



CITY OF LOS ANGELES
INTER-DEPARTMENTAL CORRESPONDENCE

DATE: September 21, 2018

CF 17-0453

TO: The Honorable Members of the
Arts, Entertainment, Parks and River CommitteeFROM: Sharon M. Tso, Chief Legislative Analyst  WAS No. 18-07-0665
Richard H. Llewellyn, Jr., City Administrative Officer SUBJECT: **Review of Alternative Qualifications for Veterinarian Panelists****RECOMMENDATION**

Note and File.

SUMMARY

On June 18, 2018, the Arts, Parks, Entertainment and River (AEPR) Committee held a hearing in which the Committee discussed a joint report from the Offices of the Chief Legislative Analyst (CLA) and the City Administrative Officer (CAO) regarding Billy the Elephant (CF 17-0453). That joint report, submitted in response to prior Committee instructions, proposed certain qualifications that, if endorsed by the City Council, would be used to identify three veterinarians to independently examine the health and well-being of the elephant. The selected medical professionals would be tasked with responding to a set of questions posed by the Committee regarding the elephant's health and care, and opining on the potential impact of relocating the elephant to a sanctuary.

Councilmember Koretz appeared at the June 18, 2018 hearing and submitted a letter in which he proposed alternative qualifications for veterinarian panelists (see Attachment). The AEPR Committee requested that the CAO and CLA review and respond to the alternative criteria proposed by Council District 5.

We have reviewed the alternative criteria and find that, in general, the proposed changes to the qualifications of potential panelists will essentially expand the candidate pool. The CAO and CLA will utilize alternative qualifications if instructed to do so by the AEPR Committee and the City Council.

BACKGROUND

On June 18, 2018, the CLA and CAO submitted to the AEPR Committee a Joint Report in which staff proposed the following qualifications for potential veterinarian panelists:

“Authorize the City Administrative Officer and the Chief Legislative Analyst, with the assistance of the Zoo Department, to seek advice from licensed veterinarians certified by the American College of Zoological Medicine (ACZM) who have at least five years of full-time experience in zoo medicine specifically providing veterinarian care for the unique needs of Asian elephants and advice from subject matter experts, and report with findings in response to the Arts, Entertainment, Parks and River Committee questions (Attachment 1).”

At the June 18, 2018 hearing of the AEPR Committee, a letter was submitted by Council District 5 recommending changes to the language to establish alternative qualifications for potential panelists. The following discusses each component of the alternative language proposed by CD 5 and offers comments from staff as to the effect of the proposed change.

1. Add the following language:

“Authorize the City Administrative Officer and the Chief Legislative Analyst, with the assistance of the Zoo Department to facilitate full access to observing and examining Billy, his habitat and housing, and his complete medical records,”...

Staff comments: This language clarifies the role and responsibilities of the Zoo department with respect to this study and does not have any material impact on the intent of the initial recommendation.

2. Add the following language:

“...to seek advice from licensed veterinarians certified by the American College of Zoological Medicine (ACZM), or the American College of Animal Welfare (ACAW), or the U.S. Department of Agriculture Animal Plant Health Inspection Service National Veterinary Accreditation Program (APHIS-NVAP).”...

Staff comments: Since 1863, the American Veterinarian Medical Association (AVMA) has served as the leading advocate for the veterinary profession, and currently represents over 91,100 veterinarians, and offers educational accreditation and certification programs for its members to improve the profession. The AVMA’s American Board of Veterinary Specialties (ABVS) administers the accreditation program for veterinary specialty organizations.

To date, the ABVS has established 23 AVMA-recognized veterinary specialty organizations, which includes both the American College of Zoological Medicine (ACZM) and the American College of Animal Welfare (ACAW), the latter being its most newly certified organization. The original language in the joint report proposed to use ACZM-accredited veterinarians because this accreditation encompasses all veterinarians certified in “zoological medicine,” the discipline that integrates principles of ecology, conservation, and veterinary medicine and applies them to wild animals within both natural and captive environments. Expanding the potential candidate pool to include ACAW certification is consistent with the original criteria in that it allows an alternative certification for veterinarians who work in zoological medicine.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture Animal Plant Health Inspection Service National Veterinary Accreditation Program (APHIS-NVAP) offers a certification to private sector veterinarians to assist the USDA to test for a variety of government-regulated diseases for animals being transported across state or international borders. Initial accreditation training requires veterinarians to complete approximately ten hours of web-based training on Veterinary Accreditation Lessons, Emerging and Exotic Diseases of Animals Lessons, and Trans-boundary Disease Incursions. Accreditation must be renewed every three years. Expanding the potential candidate pool to APHIS-NVAP certified veterinarians will further expand the candidate pool.

3. Revise the language to read as follows:

“...who have at least five years of ~~full-time~~ experience in exotic and/or wild animal ~~zoo~~ medicine, specifically including providing care for the unique needs of ~~Asian~~ elephants...”

Staff comments: We have two areas of concern regarding the revised language. First, the proposed language would expand the candidate pool to veterinarians with experience in caring for the broader category of “exotic and/or wild animals, including” elephants. This criteria would include veterinarians who, for example, specialize in big cats or reptiles, in contrast to the original criteria proposed by the CAO and CLA which recommended limiting the candidate pool to veterinarians with specific experience caring for elephants. While the alternative criteria would expand the candidate pool significantly, we recommend that staff be authorized to focus the initial search for panelists on the segment of the candidate pool with specific experience caring for elephants to ensure the selection of veterinarians most qualified to assess Billy the Elephant’s health and well-being. If a sufficient number of qualified veterinarians cannot be identified from this segment, then staff could expand the search to the broader category of veterinarians with experience in caring for exotic and/or wild animals.

Secondly, the letter submitted to the AEPR Committee suggests that panelists be “non-zoo-affiliated veterinarians,” which would effectively eliminate from the candidate pool all veterinarians with any zoo affiliation. The CAO and CLA intend to select qualified independent panelists available irrespective of their affiliation, unless otherwise directed by the AEPR Committee and Council to limit the search to independent non-zoo-affiliated veterinarians.

Lastly, there is a suggestion in the letter that the criteria proposed in the Joint Report would result in an unfair evaluation process. The CLA and CAO wish to reassure the AEPR Committee and the City Council that the panelist selection process will be fair and impartial, and the intent is to select a balanced panel of independent, qualified medical experts who will provide their professional assessment of Billy’s health and well-being and respond fully to the AEPR Committee’s list of questions.

SMT:RHL

Attachment

Committees:

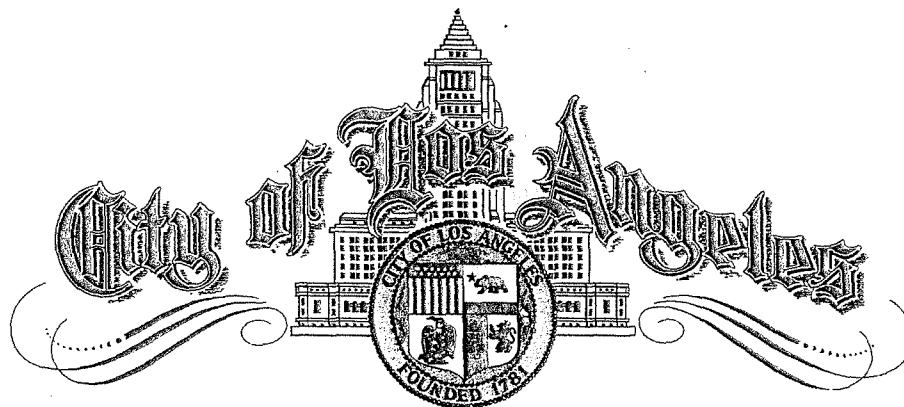
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June 18, 2018

Honorable Mitch O'Farrell
Chair, Arts, Entertainment, Parks and River Committee
City Hall, Room 480
200 North Spring Street
Los Angeles, C A 90012

Dear Chairperson O'Farrell

RE: CF 17-0453; agenda item 3, June 18, 2018

I am writing to offer comments on the June 13, 2018, report from the Chief Legislative Analyst and the City Administrative Officer in response to your Committee's instructions of January 24th regarding Billy, the bull elephant currently residing at the Los Angeles Zoo.

To some degree the report and its recommendations respond to the Committee in a straightforward and logical manner. However, I must take issue with Recommendation 1, and also comment on an implication in the body of the report that creates an erroneous impression of my office's involvement in its preparation.

With regard to Recommendation 1, it is clear to me that it defies the Committee's stated instruction that the study of Billy's health and well-being be conducted by an independent panel of non-zoo-affiliated veterinarians. As written, it would ensure that any veterinary assessment would substantially be dominated by professionals whose livelihoods directly depend, or have depended, upon the largesse of zoos and additionally whose ability to conduct the assessment of Billy likely would be dominated by the Zoo Department's influence. That does not reflect independence. Allowing and seriously considering veterinarians with a wider range of experience with exotic and wild animals opens the way to creating a panel that I believe does meet the Committee's intent. In fact, I would insist that such veterinarians be chosen to ensure the integrity of this exercise.

I offer the following substitute language for Recommendation 1 (with strike-outs and underlining for clarity):

Revised Recommendation 1:

Authorize the City Administrative Officer and the Chief Legislative Analyst, with the assistance of the Zoo Department to facilitate full access to observing and examining Billy, his habitat and housing, and his complete medical records, to seek advice from licensed veterinarians certified by the American College of Zoological Medicine (ACZM), or the American College of Animal Welfare (ACAW), or the U.S. Department of Agriculture Animal Plant Health Inspection Service National Veterinary Accreditation Program (APHIS-NVAD), who have at least five years of full-time experience in exotic and/or wild animal zoe medicine, specifically including providing care for the unique needs of Asian elephants, and advice from subject matter experts, and report with findings in response to the Arts, Entertainment, Parks and River Committee questions (Attachment 1).

The report's background discussion also refers to "including some suggestions from Council District 5." I want to clarify for the purpose of correcting any misleading perceptions or allegations that may be extant that the only conversations my office had with the Chief Legislative Analyst's staff regarding the substance of this matter occurred shortly after the January 24th Committee hearing. This was at a time when I expected the Committee to actually choose the panel membership, so the suggestions concerned three veterinarians I thought should be considered. My office had no further input to the report. If it had, I can assure you Recommendation 1 wouldn't read as it does, or at least it wouldn't have without a fight.

I strongly believe that this assessment of Billy's health and welfare must be conducted by professionals who are as independent as possible of obligations to, and the doctrines and influence of, the zoo industry. I am prepared to accept the results of a fairly conducted assessment, but Recommendation 1 as currently written clearly will not result in fairness, nor does it appear to be designed to do so. I ask you to amend the recommendations as I have suggested to ensure independence and the widest possible range of input.

Sincerely,



PAUL KORETZ

Councilmember, 5th District

Cc: All members