From: Valerie Schwebach, Ph.D.
To: dencc - City Council
Subject: Denver Zoo Master Plan
Date: Monday, April 20, 2015 3:09:25 PM

Dear Members of City Council,

I write in support of the Denver Zoo's proposed Master Plan. I attended two of the Zoo's numerous public meetings on this plan, and was struck by the thoughtfulness of the proposal, the extent of the Zoo's public outreach, and the supportive reactions of my fellow citizen-attendees. I'll touch on each of these briefly.

First, the ideas reflected in the Master Plan are in line with the Denver Zoo's long tradition of innovation. That tradition began in 1918 with Bear Mountain, one of the world's first naturalistic animal exhibits. It continued in 2011 with the Zoo winning the first ever Green Award from the Association of Zoos and Aquariums. Now, in 2015, the Zoo seeks to implement new approaches in animal husbandry and exhibition, reinforce its commitment to conservation and education, and redesign the public's experience of the zoo – both within the Zoo's perimeter (e.g. with features like the Braided Path) and outside it (for example by improving the aesthetics of the Waste-to-Energy Building). These changes are key to ensuring that the Denver Zoo continues to attract visitors from Colorado and beyond – and ensuring that the Zoo stays on the forefront of innovation – as it moves into the second century of its existence.

What's more, the Zoo has gone to extraordinary lengths to involve the public with its Plan. Presentations at the public meetings and in the Zoo's website survey clearly described and illustrated the numerous projects that comprise the Plan. Zoo personnel explained the thinking behind each project and the overall rationale behind the Plan. And citizens have had multiple opportunities to provide feedback and input on specific aspects of the Plan, through participation in the meetings, discussions with Zoo personnel, and voting on the Zoo's website.

My own impression of this feedback and input, based on my observations of two public meetings and an almost City-wide discussion on the online Nextdoor forum is that the vast majority of citizens support of the Zoo's vision and appreciate the role they've had in shaping it. I recognize that there is vociferous opposition to the Plan, and I think the Zoo has tried to address those concerns in a respectful way. However, I strongly believe that this opposition reflects a minority opinion that is not representative of the broader public, and feel that in many respects it is not factually based.

The Master Plan is a well-reasoned and thoughtful approach to updating the Denver Zoo as it

moves into its second century. The Plan reflects a tradition of innovation that is symbolic not just of the Zoo's history but of the City of Denver itself. The Zoo has actively engaged the citizenry of the City in the discussion and development of this Plan. For these reasons, I urge the Council to vote to allow the implementation of the Zoo's Master Plan.

Sincerely,

Valerie Schwebach, Ph.D.