

Griffith Park Master Plan – Working Group
Meeting Summary – August 7, 2006

The Griffith Park Master Plan Working Group convened their meeting on Monday, August 7, 2006, at 6:30 p.m. at the Griffith Park Ranger Station Auditorium.

Present: Working Group – Bernadette Soter, Clare Darden, Craig Kessler, George Grace, Gerry Hans, Jose Sigala, Louis Alvarado, Lynn Brown, Richard Bogy, Susan Swan, and Chris Laib (alternate for Valerie Vanaman).

Rene Weitzer, Council District 4
Rory Fitzpatrick, Council District 4
Steve Davis, Bureau of Engineering
Tom McCall, Recreation and Parks

Absent: Jeff Gardner

Facilitator: Vicki Israel, Superintendent, Griffith Region, Department of Recreation and Parks

Ms. Israel began the meeting by calling the role of the Working Group Members and City Employees.

Councilmember LaBonge was present and introduced the General Manager of the Los Angeles Zoo, John Lewis. Mr. Lewis began his presentation by stating that the Zoo's vision statement is to nurture wildlife and enhance the human experience. This is their focus on development when enhancing programming. The Zoo opened in 1966 and has 1.5 million visitors yearly with an annual budget of \$19 million. Currently, there are approximately 370 species of animals and 15 botanical gardens. Mr. Lewis point out that the new entrance to the zoo is marked by a larger entryway as people not familiar with the area complained they had difficulty with locating the entrance. He shared some of the changes with animal exhibits at the Zoo as well as highlighting special breeding programs. Lastly, Mr. Lewis shared that the parking lot would be renovated in stages to include permeable paving.

A question and answer period then followed Mr. Lewis' presentation. Mr. Kessler asked if the Zoo would be expanding their current footprint, and if so, where would the expansion occur. Mr. Lewis assured the Working Group that the Zoo has no plans to expand their current footprint and that new exhibits would be expanded into existing space by re-locating existing exhibits. Ms. Soter asked if the plans for permeable paving in the parking lot would also help to reduce the "heat island" effects. Mr. Lewis stated he hoped those changes as well as increased shading would do just that. Mr. Hans asked how the Zoo came to be its own City department. Mr. Lewis explained that the change was made so that the Zoo could have better control of its destiny. As part of a larger department, the zoo had fallen into disrepair. Ms. Weitzer also explained that the change occurred under Mayor Riordan's term. While part of the Recreation and Parks Department, there was not sufficient time devoted to the Zoo. Mr. Grace asked about the interaction of wildlife in Griffith Park with animals in the Zoo. Mr. Lewis explained that the Zoo has a predator control program that mainly affects skunks and raccoons, which can carry parasites that can transmit diseases to the Zoo animals. Mr. Laib asked if the Zoo is operating

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under a master plan. Mr. Lewis stated that they are, and that the process began in 1999 with the consulting group of Coley, Richards CLR. Ms. Soter asked if the Zoo's activities, such as night lighting, could affect the surrounding eco-system in Griffith Park. Mr. Lewis stated that they are very cognizant of the surrounding wildlife as night lighting also affects the animals at the Zoo. He further explained that the Zoo's focus on minimizing impact on native wildlife is with their preventive medicine program. Every animal that comes to the Zoo goes through a quarantine program from 30 to 90 days before becoming a part of the Zoo population. Ms. Hans asked how the neon sign at the Zoo's entrance came into existence. Mr. Lewis explained that the signage was in place prior to his arrival to the department and that the explanation provided him was that there needed to be a better way to indicate to visitors how to find the Zoo. Mr. Hans asked if the Zoo experience could be made free of charge. Mr. Lewis explained that in order for that to happen, the City would have to pay for the entire Zoo operation. He also pointed out that the Zoo currently has 1.5 million visitors a year and that if it was made free of charge, the amount of visitors would dramatically increase which would also cause an increase in traffic.

Mr. Lewis then took questions from the public that included responding to the issue of the neon sign. He reiterated his earlier explanation and stated that he understood the public's concerns. Another question was asked regarding the cost and durability of permeable parking. Mr. Lewis stated that the costs are about the same and that engineers have assured him permeable parking would support the weight of large vehicles such as buses. A member of the public then asked how a snow leopard, which is native to cooler climates, could be on exhibit when it was a 100 degrees. Mr. Lewis explained that that particular animal is able to adapt to various climates and does seek shade when the weather is hot. He further explained that measures are taken during extreme heat to ensure the animals are kept cool. Mr. Lewis also reiterated that the expansion of the elephant exhibit would not expand into existing golf course space. In answer to a question about evening hours, Mr. Lewis stated that there has been internal discussion of opening the Zoo during off peak hours on a selective schedule but that nothing has been finalized. Mr. Grace inquired about the Zoo's conservation programs and Mr. Lewis explained that there are several projects already being carried out with. Mr. Laib stated his concern with the Zoo being open at night as there are already existing programs such as the DWP light show that take place in the evening. Mr. Lewis said that evening events at the Zoo would not conflict with ongoing and existing evening programs such as the light show. Ms. Israel thanked Mr. Lewis for his very informative and educational presentation.

Next, there was a presentation by Mr. John Gray, President and CEO of the Autry National Center. Mr. Gray stated that he is also a resident of Griffith Park, lives in Silverlake, and hikes in the park on a regular basis. In 2003, the Autry Museum of Western Heritage merged with the Southwest Museum of the American Indian, formerly located in Mt. Washington. The collections from the Southwest Museum were not kept under ideal conditions and required immediate care and conservation. He explained that the collections are national treasures so the decision was made to move them to the Autry and that classes and other programming would take place at the Mt. Washington campus. Mr. Gray said that the goal is to have the collection exhibit on display with the public being able to view conservation efforts in progress.

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Ms. Swan inquired about the Autry's master plan. Mr. Gray explained that they do not have a master plan that is a finished product but an internal master plan approved by their board of trustees. He stated that they do anticipate having a formal master plan that will be made public once adopted by their board of trustees. He also explained that the expansion of their location includes the enclosure of an existing courtyard and expansion into a staff parking lot at the rear of the building; but not building out into the Park itself. Ms. Soter asked for an overview of the issues between the Autry National Center and the Highland Park Mt. Washington Neighborhood. Mr. Gray explained that one of the issues is whether or not the Southwest Museum failed, thus its merge with the Autry; and whether or not it should be a public destination. Since the merger, major improvements have been made to the Southwest Museum and it has since been placed on the national registry of historic places. Ms. Soter remarked that the Southwest Museum is very much worth preserving and Mr. Alvarado also commented that the move to the Autry is a positive one.

A member of the public commented that community plans are in the works to connect the Southwest Museum with the Autry via hiking trails. Ms. Israel then thanked Mr. Gray for his informative presentation.

Ms. Israel then handed out summaries of previous Working Group meetings for everyone to review.

Ms. Soter provided a sub-committee report on the Vehicular Chapter and indicated that they would be addressing the same points in the outline as written by Melendrez in the draft of the Griffith Park Master Plan. She asked if the Department of Recreation and Parks could provide an expert to address some of the issues. She noted that the Elysian Park Master Plan Group is satisfied with the traffic consultant being utilized and asked if the same consultant could address questions from the Working Group. Mr. Davis responded that the consultants responded to very limited questions and made their conclusions with data provided by the Department of Transportation. Ms. Israel stated she would look into the matter of locating personnel from DOT and Cal Trans to assist the Working Group.

The following comments were made by the public:

- ★ The Working Group keeps asking for things that cost less than what the Councilmember is proposing in RFPs.
- ★ An inquiry was made about the Building chapter.
- ★ Passive and active recreation are terms mostly used but should also include breaking down activities as social or solitary, and it should be noted that not everyone wants Griffith Park to be left alone with no changes made to it.
- ★ The Working Group should read the original deed and any disagreements settled with reference to the original deed.

The next scheduled meeting of the Griffith Park Master Plan Working Group is scheduled for Monday, September 11, 2006. This concluded the Working Group meeting for August 7, 2006.