



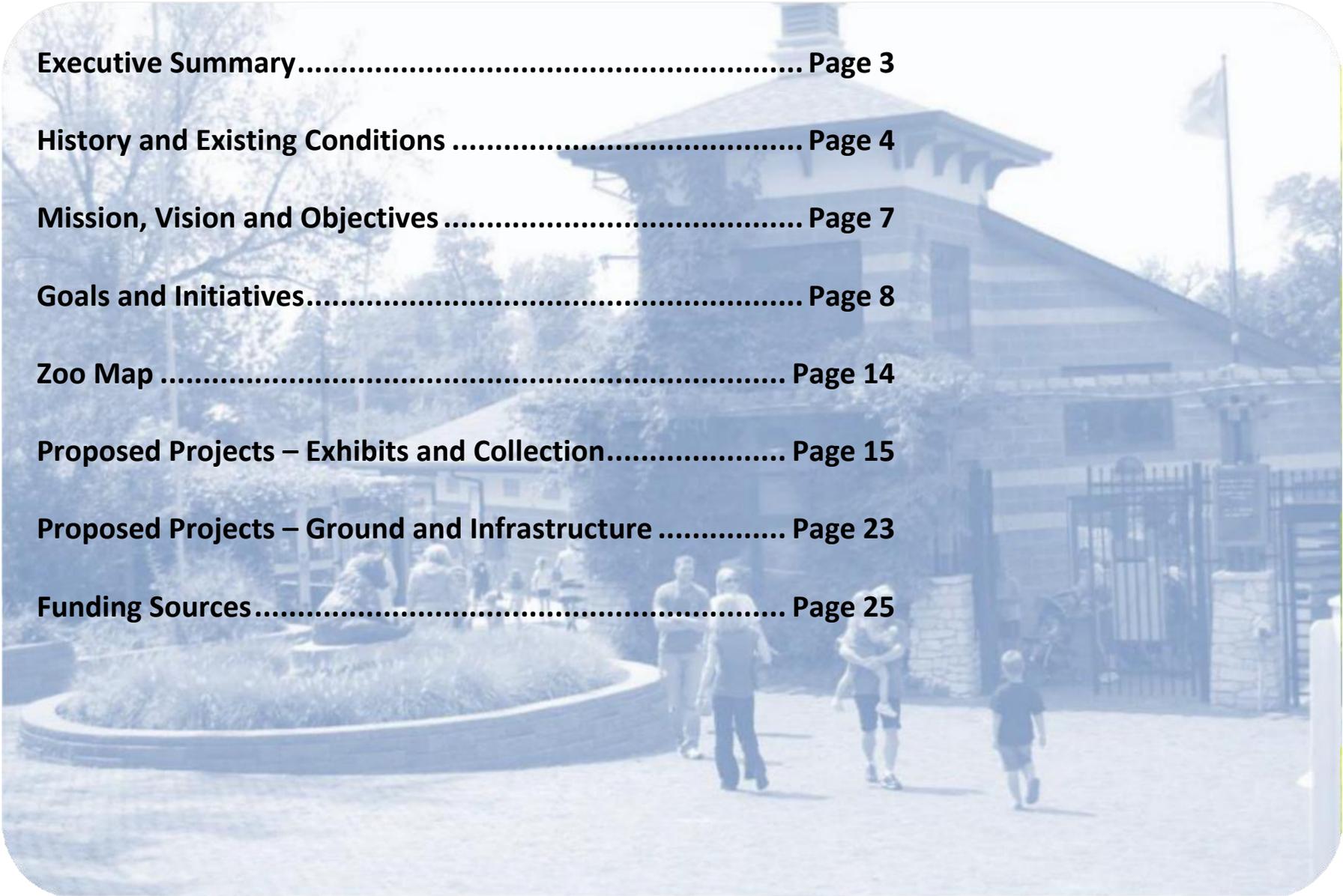
2026 – 2030 Strategic Plan
Guidelines for Redevelopment – Swinging into Action



January 2026



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Washington Park Zoo has been an integral part of the Michigan City landscape since 1928. Over time, we have seen many changes, and we are excited about the upcoming improvements 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—to connect 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.

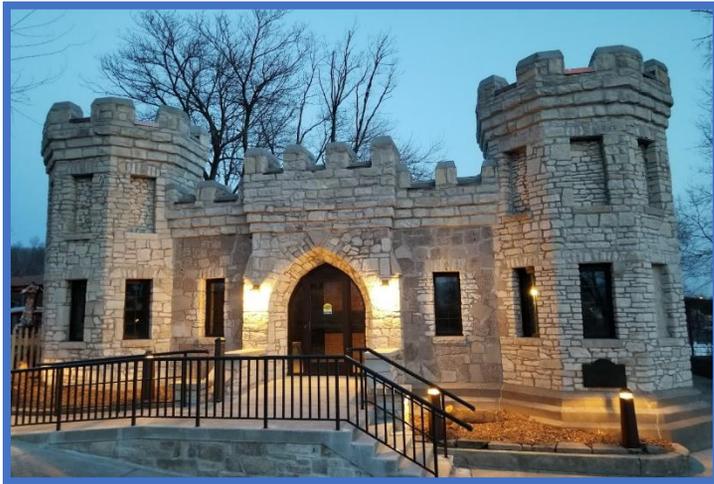
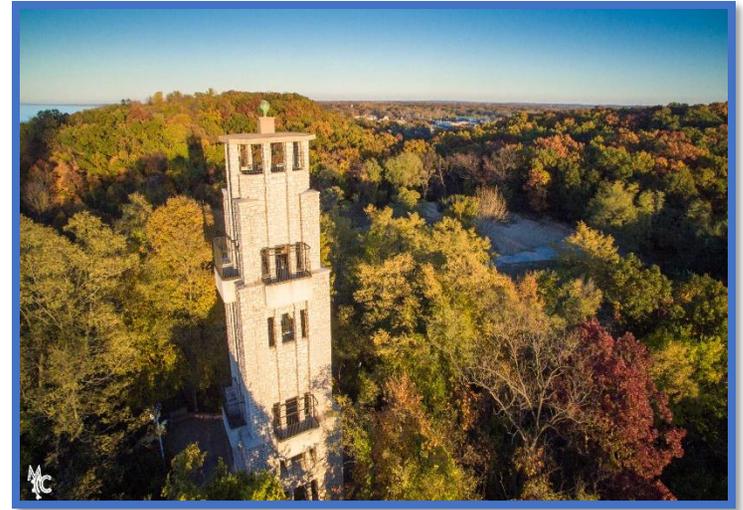
We must achieve the following in order to move the Washington Park Zoo forward:

- 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 incorporate the study of zoology to provide wholesome and free entertainment to the families of Michigan City, as well as for 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 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. Improvement highlights over the years include:

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

2019	Castle restoration and renovation project completed. Building exhibits misc. small animals and a Honey Bee observation exhibit	2025	AC installed in the Big Cat House
2019	Replaced electric service panel outside the tortoise yard and inside the Tortoise barn. Installed new tortoise pool and water spigot.	2025	Construction an addition to the Capybara house
2020	Completed the off-exhibit holding shed behind the castle	2025	Installed water lines in Alligator and Capybara exhibits
2021	Restored the historic WPA spring well attraction	2025	Awarded bid for new Wings of Wonder exhibit
2021	Installed a sponsor tree for donor names and an eco-friendly refillable water bottle fountain in the Discovery Center		
2021	Installed a Capybara house		
2023	Expansion and renovation of the African Lion and Bengal Tiger habitats		
2023	Installed a water line in zebra yard		
2024	Renovated old porcupine exhibit and created a new multi-tier bobcat habitat		
2025	Replaced red barn outer yard fencing		
2025	Roof replacement from hail damage to all buildings except Wolf and Eagle exhibits, Castle, and Observation Tower		
2025	Metal roofs installed on upper aviary to protect against avian influenza		
2025	A new sign was painted on the east side of the zoo viewable from Lake Shore Drive		
2025	Updated computer and phone system installed		
2025	Split unit HVAC units installed at Wolf barn, Muntjack barn, Coop Concession Stand, and winter holding building		
2025	Butterfly pollination garden added near Turkey Vulture exhibit		
2025	New chicken coop installed next to the red barn, moved barn owl as avian flu prevention		
2025	Removed seven dead trees through city grant program		
2025	Five new benches with planter boxes donated as Eagle Scout project		
2025	Replaced Australian Walk About wooden visitor barrier fence		

MISSION AND VISION



Vision

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

- 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 animal appreciation 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

- Transform the current collection into bio-themed, multi-species habitats, prioritizing species native to Eurasia, Africa, Australia, North America, and South America.
- Prioritize temperate climate animals until additional 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 appropriate training and enrichment programs for each species.
- Ensure the best possible animal care by seeking educational and training opportunities for all keepers.
- Focus acquisition on animals exhibited in multi-species habitats.



GOALS AND INITIATIVES

Marketing

Create an exciting and intriguing environment 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.

- Grow marketing efforts in media relations, promotions, and advertising, on a regional level, to reach maximum attendance goals.
- Create annual events, promotions, and interactive programs to meet customer needs and achieve annual attendance and revenue goals.



GOALS AND INITIATIVES

Guest Experience

In addition to educational and engaging experiences, guests' needs must be met to create a comfortable and fulfilling experience. Gathering and resting places should be considered. Restrooms and drinking fountains must be properly identified and strategically placed. Food and beverage service, as well as the gift shop, should include 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 provides space for guests to gather and plan their visit. This space is also large enough for animal presentations for groups of up to 50.

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

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

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



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 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 and rental space while a gift shop with an attached merchandise storage area would occupy the lower level. The existing Treehouse Gift Shop is not large enough to accommodate large groups or store merchandise inventory.

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

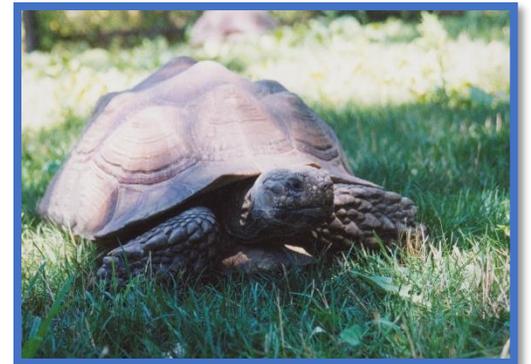


GOALS AND INITIATIVES

Exhibits & Facilities

Create and implement a five to ten-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, using landscaping to develop line-of-sight barriers
- Design exhibits with natural habitats for the animal collection
- Receive accreditation from the American Zoological Association
- Continue membership in the American Association of Zookeepers – Institutional Facility



EXHIBITS AND SERVICE AREAS



Park Map

Connecting Wildlife to You!

VISITOR POLICIES

Visitor safety: Rails, moats, fencing and other barriers between you and the animals are there to protect both you and the animals from harm. Please do not lift children over rails or fences.

Feeding animals: All zoo animals are on a carefully structured diet, and introducing outside food can harm them.

Photos: Personal photos and video are allowed, but we do not allow selfie sticks or tripods.

Respecting animals: Please show respect for the zoo's inhabitants by refraining from banging on windows, throwing objects into exhibits, harassing or teasing the animals.

No Coolers: For the safety of the animals we don't allow any outside food or coolers to be brought into the zoo, but there are picnic areas outside the zoo in the park.

Prohibited Items
For the health and safety of our guests and animals, the following items are prohibited:

- weapons or fireworks
- alcohol or illicit materials
- bicycles, riding toys, skates, skate shoes and skateboards
- balloons, balls and flying toys
- noise devices, laser pointers



Map Key

- Food & Refreshments
- Restrooms
- Gift Shop
- Parking
- Guest Services
- Stroller/Wagon
- First Aid
- Picnic Area

THINGS TO KNOW

- The Zoo is wheelchair accessible except for the Observation Tower.
- All of the Zoo grounds are a smoke/vape free area. You may exit thru the main gate and get a hand stamp to re-entry.

The WPZoo reserves the right to exclude anyone who engages in inappropriate or offensive conduct, as determined by zoo staff. The zoo is not responsible for lost, stolen or damaged articles and is not required to issue refunds or exchanges for inclement weather

We are going paperless to help the planet!

Please note that no paper maps are available at the zoo.

Guests are encouraged to download or photo a copy of the map. Zoo maps are also displayed on large boards around the zoo. Be sure to also locate our wayfinding signage for directions to many popular animals on our trails.

Thank you for your understanding as we all do our part.



PROPOSED PROJECTS - EXHIBITS AND COLLECTION

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: 2029

Estimated Cost: Pending estimate \$700,000

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



PROPOSED PROJECTS - EXHIBITS AND COLLECTION

Monkey Island Exhibit

Monkey Island was constructed in 1934 under the Works Progress Administration and is now outdated. It cannot house larger species or a group of primates due to its lack of off display holding area for cleaning and winter housing. Our goal is to renovate this exhibit by 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, allowing visitors to view the primates. The massive outer walls surrounding the exhibit, the center rock base, and the metal tower will also need updating. 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. Based on the design, the exhibit will feature a mixed-species primate exhibit.

Year: 2027

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

American Wetlands

The desired exhibit space will include 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 to their exhibit yard. This building would eliminate the staff's need to move these animals into other zoo areas for the winter months. Currently, we seasonally borrow rescued alligators from the Herpetological Society each year since we do not have the space to house them in the winter after they grow to a certain size.

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

Year: 2026

Estimated cost: \$100,000

Funding Source: 2026 Endowment Fund



PROPOSED PROJECTS – BUILDINGS

New Gift Shop with Classroom and Rental Space

A 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 big enough to accommodate large groups. Both areas are very successful in generating revenue. The investment in expanding and improving the space will pay for the project within a few years.

Year: 2027-2028

Estimated Cost: \$2,000,000

Funding Source: Gift Shop Funding Account/2026 Endowment/Donation/Grant/City Capital



Lower Gift Shop Space

Upper Classroom/ Rental Space



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 for a male Eurasian Eagle Owl, creating a breeding pair exhibit.

Year: 2026

Estimated cost: \$15,000

Funding Source: 2026 Endowment/Donation



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 I 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 visitors 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 necessary. There are no cost-effective routes to install a drainage line to this exhibit. It was constructed on the highest point in the zoo on a sand dune.

In 2026, a secondary keeper entrance will be added on the south side, to prevent escape, as a safety precaution. We have been adding these to all exhibits. We also plan on add a covered viewing deck just inside the exhibit as a guest feature.

Year: 2026

Estimated cost: \$20,000

Funding Source: Donation/ 2026 Budget



PROPOSED PROJECTS – BUILDINGS

Wings of Wonder Aviary Enclosure

Replace the mesh exhibit with an enclosed, heated, and cooled building. The new building will enable the exhibit to remain open to visitors and the avian residences during changing weather conditions, providing a safer habitat for the birds by preventing disease and predator harassment. Kil Architecture was hired, and design and engineering began in January 2025.

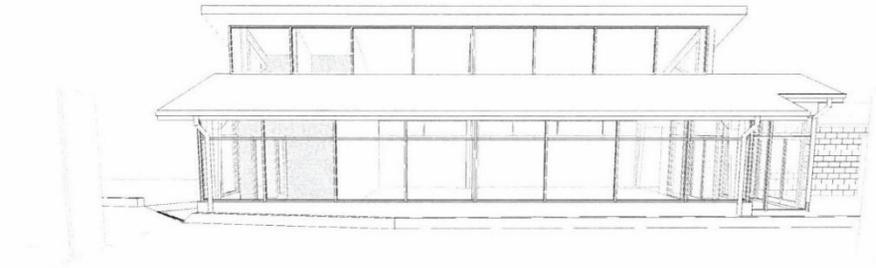
Year: 2026

Projected Cost: \$475,000

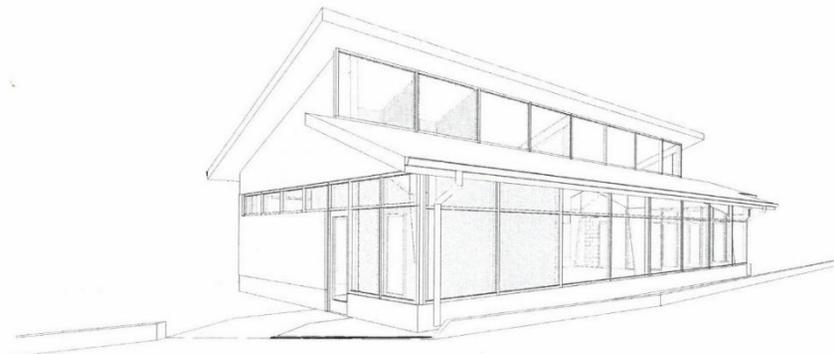
Funding Source: 2024-2025 Endowment/Park Budgets



WASHINGTON PARK ZOO - WINGS OF WONDER AVIARY | 115 Lake Shore Drive
Michigan City, IN
46360



1 NORTH EXTERIOR VIEW



2 NORTH EAST EXTERIOR VIEW

PROPOSED PROJECTS – GROUNDS AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Run-in shelter for eastside barn yards

We would like to install a shared, open-sided 12 x 20 ft run-in shelter over both outer yards at the Red Barn Exhibit. We lost two large shade trees that covered this area.

Year: 2026

Projected Cost: \$5,000

Funding Source: Donation/Budget

Handrail Install

Replace the damaged metal handrail leading from the Bald Eagle exhibit to Upper Aviary with a safer, ADA-compliant railing.

Year: 2026-2027

Projected Cost: \$ 7,000

Funding Source: 2026 Operation Budget/Grant

Tree Maintenance

Continue trimming back and removing unsafe limbs for the safety of ours guests, animals, and property.

Year: 2026-2027

Projected Cost: Unknown

Funding Source: Budget/City Tree Board Project

Replace Southside Zebra Fence

Replace the existing woven wire fence and post with a stronger welded mesh fence with concrete footings.

Projected Cost: \$18,534

Funding Source: 2026 Budget

Outdoor Lighting

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

Year: 2022 -2027

Projected Cost: \$40,000

Funding Source: Pending project and locations

Sidewalk Repairs

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

Year: 2022 -2027

Projected Cost: \$50,000

Funding Source: Endowment

Security and Safety Systems

New Camera system installed in the Observation Tower.

Year: 2029

Projected Cost: \$25,000

Funding Source: 2029 Endowment/ Operation Budget/ Capital

Funding Sources

FUNDING SOURCES	Fund 2204.504	Grants	MCCEC
2026 Operating Budget Fund 2204.504 (pending approval by State of Indiana)	\$1,445,401		
2023 Otto and Margaret Zack Charitable Trust Zack Grant - Wings of Wonder		\$75,000	
2024 Michigan City Community Enrichment annual contribution			\$100,000
2025 GAF Donation		\$5,000	
2025 Michiana Bird Society Donation		\$12,000	
2025 Michigan City Community Enrichment annual contribution			\$100,000
2026 Michigan City Community Enrichment annual contribution			\$100,000
2027 Michigan City Community Enrichment annual contribution			\$100,000
2028 Michigan City Community Enrichment annual contribution			\$100,000
2029 Michigan City Community Enrichment annual contribution			\$100,000
TOTAL FUNDING	\$1,445,401	\$92,000	\$600,000

Projects Listed by Funding Source and Year

YEAR	TYPE	LOCATION	DESCRIPTION	COST EST	FUNDING SOURCE	COMMENTS
2026	Exhibit	Eurasian Exhibit	exhibit renovation	\$15,000	2026 Endowment/Donation	
2026	Exhibit	Upper Aviary	exhibit renovation	\$20,000	Operating Budget/Donation	
2026	Exhibit	Wings of Wonder Aviary	construct a new enclosed building	\$150,000	2024/2025 Endowment/Park Budgets	
2026	Exhibit	American Wetlands	exhibit renovation	\$100,000	2026 Endowment Fund	2017 Deutscher Construction est \$100,000 x 5% inflation per year
2026	Exhibit	Red Barn yard shelters	construct two shade shelters	\$5,000	Operating Budget/Donation	12' x 20'
2026	Infrastructure	Bald Eagle to Upper Aviary	install new handrail	\$7,000	Operating Budget/Grant	
2026	Infrastructure	Zoo Property	remove and trim trees	\$25,000	City Tree Grant	
2026	Infrastructure	Zebra Yard	New fence	\$18,534	Operating Budget	
2027	Infrastructure	Outdoor Security Lighting	purchase and install	\$40,000	Grants/Zoo Soc/City/RDC/Private Donation	
2027	Infrastructure	Upper Aviary, red barn	remove and replace sidewalks	\$50,000	Endowment	
2027	Exhibit	Monkey Island	exhibit renovation	\$1,900,000	Grants/Zoo Soc/City/RDC/Private Donation	2011 cost of \$996,000 x inflation per year
2028	Building	New Gift Shop/Classroom	new building	\$2,000,000	Park Conc Fund/2026 Endowment/Donation/Grant/City Capital	2022 Ivy Tech Architecture Class estimate x 5% inflation per year
2029	Exhibit	Observation Tower	renovation	\$700,000	Grants/Zoo Soc/City/RDC/Private Donation	2006 Slatile \$361,573 - in house estimate
2029	Infrastructure	Observation Tower	install new security camera system	\$25,000	2029 Endowment/Operating Budget/City Capital	
				2026	\$340,534	
				2027	\$1,990,000	
				2028	\$2,000,000	
				2029	\$725,000	
			2026-2029 TOTAL	\$5,055,534		