



July 14, 2022

Honorable City Council
c/o City Clerk, Room 395, City Hall
Los Angeles, CA 90012

“Creating dynamic experiences to connect people and animals”

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LOS ANGELES ZOO VISION PLAN – ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT (EIR) – PROJECT STATUS UPDATE (C.F. 21-0828)

In July 2021, the Zoo Department transmitted the Final Los Angeles Zoo Vision Plan Environmental Impact Report (EIR) and the Los Angeles Zoo Vision Plan (Proposed Project) for the City Council’s review, consideration, and certification in accordance with the *California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)*. This report provides an update on this project.

BACKGROUND

In 2016, the Los Angeles Zoo began the process of reimagining its 133-acre campus for the future. The Zoo engaged the public to understand and consider what Angelenos wanted their Zoo to be. By 2018, we had created the Zoo’s *Vision Plan for 2028 and Beyond*, which became the Proposed Project for an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) developed to evaluate the plan as required by CEQA. In 2021, the EIR was published by the City’s Bureau of Engineering, which was developed with a public feedback process, and which fully evaluated three alternatives in addition to the Proposed Project: a no project alternative, Alternative 1, and Alternative 2. The EIR was transmitted to the Los Angeles City Council, for approval in July 2021. The Zoo continued to monitor the public feedback submitted to the Council File, which has comprised more than 300 comments to date. As a result of the ongoing feedback, Zoo staff conducted listening sessions and tours with key stakeholders, including representatives of neighborhood councils, elected officials, City agency partners, community thought leaders, and representatives of non-profit organizations, to better understand and address public input. Through this engagement, the Zoo collectively created a new, fourth alternative: Project Alternative 1.5, the California Focused Conservation Alternative, which is now considered the Environmentally Superior Alternative in the Focused Recirculated EIR.

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ALTERNATIVE 1.5, THE CALIFORNIA FOCUSED CONSERVATION ALTERNATIVE

Alternative 1.5, The California Focused Conservation Alternative (Alternative 1.5) responds to public feedback on the Proposed Project while making the vital improvements that are essential for the Zoo’s transformation and emphasis on animal care and welfare. Significant changes from the 2018 Vision Plan to the 2022 California Focused Conservation Alternative 1.5 are as follows:

Denise M. Verret
Chief Executive Officer
& Zoo Director



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RESTORE COAST LIVE OAK WOODLAND

- The Zoo will restore six acres of its undeveloped hillside in the *Africa* area to be a healthier, more productive habitat for Griffith Park’s native wildlife. The 2018 Plan included this space as developed acreage, but the 2022 Plan calls for it to be managed as a native habitat restoration project. A backdrop to *Africa*’s multi-species savanna, this Coast Live Oak Woodland contains over 100 California live oak and approximately 22 Southern California black walnut tree species.

REMOVE PARKING GARAGE AND AERIAL TRAM

- The proposed 2,200-space multi-level parking garage originally planned for the final phase of the 2018 Vision Plan has been removed in order to discourage trips to the Zoo by car. In addition, the Zoo will implement a peak visitation management program that will cap daily attendance to a level that can be accommodated by its existing parking lots. Alternative 1.5 also removes the proposed aerial tram and thereby relies upon the campus-wide ground level tram and re-graded pathways to accomplish its accessibility goals.

INCREASE EMPHASIS ON CALIFORNIA BIODIVERSITY

- The *California* and *Entry* projects are moved to Phase 1 to have the biggest impact for guests and more quickly transform the publicly-inaccessible, historically-disturbed shrubland of that section into productive native California habitat. The ADA accessible ramp from the Entry Plaza to the top of the hill at the California Overlook will not be planted with vineyard-style grapes, but instead will be planted with local native drought-tolerant plant species.

NEXT STEPS

In accordance with CEQA, the new project alternative, Alternative 1.5, the California Focused Conservation Alternative, shall be recirculated for public review and comment. The City has elected to revise and recirculate sections of the EIR related to the alternatives analysis and supporting technical memoranda for a period of 45 days, from July 14 through August 29. The Focused Recirculated EIR has been prepared consistent with the standards provided in the CEQA Guidelines Section 15088.5, which set forth the conditions governing the recirculation of an EIR prior to certification. The Focused Recirculated EIR includes only those sections of the EIR that have been revised to address the new project alternative. Consistent with the standards provided in the CEQA Guidelines Section 15088.5(g), the specific sections of the Final EIR that have been revised and are included in the Focused Recirculated EIR include:

- Section 1.0, *Introduction* – This section has been modified to describe the Focused Recirculated EIR process and related CEQA requirements.
- Section 4.0, *Alternatives* – This section has been expanded to describe and analyze a new project alternative – Alternative 1.5, the California Focused Conservation Alternative. When compared to the proposed Project and among alternatives, the California Focused Conservation Alternative has been identified as the Environmentally Superior Alternative due to its reduction in impacts related to aesthetics, air quality, biological resources, energy, urban forestry resources, greenhouse gas emissions, noise, transportation, and utilities. Alternative 1.5 would also achieve more of the Project objectives when compared to Alternatives 1 and 2. In addition, a new discussion has been added that provides an analysis of the space dedicated to animal welfare and care under the proposed Project and alternatives.

- Appendix O, *Alternative 1.5 Project Description* – This new appendix contains a detailed description of the new California Focused Conservation Alternative. A copy of the planning document, 2022 Vision Plan – Alternative 1.5, is also included.
- Appendix P, *Parking Analysis for Alternative 1.5* – This is a new appendix to the Final EIR that provides a summary of analysis of parking demand under the new Alternative 1.5 and informs recommendations for development of a Peak Visitation Management Program, a key component of Alternative 1.5.
- Appendix Q, *Animal Welfare Area Assessment* – This provides a comparative analysis of the area that would be dedicated to animal welfare under implementation of the proposed Project and project alternatives.

All EIR documents can be found on the Bureau of Engineering's website at <https://eng.lacity.org/los-angeles-zoo-vision-plan> and supplemental information can also be found on the Zoo's website at <https://www.lazoo.org/visionplan>. In addition to the public review and comment period, there will be a virtual public meeting held on August 15th at 6:00 pm and the link to the public meeting will be posted here: <https://eng.lacity.org/los-angeles-zoo-vision-plan>.

CONCLUSION

Once the public comment period has ended and the Final EIR is updated, the Zoo will transmit a final report with recommendations to the Los Angeles City Council for consideration and approval.

RECOMMENDATION

Note and file this report inasmuch as it provides a status update and no further action is required.

FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT

There is no fiscal impact inasmuch as this is an informational report.

Respectfully Submitted,



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General Manager, Zoo Department

DMV/dmt

cc: Mary Hodge, Office of the Mayor
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