

TASK FORCE



Little Rock Zoo

Task Force Findings & Recommendations

Final Report

Overview



- The Zoo Task Force engaged Zoo Advisors Relevant Strategies & Solutions (RS&S)
- Zoo Foundation paid for fees associated with RS&S
- RS&S advised the task force and helped develop a plan to secure the Zoo's long-term sustainability
- This presentation shares an overview of the process, findings and recommendations to support the Zoo in pursuing its vision

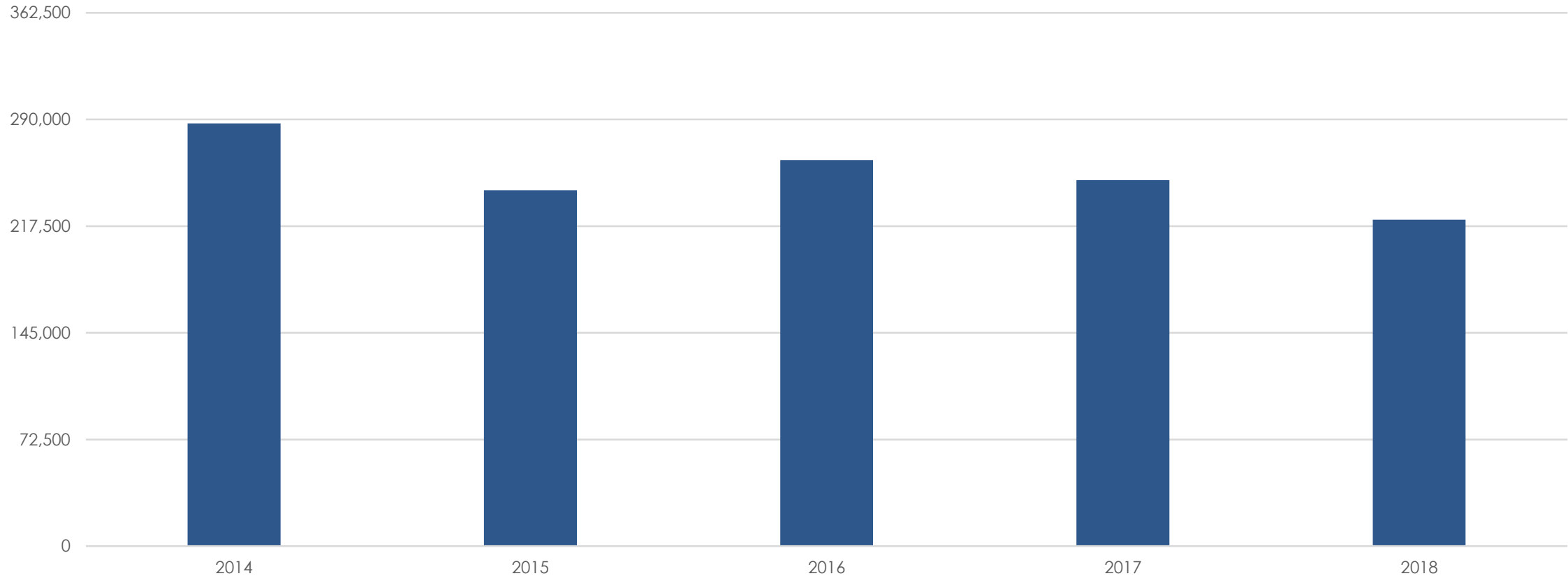
Little Rock Zoo's Current Situation

- The Zoo has a compelling facility master plan.
- However, there has been minimal investment in the projects outlined in the plan.
- With no new major exhibits or programs (due to the minimal capital investment), the Zoo is not realizing its full potential.
- With no new major exhibits or programs, the Zoo's annual attendance is decreasing.
- With minimal capital investment, the Zoo's deferred maintenance needs are steadily increasing.
- An aging facility only compounds facility issues – maintenance issues continue to get worse and worse.



Little Rock Zoo's Current Situation

Attendance Trend Over the Last Five Years



Little Rock Zoo's Current Situation

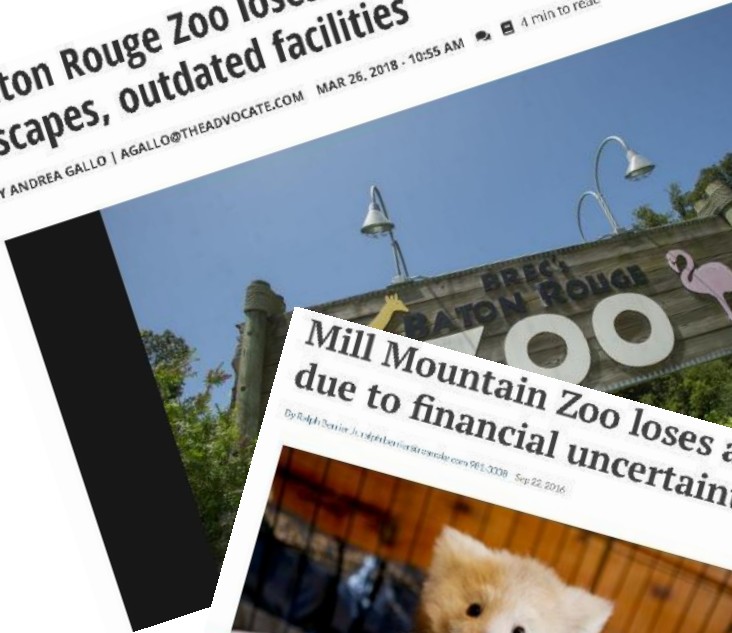


- Challenged staffing model
- Unbalanced mix of FT and PT employees
- Large number of FT position vacancies over the years
- Instability makes strategic planning for the Zoo challenging
- The lack of capital and staffing investment in the Zoo places the Zoo's accreditation status with the AZA (Association of Zoos and Aquariums) at risk
- **Maintaining AZA accreditation was identified as a significant “must-have” in a recent research poll with City of Little Rock citizens**



Zoos Recently Losing Accreditation

Baton Rouge Zoo loses accreditation; inspectors cite animal escapes, outdated facilities
BY ANDREA GALLO | AGALLO@THEADVOCATE.COM MAR 26, 2018 · 10:55 AM 4 min to read



Mill Mountain Zoo loses accreditation due to financial uncertainties
By Ralph Durrin Jr. | rdurrin@timesdispatch.com 961-3338 Sep 22, 2016



WLBT 3 ON YOUR SIDE HOME WATCH LIVE NEWS TRAFFIC WEATHER

Jackson Zoo loses accreditation



TOP NEWS
Honolulu Zoo loses accreditation
By Gordon Y.K. Pang March 22, 2016



Little Rock Zoo's Current Situation

- Findings from a recently conducted fundraising feasibility study revealed donors' reluctance to contribute private support without a significant investment from the City first.
- The Zoo's current annual operating budget is currently underfunded by nearly \$2 million annually. This excludes its capital needs.
- The City's annual funding investment in the Zoo has been somewhat uncertain subject to funding cuts.
- This challenges the Zoo's ability to commit to more ambitious, multi-year planning and/or implementation projects and undercuts the Zoo's ability to build up donor confidence and leverage additional support.



Creating a Forward Roadmap for the Zoo

- A Task Force of community stakeholders was convened, in partnership with the Arkansas Zoological Foundation. The Task Force was supported by consulting firm, RS&S.
- The Task Force was charged with:
 - Providing leadership in assessing the current financial and operational status of the Little Rock Zoo;
 - Exploring new sustainable funding strategies and options; and
 - Outlining next steps to strengthen the Little Rock Zoo's viable and sustainable business model.
- The Task Force explored public-sector funding models (City, County, State and regional funding models) that have successfully been implemented at AZA zoos throughout the country.



Task Force Members

Name	Affiliation
Brad Cazort	Chair of the Zoo Board of Governors
Lisa Buehler	Chair of the Arkansas Zoological Foundation Owner, Allegra Little Rock
State Senator Joyce Elliott	Vice-Chair of the Mayor's Quality of Life Subcommittee for the Scott Script
Kathy Webb*	City Ward 3 Director; Liaison to the Zoo Board of Governors
Mallory Jayroe	Generational Zoo Young Professionals
Chad Causey	Causey Law Firm; Board Member, Arkansas Zoological Foundation
Joni Lee	Vice Chancellor of University Affairs, University of Arkansas at Little Rock
Hank Kelley	CEO/Partner, Flake & Kelley Commercial & President of Little Rock Rotary Club
Tab Townsell	Executive Director, Metroplan
Rhonna Wade	Chair, Create Little Rock
Gretchen Hall	Executive Director, Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau
Brandon Bibby	Associate AIA, WER Architects/Planners
Nate Coulter	Director, Central Arkansas Library System
Susan Altrui, Ex Officio	Zoo Director
Bruce Moore, Ex Officio	City Manager
Jay Chessir, Ex Officio	President & CEO, Greater Little Rock Chamber of Commerce

*Kathy Webb was unable to attend one meeting and Director Capi Peck attended in her absence



Task Force Meetings



- Two Task Force Meetings conducted
 - July 2019
 - November 2019
- Kids Task Force Convened & Met Over a Two-Day Program
- Zoo conducted online public opinion surveys (pre and post in March and September)
- Research poll conducted summer 2019 with LR citizens



The Planning Process



- Focus for the Task Force was to define the “why,” “what” and “how”
- **Why** is a new funding model important for the Zoo now?
- **What** is needed to get the funding?
- **How** does the Zoo ensure its success and what does success look like?

Why – The Vision for the Zoo



The Why Behind the Vision

- Allows the Zoo to fully deliver its mission – to create engaging guest experiences that connect and educate audiences with nature
- Positions the Zoo for long-term sustainability
- Ensures the Zoo remains an AZA accredited institution
- Helps the Zoo become a stronger top tier destination and community asset
- Makes the Zoo a community asset and resource



Kid's Task Force Results

- Kids' Task Force consisted of a group of children ages 7-11 that represented all Wards in the City of Little Rock
- Gave input on what animals they wanted to see and what kinds of experiences they want
- Met over two days at the Little Rock Zoo through guided Zoo program experience led by Zoo education staff
- Through focus group activities we were able to determine the following:
 - Kids want more up-close encounters with animals
 - Kids want to see animals active & in natural habitats
 - Kids want active learning spaces where they can “play” like the animals



Summary of Online Polls

- Two Major Online Polls Conducted to Gain Public Input
- Total of 6,539 respondents representing all City Wards
- Guests ranked the following amenities:
 - #1 Restaurant open after hours overlooking animals
 - #2 Large Ferris Wheel ride
 - #3 Rope mazes/zip lines
- Guest ranked the following as desired new animal habitats:
 - #1 New Multi-Species African Habitat with Giraffes
 - #2 New Asia Habitat with Sloth Bears
 - #3 New “Aquatorium” with large fish tanks and other touch tank opportunities



OUR VISION

New Giraffe Habitat



OUR VISION

Giraffe Habitat with Feeding Deck



OUR VISION

New Rhino Feeding Deck in African Habitat



OUR VISION

New Bear Habitat



OUR VISION

New Red Wolf & Razorback Hog Habitat



Potential Impacts of the Buildout of the Master Plan



- With the facility master plan buildout, the Zoo has the following potential:
 - The Zoo's annual visitation could increase to over 550,000 visitors, doubling its annual attendance
 - This would make it one of the largest attractions in the state and region
 - The Zoo could support an annual operating budget of \$12-13 million – with most funds coming from non-City sources
 - The Zoo could generate an annual economic impact from operations of over \$20 million, with a **five year impact of over \$100 million.**



Potential Impacts of the Buildout of the Master Plan

- With a new funding model, the Little Rock Zoo can establish new public-private partnerships that will realize several critical objectives:
 - Establish a sound financial base for Zoo operations
 - Position the Zoo for stability and annual growth in revenues
 - Promote partnerships to leverage private funding
 - Create mutually beneficial connections with other cultural, recreational, and educational organizations throughout Little Rock
 - Spur additional opportunities for smart development and growth in and around Mid-town and the 12th Street Corridor





The What – The Zoo's Need



The What – the Funding Need

- LRZoo's Master Plan is estimated to cost \$90-100 million over 10 years.
- The addition of a multi-species African habitat with giraffes, the expansion of the Zoo into the three golf course holes north into War Memorial Park and the connectivity of the park south over I-630 all offer huge opportunity.
- In addition, the Zoo needs an increase in support for its operations of at least \$2MM annually at the end of 10 years to successfully implement a master plan.
- Resources are needed now to secure the Zoo's AZA accreditation.
- To achieve this vision, the Zoo needs at least **\$5M in operations and at least \$10M in capital annually**



The How – Primary Opportunities to Secure the Zoo's Viability and Financial Sustainability



Secure a New Dedicated Source of Revenue through a Public Funding Initiative

- One Recommended Solution = City Referendum with Parks
 - Sales Tax Initiative
 - Could Generate \$25MM - \$50MM annually (1/2 cent - one cent)
- While securing Zoo's Vision, we could;
- Create free school field trips for all public school children in Little Rock
- Offer quarterly free days to Little Rock residents
- Inject nearly \$1MM into education programming partnering with STEM learning
- The "new" revenue would be a "savings" to the City – once Zoo is generating more earned revenue as a result of capital improvements – its current annual investment in the Zoo – up to \$3.2MM – goes back to the City General Fund.



The How – The Solutions

- **When Zoos are on ballots, they win**

- St. Louis County passed a dedicated sales tax last year for its Zoo
 - This is in addition to a dedicated local property tax the Zoo already gets
- The City of Tulsa passed a bond initiative for its Zoo
- Kansas City has two counties with taxes supporting its Zoo
- Oklahoma City Zoo has a dedicated sales tax supporting its Zoo
- The City of Tucson, AZ just passed a dedicated sales tax for its Zoo
- Dozens of other cities have passed major dedicated funding initiatives for their zoos

AZA Zoos are popular attractions that citizens support!



Results of Likely Voter Poll

- **Little Rock Voters Support a Zoo/Parks Initiative**

- Poll conducted by InVeritas in July of 2019
- Covered likely voters in all City Wards
- Found high support for a dedicated tax for Zoo/Parks
- Strong support from all Wards and all demographic groups
- Support rises to two thirds of respondents with the following:
 - Free school group tours at the Zoo
 - STEM education partnerships in learning
 - Solidifying the Zoo's accreditation with AZA
 - Updating old facilities into dynamic attractions that attract tourism



The How – The Solutions

- **Modernizing Governance to a new Public-Private Partnership**
 - With a new dedicated funding model, the Zoo will need a more effective operating and governance model to administer and maximize these funds.
- Outcomes from Modernizing Governance:
 - Maintaining AZA accreditation
 - Enhance the guest experience
 - Increase ability to raise private donations
 - Streamline City operations
 - Streamline processes/procedures for business operations
 - Provide more resources for Zoo staff
 - Provide a cost savings to the City over the long-term



Conclusion



- A great zoo is a hallmark of a great city.
- The new vision for the Little Rock Zoo will become a rally point and source of pride for the community.
- This opportunity will allow the Zoo to perform with maximum efficiency, but will also engage partners who will work together to guarantee the Zoo's continued viability and sustainability.
- This benefits the residents of and visitors to the City of Little Rock and the entire state of Arkansas.

