

Comments of the Woodley Park Community Association

The Woodley Park Community Association (WPCA) offers these comments on the National Zoo's Facilities Master Plan alternative presented at the June 28th Alternatives Meeting and in its newsletter. Woodley Park is the primarily residential neighborhood immediately to the west of the Zoo. WPCA is a DC not-for-profit membership corporation organized to maintain and advance the quality of the Woodley Park area and has approximately 700 individual members, all residing in the neighborhood.

In General. The National Zoo is a wonderful resource for the entire Washington area community, including and especially the Woodley Park neighborhood. WPCA would want nothing done to diminish that.

In planning its facilities for the future, however, the Zoo must keep in mind that it is located in the middle of the City, in the heart of a residential area. In particular, Zoo exhibit areas abut residential buildings on Connecticut and Cathedral Avenues and Hawthorne Street. Care should always be taken to ensure that changes at the Zoo do not adversely affect the surrounding area; for example, noisy equipment should not be installed near neighbors' homes. In addition, construction activities and related deliveries should be limited to normal work hours.

Parking. The Zoo now has parking for 868 visitor vehicles. The Zoo's Alternative A would increase this by 64 percent to 1426 spaces, while Alternative B would reduce it to 643, a reduction of more than 25 percent. The amount of on-site parking today is insufficient, and it should be increased. There can be no justification for substantially reducing it, and any proposal to do so should be rejected.

The amount of parking at the Zoo is not adequate today to handle all the visitors who want to use it. The Zoo estimates that roughly half its more than 2 million annual visitors arrive by automobile. Last year, the Zoo had to turn away would-be parkers on 88 different days.

The Zoo is projecting the number of visitors annually to increase to 3 million by 2016. As inadequate as the amount of parking is today, matters will become even worse as attendance increases.

WPCA would support any efforts by the Zoo to affirmatively discourage driving to the Zoo. Even when there is space in the Zoo's lots, many visitors park on neighborhood streets — a quarter of a mile and more away from the Zoo's main entrance — to avoid paying for parking.

Decreasing the amount of on-site parking will not discourage drivers, however. The only practical way to get to the Zoo for many suburban families with multiple children and the equipment that often comes with them is by private automobile. "If you build it, they will come" might well be a planning axiom when it comes to roads and parking. However, the inverse — "If you don't build parking, they won't come" — is simply not the case.

WPCA appreciates the Zoo's interest in sustainability and in being environmentally friendly. However, reducing the number of parking spaces will not

reduce the number of vehicles driven to the Zoo. It will just force more vehicles to park on neighborhood streets and move more of the Zoo's "carbon footprint" into the neighborhoods.

Aerial Tram. WPCA understands the Zoo's interest in finding ways to make it easier for visitors to deal with The Hill. We are concerned, however, about the proximity of the proposed aerial tram to neighboring houses (on Connecticut and Cathedral Avenues). Would it be visible from these houses? Could riders see into them? How noisy would the tram and its riders be?

The tram proposed in Alternative A has three legs. It is the long leg — from the bottom directly to the top — that is the primary cause of concern. At the very least, that leg should be eliminated from the proposal.

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WPCA appreciates this opportunity to comment on the proposals being considered by the Zoo and looks forward to working with the Zoo as its planning process continues.