SOURCE OF FUNDING:

How will this item be funded? Has the item been budgeted? If so, identify funding source by account numbers and description of account. Does it require a budget transfer?

N/A

BOARD / COMMISSION ACTION:

Enter appropriate comments or N/A

*****REQUIRED AUTHORIZATION*****

LEGAL: (if required) _____ **FINANCE:** (if required) _____

DEPARTMENT HEAD: _____

(Example: if RCA is initiated by Purchasing, client department should sign also)
Information copy to appropriate Deputy City Manager

APPROVED FOR AGENDA:

CITY MANAGER: _____

DATE: _____

Talking Points for City Council Presentation
March 27, 2007
Agenda Item 15
Zoo Director, Steve Marshall

SLIDE 1

I am here today to answer two questions for City Counsel.

First, I want to let you know that I have brought two professionals that will also speak during the public comment session. They are Mike Keel, Deputy Director Oregon Zoo representing the AZA Elephant SSP and Ray Darnell, Director Albuquerque Biological Park, and member of the AZA Board of Directors.

First, allow me to review the general mission under which the zoo operates.

SLIDE 2

It is our mission to create opportunities of discovery for families and other guests from this region and beyond and to reestablish a forgotten connection between humans, animals, and the natural world. Our mission is to inspire people, using the unique experience of a zoo visit, to take positive steps in their everyday lives to become better citizens of the world in which we all live. We do this in a fun, safe, family friendly setting, while recognizing that the wellbeing of each of the animals in our care as our highest priority.

SLIDE 3

Question One: Is the El Paso Zoo fit to include the two Asian elephants currently in its collection?

During my interview for this position, in meetings with Council Members, the Mayor, the City Manager and her staff, the Zoological Society, and even my staff at the zoo, I was open to all possibilities including recommending an end to the elephant program here if I found anything that necessitated such action.

SLIDE 4

The process that I outlined for you two months ago was followed. I involved the professional staff at the zoo. I reviewed medical records and operational protocols. We interviewed zoos that have recently made a decision not to have elephants and zoos that have made a decision to continue with their elephant program. I remained impartial and objective until I invested the time and energy necessary for me to answer this question. You should feel confident that the results will give you a solid foundation on which to base your support.

SLIDE 5

Here are my findings:

Since the new animal handling and elephant management policies and procedures were developed and implemented in 2001 there has been only the one incident of any staff member acting outside of established protocol and animal welfare standards regarding using positive conditioning. This recent incident was immediately reported by another staff member and resulted in an immediate termination.

Can I guarantee that this will never happen again? This is a very serious question, one that deserves consideration and one that I would expect you to ask. Few things in life, if any, can be guaranteed.

Here is what I will guarantee that you can expect from your zoo:

We will be ethical in everything that we do.

We will be the strongest advocates for the welfare of our animals.

We will be diligent in overseeing our animal programs.

We will continue to improve the science of our programs.

We will continue to develop and improve our protocols.

We will continue to hire and retain the best people.

We will provide staff training in the best practices of animal care.

We will be worthy of the trust of this community.

SLIDE 6

My extensive review also revealed that the facilities and management programs are outstanding and in some cases innovative. The physical and psychological wellbeing of our elephants is viewed by our staff as a continuum on which they tirelessly work to improve and exceed needs. You have been informed before of the active management program and exhibit improvements that our staff developed: puzzle feeders, sleeping mounds, mud wallows, pool improvements, and other enrichment programs. There is more that we want to accomplish. The zoo currently has capital improvement and contingency funds available to be committed toward further improvements that include a soft indoor floor, elephant activated showers, more shade, outdoor heaters, and new gate installations. This will increase the quality of the elephant exhibit and provide for an increase in free choice outdoor time for the elephants.

These improvements will total less than \$200,000 and most will be accomplished within next calendar year I will be returning to you as needed for approval for these expenditures.

SLIDE 7

Is the El Paso Zoo fit to include the two Asian elephants currently in its collection? Yes it is, without a doubt.

SLIDE 8

Question Two: Should the El Paso Zoo continue with its elephant program in the future?

SLIDE 9

Because of the quickly deteriorating situation for elephants in the wild, the need for more conservation/education efforts, and the need to plan for a collectively managed sustainable North American elephant population, the AZA posed a similar question to each zoo with an elephant program in 2005. AZA asked for some level of commitment to a series of proposed program ideas.

SLIDE 10

After much research into this matter we discovered the consideration that required the most investigation on our part was the proposed future standard to manage no fewer than three females. This is a clarification of an early AZA statement about holding 3 to 6 elephants. Our current facility was designed for three females; therefore, we can meet proposed future standards.

SLIDE 11

We do not have an immediate need for expansion into Washington Park because we can meet these future standards. Will the zoo and specifically our elephant management program have physical needs in the future? Of course, the answer is yes. The zoo will soon be following the lead of El Paso City Government and individual city departments by producing a well thought out master plan. This master plan will mirror the dynamic growth of this community by planning for new, innovative exhibits encouraging family discovery and fun.

SLIDE 12

I am informing you today that the El Paso Zoo can continue to manage elephants in the future. We should continue because it enriches our community by having our children inspired by this experience. We should continue because having these animals directly and indirectly contributes to wild elephant conservation.

SLIDE 13

Can the El Paso Zoo continue with its elephant program in the future?

Yes it can, without a doubt.

Should the El Paso Zoo continue with its elephant program in the future?

Yes it should, without a doubt.