
National Zoo Continues Revitalization Planning

The Smithsonian National Zoological Park (the National Zoo) is currently undergoing a comprehensive planning process to identify facilities and infrastructure needs, as well as implementation strategies at its two campuses: the National Zoo located in Rock Creek Park in Washington, D.C. and the Conservation and Research Center located in Front Royal, Va. While the National Zoo has a long tradition and history in internationally renowned research and training programs, many of the facilities have become outdated and no longer meet the needs of the visitors, staff, animal exhibit and research collections, and research programs. The Facilities Master Plan will guide the facilities renewal at the National Zoo. This renewal is part of the National Zoo's 10-year strategic plan to be the world's finest zoo by 2016. The facilities renewal will also help the National Zoo achieve its mission: to provide leadership in animal care, science, education and sustainability.

The proposed Facilities Master Plan emphasizes creating large land areas for exhibit renewal and making campus-wide improvements to circulation, entry/arrival experience, service access, and parking. It provides the support for a separate Collection and Exhibit Planning process to determine which species will be in the National Zoo's living collection. Specific design elements within the Master Plan will be developed and reviewed on a project by project basis.

The Facilities Master Plan will ultimately address both the National Zoo's Rock Creek campus and the Conservation and Research Center campus in Front Royal; however, the upcoming Alternatives Informational Meeting and public comment period will focus solely on the current alternatives under consideration for the Rock Creek campus. While the planning team has begun to formulate alternatives for consideration and has analyzed the existing conditions of the natural, built, and programmatic systems of the National Zoo, it is important for the local community and general public to provide insight into the issues and opportunities related to the Facilities Master Plan.

The Smithsonian Institution (SI) is committed to integrating environmental and cultural resource considerations into its planning and decision-making process. Consistent with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), SI will analyze the potential impacts of feasible alternatives (including a No-Action Alternative) for facilities improvements identified in the Master

Plan. SI will assess potential impacts on the human and natural environments, as well as on the historic properties within the Rock Creek campus and surrounding area.

Public involvement in the decision-making process is an important part of the NEPA and master planning process. The upcoming public meeting will provide an opportunity to learn about the alternatives being considered, as well as to provide comments on potential impacts to the natural and cultural environments.

The Smithsonian Institution welcomes your input, and has provided three ways for you to offer comments and suggestions regarding the National Zoo's Facilities Master Plan:

1. Attend the Alternatives Informational Meeting on June 28, 2007 from 6:30-8:30 p.m. at the Visitor Center of the National Zoo.
2. Visit the National Zoo's Web site at nationalzoo.si.edu or email John Gibbons at gibbonsjp@si.edu by July 30, 2007.
3. Write your comments on the sheet provided in this newsletter and send them back via U.S. Mail by July 30, 2007.

Purpose and Need for Master Plan and Environmental Review

The purpose of the Facilities Master Plan is to identify infrastructure needs and develop a comprehensive strategy that helps guide facilities renewal related to animal welfare, research, exhibits, visitor services, and circulation at the National Zoo over the next 10 to 15 years. The Master Plan is needed to outline goals and implement improvements based on good planning and design principles. It will provide an update to the 1971 Master Plan and the 1986 Revised Master Plan which are currently in use.

As part of the environmental review process, SI is considering the environmental effects of the proposed actions and alternatives (including the No-Action Alternative) on the human and natural environment. SI will be preparing an Environmental Assessment (EA) consistent with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), the Council on Environmental Quality Regulations, and National Capital Planning Commission policies. The draft EA will be made available to the public in the fall of 2007 for review and comment. SI is also using the public participation process to facilitate consultation with the public consistent with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA). SI welcomes comments from interested parties to ensure that the effects of its action on historic properties are taken into account. SI intends to conduct the NEPA and Section 106 reviews concurrently.

Environmental Resources Summary

The National Zoo is a beautiful 163-acre park located in Washington, D.C. Land use around the National Zoo is mostly residential. Commercial uses are also located near the Connecticut Avenue entrance. Rock Creek Park, which is owned and administered by the National Park Service (NPS), abuts the National Zoo property to the north and south. Beach Drive and a NPS bike path transect the property following the Rock Creek stream valley. There are native woodlands and a variety of non-native tree and plant species within the park's exhibit space. The Hay's Amphipod, a rare crustacean species, is known to exist on or near the National Zoo property.

No-Action Alternative: Continuation of Existing Efforts

Current programs and projects would be carried forward. Attendance would increase to the peak attendance levels of 2001. Ongoing improvements, building rehabilitation, and facility updates related to safety, health, and welfare would continue. The renewal of exhibits at the northwest end of the park (toward Connecticut Avenue) and the transition to multi-species exhibits would continue with the completion of Asia Trail I and the Elephant Trail. Exhibit planning would continue on a site-by-site basis as large land areas, preferable for new exhibits, are not available. Minor improvements to visitor services, such as retail outlets and information kiosks, would be implemented as currently planned. The Connecticut

Cultural Resources Summary

The National Zoo was established in 1889 to protect endangered native animals, particularly the American bison. The development of the National Zoo's grounds was heavily influenced by plans prepared from the firm of the nation's preeminent landscape architect, Frederick Law Olmsted. The National Zoo is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Within the park property, the Holt House is individually listed in the National Register of Historic Places. In addition, there are known areas of high archeological potential in and around the National Zoo's property.

Alternatives under Consideration

After gathering public input, testing various development schemes, and conducting detailed technical analysis, the planning team has developed two conceptual development alternatives and a no-action alternative for the renewal of the National Zoo.

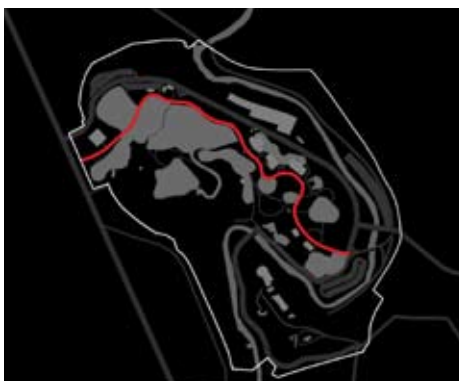
Under these alternatives, there are elements that are common to all.

- "Elephant Trail" site planning and exhibit design is underway and is considered an existing condition for each alternative.
- Olmsted Walk remains the central circulation spine with improvements made to accessibility through individual project design.
- Exhibit areas continue to be renewed for multi-species exhibits; Collection Planning efforts determine future exhibits.
- Attendance increases are expected to exceed the peak attendance levels of the year 2001.
- Visitor services and education spaces are revitalized.
- Transit incentives are offered to promote alternative transportation and to accommodate an increase in visitation.
- Partnerships for satellite parking are maintained and increased.
- Staff parking policies are implemented.
- North Road and Blue Road become the service backbone of the park; Hawthorne Street is used for emergency access.
- A new hay storage facility is located behind the Mane Restaurant, near the Kids' Farm.

Avenue Visitor Center would remain the primary source of visitor orientation, information, and education.

Multiple visitor entries into the park would remain with ten pedestrian entrances and one dedicated bus passenger entry. Parking locations and amount would remain the same as today. Sections of the park may not achieve ADA compliance and an in-park transportation system would not be feasible with the current infrastructure; no infrastructure improvements to resolve the issue are foreseen. Service conflicts with visitor paths would remain but would be mitigated through scheduling and limiting of service hours.

No-Action Alternative



Visitor Circulation



Parking and Visitor Entry



Service Routes



Alternative A

Under Alternative A, large, multi-species exhibits would be developed throughout the park, allowing visitors to disperse throughout the park and to have more direct exposure to animals along Olmsted Walk. Older exhibits would be revitalized, and flat land, once used for surface parking, would be developed as exhibits. The entry and arrival sequence would be enhanced through the revitalization and construction of three major visitor hubs: Connecticut Avenue (1), a new Mid-Point Entry from Lot C (2), and Rock Creek-Harvard Street (3). An aerial tram (4) would make stops at these three entry points to assist visitors in traversing the hill and to provide a unique interpretive experience and views of the National Zoo. An additional dedicated entry for visitors arriving by bus would remain in Panda Plaza. The Bus Lot (5) would be slightly reconfigured to accommodate safe and efficient drop-off and pick-up.

The Connecticut Avenue entrance (1), the major entry for pedestrians and visitors coming from WMATA buses and trains, would be revitalized with a defined plaza for events and informal gathering. Current Lot A (6) would be relocated to the interior of a realigned North Road to increase vehicular flow along the road and increase pedestrian safety to and from the parking lot. The current Bus Lot (5) would remain a dedicated bus drop-off and pick-up while current Lot B would be reclaimed for exhibit space (7). The current Visitor Center would be enlarged, renovated, and reprogrammed (8) to include visitor services such as restrooms, information kiosks, educational facilities, retail and dining, membership office, event space, and a tram station.

The new Mid-Point Entry (2), the major entry for patrons arriving to the park by vehicles, would bring visitors into a new parking structure on the existing Lot C (9) linked to the park by a new access bridge over North Road. A new entrance pavilion, facing a grand pedestrian plaza at the site of the existing Great Ape House, would provide visitor services, including restrooms, informational kiosks, educational facilities, and retail and dining. A new plaza (10) would be framed by the Small Mammal House, the Reptile House, and the mid-point tram station. The new structure on Lot C would also have a small bus drop-off area for efficient mid-park bus loading and unloading.

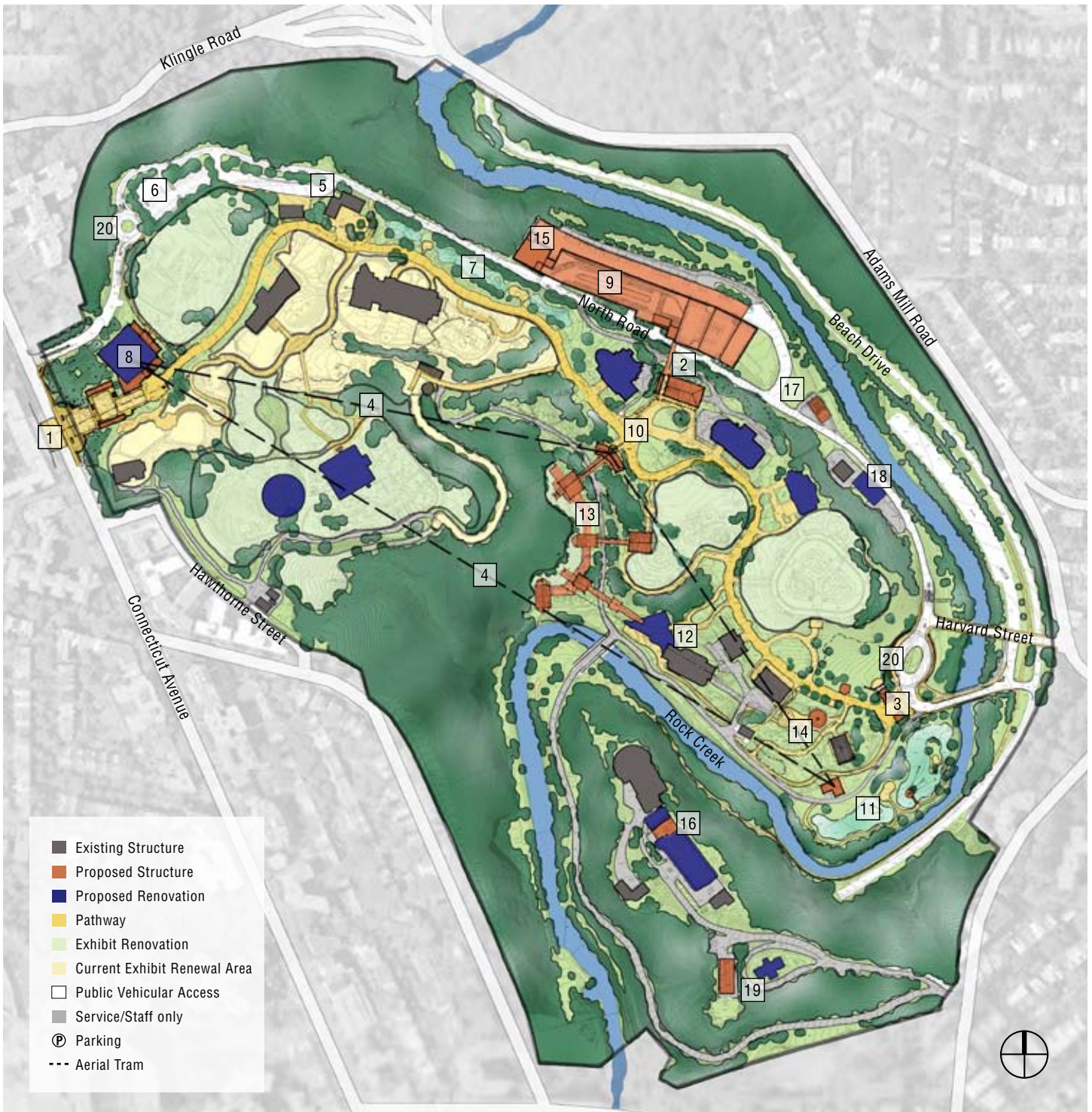
A third entry near Rock-Creek-Harvard Street (3) provides another entrance for visitors parking in Lot E, pedestrians entering from Adams Morgan, or visitors coming from a WMATA shuttle or bus. The entry would be reconfigured and revitalized to provide visitor services such as information kiosks, educational facilities, rental, retail, event space, and a tram station. The Mane Restaurant would continue to provide dining and event support. The National Zoo's conservation message would be enhanced with the reclamation of surface parking (Lot D) and the creation of a visitor experience focused on the Rock Creek ecosystem (11).

The current Amazonia exhibit (12) would be modified so that the main entrance would be located on Olmsted Walk. Beaver Valley exhibits and walkways (13) would be redesigned to separate service from visitor circulation and allow universal access through a series of bridges, structures, lifts, and ramps that mitigate the topography. Stronger connections would be made between the existing Beaver Valley and Olmsted Walk. A children's discovery area or entertainment zone (14) would be located near the Kids' Farm.

A new administrative, support, and operations hub (15) would also be constructed on the Lot C site with the new parking garage. Additions to the General Services Building would provide new administrative offices for the National Zoo and Friends of the National Zoo employees. Additions to the research buildings near the hospital would include new office and lab space (16). A new greenhouse (17) would be constructed near the existing Lot C driveway and the Genetics Building would be renovated (18). In the future, Holt House would be renovated for NZP uses including a meeting and training center (19) with guest housing.

Congestion along North Road would be mitigated through a comprehensive traffic and parking management strategy including two traffic circles (20) and a limited-use turn lane on North Road. During peak times and events, the traffic circles would be used for passenger drop-off, vehicular turn-arounds, and information dissemination. Service vehicle and visitor conflicts would be minimized by separating the visitor and service paths in Beaver Valley and by limiting service vehicles from Olmsted Walk when possible.

Alternative A



Proposed Visitor Circulation and Aerial Tram



Proposed Parking and Visitor Entry



Proposed Service Routes

Alternative B

Under Alternative B, large, multi-species exhibits would be developed throughout the park, allowing opportunities for more direct exposure to animals along Olmsted Walk. Older exhibits would be revitalized, and other flat land would be developed as exhibits. The entry and arrival sequence would be enhanced through the revitalization of two existing visitor entrances at Connecticut Avenue (1) and Rock Creek-Harvard Street (2). A smaller dedicated entry for those arriving by bus (3) would be located at the location of current Lot B. The current Bus Lot would be reclaimed for exhibit space (4). A surface tram along the North Road (5) would connect the entries at the upper and lower ends of the park to assist visitors in traversing the hill and provide them an introductory interpretive experience.

The Connecticut Avenue entrance (1), the major entrance for pedestrians and visitors coming from WMATA buses and trains, would be revitalized with a defined plaza for events and informal gathering and a new underground parking garage (6). Current Lot A (7) would be reclaimed for exhibit space. The current Visitor Center would be enlarged, renovated, and reprogrammed (8) to include visitor services such as restrooms, information kiosks, educational facilities, retail and dining, membership office, and event space.

The Rock-Creek-Harvard Street entry (2), the primary entrance for pedestrians from the existing zoo parking Lots D and E, Adams Morgan and a WMATA shuttle or bus drop-off, would be reconfigured and revitalized to provide visitor services such as information kiosks, educational facilities, rental, retail, and event space. Surface parking Lots D and E (9) would remain at the lower end of the park. The Mane Restaurant would continue to provide dining and event support.

A new administrative, support, and operations hub (10), including staff parking, would be constructed on the General Services

Building/Lot C site. At the administration, support and operations hub, the General Services Building would be expanded to provide new administrative offices for the National Zoo's and Friends of the National Zoo employees and additional space for service and support functions, such as security, health services, and storage, as well as a new boiler and physical plant. Current Lot C would be dedicated to staff parking and the motor pool. No visitors would enter from the middle of the park.

The Great Ape House would be renovated (11) to provide enhanced visitor services and education space at a central point in the park. Amazonia (12) would be modified so that the main entrance would be located on Olmsted Walk. Beaver Valley exhibits and walkways (13) would be designed to separate service vehicles from visitor circulation and allow universal access through a series of bridges, structures, lifts, and ramps that would mitigate the topography. A children's discovery area or entertainment zone (14) would be located near the current Kids' Farm.

Additions to the research buildings (15) near the hospital would include new office and lab space. In the future, Holt House (16) would be renovated for partnership uses including a meeting and resource center.

Congestion along North Road would be mitigated through a comprehensive traffic and parking management strategy including two traffic circles (17) and a limited-use turn lane on North Road. During peak times and events, the traffic circles would be used for passenger drop-off, vehicular turn-arounds, and information dissemination. Service vehicle and visitor conflicts would be minimized by separating the visitor and service paths in Beaver Valley and by limiting service from Olmsted Walk when possible.

Summary of Major Differences

The two Action Alternatives being considered for the National Zoo have several key differences.

- Alternative A consolidates the visitor entry with three primary entry portals, including a major, new visitor hub at the mid-point of the park. A large parking resource would allow visitors arriving by car and bus to enter at the mid-point, gain orientation to the park, and navigate based on this central location. An aerial tram would connect the mid-point entry to the upper and lower ends of the park, mitigating the steep topography and providing a unique vantage point above the National Zoo.
- Alternative B consolidates entry at the upper and lower ends of the park, connecting the two entries and mitigating the park's hill with a ground-based tram along North Road. A new administrative, support, and operations hub would be located on the General Services Building/Lot C site, along with staff parking.
- In Alternative A, a new visitor hub at the mid-point entry would replace the Great Ape House. A new plaza for informal gathering and events would be framed by the architecture of the Small Mammal House and the Reptile Discovery Center buildings.
- In Alternative B, the Great Ape House would be recycled for visitor services and education uses. A small open space behind the building would be used for informal gathering and events.
- Under Alternative A, surface parking would be reclaimed (Lots B and D) for new exhibit space and interpretation related to conservation. In Alternative B, Lot D remains a parking resource but surface Lot A and Bus Lot are reclaimed for exhibit area.

Alternative B



Proposed Visitor Circulation and Surface Tram



Proposed Parking and Visitor Entry



Proposed Service Routes

Opportunity for Public Input

The Smithsonian Institution (SI) will hold an Alternatives Informational Meeting on June 28, 2007 from 6:30-8:30 p.m. in the Visitor Center at the National Zoo to present alternatives under consideration, and to solicit public comment for the Facilities Master Plan. The National Zoological Park is located at 3001 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Washington, DC.



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