

CITY OF WATERTOWN, NEW YORK
WORK SESSION AGENDA
Wednesday, March 13, 2024
7:00 p.m.

This shall serve as notice that a work session of the City Council will be held on **Wednesday, March 13, 2024 at 7:00 p.m.** in the City Council Chambers, 245 Washington Street, Watertown, New York.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

1. Viability of Expanding Transportation
Presenter:
 - Ryan Henry-Wilkinson

2. Factory Square – Carriages on the River Project at 629 Factory Street
Project Overview and Restore NY Grant Program
Discussion
Presenters:
 - Tony D’Arpino Vice President, Greenleaf Builders
 - Scott Burto, WCP Consultants
 - Michael A Lumbis, Director of Planning and Community Development

3. Zoo New York Discussion

4. City Manager’s Update

From: Watertown City Manager

04 March 2024

To: Mayor and Council Members

Subject: Zoo NY Funding Fact Sheet

1. At a recent meeting between City staff and the Zoo Conservancy's Board President Ken Mix and Interim Director Mark Irwin, it was stated that an annual contribution of \$750,000 is needed to support the Zoo's day-to-day operations.
2. The Zoo's infrastructure is aged and a "rough of magnitude" (ROM) estimate to repair the infrastructure and provide for the possibility of adding new exhibits is well over \$2 million. There is no estimate available for annual sustainment costs.
3. At this time there are limited contributions from other municipalities whose citizens would potentially use the Zoo. The City Taxpayers will shoulder most of the financial burden to keep the zoo operational for years to come.
4. This request requires a tax levy increase at a cost for the average single-family home taxpayer of approximately \$75 on an annual basis.
5. Additional funding is required for the golf course projected deficit, which has its own need for near-term capital reinvestments in the clubhouse and to replace aged equipment.
6. Given the Zoo's projected deficit, along with the golf course operation, a property tax levy increase will be necessary to cover over \$1 million dollars a year for the foreseeable future. This could translate to an annual property tax levy increase of over 10% for the City Taxpayer.
7. The above increase does not cover the property tax levy increase needed to cover the recent health insurance premium increase of 25% (\$1.8M) and the 18% / 14% (\$725k) increases to the cost of the Employees' Retirement System and Police/Fire Retirement System contributions respectively. Collectively this represents an increase of \$2.5M+ in reoccurring costs to the General Fund that should be funded with reoccurring revenues. The only major City Council controllable revenue source is the property tax levy. Based on the current levy of just under \$10M there is a need to increase the property tax levy 25% just to address these two costs.
8. The City has challenges keeping wages competitive with the market and addressing critical needs such as clean water, sewer issues, and aging capital equipment and infrastructure. The General Fund, Water, and Sewer funds will all see increases that impact taxpayers and water/sewer rate payers.
9. Based on the FY 22/23 audit the City is in a fortunate position to have nearly \$17M in unassigned General Fund fund balance. When you set aside the \$10M needed for cash flow and as a safeguard against the volatility of sales tax and hydro revenues the prudent amount of usable unassigned fund balance drops to \$7M. During FY 23/24 City Council has thus far approved the use of an additional \$1.4M of fund balance for the increase to health insurance premiums, additional Zoo Conservancy funding, the Thompson Park bandstand, eclipse funding, police over-hires and Flynn pool cost overruns. Thus, the fund balance to potentially appropriate to FY 24/25's issues is down to \$5.6M which when considering other normal cost increases such as wages (~\$500k+) the unassigned fund balance gets the City through, at most, one year of funding before a major shift would be needed between the property levy and/or the level of services and programs. Fund balance needs to be strategically used over the next few years as we approach the end of the hydro contract when bigger fiscal challenges will be unavoidable.

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New York

Marketing & Fundraising

Blue Ribbon Committee, 2024

Corporate Objective

- The purpose of this marketing plan is to guide Zoo New York in its journey towards becoming a more self-sustainable organization. It outlines a targeted marketing strategy with actionable steps aimed at rebuilding and strengthening the organization for the **next two to three years**. The plan aims to enhance Zoo New York's brand, increase visitor engagement, and contribute to its long-term sustainability goals.

Mission Statement

Current Mission Statement


- Zoo New York, by example and action, provides knowledge and motivation to conserve nature in New York State through science-based natural and cultural experiences. We envision a future where New York's nature is valued and conserved.

Suggested Mission Statement

- At Zoo New York, our commitment is to safeguard wildlife and their ecosystems through dedicated conservation initiatives, impactful education, extensive research, and immersive experiences.

Suggested Vision Statement

- We aspire to ignite a passion within communities, fostering a deep appreciation for the significance of wildlife through experiential education and animal encounters.



Target Markets — we need to target individuals who will increase visitation and who will be beneficial to the zoo.

- Families with children
- Sponsors
- School districts/students
- Teens — future careers, non-drinking/safe activity, social gathering opportunities

This marketing plan is developed with the idea of targeting these groups of people.

SWOT Analysis — a description of our strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.



Strengths:

- Uniquely positioned as the only zoo dedicated to conservation of New York's indigenous animals.
- We are the only zoo within a 60-mile radius.
- We have a supportive and energetic community.

Weaknesses:

- Lack of AZA accreditation.
- Downward trajectory contributing to lack of confidence among donor/sponsors and public.
- Limited resources, particularly with funding.
- Older habitats.
- No new animals.
- Individuals calling different authorities to make complaints.

Opportunities:

- Market includes local, but also transient, family populations from which to mine for supporters, donors, and patrons.
- Expansion of education.
- Eclipse open date.

Threats:

- Sustained financial woes - real and perceived - hamper development and patronage campaigns.
- Starting from scratch.



Visitation vs Education

This marketing plan is developed into different phases for a better transition.

Visitation Phase 1

- Develop four separate email marketing lists comprised of every visitor, sponsor, member, and school district email addresses. **Each month, emails should be sent for updates, sharing upcoming events, and regular contact.**
- Determine which animals are fit for 7 News showings.
 - Determine who can go on the show with the animals.
- Schedule regular bi-weekly 7 News showings with animals and radio talk shows to advertise events that are happening at the zoo.
- Possibly Create a Shutterstock account for images.
 - **Shutterstock is an asset library where you can download images and use them as your own. It is much more affordable than hiring a photographer.**
- Develop an asset library.
 - **Webdam is a creative asset management database where creative assets that we develop (images, etc.) are placed on approval paths and stored on a common, cloud-based platform.**
 - **Owned Media update. Owned media is any type of content a brand creates and controls.**
 - **Website update: re-label “Donate” dropdown to “Support”. This dropdown will have programming options, membership opportunities, adopt an animal, donations, how-to-sponsor and event/exhibit, volunteering, etc.**
 - **Develop a monthly calendar to be added to “Events” tab and to be posted and “pinned” to social media channels.**
 - **add mission statement, update tabs/remove unnecessary tabs, make all tabs current and up-to-date, remove reviews, etc.**
- **In phase one, we want to focus on an earned media strategy. Earned media is content relating to a person or organization which is published by a third party without any form of payment to the publisher.**

Email and Social Media Campaigns

Hootsuite

- Social media management tool used to organize social media accounts.
- Generate, curate, and schedule social media posts. These posts can then be added to a content calendar, so they are planned out.
- Provides images and is able to integrate other image building sites. We can also integrate a Canva account to Hootsuite to create more engaging posts. Canva is a database where we develop creative assets from social media images, videos and gifs to posters, websites, booklets, multimedia presentations, etc.
- Track analytics. Can track all analytics to see consumer engagement, post likes, when the best time would be for us to post, etc.

MailChimp

- Email marketing database used to send mass emails to different groups of people.
- Track analytics. We can see how many subscribers we have, how many guests have unsubscribed to our emails, create interesting and engaging emails, send mass emails to different groups of people, import email list from separate email list that we may have.
- Email subscription sign-up form. Can be embedded in the Zoo NY website for guests to sign up for our email list, ask guests to complete surveys. Can ask for their physical address, etc.
- Generate reports. To see how well our campaigns are doing, etc.

Education Phase 1

- Create a list of school districts in surrounding counties.
- Determine liaisons for school districts.
- Determine which grades would be best for school visits.
- Determine which animals are fit for showings.
 - Determine who can go to schools with the animals.



Visitation Phase 2

- Develop material to be sent in email marketing. These emails will include monthly zoo correspondence to keep the community informed about upcoming events, animal spotlights, projects that their donations are being used for, etc. We should have 3 - 4 separate email marketing groups.
- Group 1: **Sponsors** – Monthly email correspondence to keep sponsors informed about upcoming events, animal spotlights, projects that their donations are being used for, etc.
- Group 2: **Members** - Monthly email correspondence to keep members informed about upcoming events, animal spotlights, asking for donations, how being a member is appreciated and what it means to be a member, etc.
- Group 3: **Non-member visitors** - Monthly email correspondence to keep visitors informed about upcoming events, animal spotlights, asking for donations, and marketing different membership opportunities, etc.
- Group 4: **Education** - Monthly email correspondence to keep school districts AND homeschools informed about upcoming events, different education opportunities, different education packets regarding what could be offered if the zoo goes to their school, animal spotlights, asking for donations, market different membership.



Visitation Phase 2 Continued

- Social Media:
 - Develop engaging and educational social media posts for Facebook, Instagram, etc. **This includes animal photos with fun and educational descriptions, photos of classroom visits, animal health updates (pictures of vet visits – keep community informed that these animals ARE being taken care of.), upcoming events, etc.**
 - Schedule posts through Hootsuite.
- Target Fort Drum:
 - Family Morale and Welfare Recreation (FMWR)
 - **Offer Fort Drum behind-the-scenes tour.**
 - New soldier processing.
 - Veterans and active duty receive free admission and for one day every month, their families receive 10% off each admission ticket.



Education Phase 2

- Create education packets tailored to school science classes. This may include lesson plans, lesson plan ideas, suggested activities, etc.
 - This can be developed working in conjunction with the school system.
- Develop student tickets. Each class receiving a visit should be given one child admission ticket for free Zoo NY entry.
- **Fundraising opportunity:** Create animal adoption materials:
 - Prior to class visits, the class could adopt which animal they would like to see. For week or months, the class should be bringing in donations in support of the animal. At the end of the fundraiser, the animal will be brought to the classrooms for viewing.
- Capitalize on homeschooling programs.



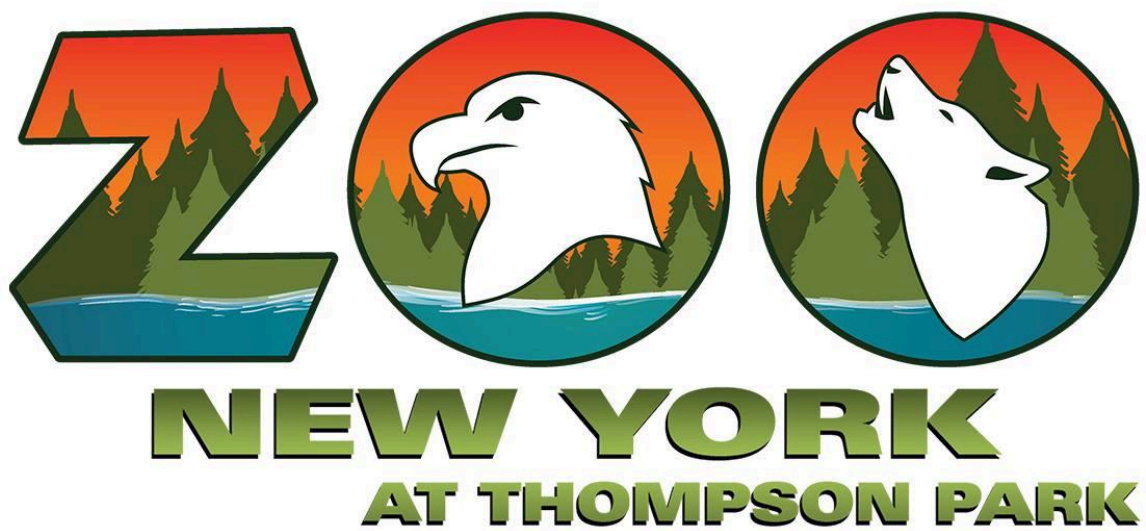
Visitation and Education Phase 3

- Create animal adoption materials:
 - Visitors can adopt an animal for different prices. QR codes should be placed on each animal exhibit that will link you to the animal adoption page. The price point of the donation will determine what the guest will receive in return.
 - Bronze Level \$35 (price TBD): The bronze package includes a certificate of adoption, animal fact sheet and 8" x 10" species photo.
 - Silver Level \$75 (price TBD): Package includes an animal plush, certificate of adoption, animal fact sheet and 8" x 10" species photo.
 - Gold Level \$125 (price TBD): Package includes an animal plush, certificate of adoption, animal fact sheet, 8" x 10" species photo, magnet, and reusable bag.
 - Platinum Level \$175 (price TBD): Package includes an animal plush, certificate of adoption, animal fact sheet, 8" x 10" species photo, magnet, reusable bag, animal greeting cards, and quarterly newsletter.
- Paid Media Advertising:
 - Paid social media campaigns for Facebook, Instagram, etc. All social media ads are tracked to determine engagement. **Target certain demographics**
 - Can we team up with JCC to market the Zoo Technology program in conjunction with Zoo NY?



Fundraising

- Telethons/Radio
- Butterfly release gala
- “You don’t have to come” event: There’s certain people who don’t enjoy going to events. It’s a clever way of asking for donations in a humorous manner. This event will never actually happen other than on paper. Send out invites for a great event with a guest of honor to ask many guests as you want. Send press out. Why would people want to purchase a ticket to a “don’t come event”? Because people are busy and still want to support a good cause.
- Golf tournament – directed towards education.



Zoo Task Force Report
March 7, 2024

At the request of Zoo New York, the “Zoo Task Force” was formed by former City of Watertown Mayor Jeff Smith in November of 2023. The Zoo Task Force is comprised of the following members:

- Former Mayor Smith, followed by Mayor Sarah Compo Pierce
- Former City Manager and Thompson Park Conservancy Board Chair Ken Mix
- Zoo New York interim director Mark D. Irwin
- Jefferson County Legislature Chair William W. Johnson
- County Administrator Robert F. Hagemann III
- Corey C. Fram, executive director of the Thousand Islands Tourism Council
- Jefferson Community College President Daniel J. Dupee II
- Charles M. Capone II, Watertown Savings Bank
- Dale A. Klock, President and CEO, Carthage Savings
- Robin Stephenson, economic development specialist for Jefferson County
- Former Mayor Jeffrey E. Graham (please note, he has resigned from the Task Force)
- Dr. Alfred L. Gianfagna
- Dr. David Plante
- Livia Harrienger
- Brandon Mills
- Scott Weller, City of Watertown Parks and Recreation Superintendent

The group was tasked with answering two questions:

- ***Should Zoo New York remain open?***
- ***What model of operation makes sense for Zoo New York?***

To do so, the Task Force was divided into four subcommittees to examine the various facets of operation, including:

- Finance
- Exhibits/Special Events/Programming
- Marketing/Fundraising
- Zoo Models

Finance Subcommittee

Members: Chuck Capone, Dale Klock, Chairman Bill Johnson, and Dan Dupee

Group's focus: This group examined zoo finances, identified areas where savings could be realized, assessed the current staff structure, and explored options for different funding models.

Key Takeaways: The Finance Subcommittee reviewed available financial records from the zoo. The biggest issues/points that stood out to the committee were:

- For the Zoo, wages are its largest expense.
- The Zoo's long-term debt has increased considerably.
- If the Zoo were to proceed with a capital campaign to make improvements, it would result in more operational costs.
- One of the possibilities raised for funding the Zoo has been a county tax. A roughly 2% increase would result in the funds the Zoo is seeking to obtain annually. Note, however, that implementing this additional tax would require state legislation. That can be a lengthy process and it is highly unlikely it could happen before the end of the 2024 Legislative Session.
- The question of whether the Zoo has exhausted all grant writing options was raised. According to Zoo officials, they have not been able to employ anyone who can write grants and believe fundraising and grants won't be enough to fill the gap.
- Dale Klock, who was on the Conservancy Board previously noted that the Zoo's financials don't look that much different than when he was on the Board.

Exhibits/Special Events/Programming Subcommittee

Members: Ken Mix, Dr. David Plante, Livia Harringer, and Scott Weller

Group's focus: This group assessed recent zoo exhibits, special events, and programming, identified events/programming that may be underperforming, and made suggestions for alternatives that may be more lucrative.

Key Takeaways: One of the Zoo's biggest hurdles is the lack of new exhibits in recent years. The group found that a plan is sorely needed for rehabbing existing structures. Additionally, other efforts need to be undertaken to make the most of the facility, namely renting out space for weddings and other special events. The question was raised as to whether the Zoo has sought out sponsorships to help with the upkeep of exhibits and landscaping. Per Zoo officials, this has been done, but to varying degrees of success.

******Please see the following page for additional information/findings from the Exhibits/Special Events/Programming Subcommittee***

Zoo Task Force

Exhibits/Special Events/Programming Sub-Group

1/5/2024 Notes

Purpose: This group will assess recent zoo exhibits, special events, and programming. Identify events/programming that may be underperforming and make suggestions for alternatives that may be more lucrative.

Members: Ken Mix

Livia Harrienger

David Plante

Scott Weller

Exhibits: There have not been any new exhibits recently to assess.

There is a great need to repair existing exhibits.

The Master Plan gives guidance for future exhibits.

The first new exhibit should be for farm animals (possibly heritage breeds) for more direct interactions with animals.

There should be more gardens worked into the zoo (possibly highlighting native species.)

Put QR codes on exhibits for donations.

Events: The zoo has four main events: Boo at the Zoo, Zoo Brew, Winter Wonder Lights, and Spring Opening. In 2022 they brought in a total of \$41,000 in profit. \$25,000 of that was from Boo at the Zoo. Wine, Art, and Wilderness is a new event that was started last year. Each of these should be evaluated in greater detail.

Programs: The following programs were suggested for consideration:

TV reports from habitats.

Increase number of birthday parties (current price may be too high).

Increase number of elementary school visits

Zumba at Zoo

Family Photos

BOCES Classes

Summer Camps

Hunter Heroes

Newborn Program

Beekeeping Course – Sell Honey

More Education Programs at Schools

Agricultural classes - team up with FFA clubs since they do in-school egg incubation. The students could learn about incubation and we could take the chickens into our care once the animal is born. This concept can be developed.

Crow Town Celebration! - We could have a bird expert talk about how crows can be beneficial to areas as opposed to removing them.

Cow Cuddle Therapy - This is an event that could happen once or twice a month through the course of the warmer months.

Goat Yoga - This is an event that could happen once or twice a month through the course of the warmer months.

Marketing/Fundraising Subcommittee

Members: Livia Harringer, Corey Fram, and Brandon Mills

Group's focus: This group examined recent marketing efforts and recent fundraising efforts, as well as made suggestions for improvement in the areas of marketing and fundraising.

Key Takeaways: The Marketing/Fundraising Subcommittee prepared a marketing plan for Zoo New York that identified ways they could raise funds and improve their bottom line. That marketing plan is attached.

******Please see the additional attachment for the full report of the Marketing/Fundraising Subcommittee.***

Zoo Models Subcommittee

Members: Dr. Gianfagnia, Robert Hagemann, Robin Stephenson, and Dr. Mark Irwin

Group's focus: This group reviewed various models of zoo operation and identified the pros/cons of each.

Key Takeaways: There are three models this group identified:

- Privately owned, without municipal funding, similar to The Wild Center in Chittenango
- Municipally owned and operated (like the Seneca Park Zoo in Rochester and Rosemond Gifford Zoo in Syracuse). These are managed by the municipality and in the aforementioned examples, the zoos are county-run and have a not-for-profit arm that supplements their activities; and
- Zoos that are run by a not-for-profit (like the Thompson Park Conservancy)

If Zoo New York were to become a fully municipal zoo, the County would not be able to undertake its operation as the County does not have a Parks and Recreation Department. Additionally, if it were to be a municipal Zoo, it would come at a greater cost to the taxpayer, as there would be City employees with increased wages and benefits.

The Conservancy's position is that a model where there is a "management contract" with the City would be the most feasible. If this were to happen, the Conservancy would have a member of the City Council and the Jefferson County Board of Legislators on its Board.

******Please see the following page for additional information/findings from the Zoo Models Subcommittee***

Task Force – Sub-group on Models

Basic Models

1-Privately owned – Site has an owner, no municipal funding, Disney's Animal Kingdom, SeaWorld, The Wilds

2-Private Non-Profit – Operated as a nonprofit, often times a subsidy is contributed to the nonprofit via direct budget, taxes, levy, etc. This reflects the current model, except the Thompson Park Conservancy does not have adequate financing to modernize. In this model, the land and assets are usually owned by a municipality. This is the model recommended by this subcommittee.

3-Municipally owned and operated – This example includes Seneca Park Zoo, Rosamond Gifford Zoo, etc. These seem to be the most successful zoos in the region. Their operations are managed by a municipality and they receive capital investment from them. Both zoos have non-profit support organizations that supplement the zoo's operation. The nonprofits do not operate the zoo, they are strictly there for support.

Variations

- WCS – Wildlife Conservation Society – nonprofit oversees several accredited zoos in NYC., in collaboration with city support, Santa Fe Teaching Zoo on campus of Santa Fe Community College, Gainesville, FL., Moorpark – America's Teaching Zoo, Moorpark, CA., Trevor Teaching Zoo, Millbrook School (Highschool-associated, in wealthy area of NY)

Examples

- Akron Zoo – similar size and initial course
- Local attractions/organizations: Boldt Castle, Flower Library, YMCA (investment)

Considerations & discussion points

1. The Zoo has existed for over 100 years and is a unique, beloved and valued part of the North Country, central Jefferson County and the City of Watertown
2. TPC is a nonprofit organization that manages the Watertown zoo. With only utilities covered and some reimbursement for repairs to the City's original buildings, the TPC has operated the Zoo for 25 years without operating funds from the City. All fundraising has been applied to maintain basic operations.
3. TPC does not currently have the financial means to continue to operate and advance the Zoo as a modern zoological facility
4. The zoo is an asset for all residents of Jefferson County, surrounding counties and as a regional attraction
5. The TPC can leverage public-private partnerships to provide the most efficient return on investment to tax payers and private sponsors
6. The Zoo needs to be rejuvenated with exciting new exhibits & activities to meet modern zoological practices and the needs of the community
7. The Association of Zoos and Aquariums publish standards of zoo operation and the zoo has twice been accredited demonstrating the meeting of these standards (2000, 2005)
8. The Zoo cannot become accredited by AZA again without addressing issues of deferred maintenance, modern operation and sufficient, stable funding.
9. Closure of the Zoo would be a costly endeavor and diminish our community

10. Government operation of the Zoo could be inefficient, excessively costly and at risk to return the Zoo to the situation of the late 1970s & 1980s
11. A successful zoo does not directly generate net profit, but is indirectly a tremendous economic asset to the community
12. The businesses & organizations of Jefferson need a vibrant and diverse quality of life to recruit professionals to our area
13. Support services within Jefferson County and partner organizations have need for community assets that promote family recreation, outdoor fitness activities, science education as well as cultural and recreational experiences. E.g., ARC, JCC collegiate programs, children's home, Credo ...
14. Most other successful zoos are supported by municipal governments to an average of nearly 50% of budget while ZNY receives approximately 28% of a barebones budget
15. The target budget of the Zoo in 3-5 years is 1.5-2 million with a gradual, steady increase from the current level over to address the need for new exhibits/activities, deferred maintenance and development of staff, grant writing and community development programs.

From: Watertown City Manager

04 March 2024

To: Mayor and Council Members

Subject: Zoo NY Funding Fact Sheet

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Memo From Mayor Sarah Compo Pierce

It goes without saying that Zoo New York is a valuable asset in our community. Beyond providing entertainment and educational opportunities for residents and visitors, it serves as a focal point for community engagement and connection with nature. As we look to attract families with young children to reside in our City, attractions that enhance the quality of life, like Zoo New York, are an important piece of the puzzle.

However, it is no secret that in recent years, Zoo New York has struggled financially. It has been made clear that the way in which Zoo New York exists currently is not sustainable. Representatives of Zoo New York have stated that in order to continue and become a Zoo that is profitable, it will require an annual government contribution of \$750,000.

As noted in this report, the “Zoo Task Force” met several times in a larger group and subgroups to examine all aspects of zoo operation. The Task Force was charged with answering two questions:

- ***Should Zoo New York remain open; and***
- ***If so, what model of operation makes the most sense for Zoo New York***

The Task Force recognized the value of the Zoo to our community and region. As such, they support it's remaining open. However, that decision will ultimately fall to lawmakers who are charged with making fiscal decisions for the City and weighing varying priorities when it comes to doing so.

At this point, I see four options the City should consider as it deliberates this issue:

- ***The City provides Zoo New York with the \$75,000 they have requested to get them through the spring and summer seasons.*** In that time, the Thompson Park Conservancy Board will be responsible for drafting a concrete plan for the future that demonstrates its ability to succeed financially.
- ***The City begins to allocate the \$750,000 annual contribution the Zoo is seeking.*** Given our current and future fiscal challenges as outlined in the memo from our City Manager, I do not see this as a viable option. Additionally, the City Council's decision to purchase the Watertown Golf Club for \$3.4 million, as well as to allocate more than \$4 million for the new Flynn Pool has overextended us when it comes to spending on recreational assets. Had the City decided not to

allocate funds on the pool and golf course, a significant investment into Zoo New York could have been more financially viable.

- ***The City, in conjunction with the County, provides increased funding to Zoo New York.*** Because the Zoo is a regional attraction, in my opinion, this could potentially be a more realistic and equitable option to pursue.
- ***Begin the process of reimagining the space where the Zoo exists to provide a different recreational/educational asset to local families and individuals, as well as visitors to our community.*** The current Zoo Task Force could be re-engaged to assist in this effort. A smaller-scale attraction that has limited operation and maintenance costs could be more viable. I would encourage the Council to look into the following facilities as examples:
 - The Minna Anthony Common Nature Center (Wellesley Island, New York)
 - The Wild Center (Tupper Lake, New York)
 - Old McDonald's Farm (Sackets Harbor, New York)
 - The North Country Children's Museum (Potsdam, New York)
 - The Children's Museum of Oswego County (Oswego, New York)
 - Hudson Highlands Nature Museum (Cornwall, New York)

An important point to consider as the Council considers this option is the proximity of other zoos in relation to Zoo New York. For example, the Rosamond Gifford Zoo is roughly an hour drive from Watertown. Additionally, U.S. veterans and active military receive free admission, which I can imagine is difficult for Zoo New York to compete with.

As we move forward with deliberations concerning Zoo New York, it is essential to emphasize that any decisions we make must prioritize fiscal sustainability, taking into account past decisions regarding recreational spending and challenges the City will face in the near future. While I think we can all agree Zoo New York is an asset to the community, we must ensure any plans for its future align with responsible financial stewardship. As Mayor, I am eagerly anticipating the forthcoming discussions with the City Council regarding the future of Zoo New York. Additionally, I would like to extend my thanks to the members of the Zoo Task Force who gave of their time to examine various aspects of Zoo operation. Their insights will undoubtedly serve as invaluable resources as we navigate a path forward.



March 5, 2024

Honorable Mayor and City Council
City of Watertown
City Hall
245 Washington Street, Suite 302
Watertown, NY 13601

Dear Honorable Mayor and City Council:

Zoo New York at Thompson Park has been a beloved fixture of our community for over a century with generations of families building treasured memories from visiting. In 1991, the Thompson Park Conservancy, Inc. (TPC) was formed to operate it and help it grow into a modern zoological park and tourist attraction. Today, it stands at a financial crossroads following many years without major investment. Much like in 1990, a decision needs to be made on providing more governmental support or closing the zoo.

Even with lower attendance, the residents of Jefferson County still understand the importance of the Zoo. In a recent survey by the Center for Community Studies at Jefferson Community College residents said that the following were very or somewhat positively impacted by the Zoo: quality of life - 84%, quality family time - 89%, family gathering location - 85%, safe outdoor recreation - 86%, education - 88%, North Country reputation - 75%, and tourism 75%.

When asked to make a choice between finding a funding solution that involves increased government support and keeping the zoo running and growing or close the zoo, 90% of the residents chose the former. That number rose to 98% of the active military population.

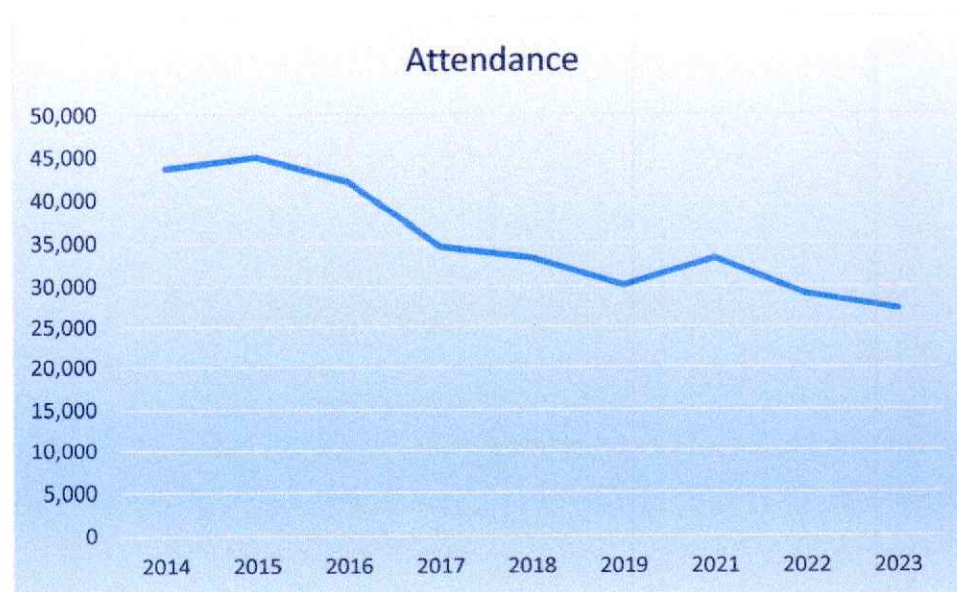
It was the consensus of the Zoo Task Force that Zoo New York should remain open and that TPC should continue to operate it.

Municipal zoos are not self-sustaining. They cannot survive on self-generated revenues and donations. Most receive substantially more income from governmental sources than Zoo New York. Our Zoo has been running at a loss for many years, as shown by the following graph.

Zoo New York
One Thompson Park • Watertown, NY • 13601
Tel: 315.782.6180 • Fax: 315.782.6192 • Email: info@nyszoo.org



These deficits have led to TPC being unable to properly maintain the facility or add any significant exhibits since 2009. This in turn has led to decreased attendance, which continues the downward spiral of reduced revenue. The graph below shows the attendance trend.



TPC would like to continue operating the Zoo but wants a Zoo that is thriving and not just surviving. We want to make it more than it has ever been. It should not only have more animal exhibits, but it should also have gardens and educational exhibits about other aspects of the natural world. It should impress locals and tourists alike as **the** place to visit in Watertown.

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TPC is looking to local government for a combined financial support of \$750,000 starting this calendar year and increasing 5% each following year with a 5-year commitment. We are requesting \$375,000, in addition to paying for utilities, from the City at this time.

We project that this amount combined with earned income and donations will provide enough financial resources to thrive. It will allow us to hire adequate staff and make some of the needed repairs and improvements.

The following is what we consider to be adequate full staffing to accomplish our aspirations and goals. It includes some restructuring of the staffing that has been in place. With sufficient funding, this staffing plan will be phased in over a three-year period.

Executive Director

Curator

Zookeepers (5.5)

Horticulturalist

Maintenance Supervisor

Maintenance Assistant (PT)

Program Director

Educator

Seasonal Employees (5)

Business Manager

Marketing & Development Coordinator

Guest Experience Coordinator

Guest Experience Lead (PT)

Seasonal Employees (6)

The following are our goals for the next 5 years to improve the Zoo's financial stability and make it a more enticing attraction:

Increase attendance by 20% each year.

Increase donations and sponsorships by 10% each year.

Repair all the deferred maintenance items.

Improve the landscaping of the grounds.

Construct at least 3 new small exhibits each year.

Construct a major exhibit every 3 years.

Be ready to apply for AZA accreditation in 5 years.

A 5-year pro forma is attached that shows how we plan to financially accomplish our goals. It assumes a \$750,000 annual contribution from local governments.

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TPC is also requesting a change in the contractual arrangement for the operation of the zoo. We would like to replace the lease agreement with a management contract. Under this arrangement it would be more explicit that TPC is operating the City's Zoo for the City. As facility owner, the City would be responsible for all repairs. Capital projects would be managed through the City's capital budgeting and construction process. Funds raised for capital projects by the Conservancy would be turned over to the City before construction. Volunteer construction projects would gain approval from the City Manager before construction.

If the City Council agrees with this additional support, we are proposing that the City Council appoint one member to the Conservancy Board of Directors. We are also proposing that city residents receive a modest admission discount.

To reiterate, our requests are that:

1. The City commits to providing \$375,000, with a 5% escalation per year, for operations for a 5-year period.
2. The City continues to pay the cost of water, sewer, electricity, and gas utilities.
3. The contractual arrangement is changed to a management agreement, rather than the current lease.
4. The City becomes responsible for the maintenance of all structures within the zoo, instead of just those constructed before the operation of the zoo by TPC.

TPC truly hopes that the City Council accepts this proposal. It is very clear from the survey that the public supports the zoo and wishes to see it continue. We are available to discuss this at the City Council's and Staff's convenience.

Sincerely,

Mark Irwin
Executive Director

Sincerely,

Kenneth Mix
Chair, Board of Directors

Zoo New York

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Zoo New York Financial Pro Forma - 3/4/24

Thompson Park Conservancy, Inc.

Year	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028
REVENUE					
Donations & Sponsorships	\$ 90,000	\$ 99,000	\$ 108,900	\$ 119,790	\$ 131,769
Café Sales -Net	\$ 10,000	\$ 12,000	\$ 14,000	\$ 16,000	\$ 18,000
Gift Shop Sales -Net	\$ 25,000	\$ 27,000	\$ 29,000	\$ 31,000	\$ 33,000
Memberships	\$ 40,000	\$ 42,000	\$ 44,000	\$ 46,000	\$ 48,000
Admissions	\$ 230,000	\$ 276,000	\$ 331,200	\$ 397,440	\$ 476,928
Programs	\$ 45,000	\$ 47,000	\$ 49,000	\$ 51,000	\$ 53,000
Event Rental	\$ 7,000	\$ 9,000	\$ 11,000	\$ 13,000	\$ 15,000
ZBGA	\$ 66,000	\$ 66,000	\$ 66,000	\$ 66,000	\$ 66,000
City/County Operating	\$ 750,000	\$ 787,500	\$ 826,875	\$ 868,219	\$ 911,630
Endowment Draw	\$ 22,000	\$ 22,000	\$ 22,000	\$ 22,000	\$ 22,000
Reserves Draw		\$ 45,625	\$ 45,506		
TOTAL REVENUE	\$ 1,285,000	\$ 1,433,125	\$ 1,547,481	\$ 1,630,449	\$ 1,775,327
EXPENDITURES					
Business Operation Expenses	\$ 162,000	\$ 170,100	\$ 178,605	\$ 187,535	\$ 196,912
Facilities Maintenance	\$ 104,500	\$ 20,000	\$ 45,000	\$ 80,843	\$ 175,791
Insurances	\$ 44,000	\$ 46,200	\$ 48,510	\$ 50,936	\$ 53,482
Advertising	\$ 25,000	\$ 26,250	\$ 27,563	\$ 28,941	\$ 30,388
Animal Care	\$ 48,000	\$ 50,400	\$ 52,920	\$ 55,566	\$ 58,344
Finance Fees	\$ 30,000	\$ 15,000	\$ 15,000	\$ 15,000	\$ 15,000
Fuel	\$ 3,500	\$ 3,675	\$ 3,859	\$ 4,052	\$ 4,254
Employee Expenses	\$ 613,000	\$ 1,046,000	\$ 1,120,000	\$ 1,151,000	\$ 1,184,000
Misc	\$ 10,000	\$ 10,500	\$ 11,025	\$ 11,576	\$ 12,155
Debt Principal Payments	\$ 45,000	\$ 45,000	\$ 45,000	\$ 45,000	\$ 45,000
Reserves	\$ 200,000				
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	\$ 1,285,000	\$ 1,433,125	\$ 1,547,481	\$ 1,630,448	\$ 1,775,327
NET PROFIT	\$ -	\$ -	\$ (0)	\$ 0	\$ 0