

Communication from Public

Name:

Date Submitted: 01/02/2022 11:23 AM

Council File No: 21-0828

Comments for Public Posting: I have attached a public letter to the City Council, decrying their outdated institutional processes that are wedded by default to growth options, in an era when the city itself is unraveling as a result of a century of trampling roughshod over nature. The Zoo Department does not have the overview of what is good for the City, rather the Zoo Department is a self-justifying bureaucracy. The City Council needs more courageous leadership. Speak up with better foresight for the welfare of the city's ecology and health, because the majority of the public are fed up with this rubberstamping of growth and expansion model that masquerades as "due process". Stop the Zoo expansion and please note my published open letter in the attachment.

Remarks for the City Council to vote NO on the Zoo Expansion

Years-long drought, wildfires, and heat-related death and illness are only a few of the catastrophes facing the City of Los Angeles today, as a cumulative result of eviscerating indigenous nature in the name of “development” over the last century. The City's [Zoo Vision Plan](#), in spite of its name, appears to be irrationally *blind* to the irony that it seeks to encroach into [Griffith Park, one of the city's last-remaining patches of still-intact nature](#), in its proposed expansion. This open letter to the City Council of Los Angeles exhorts them to reject the Zoo expansion proposal and reevaluate their institutional processes wedded to a default, but debunked, assumption that growth is always a positive.

A Debunked Model of Growth/Expansion

The City's [Zoo Vision Plan](#) rehashes a 19th century rationale of running roughshod over the delicate, ecological complex of the unique biome in California to superimpose landscaping, construction, agriculture and production styles, usually copied from elsewhere, which are posited as “advancement” or an “improvement” over nature.

When [zoo director Denise Verret calls Griffith Park an “undeveloped area”](#) she unabashedly uses the same wording that greedy 19th century real-estate developers did as they sought to turn land into coin. She is reproducing the same Euro-American cultural legacy that treats nature, not as a spiritually alive source of our own life, rather as a “resource” to be exploited. In that same vein, she is venerating a form of artifice-shaped “growth” that has eradicated millions of acres of native, deep-rooted trees and vegetation that would otherwise have stored carbon and water in the ground, and supplied atmospheric moisture to stimulate rain and snow. This “development” model—heedless of nature’s sanctity and balance—has desertified central California and lowered groundwater tables across the state. It has suffocated millions of acres of living soil under concrete, and sealed off the natural Los Angeles River.

To not connect the fiery conflagrations, for which California is today world-famous, with this legacy of indigenous nature erasure and shrinking is to continue in a dangerously blinkered self-justifying bubble. Residents of Los Angeles fully well recognize the dangers resulting from destroying nature—it is manifested in the impaired lungs of their children.

That City of LA departments continue to proffer proposals like the Zoo Vision Plan which assume such a “growth” model, as if morally right or desirable, is shocking.

Monumentalizing is no Measure of Greatness

In addition this Zoo Vision Plan is peddling the same grandiose narratives used by the City of Los Angeles in the racist practice of land seizures and community evictions to build outsized stadiums (e.g., Dodger Stadium which caused over a thousand, mostly Mexican, homes to be

demolished). The unselfconscious rhetoric about expanding the LA Zoo into a “world-class destination” follows in that same vein.

The Bureau of Engineering plans betray a textbook case of prestige-seeking by monument, as if power could be projected by the scale of construction. To bring some realism to this vanity, the proposed 20-year Zoo expansion project would boil down to another gimcrack amusement park with more paved parking lots, additional roads, a “funicular”, and visitor’s services as august as public bathrooms and refreshment kiosks.

Even accounting for some “educational exhibits” and improved animal enclosures, most of the public are aware that zoos are more for people and the implied monetary spending they bring, than homage to the wellbeing of animals. Ideally animals could thrive without danger from humans in their own natural habitat, rather than being captive as the lone remaining representatives of their species--thanks to human-driven extinctions. As one Los Angeles resident notes, "The destruction of a natural habitat to displace/eradicate an ecosystem seems surreal as an excuse to then create a superficial habitat for animals." Expanded construction is simply more uprooting of irreplaceably unique nature thousands of years in the making, with immeasurable value for human and ecological health, for a quick buck.

Legacy Self-Interested Institutional Processes

The recommendations for expanding the zoo are put forward by the same Department in charge of managing the zoo. This *conflict of interest* taints the entire remit—the Zoo Department is invested in perpetuating, if not expanding, its own budgetary commitments. Both alternatives to grow the zoo have negative consequences for the City’s residents in terms of reduced air quality, increased traffic congestion, and lower quality of experience of visitors. Going from 1.8 million to 3 million visitors annually, demolition of existing buildings, installation of new facilities, adding new road connectors will all exact a too-high toll from Griffith Park’s trees, wildlife, and the visitors' quality of experience. Expanding vehicular traffic in the park and cutting down priceless native woodland habitat are unacceptable to the majority of Los Angeles residents who turn to this precious parkland precisely to escape the urban experience of crowds of people and concrete.

Perhaps considerations such as crowding, more waste and refuse, encroaching natural areas that offer untold health benefits are not the moral concern of the Zoo Department itself, whose brief is narrower. Consider that the Zoo Department’s ultimate, fiscal, purpose is to generate revenues. They say as much in their submitted documents: “Implementation of early phases [*of development*] will facilitate increased attendance and revenue, ensuring a financially sustaining operating model for the Zoo.” This underlying fiscal purpose drives the logic that increasing visitors by a million annually is actually a “good” thing. That however, certainly doesn’t hoodwink the public who understand the implications of the zoo expansion proposal from a much more wise, holistic perspective. The **Environmental Impact Statement** the Zoo Department proffers, notwithstanding its length, is little more than a public relations exercise to make the public feel assuaged about the inevitable hacking down of trees to make way for more concrete-capped expanses.

Egregious Conflicts in the City's Plans

The “[2020 Los Angeles Biodiversity Report](#)” and the “[Green New Deal](#)” are published by the same City authority which, on the other hand, is proposing to slash down precious remaining natural areas to expand construction. To claim alongside the zoo expansion proposal, that Los Angeles is (1) a global biodiversity hot spot, and (2) a “global leader” in climate change mitigation measures sounds little short of schizophrenic.

The Zoo Vision Plan runs counter to the commitments to biodiversity and climate impacts mitigation laid out by (other departments of) the city itself. In this contradiction is the tragedy of inertia, as the city's bureaucratic machinery grinds on obliviously inside administrative silos and entrenched budgets whose overriding logic is trained on a trellis that upholds forever-growth as a “good”. It is 2021 and few of us are disabused of the maxim that unchecked growth is a “good.”

In this contradiction is also the tragedy of timid city leaders who are afraid to challenge inherited, legacy processes in favor of strategies that more properly befit the dystopian future that lies before us.

Why would the City of Los Angeles leaders and apparatchiks cling to past distortions, rather than step into strategies for a saner future? *The champions of this zoo expansion are no wise, forward-looking captains steering us into the existential storms of climate instability, they are shrill salesmen of a hackneyed model of “advancement” long-past its expiry date, and now poisonous.*

Recommendations

We deserve more sage leadership from a City Council who would now make short shrift of our precious remaining nature by a rubberstamping exercise, masquerading as a vote, on a legacy institutional process that is designed to push growth.

The City Council would be doing grievous harm to its residents, human and nonhuman, by rubberstamping a proposal to destroy swaths of Griffith Park's natural heritage. The public wants to ensure a livable future with old mature trees, intact in Griffith Park. The public overwhelmingly [rejects a proposal that would slash down 200 old-growth California native, protected trees in the name of expanding the zoo](#). The City Council is urged to uphold the “priceless, inherent good” of nature. Voters wish the City Council strongly consider the “**No Project Alternative**”, in which precious remaining mature, native trees in Griffith Park are protected. This would be one small step in keeping the City of Los Angeles livable into the future.

Communication from Public

Name: SORO People's Committee

Date Submitted: 01/02/2022 12:23 AM

Council File No: 21-0828

Comments for Public Posting: We are concerned about the largely unpopular proposed LA Zoo expansion plan. We understand that the Zoo needs to modernize its facilities, but the proposed plans would destroy the integrity of the park. We recommend that the Zoo adopt Alternative 1, while also utilizing portions proposed in Alternative 2, with the goal being retaining all land currently zoned as open space, abiding by net-zero plans that are instated by the city, and eliminating plans that would harm or destroy elements of the park. We ask that the city reject the Zoo's request to adopt the findings and statement of overriding considerations, which would violate the city's net-zero policy for the Zoo. We must, above all else, avoid any damage to currently existing native flora and fauna in the park. The land currently houses 200 trees, including endangered native species which are an integral part of our urban canopy. At this time, a Zoo expansion that creates increased vehicle traffic and destruction of wildlands will only aggravate the effects of climate change, like poor air quality. We must conserve this natural habitat for everyone in the city to enjoy for decades to come.



Sunday, January 2, 2022

To our esteemed councilmembers,

We are concerned about the largely unpopular proposed LA Zoo expansion plan. We understand that the Zoo needs to modernize its facilities, but the proposed plans would destroy the integrity of the park.

We recommend that the Zoo adopt Alternative 1, while also utilizing portions proposed in Alternative 2, with the goal being retaining all land currently zoned as open space, abiding by net-zero plans that are instated by the city, and eliminating plans that would harm or destroy elements of the park. We ask that the city reject the Zoo's request to adopt the findings and statement of overriding considerations, which would violate the city's net-zero policy for the Zoo.

We must, above all else, avoid any damage to currently existing native flora and fauna in the park. The land currently houses 200 trees, including endangered native species which are an integral part of our urban canopy.

At this time, a Zoo expansion that creates increased vehicle traffic and destruction of wildlands will only aggravate the effects of climate change, like poor air quality. We must conserve this natural habitat for everyone in the city to enjoy for decades to come.

YOURS SINCERELY,

THE CONCERNED STAKEHOLDERS OF THE SOUTH ROBERTSON PEOPLE'S COMMITTEE