



National Zoo Master Plan Nearing Completion

The Smithsonian Institution (SI) is committed to integrating environmental and cultural resource considerations into its planning and decision-making process. 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 has prepared 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 National Capital Planning Commission is the lead responsible federal agency for this NEPA action. 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.

The draft EA will be available for public review and comment from May 19 – June 19 on the National Zoo web site (<http://nationalzoo.si.edu>), and at the following Washington, DC locations:

- Office of Public Affairs at the National Zoological Park Visitor Center, 3001 Connecticut Avenue, NW (By appointment, Mon-Fri. Please call 202-633-3079)
- National Capital Planning Commission Library, 401 9th Street, NW, North Lobby, Suite 500 (By appointment, Mon-Fri 9am-4pm. Please call 202-482-7200)
- Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Library, 9th and G Streets (Mon-Thu 9:30am-9pm, Fri-Sat 9:30am-5:30pm, Sun 1pm-5pm)
- Cleveland Park Branch Library, 3310 Connecticut Ave. NW (Mon/Wed/Fri 9:30am-5:30pm, T/Th 9:30am-9pm, Sun 1pm-5pm)
- Office of Planning and Project Management Library and Resource Room, 600 Maryland Avenue, SW, West Lobby, Suite 5001 (By appointment, Mon-Fri. Please call Harry Rombach or Michelle Spofford at 202-633-6555)

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 that were considered, the Preferred Alternative, and the Environmental Assessment, as well as to comment on potential impacts to the natural and cultural environments. The Smithsonian Institution appreciates your input regarding the National Zoo's Facilities Master Plan. Comments and suggestions must be provided during the official public review period from May 19 to June 19, and may be submitted in the following three ways:

1. At the Alternatives Informational Meeting on May 22, 2008 from 6:30-8:30 p.m. at the Visitor Center, National Zoo.
2. Visit the National Zoo's web site at nationalzoo.si.edu or email jwiser@jwiser@si.edu by June 27, 2008.
3. Write your comments on the sheet provided in this newsletter and send them back via US mail by June 27, 2008.

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 20 to 25 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.

Environmental Resources Summary

The National Zoo is a beautiful 163-acre park located in Washington, DC. Land use around the National Zoo is mostly residential, with some commercial uses 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 along the Rock Creek stream valley. A variety of native and non-native tree and plant species grow throughout the National Zoo park and exhibit spaces. The zoological park also provides a green corridor that supports wildlife including birds, small mammals, reptiles and amphibians, The Hay's Spring Amphipod, an endangered crustacean species, is known to exist near the National Zoo property in neighboring Rock Creek Park.

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.

Master Plan Objectives

The Master Planning Team developed a conceptual framework based on the analysis of existing conditions and facilities needs. Six major elements were emphasized to test the broad design concepts and development scenarios and guide discussion to the core topics of this Master Plan for facilities and infrastructure renewal.

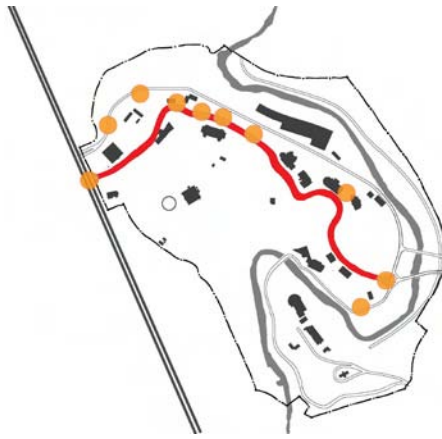
1. Renew park infrastructure and facilities to create large, adaptable land areas to meet future collection planning goals;
2. Clarify the entry and arrival experience by consolidating visitor entry and exit points, enhancing visitor facilities, and providing iconic entry points;
3. Simplify and ease circulation around the site by mitigating the topography and separating vehicular and pedestrian circulation whenever possible;
4. Revitalize and strategically add visitor and park amenities, special event venues, education facilities, and research, administrative, and operational space;
5. Embody the National Zoo's sustainability goals and conservation mission by celebrating, protecting, and enhancing the Rock Creek ecosystem, and using energy efficient practices in design of facilities in operations;
6. Celebrate the National Zoo's history by protecting and revitalizing the historic structures and cultural landscapes.

Alternatives under Consideration

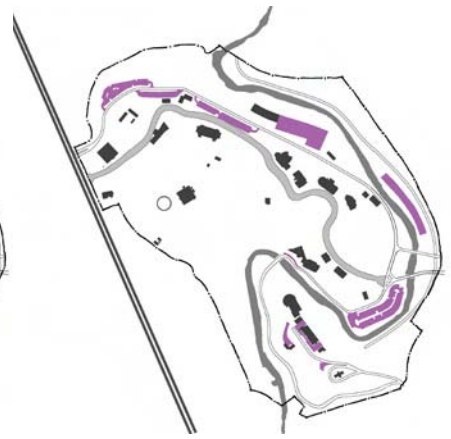
After gathering public input, testing various development schemes, and conducting detailed technical analysis, the Master Planning Team has developed three action alternatives, and a no-action alternative, for the renewal of the National Zoo. Two of the action alternatives, Alternatives A and B, were presented in a newsletter and public meeting on June 28, 2007. Many of the same components in these action alternatives are included in Alternative C (Preferred Alternative). The graphics that follow convey the major themes of each alternative specific to visitor entry, circulation, and parking. The table on page 7 compares the elements of all four alternatives in more detail.



No-Action Alternative

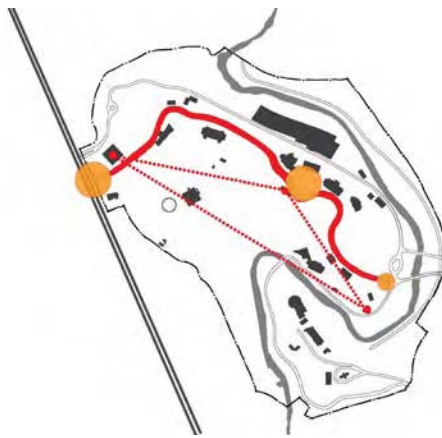


Visitor Circulation and Entry

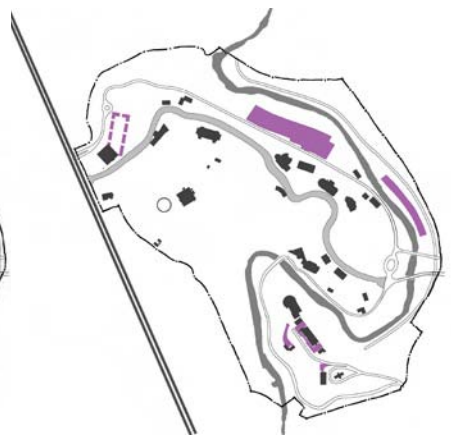


Parking

Alternative A

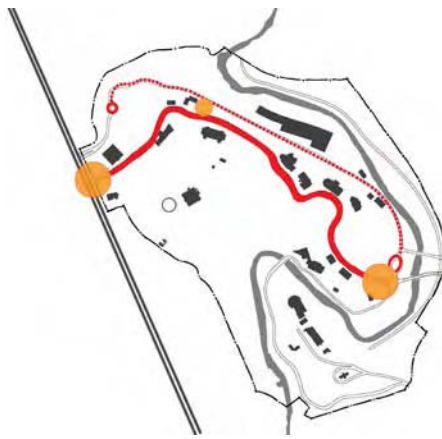


Proposed Visitor Entry, Circulation, and Aerial Tram

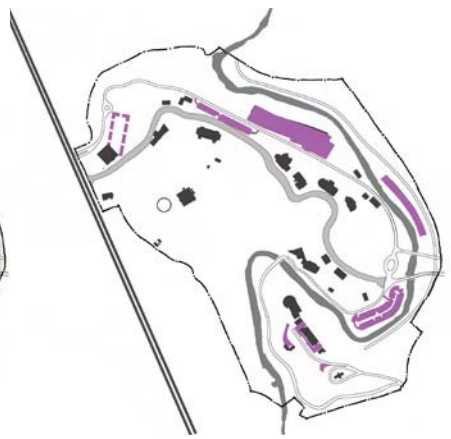


Proposed Parking

Alternative B



Proposed Visitor Entry, Circulation, and Surface Tram



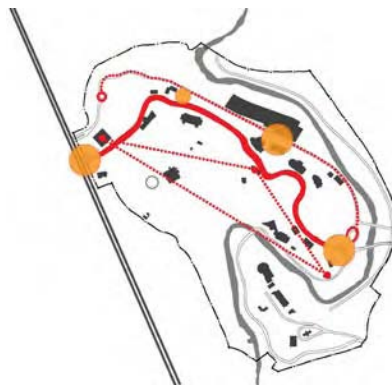
Proposed Parking

- Existing Structure
- Proposed Renovation
- Exhibit Renovation
- Public Vehicular Access
- Ⓟ Parking
- Proposed Structure
- Pathway
- Current Exhibit Renewal Area
- Service/Staff only
- Ⓢ Staff parking

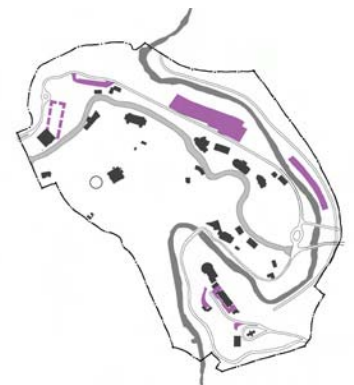
Alternative C



- Existing Structure
- Proposed Structure
- Proposed Renovation
- Pathway
- Exhibit Renovation
- Current Exhibit Renewal Area
- Public Vehicular Access
- Service/Staff only
- Ⓟ Parking
- Aerial Tram and Surface Tram



Proposed Visitor Entry, Circulation, Surface Tram, and Aerial Tram



Proposed Parking

Alternative C (Preferred Alternative)

Based on public and agency comments and review by the SI staff of Alternatives A and B, Alternative C was selected as SI's preferred alternative for the Facilities Master Plan.

Under Alternative C, large multi-species exhibits would be developed throughout the park, allowing visitors to disperse and to have more direct exposure to animals along Olmsted Walk. Older exhibits would be revitalized, and scarce 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 visitor entry and facility hubs (Connecticut Avenue (1), Mid-Point Entry (2), and Harvard Street Bridge/Beach Drive (3)). An aerial tram (4) would make stops at these three entry points to assist visitors in traversing the topography of the Zoo and to provide a unique interpretive experience with views of the National Zoo and Rock Creek Park. A fourth entry, dedicated to visitors arriving by bus, would remain at the current bus lot (5) with some reconfiguration for better access and flow. As another alternative to traversing the park's hill, a surface tram along the North Road (6) would connect the entries at the upper and lower ends of the park and would provide an introductory interpretive experience.

The Connecticut Avenue entrance (1), the primary entrance for pedestrians and visitors coming from WMATA buses and trains, would be revitalized with a defined plaza for events and informal gathering. A new underground parking garage (7) would serve the Connecticut Avenue end of the Zoo during regular hours and provide parking for special events and after-hours events at the Visitor Center. Current Parking Lot A would be reclaimed for future exhibit space (8). The existing Visitor Center would be enlarged, renovated, and reprogrammed (9) to include visitor services such as restrooms, an information kiosk, educational facilities, expanded retail, membership office, event space, and a tram station. Parking Lot B would also be reclaimed for exhibit space and stormwater management (10).

The new Mid-Point Entry, the major entry for patrons arriving by vehicle, would provide a parking structure on Parking Lot C (11) connected to the park by a new access bridge over North Road. This pedestrian overpass provides a long needed, safe, accessible route from the parking area to the exhibits and other amenities. From the bridge, visitors would enter a new pavilion/visitor center (2), facing a pedestrian plaza at the site of the existing Great Ape House. The new plaza would be framed by three of the National Zoo's distinctive historic buildings—Small Mammal House, Reptile Discovery Center, and Think Tank—and a new tram station serving the mid-point. This iconic entry would serve as an orientation point both for visitors entering at the mid-point and those navigating Olmsted Walk. A new exhibit would be created in the Upper Bear area (12), with a structure that would help link the Olmsted Walk exhibits with Beaver Valley exhibits.

The third entry point at the lower end of the park near Harvard Street bridge/Beach Drive (3) provides another entrance for visitors entering on foot from Adams-Morgan, parking in Lot E, or arriving by shuttle or bus. The entry would be reconfigured and revitalized to provide visitor services such as new restrooms,

information kiosk, stroller rentals, retail and event space, and a tram station. The National Zoo's conservation mission and efforts would be evident as the surface parking in Lot D adjacent to Rock Creek will be reclaimed for stormwater management and exhibits (13). A visitor interpretive experience and/or children's discovery area would focus on the Rock Creek ecosystem and sustainable practices related to maintaining water quality and managing stormwater. The Kids' Farm would be enhanced by this new discovery zone and other child-oriented education and entertainment facilities (14). The Great Cats exhibit and surrounding area would be revitalized as a new exhibit area (15).

The current Amazonia Science Gallery building and exhibit (16) would be modified so that the main entrance would be located on Olmsted Walk. At the lower end of Beaver Valley, exhibits and walkways (17) would be designed to allow universal access through a series of bridges, structures, lifts, and ramps that flow between Beaver Valley and Olmsted Walk exhibits. An addition to Amazonia would allow for an accessible connection between Beaver Valley, the Olmsted Walk exhibits, and the new mid-point entry. The forested edge of Beaver Valley (18) would be utilized for low impact animal exhibits that are compatible with the existing forest and topography.

Bird Hill would be revitalized as an animal exhibit area (19). The Bird House and Aviary along with the surrounding land areas would be used for animal exhibits and viewing.

Congestion and safety issues along North Road would be mitigated through a comprehensive traffic and parking management strategy including two traffic roundabouts (20) and an intermittent turn lane on North Road. Shuttles would utilize the traffic roundabouts for flexible passenger handling and for accommodating vehicles that need to turn around. During peak times and for special events, the traffic roundabouts would be used for passenger drop-off, redirecting vehicles/turning around, information dissemination, and valet service. Service vehicle and visitor conflicts would be minimized by providing alternate routes on Olmsted Walk. A dedicated service lane (21) would be constructed between North Road and the historic core buildings, passing under the pedestrian bridge. Other dedicated access for service would be created between Beaver Valley and Bird Hill plateau (22) to reduce the reliance on city streets and limit conflicts between visitors and service vehicles.

The General Services building would be renovated and expanded in order to create a consolidated administrative, support, and operations hub (23) on the Lot C site along with the parking garage (11). Additions to the General Services Building would provide relocated administrative offices for the National Zoo and Friends of the National Zoo employees. The Police Station would be renovated and would continue to be used for public safety (24). Renovations and additions to the research buildings would include new office and lab space, and space for a branch of the Smithsonian Institution Libraries (25). The animal hospital will also be renovated (26). Holt House would be renovated for National Zoo uses, potentially a meeting and training center (27) with guest housing and surface parking. A new greenhouse will be added near the Holt House (28).

Summary of Impacts of the Preferred Alternative (Alternative C)

Although more detailed investigations may be required relevant to each activity, implementation of the Preferred Alternative would cause some impacts to natural, cultural and socio-economic resources. A summary of these impacts follows.

Natural Resources:

Minor disturbance to soils would result from construction activities. Native and non-native vegetation would be removed from some construction areas, however, only native vegetation will replace disturbed areas outside of exhibits. Non-native vegetation used to simulate habitat will be limited to exhibit areas. Wildlife habitat on the campus, particularly the areas between the Amazonia Science Gallery and Bird Hill, would be disrupted with the addition of an aerial tram and a dedicated service road. However, no rare, threatened or endangered species would be impacted. The preferred alternative will not change the current carrying capacity of the National Zoo, nor would it increase vehicular trips over that of the No-Build Alternative, so minor impacts to air quality are anticipated only during demolition and construction activities. As with any large construction project, varying periods and degrees of noise are expected. Construction times would be limited to weekdays from 7:00 am to 7:00 pm, in accordance with Washington, DC regulations, and SI will seek to minimize noise levels for larger development activities and the addition of building systems such as air conditioning units, heat pumps, etc.

Cultural Resources

Physical and visual impacts to the cultural landscape and historic standing structures would occur with the proposed changes. However, some of these impacts would be beneficial as they would help to restore the historic setting of the site. There are areas of high archeological potential within the areas of proposed ground disturbance, and further consultation with the DC Historic Preservation Office would be required to establish appropriate testing and mitigation efforts for these sites.

Socio-economics

Both adverse and beneficial visual impacts would occur with the proposed changes. No changes in land use or zoning would occur, nor would impacts to demographics or environmental justice communities. There would be no impacts to existing community facilities, and existing services such as emergency response, fire and police would continue to serve the National Zoo. Additional studies would be needed during project planning and design to assess additional utility and other infrastructure needs. Visitor use and experience would be significantly improved under the Preferred Alternative, as would transportation, circulation and parking.



Comparison of Alternatives

	No-Action Alternative	Alternative A	Alternative B	Alternative C (preferred alternative)
Exhibit Strategies/ Visitor Experience	Additional exhibit planning would occur on a site-by-site basis	Great Ape House demolished and a new Mid-Point entry becomes a visitor hub Parking Lots A, B, D, and Bus Lot reclaimed for new exhibit space/ revitalization of older exhibits	Great Ape House converted to visitor/ educational center Parking Lot A and Bus Lot reclaimed for new exhibit space	Great Ape House demolished and a new Mid-Point entry becomes a visitor hub Parking Lots A, B and D reclaimed for new exhibit areas
Entry/Arrival/Parking	Entry points not consolidated, Connecticut Ave would remain primary entry, multiple pedestrian entrances would remain throughout the park, in addition to one bus entry Existing parking facilities would remain (868 spaces)	Three visitor entries at Connecticut Avenue, a Mid-Point entry from Parking Lot C and Harvard Street Bridge/Beach Drive Structured parking deck at Parking Lot C would provide 1,128 spaces New underground parking structure at Connecticut Avenue entry would provide 300 spaces	Three visitor entries at Connecticut Avenue, a bus entry at current Lot B, and Harvard Street Bridge/Beach Drive Parking Lots D and E remain Staff parking at Parking Lot C site New underground parking structure at Connecticut Avenue entry would provide 300 spaces	Three primary visitor entries at Connecticut Avenue, a Mid-Point entry from Parking Lot C and Harvard Street Bridge/Beach Drive Bus Lot incorporated with Panda Plaza for bus entry Above-ground parking structure at Parking Lot C would provide 1,128 spaces New underground parking structure at Connecticut Avenue entry would provide 300 spaces Small staff parking lot near Holt House
Transportation/ Circulation/Service	In-park transportation system would not be implemented All roads will continue to be used for service vehicles, conflicts with visitor access would continue to be mitigated by limiting service hours	Aerial tram connecting upper and lower ends of park Traffic circles on North Road North Road and Blue Road are main service roads, Hawthorne Street used for emergency access New service road for Small Mammal, RDC, and new mid-point entry	Ground-based tram along North Road Traffic circles on North Road North Road and Blue Road are main service roads, Hawthorne Street used for emergency access New service roads from Amazonia Science Gallery to Bird Hill and for Small Mammal, RDC, and new mid-point entry	Aerial tram connecting upper and lower ends of park and ground-based tram along North Road Traffic circles on North Road North Road and Blue Road become main service roads, Hawthorne Street used for emergency access New service roads from Amazonia Science Gallery to Bird Hill and for Small Mammal, RDC, and new mid-point entry
Administration/ Operational/Service	No new administrative, research or education offices	Consolidated administrative, support and operations structure at Parking Lot C site Additions to research buildings to include office and lab space, new greenhouse Holt House rehabilitated for Zoo uses	Consolidated administrative, support and operations structure at Parking Lot C site Additions to research buildings to include office and lab space, new greenhouse Holt House rehabilitated for Zoo uses	Consolidated administrative, support and operations structure at Parking Lot C site Additions to research buildings to include office and lab space, new greenhouse Holt House rehabilitated for Zoo uses

Opportunity for Public Input

The Smithsonian Institution (SI) will hold a Public Informational Meeting on the Draft Environmental Assessment on May 22, 2008 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.



Smithsonian
National Zoological Park

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