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**POINT DEFIANCE ZOO & AQUARIUM TO HOST PUBLIC MEETING ON FEB. 18
TO DISCUSS PLANS FOR NEW AQUARIUM AND UPCOMING EXHIBIT RENOVATIONS**

Zoo also is partnering with Tacoma Public Schools for a new education building on grounds

TACOMA, Wash. – Planning is underway for a new Pacific Rim Aquarium and renovations to the Rocky Shores and polar bear exhibits at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium, and members of the public are invited to a meeting at the zoo on Feb. 18 to learn about the process and hear about potential sites for the Pacific Rim Aquarium.

In addition, the zoo is collaborating with Tacoma Public Schools' Science and Math Institute on plans for a new environmental learning center on zoo grounds. The building will include instructional space for SAMI and zoo education programs.

**PUBLIC INVITED TO MEETING
ON PROJECTS AT ZOO**

- **When:** 6 to 8 p.m.
Wednesday, Feb. 18
- **Where:** Point Defiance
Zoo & Aquarium
Education Center,
5400 N. Pearl St.
- **More information:**
www.pdza.org/capital/projects

The informational meeting for updates on all of these projects is scheduled from 6 to 8 p.m. in the zoo's Education Center.

"It's an exciting time at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium," said Gary Geddes, director of the Zoological and Environmental Education Division of Metro Parks Tacoma. "Thanks to the voters of Tacoma, we're able to plan for a new aquarium that continues our ties to Puget Sound and the Pacific Rim and strengthens our conservation commitment."

Two sites on zoo grounds are under consideration for the new Pacific Rim Aquarium, which will replace the deteriorating, half-century-old North Pacific Aquarium Geddes said.

Arctic Tundra, home of the polar bear exhibit, will be renovated to meet rising international standards and expanded with the goal of the zoo acquiring additional polar bears in the future. Visitors can expect more up-close viewing experiences.

Rocky Shores work will include renovation of spaces that have deteriorated due to saltwater and heavy use and upgrades to animal life-support systems. The renovation is being designed with expanded visitor viewing opportunities in mind.

The Pacific Rim Aquarium, Rocky Shores and polar bear exhibit work will be done with \$65.4 million approved by voters as part of the 2014 Metro Parks Tacoma Parks and Zoo Bond.

In a separate project, the zoo and Tacoma Public Schools are working together on an environmental learning center to serve SAMI students and staff, as well as zoo visitors and staff. The two-story shared-use building, to be constructed with school district bond funds, would serve a range of classroom needs from the high school students who attend SAMI to the littlest learners in the zoo's early education programs. It also would replace portable buildings now used by zoo education staff and volunteers.

A pedestrian bridge over the roadway would provide safe access from indoor classrooms to the outdoor learning spaces of Point Defiance Park, where lessons in the environment literally come alive.

SAMI has operated in the park since the high school's inception six years ago.

"Our partnership with SAMI is a wonderful example of a shared vision and commitment to the environment," Geddes said.

"All of this is important work for the zoo and our community partners," Geddes said. "We're eager to move forward on exhibits and facilities that will continue our legacy of first-class environmental education and conservation of the earth's precious animals for generations to come."

For more information, go to www.pdza.org/capitalprojects.

The zoo's update session on Feb. 18 is part of a series of meetings being held this winter and spring as Metro Parks Tacoma moves ahead with the master planning process for Point Defiance Park. More than 200 people attended the first of those Destination Point Defiance meetings last month.

Metro Parks is building on a concept plan approved in 2008 to complete a new Master Plan for the park. Additional meetings are set for Feb. 26, March 26 and April 23 to discuss improvements and new facilities; pedestrian, bicycle and vehicle circulation and parking; and a review of all the work before it's presented to the Metro Parks Tacoma Board of Commissioners. More information on each meeting is available at destinationpointdefiance.org.

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Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium, the Northwest's only combined zoo and 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).