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Zoo officials unveil ideas for new aquarium complex and exhibit to replace aging facilities

Community invited to provide feedback at public meetings on Feb. 21 and 22

Tacoma, Wash. – Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium officials will unveil ideas for a new Pacific Rim aquarium and exhibit complex and a new South America exhibit as part of a long-term strategic plan to address aging and deteriorating zoo facilities. Community members are invited to provide feedback at two public meetings in Tacoma on Feb. 21 and 22.

“Strong community support has been essential to creating the nationally recognized zoo and aquarium that we have in Tacoma today,” said Larry Dahl, president of Metro Parks Tacoma Board of Park Commissioners. “As we look ahead to the future, we ask our community to help guide us in determining what the zoo and Point Defiance Park will look like in 10 to 20 years,” he said.

Gary Geddes, Metro Parks’ director of zoological and environmental education, said the Tacoma zoo’s single biggest challenge is developing a long-term plan for the nearly 50-year-old North Pacific Aquarium and the 30-year-old Rocky Shores/Arctic Tundra exhibit. Both facilities are showing typical signs of deterioration and corrosion due to salt water.

The zoo’s long-term strategic plan recommends replacing the aging facilities with a modern combined Pacific Rim aquarium and exhibit complex. Following a series of public meetings last April to solicit community input, zoo officials hired an architectural firm to sketch out ideas.

Draft conceptual renderings show a modern aquarium and exhibit complex, with more up-close animal experiences, improved breeding facilities, and many unique visitor experiences. Visitors would be able to stand inside a crashing wave and not get wet, examine a sea lion’s belly from an underwater tunnel and watch sea turtles and rays from a gigantic viewing window. The new aquarium as envisioned would be built across the road from the current Rocky Shores exhibit in Point Defiance Park and have sweeping views of Commencement Bay.

The former North Pacific Aquarium would then be transformed into a South America exhibit, which would link thematically to the nearby South Pacific Aquarium. Conceptual drawings show visitors journeying into a village high in the Andes Mountains surrounded by a lush jungle filled with jaguars, monkeys, bats, lizards and insects while Andean condors fly overhead.

“Our overriding goal from the very beginning has been to reuse and repurpose wherever possible,” said Geddes. He noted that all of the current pools in the Rocky Shores exhibit would be restored and reused in the proposed Pacific Rim aquarium and exhibit complex. The North

Pacific Aquarium building would be repurposed into a South America exhibit, reducing the building's maintenance costs and extending its lifespan.

Zoo officials will host two public meetings to solicit community input.

- Tuesday, Feb. 21, 6-7:30 p.m., Tacoma Nature Center, 1919 South Tyler Street, Tacoma
- Wednesday, Feb. 22, 6-7:30 p.m., Metro Parks Headquarters, 4702 South 19th Street, Tacoma

Individuals who are unable to participate in a public meeting are encouraged to visit the zoo's web site to learn more and then share their feedback by email at strategicplan@pdza.org, on the zoo's Facebook page at facebook.com/PtDefianceZoo, by telephone at (253) 591-5337 or by mail at 5400 North Pearl St., Tacoma WA 98407.

Staff hope to finalize the zoo's long-term master plan this spring. The zoo master plan update continues a comprehensive plan update for all of Point Defiance Park, which Metro Parks launched in conjunction with the park's centennial.

Other Metro Parks initiatives underway in Point Defiance Park this year include converting the Lodge to a seasonal Visitors' Center, reopening the historic Pagoda this fall and finalizing concepts for the Missing Link, a highly desired pedestrian connection uniting the Ruston Way promenade with Point Defiance Park's waterfront and attractions. Additional public processes slated to begin in the near future include planning for future use of the former Camp 6 site and an update to Fort Nisqually Living History Museum's master plan.

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Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium promotes responsible stewardship of the world's resources through education, conservation, research and recreational opportunities. The zoo, a division of Metro Parks Tacoma, is accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA) and the Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks and Aquariums (AMMPA).



Proposed New Pacific Rim Aquarium/Exhibit Complex

Background

Opened in 1963, the North Pacific Aquarium is the oldest building at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium. Major deterioration of concrete due to salt water corrosion is evident throughout the building. The electrical, plumbing and air handling systems are antiquated and the life support systems are functional but nominal.

Built in 1982, the Rocky Shores/Arctic Tundra exhibit is home to walruses, polar bears, seals and other mammals. It too is showing signs of age and salt water corrosion and may be near the end of its useful lifespan.

The zoo's long-term strategic plan recommends replacing the North Pacific Aquarium and Rocky Shores/Arctic Tundra exhibit with a modern combined Pacific Rim aquarium and exhibit complex. Following a series of public meetings last April to solicit community input, zoo officials hired an architectural firm to sketch out ideas.

Key Features and Visitor Experiences

The proposed modern Pacific Rim aquarium and exhibit complex would be built across the road from the current Rocky Shores exhibit in Point Defiance Park and have sweeping views of Commencement Bay. It would include the following key components:

Aquarium: A new wave tunnel would greet aquarium visitors, allowing them to stand inside a crashing wave without getting wet. The proposed aquarium would feature more animal species, up-close animal viewing, and unique visitor experiences. In addition, it would have classrooms and space for special exhibits and events.

Marine mammal area: The new area would feature larger exhibits for walruses, sea lions, and seals and an underwater tunnel entrance for up-close animal experiences. Current pools would be restored and reused in the new marine mammal area.

Polar bear complex: The complex would include new, larger facilities for future breeding of polar bears and larger exhibit areas for arctic foxes, snowy owls and arctic hares. Current pools would be restored and reused in the polar bear complex.

Russian Far East exhibit: This proposed exhibit would provide space for new species, such as Siberian musk deer, Pallas' cats, white-naped cranes and gorals.

Public Plaza: This public area would feature a public plaza, space for educational camping experiences, and exhibit space for new species, such as Amur leopards and Steller's sea eagles.

Potential New Species*

Sea lions
Sea turtles

Hammerhead sharks
Eagle rays
Amur leopard
Pallas' cat
Stellar's sea eagle
Goral
White-naped crane
Siberian musk deer
Arctic hare
Snowy owl

**These species meet preferred criteria and are currently available.*



Proposed New South America Exhibit

Background

Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium's draft strategic plan recommends transforming the current North Pacific Aquarium into a new South America exhibit complex, which would link thematically to the nearby South Pacific Aquarium.

An engineering firm hired to complete a structural assessment of the North Pacific Aquarium determined the building to be structurally sound but recommended using it for non-saltwater displays to reduce its maintenance costs and extend its lifespan.

Key Features and Visitor Experiences

The proposed South America exhibit as envisioned would contain 35 indoor exhibits and eight outdoor exhibits. Visitors would journey into South America entering a village high in the Andes Mountains and experience the sights and sounds of the rain forest, surrounded by jaguars, monkeys, bats, lizards and insects. An Andean condor, with a 10-foot wing span, would sit high above on a rock cliff and fly overhead.

Potential New Species*

Jaguar
Ocelot
Pygmy marmoset
Emperor tamarin
Goeldi's monkey
Crested capuchin
Variegated spider monkey
Wattled currawong
Sunbittern
Keel-billed toucan
Toucan barbet
Green aracari
Curl-crested aracari
Ecuadorian collared aracari
Chestnut-mandibled toucan
Toco toucan
King vulture
Andean condor
Annulated boa
Beaded lizard
Boa constrictor
Central American caecilian
Poison dart frogs
Suriname toad
Red-eyed tree frog
Waxy tree frog

**These species meet preferred criteria and are currently available.*