



2024-2028

Strategic Plan

January 2024



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Washington Park Zoo has been an integral part of the Michigan City landscape since 1928. Over time, the zoo has seen many changes, and we are excited about the planned changes to the zoo in the near future. The Washington Park Zoo Strategic Plan includes ideas for future expansion and renovation with a focus on animal exhibits, public amenities, and support facilities. Our plan's goal is to chart the course towards the realization of our mission of connecting people, animals, and the natural world. This document identifies opportunities and concepts for improving, adding, and expanding facilities and operations to meet the needs, goals, and mission of the Washington Park Zoo as it develops from a local family attraction into a regional destination. The primary factors in decision-making were animal health and welfare, as well as the overall guest experience.



The initial phases of the plan are intended to be implemented over the next 5 years with additional improvements identified to span beyond that time frame. The animal collection plan identified within each zoogeographic area is tentative and may change when final exhibit design is completed or fundraising goals are accomplished. The collection plan provides a framework for program development, fundraising, public relations, and exhibit design. Factors affecting the ultimate collection include species availability, AZA Species Survival Plan (SSP) program requirements, and creating differentiation from other zoological institutions in the region.

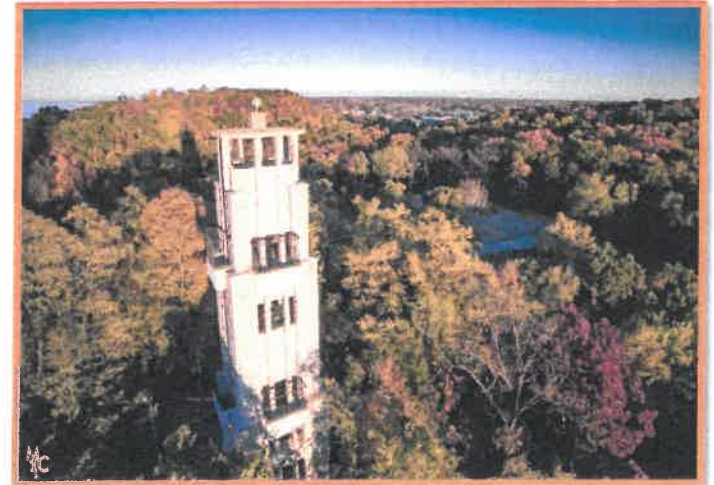
We must achieve the following in order to move the Washington Park Zoo forward:

- Maintain a collaborative approach
- Encourage and embrace community involvement
- Commit to high standards for success
- Achieve financial stability in annual operating costs
- Develop and maintain fundraising mechanisms for capital improvements

HISTORY AND EXISTING CONDITIONS

The first official Zoo Board was appointed in 1928 to create a zoological garden. The idea was to develop a park to include the study of zoology to furnish wholesome and free entertainment to the families of Michigan City as well as to the thousands of summer visitors.

The zoo was further developed during the Works Progress Administration (WPA) era in the early 1930's. Projects included Monkey Island, the Observation Tower, the Primate House, and the Engineers Castle, a replica of the Army Corp of Engineers insignia, along with many small stone buildings, walkways, benches, and walls. Many of the original WPA structures are still in use today. These 80-year-old structures require major repairs if we continue to use them.



Of the nine acres within the zoo perimeter fence, approximately 5.5 acres are developed. The remaining 3.5 acres are undeveloped, primarily due to a variety of steep and sloping dune conditions. Improvements over the years are highlighted in the following table.

1977	New feline house constructed	2015	Rotary Children's Castle was renovated including a new HVAC system	2017	Constructed a dedicated maintenance workshop building
1978	New elephant house constructed	2015	New Timber Wolf exhibit opened	2017	Constructed an attached building onto the upper Aviary
1990	Elephant house turned in to an education center	2016	Added gunite rockwork in the Wolf exhibit and wood decks for climbing	2017	Added a Koi pond, pollination flowerbeds, and wild bird and bat houses throughout the Zoo
1994	Gardens designed and landscaped	2016	Enhanced Jungle Building exhibits with shotcrete rock work, ropes and substrate	2017	Lowes constructed a new raptor exhibit near the Bobcat habitat
2004	New entrance constructed on Lake Shore Drive	2016	Updated keeper office and breakroom	2018	New Fallow Deer exhibit and Crow/Vulture/Raven habitat opened
2005	New gift shop opened in the admission building	2016	Covered the Discovery Center deck and added a concrete patio	2018	Grant Zebra yard expanded and African Sulcata Tortoise yard was constructed
2006	Observation tower restored and re-opened	2016	Constructed a storage garage for the safari train	2019	Opened a second concession stand at the Red Barn called the Coop
2007	New North American Carnivore exhibit constructed	2016	Expanded the Bald Eagle Habitat	2019	Zoo buildings and grounds light fixtures converted to LED
2007	New 40' x 80' maintenance building constructed	2016	Added new perches, nest box and solid metal siding on Wings of Wonder exhibit	2019	Castle restoration and renovation project completed. Building exhibits misc. small animals and an Honey Bee observation exhibit
2008	Existing primate building renovated, removed bars and cages and added glass viewing panes	2016	Installed stamped concrete viewing patio with wooden pergola near the hoof stock exhibits	2020	Replaced electric service panel outside the tortoise yard and inside the Tortoise barn. Installed new tortoise pool and water spigot.
2009	Australian Avian Adventure opened allowing guests to enter the exhibit and feed parakeets and cockatiels	2016	Opened a new North American Porcupine habitat	2021	Completed the off-exhibit holding shed behind the castle
2011	Treehouse Gift Shop expanded, adding 200 sq. ft.	2016	Guest photo opportunities were installed around the zoo and new exhibit signage was added throughout the zoo	2021	Restored the historic WPA spring well attraction
2011	Safari train ride opened producing additional revenue	2017	Installed 3 emergency back up generators onto buildings, installed fans with lights on the Discovery Center deck	2021	Installed a sponsor tree for donor names and an eco-friendly refillable water bottle fountain in the Discovery Center
2013	Discovery Center was enlarged adding a classroom and public restrooms	2017	Turned the classroom at the Discovery Center into a concession stand and the old concession stand into the classroom	2023	Installed a new Capybara house
2015	New Australian Outback exhibit opened	2017	Renovated the WPA limestone building into a new Arctic Fox habitat	2023	Expansion and renovation of the African Lion and Bengal Tiger habitats
2015	New Reptile Adaptation exhibit opened in Discovery Center	2017	Completed the Otto J. and Margaret M. Zack Charitable Trust Animal Care Clinic	2023	Installed a water line in zebra yard

MISSION AND VISION



Vision

The Washington Park Zoo will provide a unique, family-friendly experience that offers fun ways to learn about animals. Our approach will be demonstrated by the following:

- Helping families understand and appreciate the unique, fragile relationship people share with animals and their environments
- Expand ongoing communication and respond to our audience's needs
- Strengthen collaborations within our organization and community

Mission

The Washington Park Zoo is dedicated to promoting the appreciation of animals and conservation in ways that educate audiences through wildlife experiences while meeting the biological and psychological needs of the animals in our care.

Objectives

- Provide a cohesive circulation pattern that emphasizes the different zoogeographic areas of the zoo
- Create unique guest experiences
- Strategically locate guest services
- Provide opportunities to incorporate storylines and cultural themes to strengthen educational messages
- Create revenue-generating opportunities
- Address needed facility improvements
- Provide adequate space and services for the present and future animal collection

GOALS AND INITIATIVES

Animal Collection

Strengthen and maintain an inspirational animal collection

- Leverage the current collection to create bio-themed, multi-species habitats with priority regions of Eurasia, Africa, Australia, North America, and South America.
- Emphasize temperate climate animals until more winter holding is available
- Develop exhibits and programs that support the biological and psychological needs of the animals in the collection
- Exceed the USDA and ZAA requirements and habitat guidelines for every animal in the collection
- Develop training and enrichment programs for appropriate animals in the collection
- Seek educational and training opportunities for all keepers to ensure the best possible animal care
- Focus acquisition on animals that can be exhibited in multi-species habitats



GOALS AND INITIATIVES

Marketing

Create an environment of excitement and intrigue through our Brand Image, “Connecting wildlife to you at the Washington Park Zoo,” which provides families with a fun, educational and engaging experience at each point of contact.

- Expand marketing efforts including media relations, promotions, and advertising on a regional level to reach maximum attendance goals.
- Create annual events, promotions, and interactive programs to meet the needs of customers and achieve annual attendance and revenue goals.



GOALS AND INITIATIVES

Guest Experience

In addition to educational and engaging experiences, guests' needs must be met in order to create a comfortable and fulfilling experience. Gathering and resting places should be considered. Restrooms and drinking fountains must be strategically placed throughout the zoo and properly identified. Food and beverage service, as well as the gift shop, should include many options for all age groups. The zoo is built on a steep sand dune making access to some exhibits difficult; ADA is a paramount concern and must be addressed in this plan.



The entry plaza of the zoo provides adequate space for groups to gather and plan their visit. This space is also large enough for animal presentations for groups of up to 50.

The classroom provides space for up to 30 people for educational programming.

The deck and patio area can accommodate up to 150 seated guests.

Restrooms are located on the northwest and southeast corners of the zoo.

GOALS AND INITIATIVES

Guest Experience (continued)

In 2017, the Peacock Café was relocated to the front area of the Discovery Center building. The renovations included adding plumbing, and countertops, upgrading the electrical service, and installing two serving windows. This space is centrally located and has direct access to the covered dining area/deck, as well as the public restrooms. The new location also has heat and air conditioning; the former facility did not.



In the future, we would like to construct a new, two-story building at the Northwest corner of the Zoo, where the current classroom is located to house larger guest service spaces. The upper level of the new building would be a classroom/rental space and the lower level a gift shop with an attached merchandise storage area. The existing Treehouse Gift Shop is not large enough to accommodate large groups or house the merchandise inventory storage.

GOALS AND INITIATIVES

Education

Develop and implement a comprehensive education plan that raises awareness about the fragile relationship between people, animals, and the habitats they share.

- Establish a self-sustaining education department under the direction of a full-time Education Curator
- Utilize partnerships to create and implement educational programming.
- On-going assessment and evaluation of current educational programs.
- Grow a strong docent program that will support all aspects of zoo operations.



GOALS AND INITIATIVES

Exhibits & Facilities

Create and implement a 5 to 10-year exhibit renovation and facility strategic plan for the Washington Park Zoo that illustrates the interconnections and excitement of the animal collection.

- Satisfy AZA and exceed USDA guidelines in the design of all facilities
- Make all exhibits viewer-friendly and accessible
- Increase winter holding facilities
- Develop exhibits that offer immersive (walkthrough) experiences for guests
- Beautify the zoo with landscaping and gardens and use landscaping to develop line-of-sight barriers
- Design exhibits with natural habitats for the animal collection
- Receive accreditation from the American Zoological Association
- Join the American Association of Zookeepers – Institutional Facility



EXHIBITS AND SERVICE AREAS



PROPOSED PROJECTS - EXHIBITS AND COLLECTION

American Wetlands

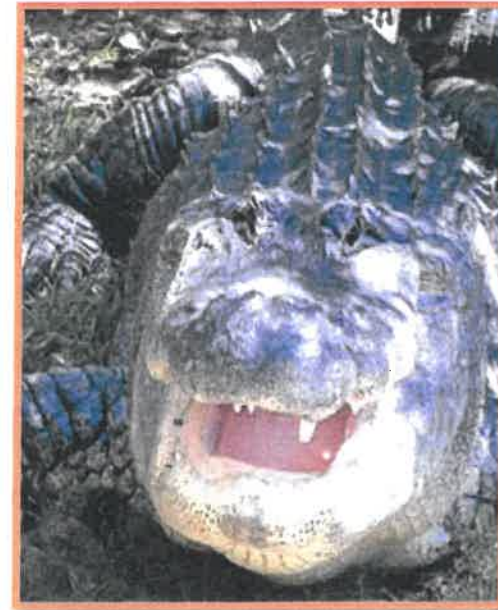
This exhibit space needs a permanent all-season building for the American Alligator, as well as a heated building in the side yard for the Capybara with direct access into their exhibit yards. This building would eliminate the need for staff to move these animals into other areas for the winter housing. We borrow rescued alligators from the Herpetological Society each year because we do not have the space to house them in the winter once they reach a certain size.

The new building plans will include a large picture window on the south side of the building to allow for year-round visitor viewing.

Year: 2024-2025

Estimated cost: \$100,000

Funding Source: 2024-2025 Endowment Fund



PROPOSED PROJECTS - EXHIBITS AND COLLECTION

Monkey Island Exhibit

Monkey Island was constructed in 1934 under the Works Progress Administration and is now outdated to house a larger species or group of primates since it lacks the off-display holding area for cleaning and winter housing. Our goal would be to renovate this exhibit before the zoo's milestone 100 anniversary in 2028.

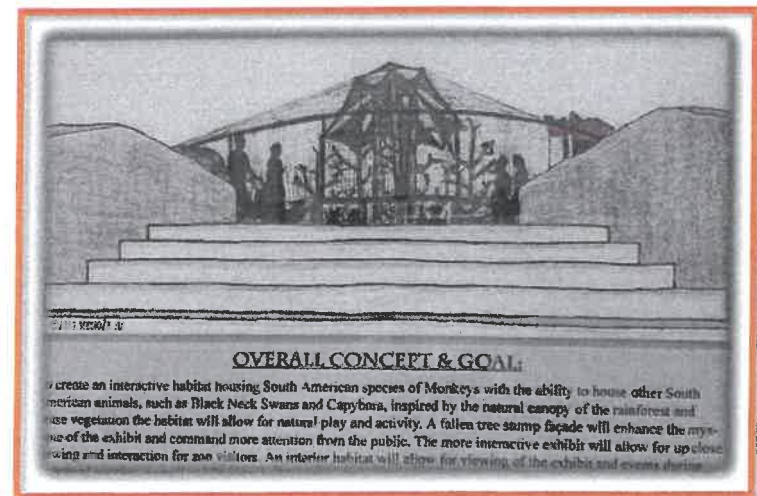
Future restoration plans will need to include an attached, heated, block building on the south side of the exhibit for primate holding and keeper access. The upper floor will be a large, open room with glass windows facing the exhibit where visitors can view the primates. The massive outer walls surrounding the exhibit, the center rock base, and the metal tower will also need to be updated. The moat area could be partially filled and planted if the proper safety modifications were done to prevent an escape. A smaller pond could be incorporated into the design to reduce the maintenance and utility costs for this exhibit. The exhibit will feature a mixed-species primate exhibit based on the design.

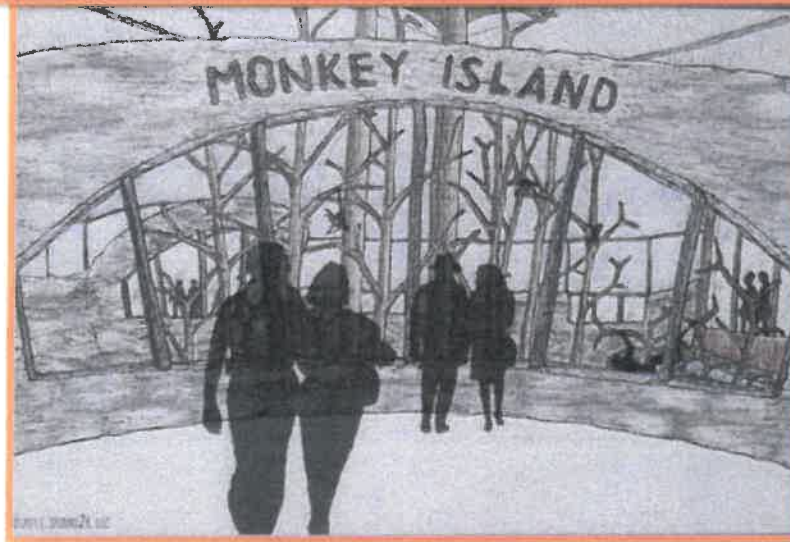
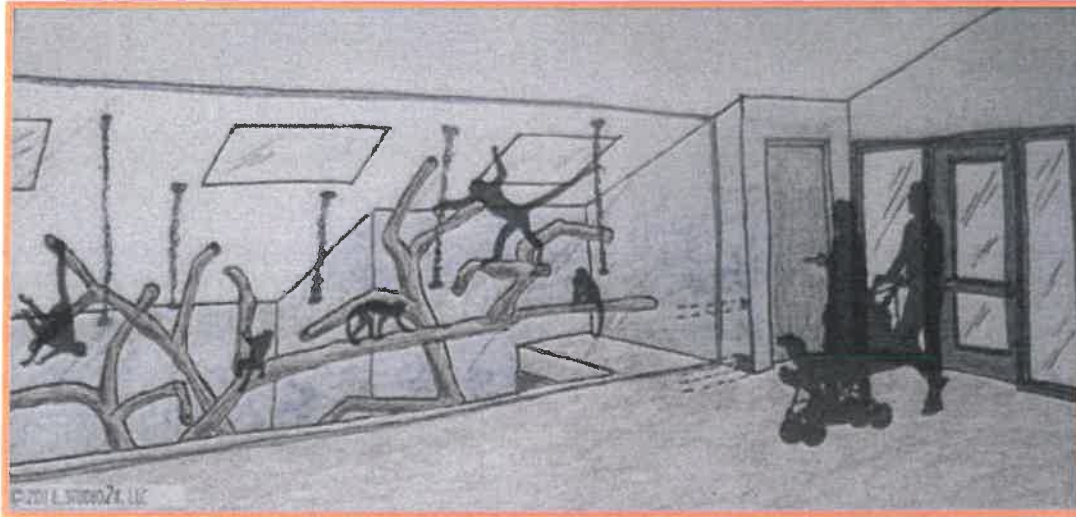
Year: 2025

Estimated Cost: \$1,900,000

A preliminary engineering study conducted in 2011 by Roger Potratz estimated the project cost at \$996,000

Funding Sources: Grants / Zoo Society / City / RDC / Private Donation





PROPOSED PROJECTS - EXHIBITS AND COLLECTION

Eurasian Exhibit

These exhibits currently display some of our raptor species. Minor improvements made in 2016 included painting the walls, replacing the wood framing, and adding natural substrate. Low-hanging and dead trees have also been removed from the surrounding area to prevent damage to the exhibits from falling trees and rubbing limbs on the roof panels.

Future renovations are needed to create a larger flight yard so that we could bring in a male Eurasian Eagle Owl to create a breeding pair exhibit.

Year: 2025

Estimated cost: \$15,000

Funding Source: 2025 Endowment



PROPOSED PROJECTS - EXHIBITS AND COLLECTION

Mixed Species Exhibit

The hilltop aviary exhibit currently houses a variety of exotic birds including Cattle Egrets, ducks and cranes.

In 2017, phase one was completed and an attached block building was constructed on the north side of the exhibit to serve as a winter holding area for the exhibited animals. A glass window was installed on the west side of the building to allow viewing access during inclement weather. Dirt ground fill and a smaller wading pond replaced the large rubber-lined pool to address pond drainage issues in the area. This change was a necessity as there are no cost-effective routes to install a drainage line from this exhibit because it is the highest point of the zoo and on a sand dune.

A secondary keeper safety entrance will need to be added to prevent escape. Lexan panels need to be installed on the lower four feet of exhibit fencing as a safety barrier between the birds and the public.

Year: 2024

Estimated cost: \$20,000

Funding Source: 2024 Operation Budget



PROPOSED PROJECTS – BUILDINGS

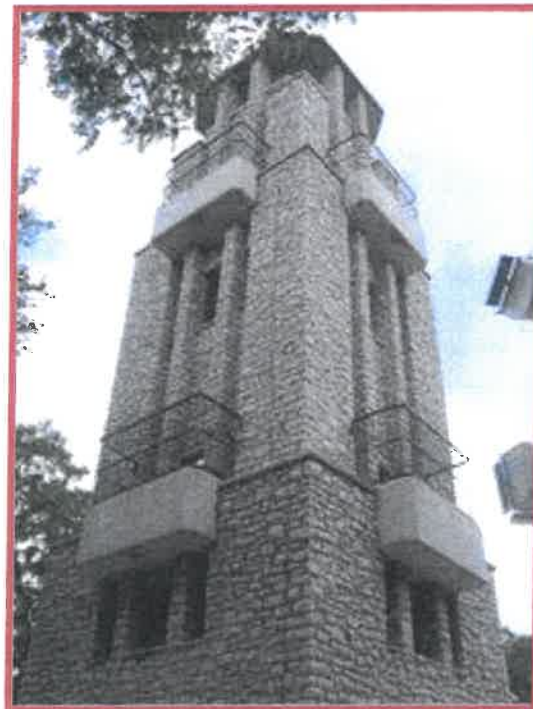
Observation Tower

The historic Observation Tower will need limestone masonry repairs, including rebuilding and tuck-pointing different sections due to deterioration caused by weather elements.

Year: 2028

Estimated Cost: Pending estimate \$700,000

Funding Source: Grants / Zoo Society / City / RDC / Private Donation



PROPOSED PROJECTS – BUILDING

New Gift Shop with Classroom and Rental Space

A new, two-story gift shop is planned for the northwest corner of the zoo where the old concession stand was located. The upper level would be used as a classroom and rental space with private restrooms and a kitchenette. The lower level would house a larger gift shop with an attached merchandise storage room. The existing Treehouse Gift Shop and classroom are not large enough to accommodate large groups. Both areas are very successful in generating revenue. The investment in expanding and improving the space will pay for themselves within a few years.

Year: 2024-2025

Estimated Cost: \$1,000,000

Funding Source: Gift Shop Funding Account/2025 Endowment/ Donation/ Grant/ City Capital



Lower Giftshop Space



Upper Classroom/ Rental Space



PROPOSED PROJECTS – BUILDINGS

Greenhouse Enclosure over the Wings of Wonder Aviary

Replace the exhibit mesh with an enclosed, heated, and cooled structure. The new building would permit the exhibit to be open to visitors and the avian residences during the changing weather conditions. It would also be a safer habitat for the birds by preventing disease and predator harassment.

Year: 2024

Projected Cost: \$150,000

Funding Source: 2024 Endowment/Grant



PROPOSED PROJECTS – GROUNDS AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Roof Repairs

The storage loft, goat shed and Wings of Wonder buildings need new roofs

Year: 2024

Projected Cost: \$15,000

Funding Source: 2024 Endowment/Otto and Margaret Zack Charitable Trust Grant

Handrails

Replace the damaged metal handrail leading from the Bald Eagle exhibit to the Upper Aviary with an ADA compliant railing. Install a new handrail in front of the Bear and Cougar habitats.

Year: 2024

Projected Cost: \$ 7,000

Funding Source: 2024 Operating Budget/Grant

Tree Work

Trim trees and remove unsafe limbs

Year: 2024

Projected Cost: \$25,000

Funding Source: 2024 Endowment

Outdoor Lighting

Continue to work on adding outdoor lighting near pathways to accommodate after-hour rentals and events and for added security. We address these concerns each time we renovate an area.

Year: 2024-2028

Projected Cost: \$ 40,000

Funding Source: 2024 Endowment/Zoo Operating Budget/City Capital

Sidewalk Repairs

Replace the main sidewalk leading to the upper aviary and repair the sidewalk on the north side of the Red Barn. We address these concerns each time we renovate an area.

Year: 2025

Projected Cost: \$50,000

Funding Source: 2025 Endowment

Security and Safety Systems

New Camera system installed in the Observation Tower

Year: 2026

Projected Cost: \$25,000

Funding Source: 2026 Endowment/Zoo Operating Budget/Capital

Projects Listed by Funding Source and Year

YEAR	TYPE	LOCATION	DESCRIPTION	EST COST	FUNDING SOURCE
2024/2025	Building	New gift shop and classroom	new building	1,000,000	Endowment/Park Concession/City Capital/RDC
2024	Building	Wings of Wonder, goat shed, storage loft	roof replacement	12,000	Zoo Operating Budget/Grant
2024	Exhibit	American Wetlands	exhibit renovation	100,000	Endowment
2024	Exhibit	Upper Aviary	exhibit renovation	20,000	Zoo Operating Budget
2024	Exhibit	Wings of Wonder Aviary	construct new enclosed building	150,000	City Capital/RDC/Grants/Donation
2024	Infrastructure	Bald Eagle to Aviary	install new handrail	3,500	Zoo Operating Budget
2024	Infrastructure	Bear and Cougar Exhibits	install new handrail	3,500	Zoo Operating Budget
2024	Infrastructure	Tree maintenance	remove and trim trees	25,000	Endowment
2025	Exhibit	Eurasian Exhibit	exhibit renovation	15,000	Zoo Operating Budget
2025	Exhibit	Monkey Island	exhibit renovation	1,900,000	City Capital/RDC/Grants/Donation/Zoo Society
2025	Infrastructure	Replace sidewalks	remove and replace	50,000	City Capital/RDC/Grants/Donation
2026	Infrastructure	Outdoor security lighting	purchase and install	30,000	City Capital/RDC/Grants/Donation/Zoo Society
2026	Infrastructure	Observation Tower	install new camera system	25,000	Endowment/Zoo Operating Budget/City Capital
2028	Building	Observation Tower	preservation	700,000	City Capital/RDC/Grants/Donation/Zoo Society
			TOTAL PROJECTS	4,034,000	