

File ID: 2026-00685

3/17/2026

Memorandum of Understanding Between the City of Sacramento and the Sacramento Zoological Society

File ID: 2026-00685

Location: Sacramento Zoo, 3930 W. Land Park Drive, District 7

Recommendation: Pass a **Motion** authorizing the City Manager or designee to execute a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Sacramento Zoological Society to establish a framework to explore a potential expansion of the Sacramento Zoo by approximately 5.8 acres.

Contact: Dustin Hollingsworth, Assistant Director, (916) 808-5538, djhollingsworth@cityofsacramento.org; Megan Van Voorhis, Director, (916) 808-5979, mvanvoorhis@cityofsacramento.org; Department of Convention and Cultural Services

Presenter: Dustin Hollingsworth, Assistant Director, (916) 808-5538, djhollingsworth@cityofsacramento.org, Department of Convention and Cultural Services

Attachments:

- 1-Description/Analysis
- 2-092225 Letter to City of Sacramento Re Proposed Expansion of Zoo Footprint
- 3-MOU Between City of Sacramento and Sacramento Zoological Society
- 4-Presentation

Description/Analysis

Issue Detail: The Sacramento Zoological Society (“Society”) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit public benefit corporation and has operated the Sacramento Zoo through City Agreement No. 97-021 since 1997. In April 2024, the Society and the City of Elk Grove agreed to finance and construct a new zoo within the City of Elk Grove. In April 2025, the Society announced that it would no longer pursue a zoo in Elk Grove but would remain at its Land Park location.

In June 2025, the City and Society executed the Twelfth Amendment to extend the term of Agreement No. 97-021 for three years through June 30, 2028, while the Society and City work together to analyze the operational conditions for continued and future operation of the Zoo in Land Park, including issues regarding space constraints. In addition, the City and Society agreed to engage in good faith negotiations with each other concerning the creation of a new partnership

agreement for operation of the Zoo.

The proposed MOU is designed to memorialize the agreed upon terms between the City and Society to explore potential expansion of the Zoo by approximately 5.8 acres, comprised of two adjacent parcels within Land Park. The proposed expansion area shown in Exhibit A of the MOU includes the 4.4 acre City parcel across Land Park Drive from the Zoo known as the “Pony Ride” area, and the 1.4 acre City parcel adjacent to the northern property line of the Zoo. The proposed MOU would expire on September 1, 2026, unless extended.

Specific activities undertaken within the scope of the proposed MOU include:

- Evaluation of implications for the current Parks Master Plan
- Development of a phasing plan for an expansion area and identify interim opportunities for improvements at the Zoo
- Development of a community engagement strategy to provide opportunities for the public to learn about the proposed expansion and provide feedback
- Explore needed amendments to the Zoo’s operating agreement including:
 - Design opportunities for the expansion area as a “contiguous campus” consistent with accreditation requirements and operational needs
 - Society’s identification of funding sources for development/improvement
 - Impacts to historical features, mature trees, utilities, traffic and parking, and need and timing of environmental documents such as CEQA review.

Policy Considerations: The proposed MOU supports the City’s 2040 General Plan Goal YPRO-4.1 to provide a diversity of arts, culture, and learning opportunities, facilities and programs for people of all ages to improve knowledge of Sacramento’s history, enhance quality of life, and enrich community culture, and policies that encourage partnerships with organizations to support cultural educational activities and programming, children’s programming, and reinvestment in City facilities.

Economic Impacts: The Zoo serves approximately 500,000 visitors annually. The Zoo's collection consists of more than 400 animals, diverse botanical life, and several specialized gardens.

Environmental Considerations: The report concerns administrative activities that will not have a significant effect on the environment and is exempt from the Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) review [CEQA Guidelines Sections 15061(b)(3); 15378(b)(2)].

Sustainability: Not applicable.

Commission/Committee Action: Not applicable.

Rationale for Recommendation: It is anticipated that expanding the current footprint of the Zoo would serve the community by allowing the Society to make improvements that would positively impact the animals and visitors, and enhance the ability of the Society to pursue its mission of inspiring a connection with nature and wildlife through education, recreation, and conservation. The space constraints of the current Zoo location make it exceedingly difficult for the City and Society to adequately plan for future accreditation and economic viability. The activities outlined in the proposed MOU allow the City and Society to pursue an analysis of the steps that should be taken to ensure its viability.

Executing this MOU reflects the City's and Society's current commitment to explore the Zoo's expansion but will not bind the City to any approval, action or funding at this time, nor does it amend the existing operating agreement. Any future action by the City shall be subject to City Council discretion and all applicable legal requirements.

Financial Considerations: There are no additional costs associated with approval of this MOU. Any future action by City shall be subject to City Council discretion and all applicable legal requirements.

For FY2025/26 the Society receives approximately \$306,994 from the Community Center Fund (Fund 6010) for the cost of the City positions (2.0 FTE) at the Zoo along with limited services and supplies. Future funding will be based on the adopted budgets for the applicable fiscal years.

Society also receives approximately \$50,000 annually from Funderland revenue. Funderland revenue is shared equally among the Fairytale Town Fund, the Sacramento Zoo Fund, and the Land Park Improvement Fund, as defined by City Agreement No. 2006-0258 and its amendments.

Local Business Enterprise (LBE): Not applicable.



3930 West Land Park Drive
Sacramento, CA 95822-1123
PHONE 916 808 5888

September 22, 2025

Mayor Kevin McCarty
915 I Street, 5th Floor
Sacramento, CA 95814

Councilmember Rick Jennings, II
915 I Street, 5th Floor
Sacramento, CA 95814

Leyne Milstein
Interim City Manager
915 I Street, 5th Floor
Sacramento, CA 95814

Michael Jasso
Assistant City Manager
915 I Street, 5th Floor
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Request To Expand the Sacramento Zoo's Operating Footprint in Land Park

Mayor McCarty, Councilmember Jennings, Ms. Milstein and Mr. Jasso:

Earlier this year, the City Council approved an amendment to the Sacramento Zoological Society's Operating Agreement with the City of Sacramento. The approved amendment acknowledged that the Society and the City would work together to analyze the operational conditions for continued and future operation of the zoo at its current Land Park location, including space restraints.

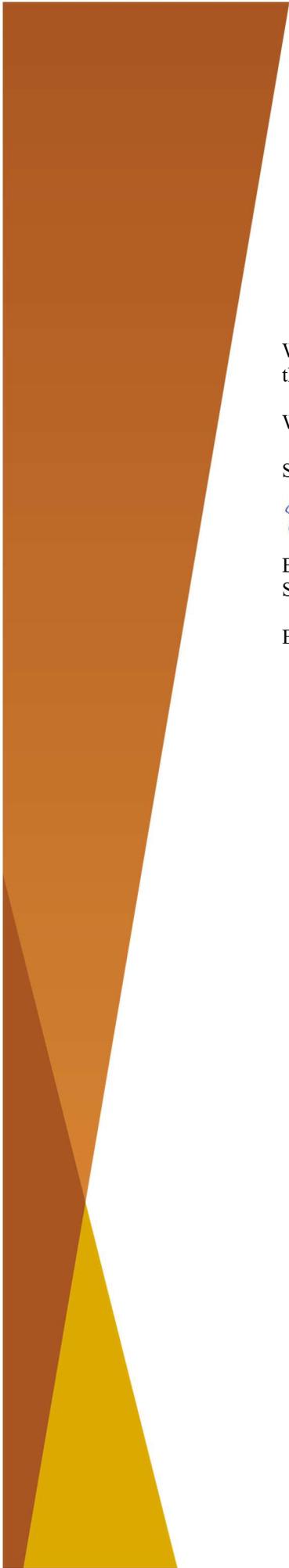
In keeping with this effort, I am now writing on behalf of the Society to formally request an expansion of the Sacramento Zoo's operating footprint. Specifically, we are requesting that the zoo's footprint be expanded to include two additional parcels:

1. The North Site parcel, which is approximately 1.4 acres in size and directly adjacent to the existing zoo site; and
2. The Former Pony Ride parcel, which is approximately 4.4 acres in size and across Land Park Drive from the existing zoo site.

The two parcels are depicted on the enclosed site drawings. Also enclosed are two concept drawings, illustrating potential uses of these areas once they are incorporated into the zoo. The Society will be responsible for developing these areas once they are added to our operating footprint, and in keeping with an overall master plan for the zoo.

This additional acreage will expand the Sacramento Zoo from 14.3 acres to 20.1 acres. This will represent an approximately 40 percent increase in the zoo's size, and the largest expansion of the zoo since the 1960s.

Most important, this expansion will provide the space and flexibility we need to commit to remaining in Land Park, and allow us to make a number of improvements materially impacting both animal habitats and visitor amenities.



We have always been incredibly proud of our nearly 100 year history in Land Park, and we are thrilled at the possibility of planning for the zoo's bigger and better future right here in Sacramento.

We look forward to discussing this proposal with you, and answering any questions you may have.

Sincerely,



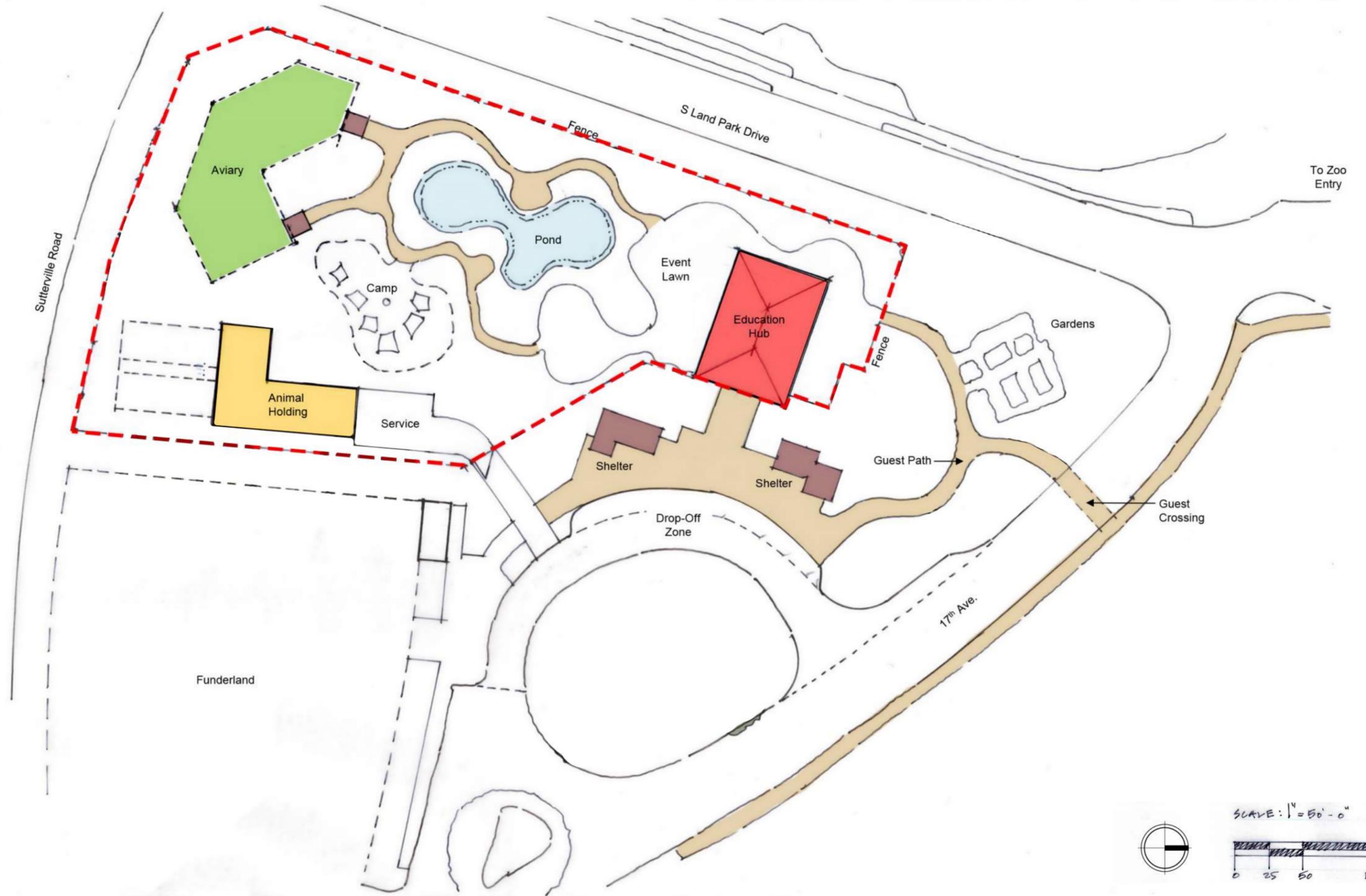
Elizabeth Stallard, Board President
Sacramento Zoological Society

Enclosures

OVERALL SITE DIAGRAM

- EXISTING ZOO AREA: 14.3 ACRES
- North Site 1.4 ACRES
- Former Pony Ride 4.4 ACRES
- TOTAL NEW AREA: 20.1 ACRES
- 41% INCREASE IN ZOO AREA





FORMER PONY RIDE TEST CONCEPT



NORTH SITE TEST CONCEPT

Contract Routing Sheet

Payment / Performance Bond Only

General Routing Information

Department: Convention and Cultural Services Department

Contract Coordinator: Rebecca Bitter Email: rbitter@cityofsacramento.org

Effective Date: _____ Expiration Date: 09/01/2026

Grant/Project Name: MOU Between City of Sacramento and Sacramento Zoological Society

Other Party: Sacramento Zoological Society

Original Not to Exceed Amount: 0

Assessor's Parcel Number(s): _____

Project Number: _____ Bid/RFQ/RFP#: _____

Supplements/Addendums/Change Orders

Adjusted Amount of this Change (+/-): _____ New Not to Exceed Amount: _____

Change In Scope: No

Original Contract Number: _____ Supplement Number: _____

Council Approval

Original Meeting Date: _____ Council File ID: _____

Supplement Meeting Date: _____ Council File ID: _____

Processing Information

- Clerk's Office to Mail for Recording
- Return to Dept for Other Party Signature
- Real Estate
- Return to Dept for Recording
- Construction Related
- Additional Originals Attached – Return to Dept.

Add notes/instructions, including any other contract or council file ID numbers related to this agreement:

Signing Authority - Department Directors up to \$100K; \$100K -\$250K City Manager or Assistant City Manager; \$250K+ Council Approval & Council Appointee or designee.

Department Review and Routing

AB 339 Review Confirmation (if needed) _____

Sign *Donna J. M... ..*

Sign _____

Sign _____

Sign _____

Sign _____

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

BETWEEN

CITY OF SACRAMENTO AND SACRAMENTO ZOOLOGICAL SOCIETY

This Memorandum of Understanding (“MOU”) is entered into by and between the City of Sacramento, a municipal corporation, hereinafter referred to as (“CITY”), and the Sacramento Zoological Society, Inc., a 501(C)(3), non-profit private corporation, hereinafter referred to as (“SOCIETY”). Each entity may be referred to herein as a “Party” and collectively, as the “Parties.”

Overview and Purpose

In recognition of their common interests in community engagement, education and quality of life for the people of Sacramento and the greater region, CITY and SOCIETY establish this MOU to establish a framework to explore potential expansion of the Sacramento Zoo by approximately 5.8 acres, comprised of two adjacent city parcels within Land Park (the “Expansion Area”), as shown in Exhibit A.

Expanding the current footprint of the Sacramento Zoo would serve the community by allowing the SOCIETY to make improvements that would positively impact the animals, visitors, and enhance the ability of the SOCIETY to deliver on its mission of inspiring appreciation, respect and a connection with wildlife and nature through education, recreation and conservation. The SOCIETY also needs to know whether the Sacramento Zoo will be provided with additional land at its current location so that the SOCIETY can determine whether it can continue to commit to operating the Sacramento Zoo in Land Park or will need to relocate.

Non-Binding Nature

This MOU reflects the Parties’ current intention to explore the potential expansion described herein. This MOU does not create any legally binding obligations, does not obligate CITY to approve, present, fund, or implement any proposal, and does not amend the existing operating agreement. Any future action by CITY shall be subject to City Council discretion and all applicable legal requirements.

Activities

The Parties will undertake the following activities, as determined appropriate and feasible, in furtherance of evaluating the proposed expansion. The Parties currently anticipate that consideration by the City Council, if pursued, will occur in September 2026; however, such timing is subject to change at either Party’s discretion.

1. The Parties will develop and agree to a schedule for deliverables consistent with completing all of the tasks detailed in this section by August 15, 2026.
2. The CITY will evaluate implications for the current Parks Master Plan.
3. The SOCIETY will develop a phasing plan for the Expansion Area and identify interim opportunities for improvements at the Sacramento Zoo.
4. The Parties will collaborate in developing a Community Engagement Strategy, which will provide reasonable opportunities for the public to learn about the proposed expansion and provide feedback to the CITY and the SOCIETY.

5. The Parties will explore which amendments to the operating agreement between the SOCIETY and the CITY will be necessary and appropriate in connection with the proposed expansion. Such efforts could address:

- The SOCIETY's exploration of design opportunities that optimize the Expansion Area in consideration of a contiguous campus, and that are also consistent with accreditation requirements and the operational needs of the Sacramento Zoo;
- The SOCIETY's identification of funding sources for any development or improvements made to the expanded footprint of the Sacramento Zoo, consistent with its method of operation on the current site; and
- The Parties' satisfaction of applicable legal requirements prior to SOCIETY commencing construction in the Expansion Area, including:
 1. Consider impacts to historical features and address any identified impacts as required by law.
 2. Identify the need and timing of any environmental study, including CEQA.
 3. Consider the impact on mature trees and address any identified impacts as required by law.
 4. A study of utilities on the current SOCIETY site, identifying needed improvements, and evaluating how the proposed expansion might impact current utility infrastructure.
 5. A study of traffic and parking, identifying the improvements needed, and evaluating how the proposed expansion might impact parking and traffic.

Other Terms

This MOU will become effective upon the date of its full execution and shall terminate on **September 1, 2026**, unless earlier terminated by either Party upon written notice. The Parties' goal is to complete their exploration of potential expansion by September 1, 2026. However, the Parties may also extend or otherwise modify this MOU by mutual written consent prior to its expiration. Termination shall not create liability for either Party.

All activities developed under this MOU will comply with the rules, regulations, policies, and/or bylaws, where applicable, of CITY and SOCIETY.

Each Party will be responsible for any/all expenses it incurs related to its own conduct as detailed herein unless otherwise agreed upon by the Parties.

Signatures

The undersigned acknowledge the terms of this non-binding MOU.

**Sacramento Zoological Society
A California Nonprofit Corporation**

**City of Sacramento
A Municipal Corporation**

By: *Daniel L. Simon*
Daniel L. Simon (Mar 9, 2026 08:45:51 PDT)

By: _____

Print Name: Daniel L. Simon

Print Name: _____

Title: CEO

Title: _____

0325658

State I.D. No.

For: Maraskeshia Smith
City Manager

exempt

City of Sacramento

Business Op. Tax Cert. No.

Attest:

City Clerk

Exhibit A



Sacramento Zoo

Discussion

PRESENTED 03/17/26

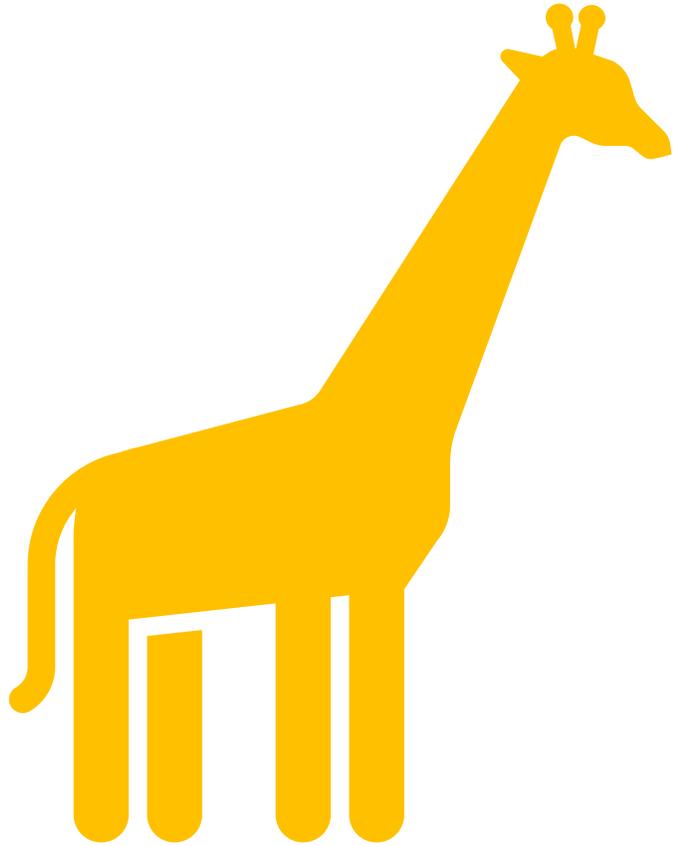


Sacramento Zoo Partnership



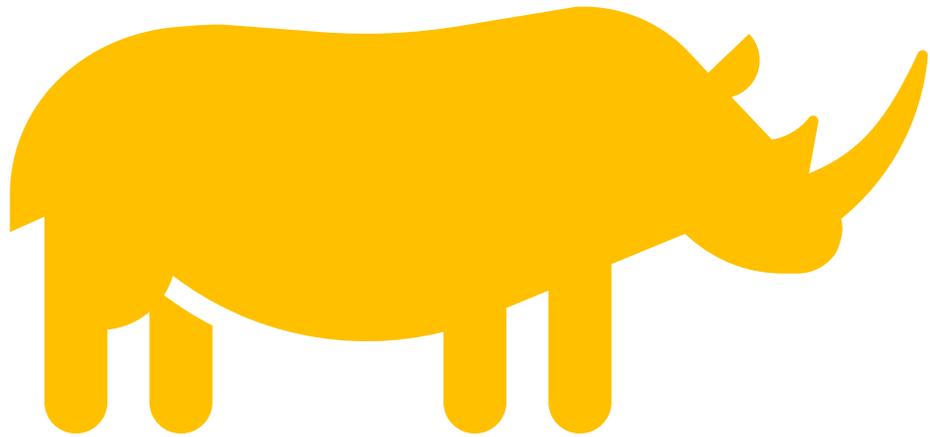
Since 1997, the City of Sacramento and the Sacramento Zoological Society have had a partnering agreement for the operation of the Sacramento Zoo





Recent Activity

- **2021**
Society entered into an Exclusive Negotiating Agreement with the City of Elk Grove
- **2024**
City of Elk Grove approved construction of a new zoo
- **2025**
Society and City of Elk Grove agreed to terminate plans for the new zoo



Recent Activity

- **June 2025**
City and Society amended and extended the existing agreement
- **September 2025**
“Request to Expand the Zoo’s Operating Footprint in Land Park”
- **January 2026**
City proposed an MOU as the path forward to explore the potential for expansion

Why does the Zoo need to expand?



Health
and
Welfare of
Animals



Meet AZA
Accreditation
Standards



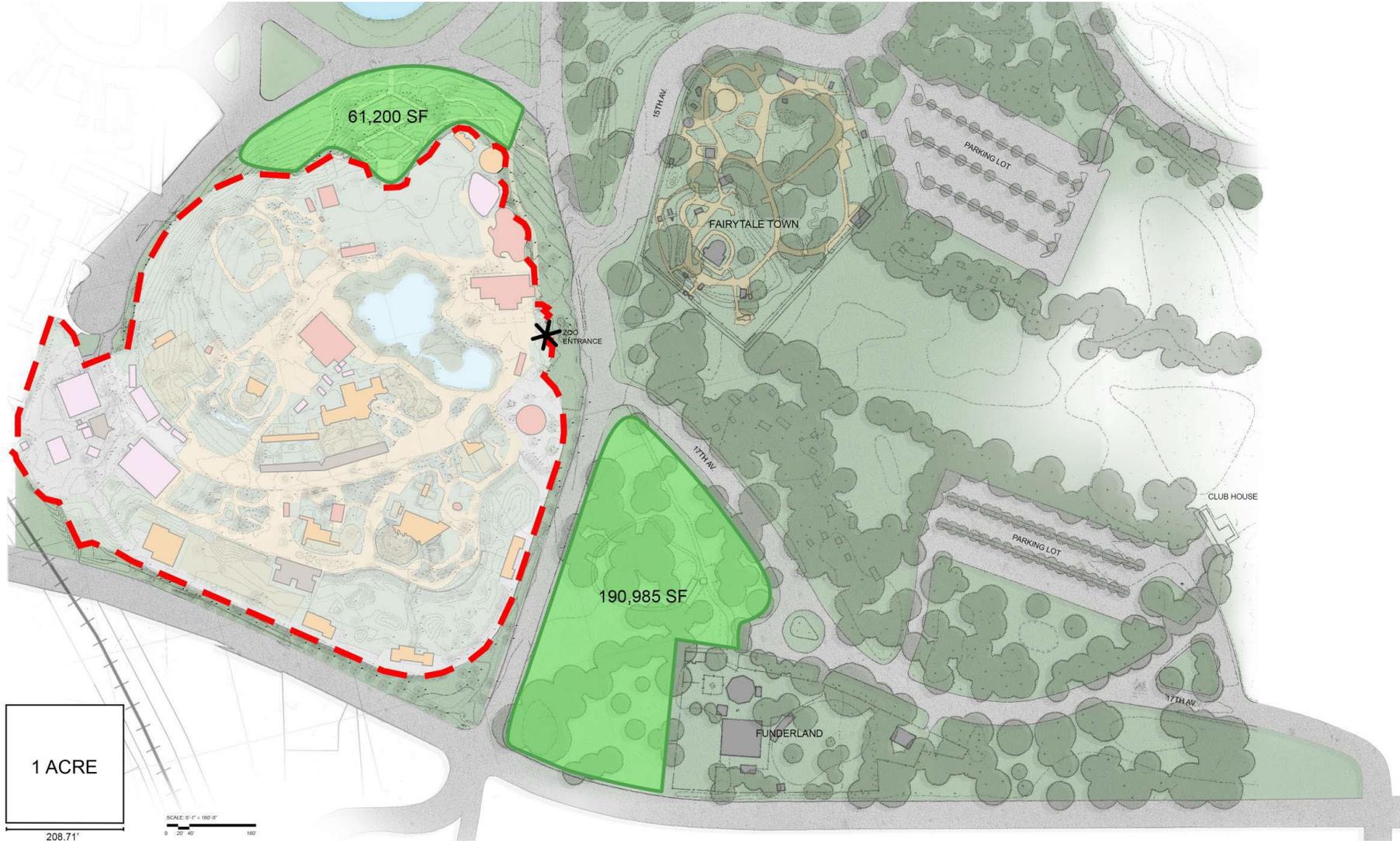
Regional
Destination



Increase
Visitors
and
Revenue



Proposed Expansion



Memorandum of Understanding

- Non-binding agreement
- Memorializes terms to explore potential expansion of the Zoo
- Future action will require City Council approval
- Expires on September 1st (unless extended)

Memorandum of Understanding

-
- Key Elements
 - Schedule
 - Impacts to Parks Master Plan
 - Phasing Plan
 - Community Engagement Strategy
 - Explore Amendment to Existing Agreement

Memorandum of Understanding

- Key Elements
 - Design Opportunities
 - Funding Sources
 - Pre-Construction Activities
 - Historical Features
 - Environmental Impacts
 - Utilities
 - Traffic and Parking

Discussion

