



Dane County

Minutes - Final Unless Amended by Committee

Henry Vilas Zoo Commission

Consider:

Who benefits? Who is burdened?

Who does not have a voice at the table?

How can policymakers mitigate unintended consequences?

Tuesday, January 5, 2021

7:30 AM

A. Call To Order

Others present: Ronda Schwetz, Joseph Darcangelo, Kristin Moala.

The meeting was called to order at 7:34am by ANNE ROSS.

Present 7 - JONATHAN BECKER, Supervisor CHUCK ERICKSON, TAG EVERS, JEFFREY GUNDERSON, SARAH JUSTUS, MICHAEL PETERSEN, and ANNE ROSS

B. Consideration of Minutes

[2020
MIN-366](#)

Minutes from the November 10, 2020 Zoo Commission meeting.

Attachments: [2020 MIN-366](#)

A motion was made by JUSTUS, seconded by PETERSEN, that the November 10, 2020 Zoo Commission Minutes be approved. The motion carried by a voice vote.

C. Action Items

None

D. Presentations

None

E. Reports to Committee

Zoo Report:

SCHWETZ went over a yearend report. The Zoo ended the year with about 284,000 visitors. That is a lot fewer people than in a normal year, which is over 700,000. We were able to host two weekends of Zoo Lights but the event was so successful that it became a mass gathering. We worked with Public health and determined that we had to close it. We were able to make just over \$75,000 in those two weekends, and if we had kept that pace throughout the entire event, we would have made significantly more than we did last year. We needed one more good evening to break even.

JUSTUS said she visited and heard nothing but positive feedback. It was disappointing we had to shut down but certainly understandable. Looking forward to next year.

GUNDERSON asked if we paid for the entire light package.

SCHWETZ said we purchased \$50,000 of permanent lighting, which included building roof lines and lighting the big tent. Those lights will be up year round and we will be able to use them for any event we host in the future. The contract for the lights was \$100k and we anticipated around \$200 - \$275k if we had been able to continue with the event.

ERICKSON explained that the cost to the light vendor was from operating funds while the permanent lighting came out of capital funding.

DARCANGELO said that the cost to the light vendor includes set-up, storage, and maintenance of all the lights.

SCHWETZ gave an animal update. Bo, our newest male polar bear, arrived safely. He just celebrated his 2nd birthday and his arrival increased our daytime attendance for the month of December. Bo was able to spend his quarantine on exhibit because Berit was denning up. They will be introduced this week and we are all looking forward to having both bears together.

Big cat dental procedures were scheduled for this week but postponed because the dentist had a COVID exposure. They will happen later this month.

We received a diamondback rattlesnake. Venomous animals have extra precautions and our staff handled all procedures very well. We had a venomous snake bite drill and the entire team did excellent.

BECKER asked how COVID affects animals who get it.

SCHWETZ explained that so far, it has been seen mainly in big cats. It presents as a cough. There isn't enough information yet about the long lasting effects but so far none have perished due to COVID.

ROSS asked if there is any evidence that animals can spread it to humans.

SCHWETZ said that she believes there is growing evidence that mink can pass it on to humans.

DARCANGELO added that the concern with zoonotic disease is both ways. Humans can get sick from animals, and vice versa. We are making sure all keepers have the right PPE, that any COVID susceptible animals has more than 6 feet between their exhibit

and any public space, and that we are enforcing the face mask mandate in the Zoo.

SCHWETZ continued with the animal update and mentioned that the zoo field has lost a lot of positions all over the county in 2020. A lot of zoos don't have staff or funds to ship animals right now so we are not sure how it will affect 2021. This industry is going through a rough time, like so many other fields. Dan Ashe, the President of AZA, has been great about lobbying for zoos to receive COVID funding.

ROSS asked if any zoos have failed because of COVID and had to close.

SCHWETZ said she didn't know about closures but they are struggling. New Orleans had to lay off 75% of their staff including animal care staff. It is very dependent on each individual facility. The Alaska SeaLife Center had to fundraise or face closure, and we can expect that to happen more this year. We need to be prepared for the reduction of collections in some zoos.

DARCANGELO added that a lot of zoos had to lay off staff and reduce events. Animals are the priority, but that could impact new exhibits down the road. We are very proud of Dane County, which continues to recognize the importance of the Zoo in this community. We are an institution that is relevant and we have gotten nothing but support from the community.

ERICKSON asked what the issues was in New Orleans.

SCHWETZ said a lot of zoos are admission based and with gate revenue down they didn't have any income coming in. Not sure what the local government contribution was in New Orleans specifically.

SCHWETZ gave a staff update. The janitor position that was discussed in the November commission meeting has been filled. Alliant Energy Center had a round of layoffs and one of those positions was able to come over and fill our janitor position. He started today so we won't have to reclassify that position. It was a lower class than his previous position so he may go back to Alliant when they can rehire but he may choose to stay. Our keeper Mary retired so that is currently the only open position. We celebrated her retirement and gave her a tile in the carousel area.

DARCANGELO went over the year to date revenue. With roughly 43% fewer guest we were able to make almost the same amount of money in donations.

ROSS said it will be interesting to see if per guest revenue will stay up after COVID.

DARCANGELO said we are seeing more repeat visitors.

JUSTUS said with so many other thing closed people have fewer places to go spend money. This shows that the community values the zoo.

SCHWETZ mentioned that we did some significant marketing this year. We worked with Affirm on the We Missed You at the Zoo campaign when we first reopened and they helped us with a yearend appeal that created awareness and made a case for support. We raised over \$30,000 directly for wildlife conservation from our memberships in 2020 and hope to see that program grow this year. She asked what other information the commission would like to see.

ROSS would like to see a current organizational chart and a comparison of what the former society organization chart was like.

EVERS would like reports more granular. Exact numbers from all sources including expenses. This only shows one element. We're making progress but it needs to be more comprehensive.

DARCANGELO agreed and added that we are evolving as we learn more about all of this.

GUNDERSON appreciated getting this type of solid data to start moving forward. Getting these numbers down to the exact penny might add a lot of staff time and he didn't know if we needed that level of detail.

F. Future Meeting Items and Dates

The next Zoo Commission meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, February 2, 2021 at 7:30am via Zoom.

G. Public Comment on Items not on the Agenda

None

H. Such Other Business as Allowed by Law

BECKER asked if the zoo has a current strategic plan. He knew there had been one done by the former society and wondered how that tied in to the City's Vilas Park Master Plan.

ROSS was concerned about giving out a strategic plan that is obsolete. It may confuse people since it was reliant on the former society which no longer exists.

SCHWETZ mentioned that the Zoo has been participating in the Vilas Park Master Plan talks. We want to work with them and continue to strengthen our relationship with City Parks.

BECKER asked if the Zoo would benefit from the City giving us more land.

SCHWETZ said that Joseph is on the Vilas Park Master Plan committee and those conversations are happening but there are a lot of factors that go into land redistribution. She added that we are fairly limited with the land that is directly adjacent to the Zoo. A lot of the focus seems to be more on safety and traffic flow.

I. Adjourn

A motion was made by BECKER, seconded by EVERS, that the Zoo Commission be adjourned. The motion carried unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 8:53am.

Respectfully submitted by Kristin Moala, pending approval by the Zoo Commission.