



# Rosamond Gifford Zoo

Strategic Master Planning Final Report  
April 2014



# Introduction

Overview — Team — Process

# Introduction

- + In February 2013, the Friends of the Rosamond Gifford Zoo engaged Zoo Advisors, LLC, to assist in the development of a comprehensive integrated strategic master plan to guide the future direction and plans for the Rosamond Gifford Zoo. Zoo Advisors partnered with GLMV Architects to conduct the four-phase project during the past year. The planning team included representatives from Onondaga County, Friends and Zoo leadership, and Board and staff members.
- + The team conducted an assessment and evaluated opportunities at the Zoo to enliven the overall guest experience, implement site and facilities improvements, strengthen the Zoo's position in conservation and sustainability, position the Zoo as a regional destination and consider various governance options. The process reached out broadly to the leaders in the community and government: During a series of seven site visits, the consulting team conducted multiple meetings with elected officials, community leaders, Friends Board and membership, and volunteers. A Blue Ribbon Panel assembled thought leaders from around the country to the Zoo for a "blue sky" session. Master planning activities included a thorough review of site and facilities, as well as adjacent land, numerous design workshops with key Board and staff, and concluded with concepts for exciting new exhibits and flow that make best use of the Zoo's site and view scapes.

# Introduction

- + The Zoo has done an excellent job in establishing itself as a valued community resource. It enjoys broad public support and a solid membership base. Its public/private partnership and leadership are well-respected, and its financial position is stable. The Zoo has enjoyed a period of recent improvements and now is poised to further strengthen its position as a community asset. The goal now is to leverage past successes, generate excitement around a new and compelling mission and vision, and attract broader audiences from throughout the Central New York region, engaging guests in new and innovative ways, and guaranteeing them the “Best Day Ever.”

# Introduction

The Rosamond Gifford Zoo's new strategic plan sets the launch pad for transformative growth and change at the Zoo, and a commitment to a new and revitalized institutional mission. By setting a bold vision for the future, Zoo leadership — from both the County and the Friends — has demonstrated the foresight and determination to become a first-class regional destination in central New York.

The process that established this vision for the future and lays out a clear path on how to achieve it, was highlighted by:

- + A highly inclusive process that included a broad range of internal and external stakeholders — Board, staff, volunteers, County leadership, City leaders, donors, supporters and the community
- + Joint planning by both the County and the Friends of the Rosamond Gifford Zoo, with full commitment and engagement of both groups throughout the process
- + Integrated planning that combined strategic, facility and business efforts into a single comprehensive initiative

# Consultant Team



- + **Zoo Advisors:** Zoo Advisors, LLC, is a full-service consulting firm providing business, organizational and financial expertise to zoo, animal and conservation organizations. Its philosophy of marrying mission with margin, and its highly personalized client relationships set it apart from the field.
  - David Walsh, President and Chief Advisor; project leader
  - Kathy Wagner, Senior Advisor; project consultant
- + **GLMV Architects:** GLMV Zoos serves zoos nationwide. Its commitment to sustainable design, creativity and personal client care is demonstrated in its work with zoological institutions across the country.
  - Craig Rhodes, Vice President Zoological Planning and Design
- + The **Zoo Advisors/GLMV** team have worked together on more than a dozen projects, developing a seamless, highly efficient and cost-effective process that drives results, ensures creative solutions and values personal client engagement.

# Strategic Planning Committee

One of the keys to the successful development of a strategic plan was to create a cross-organization planning committee comprising Zoo, County and Friends staff, leadership and members of the Board. We thank the following committee members for their involvement, input and engagement throughout the entire planning process.

- + Janet Agostini, Friends President
- + Carl Austin, Friends Board Chair
- + Ted Fox, County Zoo Director
- + Ellenrose Galgano, Friends Board Member and Education Volunteer
- + Nate Keefe, Friends Education
- + Tom LaBarge, County Zoo Curator
- + Bill Lansley, County Parks Commissioner
- + Sarah Moore, Friends Development
- + Marty Skahen, County Deputy Parks Commissioner
- + Doug Wojcik, Friends Board Member

# Our Process

The comprehensive strategic planning process included four distinct phases throughout several months. Each phase included opportunities for staff and Board feedback to build an inclusive process.

- + Discovery: *Where are we now?*
  - Internal and external stakeholder Interviews
  - Volunteer and staff engagement; public input
  - Market and demographic trends; benchmarking
  - Organizational, financial and facility assessment
- + Dreaming: *Where can we go?*
  - Updating the Zoo's mission, vision, core values
  - Identification of opportunities: revenue, operations, program, organization and facility
  - Blue Ribbon Panel
- + Reality: *What can we really do?*
  - Establishing priorities
  - Defining strategic goals
- + Action: *How do we get there?*
  - Action planning template
  - Organizational, financial and facility plans
  - Governance recommendations



# Discovery



# Discovery

It is during the Discovery Phase that we cast our net widest: conducting numerous meetings, interviews and “listening” sessions; reviewing background materials; investigating trends; and conducting facility and overall organizational assessments. Both Friends and Zoo leadership encouraged this inclusive process and were open to input and diverse perspectives from all stakeholders: This led to a plan that truly represents constituent interests and models the best practices in zoo growth and development. The varied elements of the Discovery Phase described below gave rise to a set of “emerging issues” that were reviewed with the planning team and Board, and tested and discussed by a panel of thought leaders — these issues ultimately led to the strategic goals in this plan.

- + Internal and External Stakeholder Interviews
- + Volunteer and Staff Engagement: Interviews, Meetings, Staff Survey
- + Market and Demographic Trends
- + Facility Assessment

# Analysis: Strengths and Weaknesses

Through a series of discussions with the planning committee, the staff and a group of volunteers, the consultants developed the following assessment of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. This list is not meant to be all-inclusive, but a highlight of key issues, which may have an impact on planning a long-term vision.

## Strengths

- + Partnership between County and Friends
- + Sharing of governance and roles to operate the Zoo
- + Board, staff and volunteers
- + Reputation
- + Consistent value
- + Location in Central New York
- + Financially sound

## Weaknesses

- + Location and accessibility; difficult wayfinding
- + Entrance bottlenecks
- + Staffing capacity
- + Logistics barriers
- + Lack of awareness of conservation program

# Analysis: Opportunities and Threats

## Opportunities

- + Bringing in more off-season guests
- + Available expansion space
- + Contact barn renovation
- + Area development: downtown, Destiny, CVB
- + Syracuse University, SUNY
- + Emerging Green Hub
- + STEM
- + Senior Market, young adults

## Threats

- + Perception of neighborhood
- + Destiny competition: Development of aquarium
- + Accessibility
- + Availability of animals in the future (AZA collection sustainability challenges)
- + Nearby non-AZA facilities offering contact experiences
- + City self-image

# Staff Input: Survey

As part of the Discovery Phase and the importance to engage staff in the process and hear and understand their feedback and input, the consultant team conducted a Zoo survey. This survey asked staff to provide input into needs of the Zoo and across the organization.

- + Equipment needs: IT, greater functionality
- + Space needs: Staff/volunteer office and restrooms, storage, volunteer meeting space
- + Exhibit improvements/additions:
  - Clinic
  - Outreach animal housing; education facilities
  - Main building/indoor exhibits
  - Northern Trail; outdoor primates, red wolf, lion, aviary
  - Guest amenities; catering facilities
  - Kids play area
  - Indoor group lunch facilities
  - Graphics, interpretation overall

# Staff Input: Survey

- + Opportunity area — conservation:
  - The Zoo should be doing more, telling story better.
  - The Zoo should be providing more opportunities for guest action.
- + Vision for future:
  - Richer, more interactive guest experience; more activities for children
  - More animal interactions
  - Additional indoor space
- + Possible constraints:
  - Complexities of “the system”
  - Funding
  - Staff/space resources

# Staff Input: Interviews

The consultant team also conducted one-on-one interviews with the senior management staff to gain a more in-depth perspective regarding perceptions, issues and opportunities. Highlights from these interviews are on the following slides.

- + Peg Dwyer, Collection Manager, Wildlife Trails, Outdoor Birds
- + Nate Keefe, Director of Education
- + Tom LaBarge, Curator
- + John Moakler, Collection Manager, Elephants
- + Lorrie Murray, Director of Operations
- + Maria Simmons, Director of Marketing
- + Lorrell Walter, Director of Public Relations

# Staff Input Highlights: Interviews

A few of the highlights from staff interviews are listed below:

- + Great respect for Janet and Ted; recognition of their leadership
- + Dual governance equals logistical issues; some frustration with role relationships, supervision
- + Appreciation for Friends' support
- + Committed staff, teamwork, mutual support (even "across lines")
- + Additional staff needed for growth and consistency in animal care
- + More guest interaction, rides, animal encounters
- + Some, but not much competition for family activities in region: Baltimore Woods, Highland Park, Onondaga Lake Park, MOST, Beaver Lake Nature Center, kids' school activities
- + Opportunities for collaboration: SUNY, Destiny, arts organizations
- + Need a big, "game changing" exhibit attraction; exhibits "tired," need refreshing



# External Input: Stakeholder Interviews

One of the hallmarks of the strategic planning process is to spend time talking to external stakeholders to hear an outside view of how the Zoo is perceived in the community, opportunities for future development, and to explore possible opportunities for partnership and collaboration.

By engaging this group early in the process, the Zoo begins to build buy-in for the plan from the outset and creates a sense of ownership by a much broader group of constituents. Stakeholders interviewed include:

- + J. Ryan McMahon II, Chairman, Onondaga County Legislature
- + Stephanie Miner, Mayor of City of Syracuse
- + Peter Dunn, President/CEO Central NY Community Foundation
- + Marilyn Higgins, VP Community Engagement and Economic Development, Syracuse University
- + Dirk Sonneborn, Executive Director, The Gifford Foundation
- + Paul Dodd, Managing Partner, Northwestern Mutual Greater NY Group
- + Sharon Contreras, Syracuse Superintendent of Schools
- + David Aitken, Destiny USA

# External Interviews — Highlights

Highlights of external interviews are as follows:

- + Zoo/Society management spoken of as one entity; well-respected, strong leadership
- + Good, solid, “mid-tier” board; influential business leaders
- + Zoo valued by community, but lacks strong city presence; opportunity for greater community involvement
- + Zoo is known for elephants
- + Need for more entertainment value, more interactive guest attractions; indoor exhibits feel dated, need improvement
- + Opportunities for collaboration (funding support available): Baltimore Woods, Destiny, Fowler School, IDEAS, SU, SUNY, Connective Corridor, Near Westside, Scholarship in Action, School of Education
- + Opportunity to be sustainability model; wide impact
- + Greater engagement of young adults

# Blue Ribbon Panel

During the “Dreaming” Phase of the project, a “blue sky” workshop was convened: This workshop was aimed at engaging stakeholders in a thought-provoking and inspiring — but reality-based — discussion of trends and innovative ideas to advance the planning process. This process provided a fresh perspective on the work of the Zoo; challenged the status quo; identified trends in relevant fields; and helped fine-tune the emerging key planning issues the team identified. The panel, brought in from Syracuse and throughout the country, met with not only the planning team, but also Zoo Friends membership, Board and entire staff during their two-day visit. Panelists included:

- + Sherburne “Shere” B. Abbott, Vice President for Sustainability Initiatives and Professor of Sustainability Science and Policy, Syracuse University, Syracuse, N.Y.
- + Judy Braus, Executive Director, North American Association for Environmental Education, Washington, D.C.
- + Becca Hanson, FASLA, Partner, Studio Hanson/Roberts, Bainbridge Island, Wash.
- + Steve Martin, President, Natural Encounters, Inc.; Winter Haven, Fla.
- + Eric Mower, Chairman/Chief Executive Officer, EMA, Syracuse, N.Y.

# Panelists' Observations on the Zoo

Following are panelists' observations on the Zoo:

- + There is attractive landscaping; great topography and views.
- + Is the diverse, interesting animal collection, too diverse?
- + The experience could be more fun and interactive.
- + More information about Zoo visitors needed.
- + It has a great Central New York location.
- + There exists the opportunity to be a regional hub for sustainability.
- + Consider the Zoo experience as theater: Enliven the visit and engage, inspire and empower guests.
- + Defining audience segments and understanding motivations can help expand market.
- + Zoo can be the link for community engagement with sustainability movement.
- + Zoo can be a center for STEM learning in the region; for families, students and teachers.
- + Appropriate staffing and support level is critical for "the new Zoo."

# Panelist Remarks

Panelists shared some thoughtful insights and perspectives:

- + **Shere Abbott:** Sustainability needs total engagement of research and community; the Zoo can be the link, promoting and modeling sustainability; inspire behavior change
- + **Eric Mower:** Identifying audience *persona* will help the Zoo understand motivations; treat the guest experience like theater; constantly engage with new experiences, activities
- + **Steve Martin:** Create connections; current exhibits offer untapped opportunities; engage, inspire, empower; “every kid, every time, goose bumps”; create “defining moments” that have impact distinct to Rosamond Gifford Zoo
- + **Judy Braus:** Zoo is a natural for STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) education; allow kids to connect with nature; a bright spot and hope for conservation
- + **Becca Hanson:** Zoos , with their large audiences, can influence change; consider local projects that engage citizen scientists

# Site Highlights

The Discovery Phase also included a site tour and review of facilities. Further analysis was done during subsequent stages and an iterative process of testing various aspects of the site, land usage and facilities. A number of highlights emerged, which began to inform initial aspects of facilities planning. These included:

- + Recent major investments in the front entrance, pond; elephants have yielded an upgraded visitor and animal experience
- + Great site — the topography, landscape and physical elements present many opportunities to create unique exhibits, attractions, and enhancements to surprise and wow the guest
- + Opportunities to get up-close to many animals — current exhibits are designed to get the guests as close to the animals as possible; future exhibits should offer similar experiences
- + Extensive indoor exhibits — the entry building works well given the region's climate; these areas should be maximized
- + Diversity of animal collection — the Zoo offers a wide range of animals for the guests to view; this is especially notable given the size of the Zoo, and the community it serves
- + Rental space — the Zoo has good rental spaces, conveniently located close to the entrance; however, they don't take advantage of showcasing the Zoo's animals
- + Elephant exhibit — the expanded elephant facilities show the Zoo's commitment to a sustained and successful elephant program



# Strategic Direction

Mission, Vision, Values; Goals; Objectives

# Mission, Vision, Core Values

The heart of any organization is its mission; its vision provides a glimpse of a desired future; its values guide activities along the way, providing a guidepost for doing business, treating employees, guests and associates, and serving as a touchstone for key decision-making.

An organization's mission, vision and core values statement often serves as a preamble to its strategic and master plans, acting as the launch pad for development of strategic goals and objectives.



# Mission Statement

A mission statement represents the current state of an organization; it's what we are; what we do. A mission statement is a succinct description of the business we're in; it says "why" we exist.

## New Mission Statement:

*The Rosamond Gifford Zoo is dedicated to connecting people to the natural world by providing engaging guest experiences, exceptional animal care and unparalleled conservation education.*

# Vision Statement

Your vision is your dream. A vision serves to unite people by pointing them to a destination.

## **New Vision Statement:**

*Rosamond Gifford Zoo provides its guests the "Best Day Ever," ensuring experiences that excite, memories that endure, and knowledge that inspires worldwide conservation.*

# Core Values

**Core Values** are ideals that govern the way you do what you do; they are fundamental driving forces; they are principles that guide an organization's internal conduct, as well as its relationship with the external world. As part of the planning work, we established the following six values:

- 1. Animal Welfare:** We value animal well-being above all else, and make all decisions with animal health and safety as a top priority.*
- 2. Fun:** We value fun and believe that fun is a gateway for learning and that it is essential for a healthy workforce.*
- 3. Sustainability:** To be a truly sustainable organization and to educate and encourage our guests to conserve, we must first model sustainability ourselves by saving resources and making wise choices in our business and operating practices.*

# Core Values

**4. Exceeding Standards:** *We go above and beyond in all we do, surpassing expectations of our guests and exceeding standards of our profession.*

**5. Integrity, Honesty and Trust:** *We value integrity, honesty and trust, and model these values for our guests, our business associates, the community and each other.*

**6. Diversity and Inclusion:** *We value diversity and believe that inclusion of all viewpoints and perspectives will enrich our workplace and help our Zoo grow and prosper.*

# Strategic Goals

1. Enliven the Zoo experience
2. Continually improve the Zoo's facilities and grounds
3. Develop a more robust sustainability and conservation program
4. Position the Rosamond Gifford Zoo as a regional destination
5. Develop an effective and enduring governance model

# Goal I: Enliven the Zoo Experience

Creating a livelier, more interactive, and more personalized experience for all audiences will enhance the Zoo's effectiveness as a learning environment and add to its appeal as a destination for family fun. This goal addresses the needs of both guests visiting the Zoo and those participating in programs. The Zoo will build on its current site, facilities and programs to offer a more engaging and fun experience for everyone, using our people, the best new technologies, and innovative activities and attractions. The Zoo will improve interpretation and wayfinding to create a greater sense of engagement throughout the site.

- + Add more opportunities for activity and engagement
- + Develop lifelong learning initiative
- + Improve guest amenities — areas for rest and refreshment, shade, benches
- + Create an improved guest entry experience
- + Develop opportunities for revenue generation that offer activity, up-close encounters, and interaction with animals and staff

## Goal II: Continually Improve the Zoo's Facility and Grounds

The new master plan will optimize the Zoo's magnificent views and extraordinary topography to highlight animal species and delight visitors. Development of other exhibits will match the standard of Asian Elephant Preserve, showcasing the Zoo's diverse collection, incorporating training opportunities and offering "whisker-close" encounters. Developing a clear vision for land use and horticulture, and a thoughtful plan to enhance horticultural offerings will enrich the visitor experience and increase the overall value of the site. Better interpretation will complement the Zoo's educational priorities.

- + Implement master plan improvement priorities
- + Create a mini-master plan for entry building and indoor exhibits
- + Grow and preserve horticulture and the botanical collection
- + Develop and implement integrated and comprehensive interpretive plan
- + Create a botanical plan

# Goal III: Develop a More Robust Conservation and Sustainability Program

Implementing a conservation agenda based on the two pillars of sustainability and wildlife conservation is a timely goal. Sustainability is a natural focus, given the region's impressive "green" image and broad-based support network. A renewed emphasis on wildlife conservation can strengthen existing programs and gain increased awareness of the Zoo's efforts, potentially identifying new funding sources. The Zoo will need to use human and financial resources wisely to best position itself in the broader conservation arena, and capitalize on staff skills and collection opportunities.

- + Capitalize on the region's sustainability plans, establishing the Zoo as a showcase for programs and initiatives
- + Partner with other regional leaders to create collaborative programs, which maximize the Zoo's strengths as a connection point to its guests
- + Expand conservation program
- + Increase education and awareness around Zoo conservation initiatives



# Goal IV: Position the Rosamond Gifford Zoo as a Regional Destination

The Zoo's location at the crossroads of major highways in the center of the state offers the potential for growth across the region. There is little competition for family leisure time that can match the Zoo's multigenerational appeal and price point. Creating a livelier guest experience and emphasizing the Zoo's role in conservation and education will differentiate the Zoo from other nearby destinations. Promoting the Zoo as a regional destination is a good investment and strengthens the Zoo brand as a fun family learning destination.

- + Highlight the Zoo's appeal as a regional attraction for families and other audiences
- + Improve Zoo access including signage and wayfinding to get to the Zoo
- + Collaborate and partner with other attractions and organizations to strengthen efforts to reach out-of-market audiences
- + Begin trial marketing and promotion efforts to attract visitors from other geographic markets, particularly to the east of the Zoo

# Goal V: Create an Effective and Enduring Governance Model

In order to grow and prosper, the Zoo must develop a compelling plan and vision that includes a sustainable business model for staffing, resource creation and organizational development. Like many zoos, Rosamond Gifford Zoo has dual leadership: Onondaga County and Friends of the Rosamond Gifford Zoo. The Zoo benefits from broad-based support, and staunch commitment from both the County and the Friends. However, a plan for future governance under a single operating entity should be developed to secure an enduring and thriving future for the Zoo.

- + Develop long range plan for most effective governance model
- + Begin developing relationships and leadership with the long-range governance model in mind
- + Develop organizational capacity to fulfill the Zoo's mission and realize its vision
- + Identify new and diversified sources of support



## Master Plan





# The Facility Master Plan

# Introduction

## Areas of Evaluation and Recommendation

Areas of evaluation and recommendation include:

- Review and analysis of property and its immediate environs
- Review and analysis of developed portions of the property, including traffic and circulation; parking and entrance areas; new and existing exhibits and related facilities; visitor services facilities; administration and operational facilities; site characteristics; and existing site vegetation



# Introduction

## Areas of Evaluation and Recommendation



- Preliminary Conceptual Master Plan Recommendations Including:
  - Existing Site and Context
  - Existing Facilities and Available Acreage
  - Parking and Wayfinding
  - Guest Entry Facilities
  - Expanded Retail Opportunities
  - Guest Amenities
  - Guest Experience
  - Education Programs
- Priority Projects
- Proposed Project Budgets

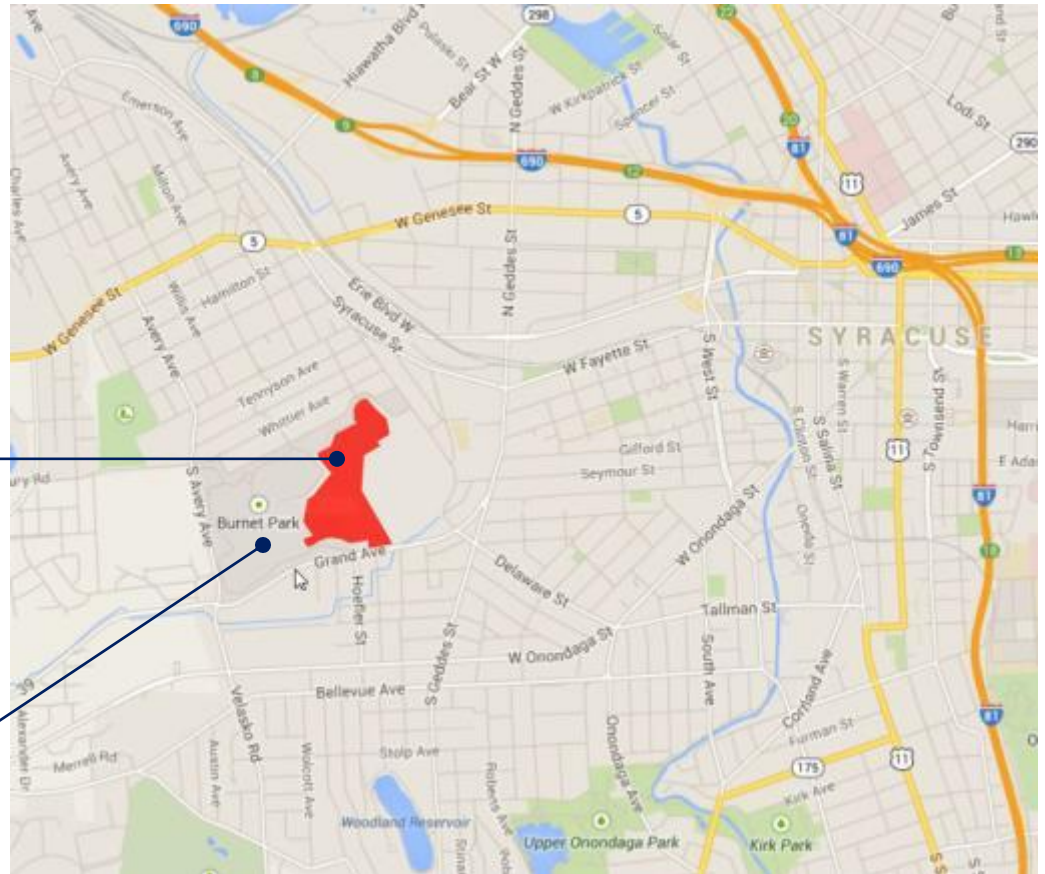


# Existing Site and Context

## Park Property

Currently the Rosamond Gifford Zoo occupies 43 acres of city-owned property in the center of Burnet Park in west central Syracuse. Located approximately 1 mile south of Interstate 690 and 2 miles east of Interstate 81, the site sits atop Tipperary Hill and has been in operation since it first opened in 1914.

Burnet Park, the largest park in the city at 88 acres, is home to a variety of sport venues, including softball, golf and swimming; and is active 12 months of the year.



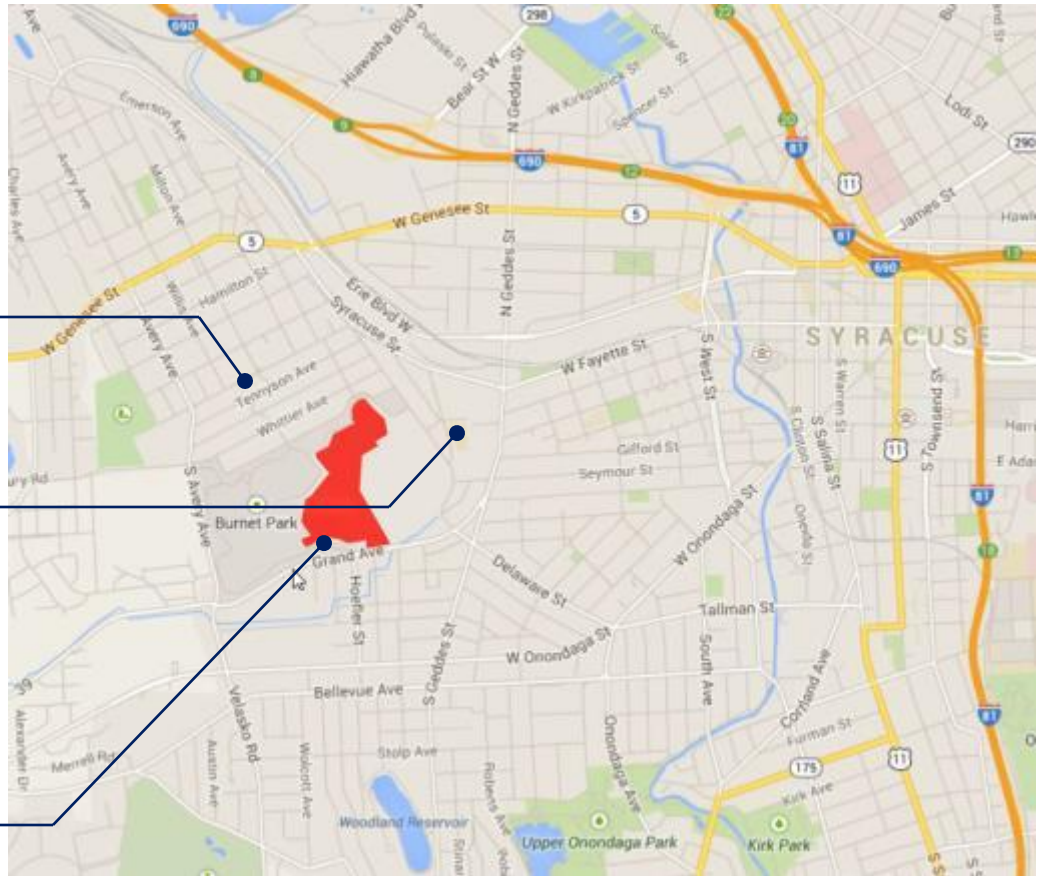
# Existing Site and Context

## Adjacent Non-park Property

The historic Tipperary Hill neighborhood is immediately adjacent to the Zoo and Burnet Park along the northern perimeter. Immediately south and east of the Zoo is a large tract of land in excess of 30 acres, currently occupied by the abandoned Syracuse Developmental Center.

Fowler High School and the Arc of Onondaga are in immediate proximity to the Zoo.

Interestingly, at the southern and eastern perimeter of the Zoo lies the George Washington Memorial Forest, which was planted in July of 1935. This wooded area provides a natural respite from the hustle and bustle of the urban neighborhood.





# Existing Facilities and Available Acreage

At 43 acres within the Zoo perimeter, there is currently more than enough space within the existing boundary for the projected growth of the Zoo's attendance during the next 20 years. Areas that have been identified for rehabilitation and growth within the Zoo perimeter offer 9.3 acres of possible development.



# Available Acreage

## 2.7 Acres East of the Main Zoo Building

The 2.7 acres adjacent to the east side of the Zoo, immediately east of the existing main Zoo building are available acreage.





# Available Acreage

## 1 Acre Former Elephant Exhibit

The former elephant exhibit and holding barn areas offer not only short-term opportunities, but one of the greatest opportunities for re-development within the existing Zoo perimeter. The site, at 1 acre, has great visibility and a location immediately adjacent to the main Zoo building.



# Available Acreage

## 1 Acre Duck Pond and Caribou Habitat

This area currently is occupied by the duck pond and caribou habitat. While this area is an attractive animal exhibit, the Zoo's emphasis on animals with a strong conservation message and a greater public appeal, coupled with easy access for both guest services and animal staff, makes this parcel ideally situated to redevelopment.





# Available Acreage

## 2.3 Acre White-Lipped Deer Yard

At nearly 2.3 acres, this is the largest single parcel of land available within the Zoo perimeter that is easily accessed by both guests and Zoo personnel. While the white-lipped deer is listed by the IUCN as vulnerable, the space could easily be reduced, making room for additional animal species or expansion of other habitats, without compromising the space needs of the white-lipped deer.



# Available Acreage

## 2.3 Acre Treed and Steep-Sloped Area

This area at the south-east end of the Zoo, currently occupied by small North American animals and larger species, including markhor, bighorn sheep, guanaco and gray wolves, has a “feel” distinctly different from the rest of the Zoo. It could be redeveloped to include additional conservation species and areas of dramatically different guest amenities.







Facility Recommendations to Create the

# **"Best Day Ever"**

for Guests to the Rosamond Gifford Zoo

# Master Plan Overview

A facilities master plan takes a long-term look at where the Zoo wants to go with respect to its site, facilities and physical environment. The plan should further the goals set out in the strategic plan and establish a bold vision of how to take the goals and make them come alive on the site. However, the plan should also be grounded in a reality of what the Zoo can achieve based on the community size, market potential and resource availability.

Using the information gleaned during the Discovery and Dreaming phases, the design team — through a very iterative and collaborative process — developed a site plan that will serve as a roadmap for future development of the Zoo. It's important to note:

- + This is a 20 year vision for the site.
- + These are “big picture” ideas; exhibit specifics may change including exact animal species to be displayed.
- + The team has evaluated and planned for a couple of areas to minimally grow outside the Zoo's current perimeter. These changes would help with parking and guest flow. However, neither would inhibit the initial stages of implementation of the plan.
- + Phasing and sequencing of the plan may change based on a wide variety of factors to include: funding, donor interest, collection planning, County priorities or AZA requirements.



# Current Trends

To maintain and grow attendance in today's competitive attractions world, zoos must continually add new exhibits and attractions. Ideally, a mix of minor and major improvements should be phased in over time to continue to grow and maintain attendance levels, and guest interest and excitement. As noted, the Rosamond Gifford Zoo has been making improvements to the site and facility during the past several years, culminating with the recent enhancements to the front entrance and the pond. However, a steady stream of changes to enhance the experience must continue. A number of other trends explored and factored into the Zoo's master planning efforts include:

- + Immersive exhibits are becoming the standard in any new exhibit design
- + Highly themed exhibits generate more excitement and interest from guests
- + Interactive, touch and feeding experiences with all types of animals are growing exponentially in zoos; feedings opportunities have included giraffe, rhino, rays and birds
- + Zoos are continually looking for additional sources of revenue through "pay-to-play" attractions
- + Catering and event rental facilities are being taken to a new level to offer attendees a truly unique and exclusively zoo experience, e.g., eating with the giraffe
- + A greater focus on mission-driven education and conservation programs, provides differentiation from other attractions

# Master Plan Opportunity Areas

After looking at the Zoo's entire campus, the team identified several key elements, which should be part of the Zoo's improvements throughout the next several years. Each of these items links closely with the Zoo's new vision, as well as its strategic goals. The Zoo will work toward:

- + Improving the overall **guest entry experience** and separating the multiple flows of guest traffic, e.g., general guests, school groups and rentals
- + Furthering the Zoo's commitment to and maximizing the investments in the **elephant facilities**
- + Taking advantage of the Zoo's **topography** to create unique animal experiences
- + Responding to AZA's concerns regarding **animal health facilities**
- + Improving **circulation** and creating shorter loop experiences for guests
- + Creating additional opportunities for **play and activity**
- + Developing areas for new **revenue generation** activities

# Facility Recommendations

*"It's about creating connections between people and animals."*

*— Steve Martin*

Growth in attendance and revenue as projected by the strategic plan will require momentum in both revenue-producing programs and continuing facility enhancements. Our report recommends significant changes to the Zoo's physical plant. The following recommendations are based on input from the Strategic Planning Committee, anticipated AZA accreditation guidelines, input from the overall planning process and generally accepted best practices for an enhanced guest experience. The following is a recommended road map to help the Zoo increase the capacity for growth in both attendance and revenue, and address the goal of becoming a regional family destination.

# Facility Master Plan — Overview





# Parking and Wayfinding

## Wayfinding

The initial approach to the Zoo is primarily from Seymour Street where it ends at S. Wilbur Avenue. This “T” Junction represents the best location to begin building the Zoo’s brand with an addition of wayfinding and a large sculptural wayfinding element.



Animals Always Sculpture  
St. Louis Zoo



# Parking and Wayfinding

## Parking

With the area around the Zoo fully developed, competition is high for the limited space available for Zoo parking. The current dedicated parking lot with 530 spaces represents one of the most significant hurdles for long-term growth for the Zoo. Alternative transportation methods, other than the private automobile, should be considered and would be in keeping with the Zoo's strong conservation message. However, this plan recommends the addition of 353 spaces. For this to happen, additional land to the east and south would need to be acquired.

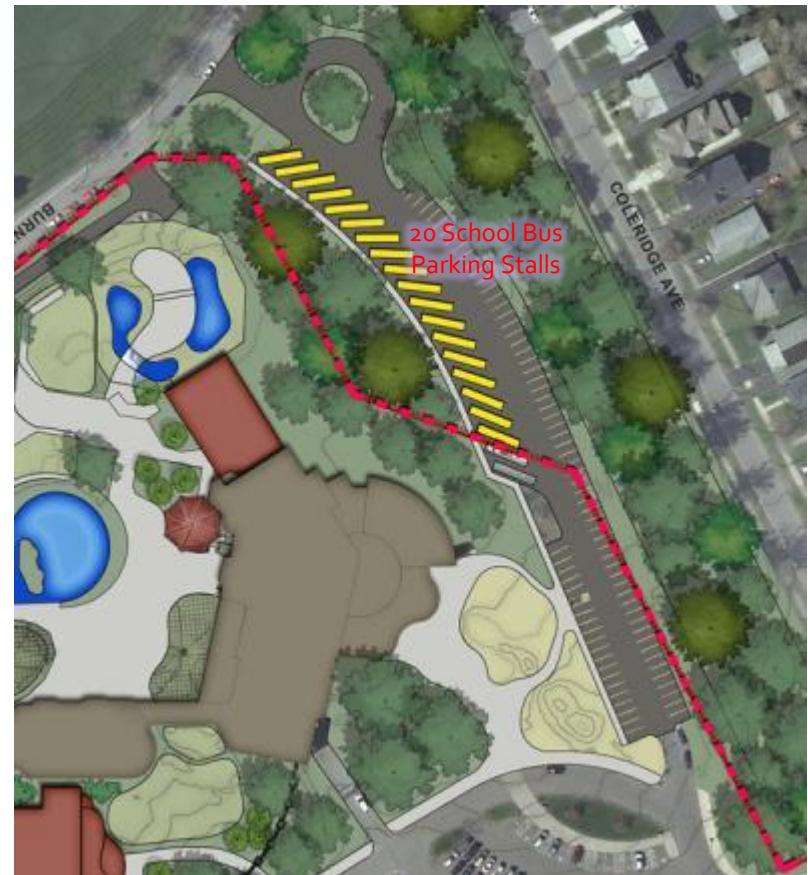


# Parking and Wayfinding

## School Bus Parking

Parking for up to 20 buses is indicated along the north perimeter of the Zoo and immediately adjacent to what will ultimately become the primary entrance for school groups and those arriving specifically for education programs and private, catered events.

By providing parking for school buses and groups separate from private automobile parking, some amount of pressure also is reduced on the primary circulation system within the parking lot and at the existing entry point.



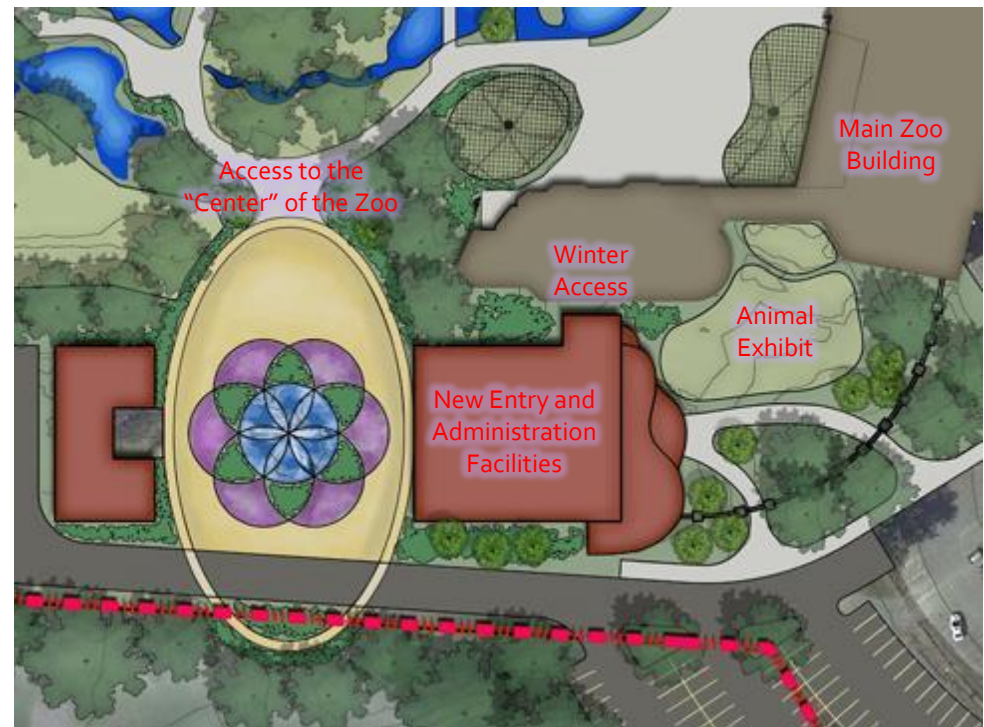


# Guest Entry Facilities

## New Entry Experience

### Guest Entry Facilities:

- Create a dynamic new entry facility with animal exhibits directly adjacent to/and before the paid entry threshold
- Direct access to the “Center” of the Zoo, allowing people multiple choices for circulation and alleviating congestion at the north end of the Zoo
- Direct access to main Zoo building in winter
- Incorporate new administration facilities into second floor of new entry building
- Two-story facility would give the entry prominence on the site





# Guest Entry Facilities

## Special Event/Education Entry

### Guest Entry Facilities:

- Alleviate crowding at existing entry: Create multiple/unique points of entry for each group
- Opens up opportunities for increased attendance
  - School Groups
  - Members
  - Events
  - Traditional guests



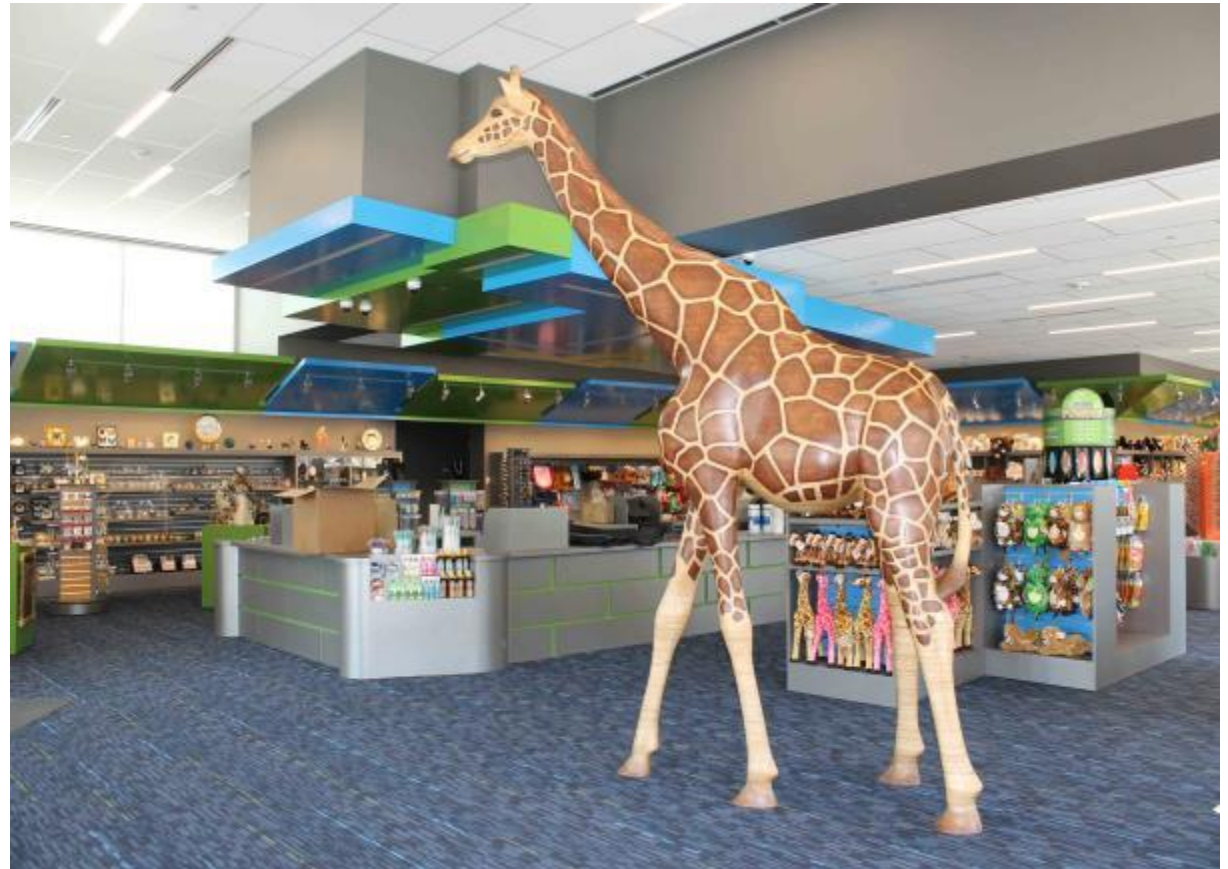
# Expanded Retail Opportunities

Create expanded retail opportunities:

- Guest foot traffic through gift shop at exit
- Additional capacity within gift shop for expanded attendance



St. Louis Zoo



Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo and Aquarium

# Guest Amenities



Create a comfortable guest experience throughout the park with the use of abundant guest amenities. This encourages longer stay times and greater return visits.



Restrooms



Food and beverage opportunities



Seating



Shade and weather shelters — cool/  
warm areas



# Guest Experiences

Provide a more engaging, interactive and educational guest experience including:

Recreation and play opportunities:

- Conservation learning-based play experiences throughout
- Traveling exhibits and/or recreation opportunities
- “Pay to Play” revenue generation opportunities

Guest/animal /keeper encounters; Create connections throughout the Zoo:

- Opportunities to feed the animals
- Keeper/animal demonstration areas throughout
- Expansion of show arena offerings

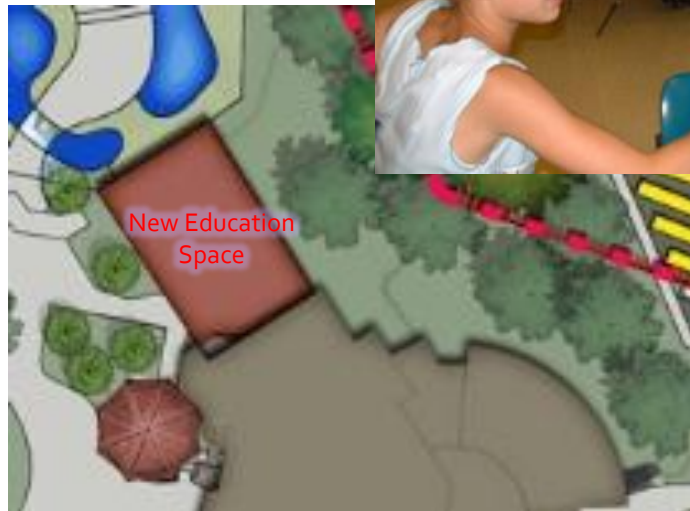


Treetop Adventures Ropes Course,  
Turtle Back Zoo, Essex County, NJ

# Education Programs

## Education Programs:

- Would be included in exhibit design — areas throughout the Zoo
- Education space is lacking: Create new education space where existing administration area and animal care area is within the main Zoo building, once that area has been vacated.
- Flexible space for learning
- Flexible office space
- Birthday party space





# Priority Projects

## The Five- to Seven-Year Plan



# African Savannah Habitat

Create a dynamic charismatic mega-vertebrate habitat, incorporating guest amenities:

- Recommend giraffe habitat with feeding experience and accessible barn for year-round indoor viewing:
  - Revenue-generating feeding opportunities
  - Strong conservation-learning objectives
  - Incorporate play
  - Develop plaza space between proposed African Savannah Habitat and existing penguin exhibit



# Gibbon/Asian Small Clawed Otter

This area will become a lively, high activity zone for both animals and guests:

- Establish an active zone where former elephant barn is located
- Deliver an innovative mixed-species exhibit
- Supply opportunities for parallel play, and guest and animal activity
- Create a sense of fun in a historic area of the Zoo
- Provide ample opportunities for education and messaging on sustainability

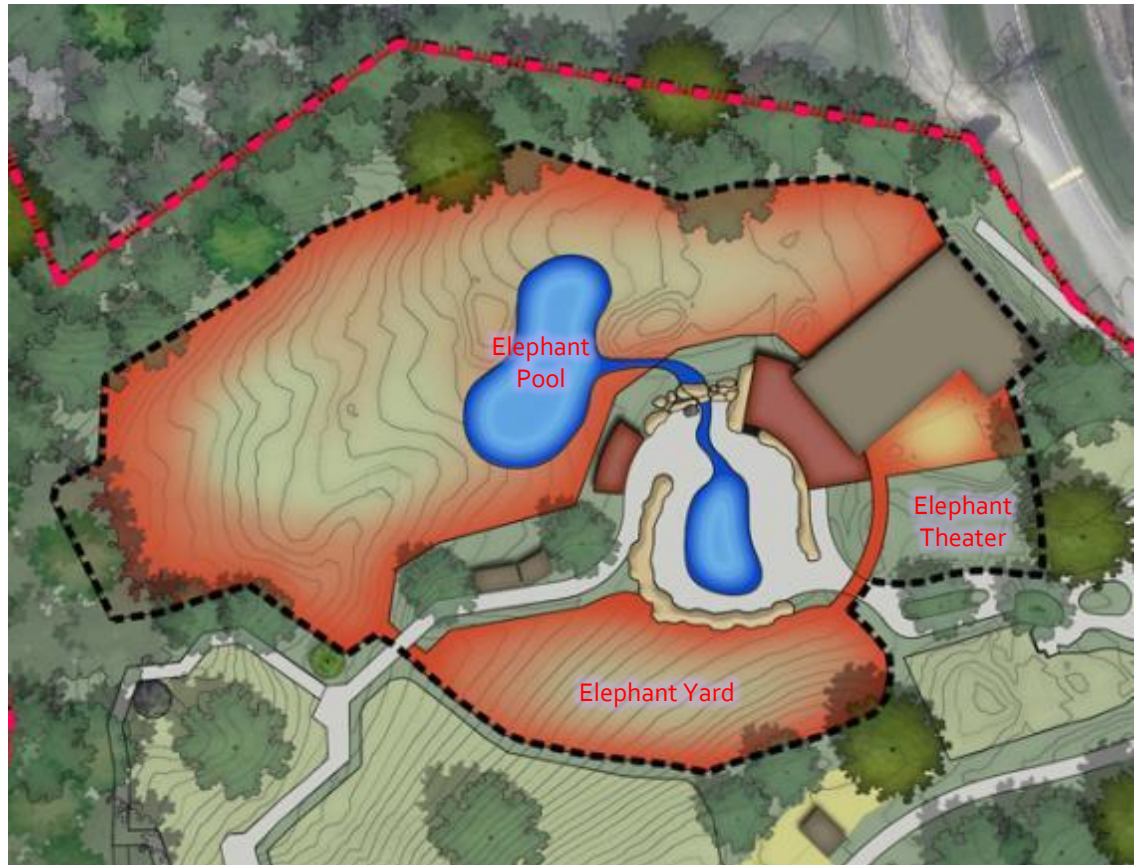




# Elephant Pool and Theater

## Elephant Pool and Theater:

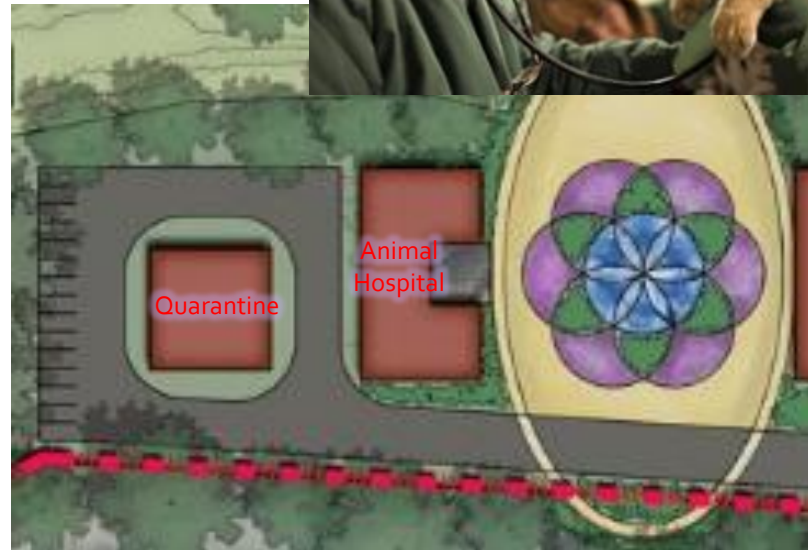
- Create new pool within the elephant yard to bring the yard into AZA compliance
- Create demonstration theater near new elephant barn



# Animal Health Center

Advancing the animal collection and new guidelines from the AZA for both veterinary care and quarantine put the need for new facilities at the top of any list for improvements for the Zoo. The existing facilities within the main building are extremely small and outdated by the current accreditation standards. Suggestions are:

- Location directly adjacent to proposed front entry, which gives prominence to the animal welfare programs at the Zoo
- State-of-the-art learning animal hospital in conjunction with Cornell University with separate quarantine facility
- Incorporate guest programs/learning/viewing into new facility



# Short-Term Project Opportunities

A number of additional short-term projects also have been identified as part of the master plan process. These initiatives include immediate action steps — “Quick Success Projects,” which can get underway as soon as funding is made available. These will begin to build momentum for larger future projects, as well as generate excitement and interest at the Zoo — offering visitors something “new at the Zoo.” Some of these projects have the added benefit of generating added revenue for the Zoo.

## Quick Success Projects:

- + **Seasonal or temporary exhibit.** Creates activity close to the entrance — could be touch tank or other interactive experience.
- + Zip line or **adventure course** to generate revenue and take advantage of the Zoo’s site.
- + Interim changes to **entry experience** to improve visitor flow and alleviate challenges with current entry sequence.
- + Adding small **play or activity** elements within the Zoo.

# Future Planning

To begin to achieve the goals as identified in the strategic plan, additional planning will be required to complete the Zoo's long-range planning efforts. Exact timing of these initiatives will be dependent on resource availability and previous commitment, but all will be essential to providing the next level of detail on the master plan. Each of these subsequent efforts will bring the plan to life and provide more specific strategies. Additional planning efforts should include:

- + An **interpretive plan** that links together educational messaging, signage, wayfinding and interpretives. This plan supports the "Enliven the Zoo" strategic goal and will provide a framework and direction on theming, brand, colors and look Zoo-wide.
- + A **horticultural plan** that links with the facilities master plan and maximizes the Zoo's site and use; care; and management of plants, trees and flowers, and ties it back into the guest experience.
- + An **entry complex mini-master plan**, which takes a more detailed look at how best to use the space and facility, and the use of resources given the longer-term vision for the building. Areas to be explored should include: interior circulation, exhibits, concessions, staff space and education facilities.

# Proposed Project Budgets



# Priority Project Costs

Estimates are provided below on possible costs for the priority projects within the master plan implementation as they have been outlined. Additional study would need to be done to refine these figures based on desired features.

During a concept design stage, where more analysis would be done on desired size, features and programming, detailed cost estimates would be developed. Discussions at that level would include number of animals, holding space, exhibit features, animal and guest interaction opportunities, and more. Estimated priority project costs are:

|   |                          |               |
|---|--------------------------|---------------|
| + | Elephant Pool; restrooms | \$250K–\$750K |
| + | Animal Health Complex    | \$5M–\$6M     |
| + | African Savannah Exhibit | \$3M–\$5M     |
| + | Otter/Gibbon Exhibit     | \$5M–\$7M     |
| + | New Entry                | \$10M–\$12M   |



# Priority Project Phasing

Outlined below is a preliminary and tentative schedule for implementation of priority projects. Exact timing is heavily dependent on available funding from both public and private sources. Schedules could change based on donor interest.

This proposed phasing was developed to begin to build momentum with smaller pricetag projects first, particularly as the Zoo has come off several years of combined public and private investment. We also included a high impact and exciting project — African Savannah Exhibit — early, as it would be of great interest to many donors and will help to increase attendance, as well as generate additional incremental revenue through feeding opportunities. The preliminary priority project schedule is as follows:

|                            |         |
|----------------------------|---------|
| + Elephant Pool; restrooms | 2015    |
| + Animal Health Complex    | 2016–18 |
| + African Savannah Exhibit | 2016–18 |
| + Otter/Gibbon Exhibit     | 2020    |
| + New Entry                | 2021–22 |



# Opportunities

Growth Potential



# Keys to Success

In order for master plan projects to be a true success, the following elements will be critical:

- + Building to the highest standards that incorporate the latest trends in zoo exhibit design
- + Integrating education and conservation components into the design and operations
- + Creating an intimate and interactive guest experience
- + Continuing to provide up-close opportunities to view the animals
- + Building in places for activity, animal interaction and interpretation
- + Incorporating attractive event and people-gathering spaces within and near the exhibits
- + Seamlessly linking the exhibits to the rest of the Zoo experience
- + Developing connections to adjacent exhibits and areas, and linking conservation and education stories and messages

# Economic Development Impact

As the planning team explored options for master plan improvements, we knew it would be essential to identify projects that could not only have a positive impact on Zoo operations but also support the region's efforts to further grow tourism. Additionally, the Zoo needs to continually develop itself as a significant quality of life component, making the area more attractive for businesses and families to relocate.

Economic development aspects of the master plan improvements include:

- + Growing attendance from out-of-town visitors
- + Providing a unique attraction to the area that could not be found within the region, and one that clearly defines the Zoo experience
- + Creating spaces that could be used for innovative corporate events and rentals
- + Further driving the economic engine of Onondaga County through increased spending and new construction
- + Continuing to support and build upon the Zoo's sustainability and conservation efforts, and enhancing educational opportunities for area students and families

# Business Impacts and Opportunities

The master plan was developed to ensure the long-term financial sustainability for the Zoo. Many opportunities for additional revenue generation have been included. This plan, when implemented, will:

- + Drive increased attendance and revenue with the opening of each new exhibit or improvement
- + Create a number of “pay-to-play” revenue-generation opportunities
- + Increase stay-time, which will help to increase concession spending
- + Offer additional areas for rentals and events
- + Open up new areas for educational fee-based programming
- + Attract new sponsors wishing to partner with a growing and engaging attraction
- + Appeal to a broader audience of donors

# Business Impacts and Opportunities

Every new exhibit should take into account how it can impact positively the Zoo's future revenue and attendance growth. This factor will be even more critical with this initial phase of development. Priority projects will provide the Zoo with significant opportunities to ensure its sustainability and grow its business. One of the first projects — African Savannah exhibit, e.g., giraffes — when done right — has the potential to take the Zoo to the next level. This project will be a defining one, setting the stage for significant growth at the Zoo.

- + An exhibit of this magnitude has the potential to increase attendance by upward of 20 percent, and with the build-out of subsequent stages, to push the Zoo higher than the 450,000 visitor mark
- + Feeding provides an excellent opportunity for additional revenue generation
- + Guest interaction and resulting guest satisfaction will increase with visitors wanting to return again and again, further growing Zoo membership
- + The addition of a unique and unmatched event venue will increase Zoo rentals, and commissions for food and gift sales
- + This type of attraction will prove to be a real draw for tourists, creating an incentive to extend their stay and come out to the Zoo

# Potential Return

## African Savannah Exhibit

The following financial returns could be seen with the opening of a new African Savannah exhibit, e.g., giraffe. These figures are only illustrative and a more in-depth analysis of the financial impact would be required once a concept has been finalized.

- + Attendance growth of 15 percent–20 percent: 60,000 additional guests at an estimated admission per cap of \$4 equals an additional \$240,000 in revenue annually
- + An increase in visitor concession spending due to increased stay-time, estimated at a total of \$0.50 (food, gift, attractions);  $450,000 \times \$0.50 = \$225,000$
- + Giraffe feeding: 25 percent capture rate at \$2 per feeding equals \$180,000
- + Added rentals and events: \$25,000–\$50,000
- + Membership increases; 20 percent growth of member households
- + Sponsorship opportunities: \$5,000–\$50,000
- + Additional educational opportunities, attracting new schools, scouts and other groups

# Education Opportunities

With education at the core of the Zoo's mission, it is critical that the master plan provide more opportunities to "live" the mission, engage visitors in learning, and showcase the Zoo's and the industry's conservation efforts. This can be accomplished through the latest in exhibit design, strong interpretives and enhanced visitor/staff interaction. The master plan allows the Zoo to leverage and further build upon its successful education programs by offering new spaces and new opportunities to connect with guests and students, with the all-important "up-close" experience. Some education opportunities are:

- + Developing the exhibit to maximize animal/guest encounters and up-close viewing, providing an opportunity to surprise guests and increase teaching moments
- + Creating places for parallel play where kids can be part of the physical activity of the animals
- + Using signage, graphics and other interactive tools as part of the exhibits to communicate key messages in a fun, colorful and meaningful way
- + Building training areas for animals and keepers where visitors can view and learn from these interactions, developing an increased understanding of the importance of great animal care
- + Linking exhibits with the Zoo's education programs and initiatives where kids can be part of a "living classroom"



# Conservation Opportunities

Along with the Zoo's education mission, implementation of the master plan can demonstrate the Zoo's commitment to conservation. This includes not only animal conservation initiatives but also environmental sustainability. Exhibit development should consistently strive to achieve the Zoo's conservation goals by:

- + Building exhibits to the latest sustainability standards as budgets allow
- + Incorporating unique and innovative conservation elements into new exhibit areas, e.g., water conservation
- + Interpreting resource conservation and sustainability features for guests
- + Committing to meaningful conservation initiatives linked to new exhibits
- + Fostering empathy through up-close encounters and interactive opportunities — a key to developing a conservation mindset in young children

# Potential Challenges

Building out the initial phases of the plan offers significant positives for the Zoo, and the entire community and region. However, as with any development of this magnitude, it would come with its share of challenges — none of which can't be overcome, but all of which must be addressed. We have begun to identify some potential obstacles:

- + Fundraising — this would be a significant capital campaign in the Zoo's history. However, the Zoo and the County have demonstrated great success in being able to raise dollars to support transformative projects.
- + Shifting County priorities — the Zoo has always been a high priority for the County, and this can be seen with the many investments in capital projects, as well as ongoing operational support. However, as with any public entity, changes in leadership, increased financial pressures or other pressing County needs may negatively impact the Zoo, and its ability to continue to grow. The Zoo's stakeholders must continually advocate for the Zoo, touting the benefits for the community, to ensure the Zoo remains a high priority among the County's many needs.

# County Support

In order to implement this project, it will be necessary to gain full commitment and support of the County. The County has always been an excellent partner in the Zoo's development and growth, and Zoo leadership looks forward to that continuing. Opportunities for the County to support this project could include:

- + Helping to secure bond support for construction
- + Leveraging County dollars for additional private investment
- + Offering low-cost loans to get the project started while fundraising progresses
- + Assisting with strategic growth of Zoo perimeter



# Governance Overview

Partnership — County and Friends

# Governance Introduction

As part of the strategic planning process, there was interest expressed by the County in exploring alternatives for governance and organizational structure. What follows is a general overview of governance options, industry benchmarks and best practices.

The current partnership between the Friends of the Rosamond Gifford Zoo and Onondaga County in operating the Zoo has proven very successful. The relationship between Friends, Zoo, County, and Parks leadership and staff has been marked by cooperation, collaboration and positive progress. This has been demonstrated by this joint investment in a new strategic master plan.

When reviewing the governance information, it is important to note:

- + This is only an overview of possibilities and practices
- + No recommendations or decisions have been made in terms of governance
- + Additional evaluation, planning and assessment would be required to develop recommendations for a governance plan

# Current Roles — Observations

The following observations can be made as they relate to the current operations of the Zoo:

- + The current partnership between the Zoo and the Friends is working well.
- + The County has been a strong supporter of the Zoo both operationally and through a variety of capital improvements, most recently the entrance and pond improvements.
- + The County remains committed to the success of the Zoo but is open to alternatives to organizational structure changes throughout the long-term.
- + The Friends are open to discussing a greater role at the Zoo to further enhance the guest experience, revenue generation and the Zoo's educational mission.
- + The Friends have proven successful at raising private support for capital improvements, contributing to the changes and enhancements to the elephant program, as well as several other projects.
- + The Friends have demonstrated excellence in operating a financially sustainable business and operating model, continuing to grow its lines of business — membership, concessions, education, rentals and invest in new staff.



# Current Responsibilities

## Onondaga County

- Day-to-day Zoo management and operations
- Staffing — animals, maintenance, admissions
- Guest services
- AZA accreditation
- Animal management
- Facility management and upkeep
- Grounds maintenance
- Capital project management
- Back-office management, HR, payroll, finances for County functions

## Friends

- Education
- Rentals/Catering
- Fundraising and events
- Donor relations
- Membership
- Marketing and public relations
- Food and gift operations
- Planning support — Strategic Master Plan
- Revenue generation activities

# Strengths and Weaknesses — Current Model

## + Strengths:

- County has continually invested in the Zoo and wants to have a successful and vibrant facility.
- County has shown commitment to the Zoo through investments in capital improvements.
- County has easier ability to raise funds for capital projects through bonds or other taxing initiatives.

## + Weaknesses:

- Pressures exist to maintain adequate staffing to provide excellent guest experience.
- Some donors may be less likely to fund public assets.
- Future County financial pressures could negatively impact Zoo operations.
- Ability to grow and invest in additional staff may be limited with County budget.
- County processes could slow improvements.

# Opportunities and Threats — Current Model

## + Opportunities:

- The Friends would continually provide investment and support to enhance the guest experience.
- County can continue to support capital investment of improvements in new jointly developed master plan.

## + Threats:

- Can the community support the Zoo at the higher levels required to implement the Zoo's master plan?
- Is the Zoo a philanthropic priority for the region?
- Does the Friends Board have the capacity to secure the additional funds to improve the Zoo?
- Will the Zoo remain a priority among County's other core services?

# Zoo Public Private Partnerships (PPP)

## An Overview

### + **What is a full Zoo PPP?** *(as defined and understood in the larger zoo community)*

- A PPP is a governance model, which shifts total organizational, operational and fiscal responsibilities of the Zoo from a public entity, e.g., the Onondaga County, to a nonprofit management organization, e.g., The Friends of the Rosamond Gifford Zoo.

### + **How does it work?**

- The County enters into a long-term agreement with the Friends to take over management of operations of the Zoo for an annual management fee paid by the County. Under one scenario, staff at the Zoo would become employees of Friends, while the Rosamond Gifford Zoo would maintain ownership of all assets, including all buildings and animals. The County would continue to provide a level of annual support for capital improvements to maintain its assets with the Friends raising outside funds to build new exhibits and attractions. The Zoo would be managed by a professional Director/CEO with oversight provided by a Board of Directors made up of business and community leaders, and could include County representative(s).

# PPPs

## PPPs —

- + Are not an answer for every operating model
- + Are successful governance models, but there are many successful publicly run zoos as well, e.g., Minnesota, Cleveland, Point Defiance
- + Are unique to individual zoos and the communities they serve
- + Can combine the elements of various alternatives to come up with what works best for the individual institution
- + Have never failed in the zoo business, i.e., no zoos have closed nor reverted back to their previous publicly run operation
- + Require the right funding model to work well

# PPP — Benefits

Shifting to a PPP operating model could result in a long list of benefits to the County, the Zoo and the community. Typically, these benefits include:

- + A streamlined and efficient organizational model with a single entity responsible for all aspects of operations
- + Staff can be deployed more effectively across the Zoo with a single entity responsible for all aspects of operations and the guest experience
- + Public costs for the Zoo remain predictable through an annual management fee resulting in long-term savings for the public
- + Donors are more likely to support a nonprofit-managed Zoo to invest in new exhibits and experiences, and help grow the Zoo with contributed operating support
- + With the Zoo operated as one entity, there is an improved guest service experience, particularly in areas such as admissions and membership (same people can service both); events and rentals (single point of contact to handle all aspects of events); and experiences (fee-based animal attractions can share staff across the Zoo)
- + An increased focus and a stronger business approach that will result in growing earned revenue
- + Public entity minimizes its risk of increasing and changing standards related to animal management and welfare, and the associated costs with meeting those standards
- + There is a greater incentive for success and growth since what gets earned in the Zoo stays at the Zoo



# Public Private Partnerships — Benchmark Zoos

- + More than 75 percent of AZA zoos are operated by private nonprofit or for-profit entities.
- + Most large zoos have already made the shift—Dallas is the most recent large zoo (in 2009); many of the remaining large public zoos have a dedicated funding model, e.g., Cleveland through property tax. Los Angeles is one large zoo that has not shifted governance, although they have explored making such a change.
- + The trend now is moving toward small- to mid-size public zoos:
  - John Ball Zoo (2014); Potawatomi Zoo (2014); Tulsa (2011); Chattanooga (2010); Lake Superior (2009)
- + A number of Zoos are actively evaluating or pursuing privatization:
  - Topeka Zoo; Topeka, Kan.
  - Reid Park Zoo; Tucson, Ariz.
  - Santa Ana Zoo; Santa Ana, Calif.
- + This is a path that is well-traveled; many lessons have already been learned; however, there is no *"one size fits all"* approach. Each agreement or partnership model is uniquely structured to meet many stakeholder groups: employees, political leadership, guests and the community.

# Public Private Partnerships — Benchmark Zoos

- + Zoos that have privatized have seen great success.
- + Based on a survey by Mesker Park Zoo in Indiana — of eight recently privatized zoos — once zoos moved to a single-operational model:
  - Attendance increased on average 24 percent from transition to date
  - These zoos saw on average a 3 percent to 6 percent increase in annual attendance
  - Operating revenues increased by 142 percent
  - Contributed revenue programs increased by 183 percent
  - Capital facility improvements increased with a balance of funds from both private donors and public sector funding (bonds)
  - Public sector funding declined in three of the eight zoos (due to new regional funding initiatives)

*Note: Findings are from Mesker Park's PPP Study. It is unknown at this time, which eight zoos were surveyed. It is expected that many of these are larger institutions, but the trends are still valid for Rosamond Gifford Zoo.*

# Funding Models

One of the keys to any successful public private partnership is the right funding model. Most successful zoos rely on three categories of funds to support their annual operations: earned, contributed and public. Relying too heavily on any one source puts the organization at greater risk for financial instability. Weather plays the greatest factor in impacting (positively and negatively) the ups and downs of earned income tied directly to attendance. A stable base of contributed operating support helps to even out those peaks and valleys. Although there are many variations in the amount of funding that comes from each, with some getting more than 50 percent of their operating budget from public sources, industry best practice percentages are outlined below. These figures exclude any capital costs.

+ Three funding sources:

- **Earned:** admission, membership, concessions (60 percent to 65 percent of revenue)
- **Contributed:** donations from individuals, corporate and foundations (10 percent to 15 percent)
- **Public:** City, County or Regional (30 percent to 35 percent)

+ Successful partnerships have consistent public support, through:

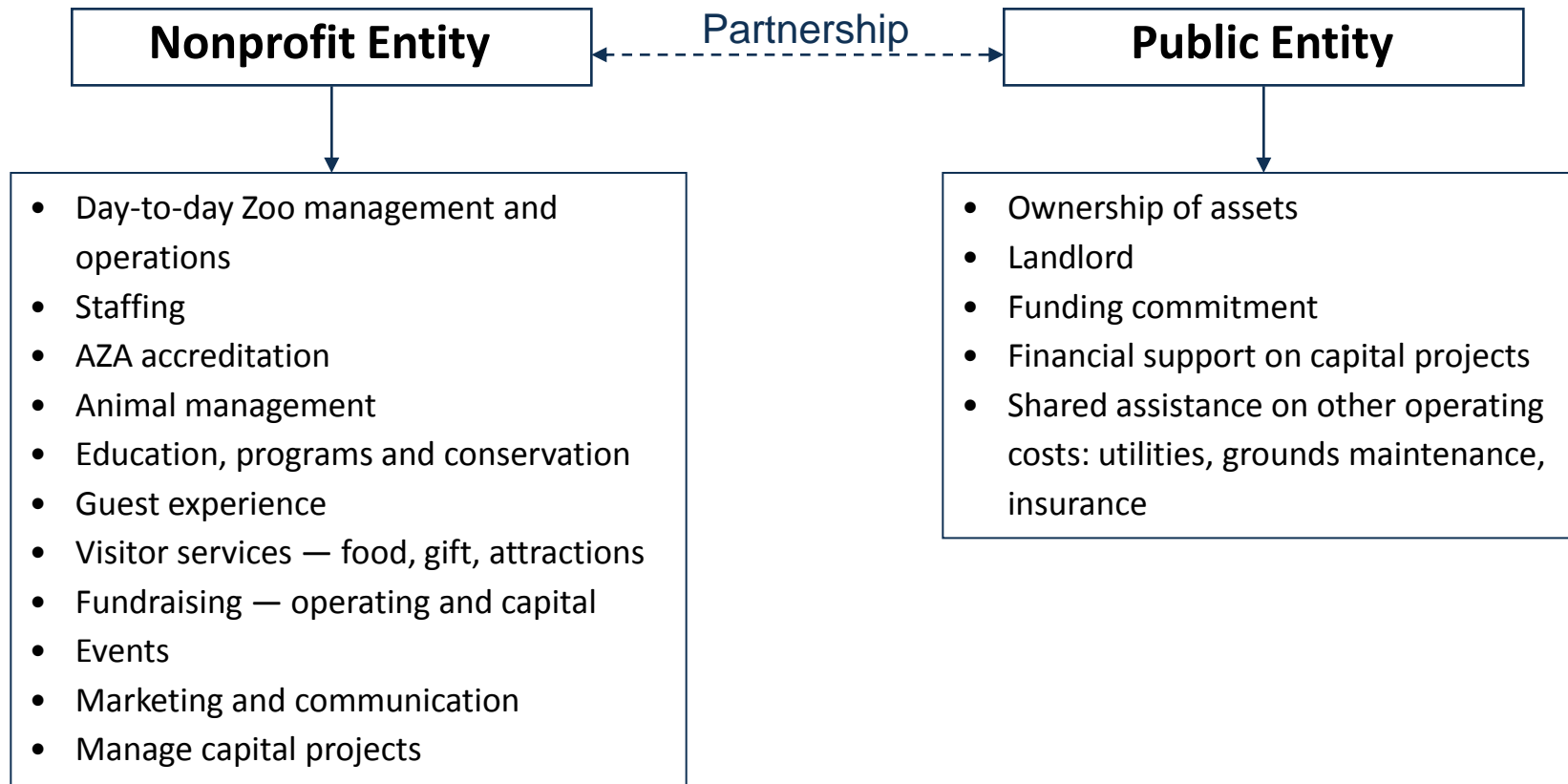
- Direct appropriation
- Regional funding mechanisms, including: sales, property and entertainment/tourism taxes

# Funding Alternatives

A number of possible funding models and alternatives have been used in zoos:

- + **Self Sustaining** — receive no public dollars; operate through combination of earned and contributed dollars; a minority of zoos, examples include Philadelphia, Naples, Indianapolis
- + **Direct Appropriation** — line item within City budget; examples include Dallas; El Paso
- + **Property Tax** — Zoos receive a combination of operating and capital dollars through a property tax millage; examples include all Ohio zoos
- + **Direct Sale Tax** — operating and capital funding provided through dedicated sales tax; examples, Fresno, Great Plains Zoo
- + **Shared Tax** — zoo shares in sales tax revenue with other cultural institutions; examples include Denver; Hogle Zoo (Utah)

# Typical Roles Under Zoo PPP



# Success Factors (Transition)

Based on working with and reviewing a number of other similar institutions that have shifted governance models, a number of success factors have been identified, such as:

- + Strong sense of partnership between all parties, uniting behind the common goal of improving the Zoo
- + Support from County at all levels. It is critical to have buy-in at the highest levels of leadership, e.g., County Executive, Legislators. Many of the transitions have taken place after a change in leadership
- + Funding commitment from the County to support ongoing operations. Ideally, the funding should remain stable from current levels and grow at some inflationary rate
- + A strong Friends Board — it will be critical to have unified support for moving forward and a commitment to making this work
- + Having the key leaders in the community on the Board has ensured success at other zoos. This would include high level business, community and philanthropic leaders
- + Additionally, the Board must be in the position to actively raise significant sums of money to fund the transition and the new capital projects that will be required to grow the organization



# Success Factors (Implementation)

Additional factors include:

- + Involvement of key community stakeholders: Getting the right community leaders engaged early in this process will help sell a transition to County and regional leadership
- + Gaining support of regional partners, both in business and government leadership to begin positioning the Zoo as a regional destination that requires regional support
- + There will be the need to grow contributed operating support as well to supplement earned and public dollars. These contributed funds — over and above capital dollars raised — will define the “margin of excellence” for the Zoo and set it apart from others
- + Consistent and coordinated communications: The County and the Friends should assign a single point of contact to get the key message points out to the right constituencies
- + Realistic implementation plan with an achievable timeline that captures the momentum and excitement of the process
- + Having the right “people on the bus” at the operational level to implement the plan, lead the new organization and manage growth
- + Willingness to invest in additional staff to exceed AZA standards for animal welfare and management, and grow new areas of the business: development; food, gift and experiences; programs

# Governance Examples (1 of 3)

As was noted earlier, a number of zoos have changed governance models. Outlined below are a number of key elements from these institutions:

## + Chattanooga

- City provides fixed level of funding; not to exceed 45 percent of operating income
- Provides \$50,000 annually for capital
- City had union employees; Society does not. Some came over to new entity; others retired or remained with the City

## + Dallas

- Set up new entity to take over management
- City provides increasing level of annual operating support
- City employees could apply for jobs at new entity; no commitment to hire

## + Tulsa

- Established new entity to manage Zoo
- Developed high-powered Board to raise funds
- City provides annual operating support with inflationary growth of management fee
- City to pay utility cost for two years; 25 years of liability insurance

# Governance Examples (2 of 3)

## + Potawatomi Zoo; South Bend, Ind.

- Transfer of management — January 1, 2014
- Five-year contract; decreasing level of funding by City
- Partial shift of City employees to PZS
- Existing Society took over management
- Major challenge: funding level

## + John Ball Zoo; Grand Rapids, Mich.

- Transfer of management — January 1, 2014
- 20-year agreement; decreasing level of funding by County
- All employees shifted to JBZ
- Management agreement is with Society, now JBZ, (with changes in by-laws)
- Major challenge: organizational structure

# Governance Examples (3 of 3)

Additional examples from other institutions:

- + Lake Superior; Duluth, Minn.
  - City-operated Zoo with union employees; no union at nonprofit
  - City is providing annual operating support
  - Society must raise funds for capital
- + Reid Park Zoo; Tucson, Ariz. (under evaluation)
  - Exploring establishing new entity with new high-level Board
  - City could continue to provide funding commitment of operating and capital funds
  - City may continue to provide some service, e.g., maintenance
- + Roger Williams Zoo; Providence, R.I.
  - Line staff remained City employees; management staff employed by nonprofit
  - City provides funding for management salaries
  - City helps to build reserve fund

# Alternatives

A number of alternatives are available to both the County and the Friends as they look to the future in evaluating alternatives in operation of the Zoo.

- + **Status Quo** — keep operations the same with no change in responsibilities between the Friends and the Zoo
- + **Full PPP** — transfer full management from County to Friends; a model similar to what has been done in most other zoos that have made a change in governance
- + **New nonprofit management** of the Zoo — create a new entity to manage the Zoo (model seen in Tulsa and Dallas)
- + **Partial shift** of operations from County to Friends
  - Friends continue to take over additional functions and operational areas of the Zoo
  - Zoo staff remains County employees with management by nonprofit

# Status Quo

Under this scenario, there would be no change in how the Zoo is operated. The County would continue to manage operations with the Friends continuing to provide fundraising support, selling memberships and supporting guest service functions.

## + Advantages:

- Current model is working with effective partnership
- Both parties are already investing in the Zoo
- The County can continue operations with no change in staffing or the funding model
- No transition costs
- No need to bring before County leadership to “sell” any change

## + Disadvantages:

- Change in leadership at County or at Friends may change partnership dynamic
- Current model is not business or industry best practice
- Zoos are not typically a core service of a County
- Doesn't maximize value of County asset
- Decision-making can be slow; not able to react as quickly as needed to guest or animal management needs



# Full PPP — Friends Management

This is the model that has proven to be the most successful at other Zoos. With many of the benefits of this alternative already having been discussed, the major ones have been highlighted below.

## + Advantages:

- Streamlines business and management operations
- Greater appeal to donors; can raise needed capital dollars to build new exhibits
- Ability to increase earned revenue through more and better offerings

## + Disadvantages:

- Requires a stable, if not growing, level of funding from the County
- Requires a strong and high level Board of Directors to raise the necessary funds to support a transition and build out the facility plan
- The amount of operating contributed funding will need to grow to balance the Zoo's funding streams and cover any gaps between earned and public support
- Resources (both time and money) will be required for a successful implementation; do the Friends have the dollars, and does the Board have the time to put toward the transition?

# Partial Shift of Operations

Under this alternative, The Friends would take over some additional areas of operations, e.g., increased revenue-producing functions, education.

## + Advantages:

- Allows the Friends to build capacity by only running select areas of the business
- The Friends, given their structure, would be in a better position to maximize new revenue opportunities
- Provides for a natural evolution to a full-blown PPP

## + Disadvantages:

- A revenue-sharing model would need to be clearly defined between the County and the Friends so that both partners can realize new benefits from this arrangement
- If new money is raised through earned income, will it be able to be invested back into operations?
- Having dual leadership over multiple areas is still an ineffective business model: Roles would need to be clearly defined
- From a guest services perspective, guests still want and need a single point of contact for their entire visit

# Governance Future

Any shifts in governance should only be undertaken after careful evaluation and analysis. The longer-term goal should be a move toward a public private partnership (PPP) as described in the previous slides. This move would bring the Zoo more in line with industry best practices, and create a stronger business and operating model. It appears that there is a willingness of both groups to “test the waters” of what a shift in governance could look like for the Rosamond Gifford Zoo.

Initial direction of a new PPP could have:

- + Friends to take over full management and operations of the Zoo by 2024 (or earlier if timing is right, and there is a willingness of all partners). This would allow for a thoughtful and planned transition of all roles and functions
- + The County continuing to provide a level of investment for operations
- + Public funding — through a direct appropriation or bonding initiative — of capital projects at the Zoo
- + The County retain ownership of all assets at the Zoo
- + The Friends enter into a long-term agreement to manage the Zoo

# Next Steps

With the success of the current operating model, and the strong partnership between the County and the Friends, both groups are in an ideal position to begin further exploring a shift in governance. It is much better to evaluate operating models and alternatives when relationships are positive and working rather than when there is tension between the two groups. To take a shift in governance to the next step, a facilitated joint-planning initiative should be undertaken within the next 18 months.

Planning should cover:

- + Additional benchmarking of successful transitions
- + Interviewing stakeholders interested and impacted
- + In-depth review of finances of both the Friends and the County, and an understanding of all direct and indirect costs to operate, maintain and improve the Zoo
- + Testing alternatives with Friends, Board and County Leadership
- + Gaining a better understanding of County's interest and willingness for greater change
- + Beginning to understand potential terms of a long-term agreement between the County and the Friends

# Conclusion



# Conclusion

During the past 10 years, the Zoo has made great strides in creating a high-quality facility, attractive exhibits and a top-notch experience. Through investment by the County and the success of the Friends of the Zoo — both in operations and capital fundraising — the Zoo has established a solid foundation for growth. The time is right to take that development at the Zoo to the next level.

A compelling vision has been laid out to chart the next round of Zoo improvements with the first projects already identified. With the “can do” attitude found both at the Zoo and the support of the Zoo’s many stakeholders, the innovative exhibits ideas can move from paper to reality.

This is a time of great excitement for the Zoo, yet one that will require the leadership and support of many — the Zoo staff and Zoo leadership, the Board, the County and other community stakeholders. It is only with everyone working together that this vision can be realized.