



1000 Elmwood Avenue
Providence, RI 02907-3659
401-785-3510
rwpzoo.org

July 29, 2020

**Rhode Island
Zoological Society**

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Howard Merten
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The Honorable Marvin L. Abney
House Committee on Finance
Rhode Island State House, Room 35
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

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Dear Chairman Abney,

I am writing on behalf of the Roger Williams Park Zoo in full support of H7959, which would put a ballot question to Rhode Island voters later this year to approve \$40 million in bonds for a full renovation of our visitor entrance.

We believe that the entrance renovation will increase the Zoo's physical visibility, improve access and further contribute to the Zoo's positive economic impacts on Roger Williams Park, the city of Providence and all of Rhode Island. The project would create a state-of-the-art entry complex that modernizes the Zoo's ticketing and admission processes and would be significantly more visible from I-95 than the current entrance. The redesign would centralize all necessary services upon entrance, allowing the Zoo to better support the various needs of our guests. Finally, the project would feature new "entry habitats" to draw in guests and provide a fully immersive and educational experience from start to finish. The project will put front-and-center some of our most popular animals, including the penguin and sealion, immediately inside the entrance.

As you are aware, Rhode Island voters approved a \$53 million "Clean Water, Open Space and Healthy Communities" Bond in 2014, which included \$15 million for the Zoo. This bond question brought together the RI Department of Environmental Management and a broad coalition of environmental groups, all of which worked collectively to promote and advocate for the passage of the referendum. The combined effort was successful and the bond passed with overwhelming support, garnering over 70% approval. The Zoo used the bond money swiftly and efficiently, completing our Faces of the Rainforest exhibit on time and on budget, opening to the public in November 2018. The exhibit has been a tremendous success, drawing an estimated 36,757 additional visitors to the Zoo in its first year. Many of those visitors came from out of state and contributed an estimated \$1.7 million in tourism spending for the Rhode Island economy. The project generated 256 jobs and will continue to produce

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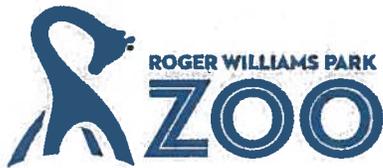
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economic output and tax revenue going forward. In just one year, the project was a net positive for the state and local economy, generating \$15.65 million in value added.

We recognize that the price tag for our proposed project is significant, but we feel that the return on investment has been well established in our previous bond-financed project. Our Zoo relies on revenue from ticket sales and membership, whereas many zoos around the country receive millions in dedicated yearly tax revenue from their municipal governments. We also believe that Rhode Island voters would again show their support for us at the ballot box — in one month, we received over 2000 signatures from Rhode Islanders who said they would like to see our bond proposal put to a vote in 2020. Given the significant return on investment from our portion of the 2014 Open Spaces bond and this enthusiasm from our visitors, we feel that this bond proposal is worthy addition to the referenda questions for consideration on the 2020 ballot.

We appreciate your willingness to consider our proposal and are happy to answer any questions about the project.

Sincerely,

Jeremy Goodman

Executive Director, Roger Williams Park Zoo

cc: Representative Scott Slater

ENTRY COMPLEX & HABITATS

During the planning process, the Master Planning team generated the following recommendations for future improvements to the entry and visitor services:

- Create a dynamic new entry facility that seamlessly transitions into active, educational and entertaining animal experiences.
- Increase visibility from I-95 for improved identity and wayfinding.
- Accommodate a quick, convenient entry experience for guests by providing intuitive circulation, ample ticketing opportunities/queuing space, generous orientation areas, and multiple, stroller-friendly admission gates.
- Allow easy access to member/visitor services, retail and rental opportunities from both sides of the admission gate.
- Provide separate circulation for entering and exiting.
- Include entry habitats which are multi-seasonal and unique to the region.
- Integrate complementing play opportunities for children of various ages.

With this in mind, the Master Plan proposes the following:

The Entry Complex

The existing admission gate and support buildings will be replaced with a state-of-the-art entry complex. The architecture of the front entry shall harmonize with the education building and have a significant visual presence from I-95. This new complex will include two buildings for ticket sales, offering convenient service to guests arriving from either parking lot. The spacious entry plaza allows adequate space for queuing without obstructing circulation into the complex. Members and guests with pre-purchased or on-line tickets can bypass ticket sales and immediately enter the complex. From the center of the complex, guests have access to a variety of services and amenities including the gift shop, restrooms, vending, stroller/wagon/wheelchair rentals, administrative offices, first aid and membership offices. Members are provided a concierge experience while entering the Zoo through the Membership Office. General admission guests enter through the main gate

The Shores

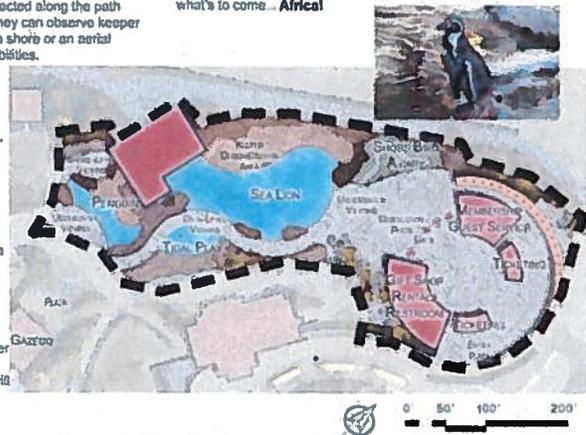
The Master Plan presents an entirely new experience immediately inside the gate. The Shores is an exciting multi-seasonal attraction where guests explore animals from various coastal regions. Habitats are highly themed, immersive learning experiences featuring California sea lion, penguin and shore birds.

The **California sea lion** is a new addition to the Roger Williams Park Zoo animal collection. The habitat offers multiple views of this active and charismatic animal from a variety of vantage points beginning with a spectacular underwater view immediately across from the admission gate. From the large underwater viewing plaza, guests are directed along the path up to a deck-level viewing plaza where they can observe keeper demonstrations, sea lions sunning on the shore or an aerial perspective of their impressive aquatic abilities.

The deck level also includes a unique **Tidal Play** opportunity. This area recreates a portion of the California coastline where children can climb rocks, discover sea creatures, dig in the sand and explore realistic coastal features. Tidal Play will also have water features built in for children and adults to cool down.

A new **Shore Bird Aviary** offers guests a unique opportunity to "walk through" and experience the sights and sounds of this interesting group of bird. Located near Member Services, adjacent to sea lion, this immersive habitat will be the first thing guests hear, if not see, as they enter the Zoo. Whether they choose to walk through or view from the plaza, guests will enjoy learning about the shore bird's unique characteristics, habitats, and challenges.

Back by popular demand, the Shores experience concludes with a guest favorite, the **Humboldt Penguin**. This highly themed habitat mimics the rugged coastline environment penguins call home. A large underwater viewing plaza offers guests a panoramic view of these agile swimmers. The underwater viewing plaza is ideally located across from the gazabo plaza. During evening events, these two species seamlessly flow together creating a large rental venue with a unique and animated animal experience. This habitat also offers a shore level view where guests can watch the penguins waddle on shore or enjoy regularly scheduled keeper demonstrations. As guests leave the shore level viewing area, they get a peek of what's to come... **Africa!**





The Economic Impact Of THE ROGER WILLIAMS PARK ZOO Faces of the Rainforest Exhibit



Rhode Island voters authorized \$15 million of bond funding to support development of the new Faces of the Rainforest Exhibit, and it is already paying dividends in the first year of operation. Researchers at the University of Rhode Island collaborated with the Rhode Island Zoological Society to estimate the economic impact of the new exhibit from conception through its first year of operation. These impacts were driven by \$14.5 million of design and construction spending, and estimated 36,657 new visitors, and \$1.7 million of tourism spending from out of state. Overall, the investment is already net positive, generating \$15.65 million of value added in state and local economies.

36,657

ADDED ANNUAL VISITORS

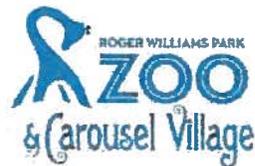
\$27.4 MILLION + 256 JOBS

FOR THE RHODE ISLAND ECONOMY

\$1.2 MILLION

STATE & LOCAL TAX REVENUE

THE
UNIVERSITY
OF RHODE ISLAND



Photos courtesy of the Roger Williams Park Zoo (Credits: Mossy Wade (Prehensile Paracoum - second from top), Giant Anteater - bottom).

Roger Williams Park Zoo ballot question petition response results

From October 25, 2019 to December 11, 2019, Roger Williams Park Zoo attendees and members were asked if they would support a bond question being placed on the 2020 ballot using the language below. We received over 2000 signatures from Rhode Island residents and, using ZIP codes, found that that support for this question comes from across our state.

“In 2020, Rhode Islanders will go back to the polls to vote for candidates for elected office will also have the opportunity to decide how their hard-earned tax dollars will be used.

You, as a member of the Zoo family, know that the Zoo is an important place for conservation and education - not to mention a great place to make family memories.

We are asking you, as a Zoo member, if you would support placing our bond initiative to be on the 2020 ballot.

We will be requesting a \$40M bond for new exhibits and new visitor amenities - including penguins, sea lions, a new entrance experience and more.

I hope you will support us and add your name to our list of Zoo supporters!”

Below is the list of signatures broken down by respondent residence:

Town/city	Signatures
Providence	293
Warwick	289
Cranston	196
Coventry	105
North Kingstown	99
East Greenwich	82
East Providence	76
Pawtucket	71
South Kingstown	70
Barrington	60
Cumberland	59
West Warwick	58
Johnston	56
Smithfield	52
Scituate	41

Lincoln	37
Woonsocket	34
North Providence	31
Bristol	29
Westerly	28
Burillville	28
Warren	25
North Smithfield	23
Portsmouth	22
Tiverton	22
Narragansett	22
Jamestown	21
Newport	21
Hopkinton	18
Charlestown	18
Glocester	18
West Greenwich	15
Middletown	13
Exeter	11
Little Compton	8
Foster	7
Central Falls	7
Richmond	4