



 **SUNSET ZOO**  
MANHATTAN, KS

// SUNSET ZOO STRATEGIC PLAN 2018 - 2023

## INTRODUCTION

Sunset Zoo engaged the team of GLMV Architecture/GLMV Zoos and Zoo Advisors LLC to conduct an integrated strategic master planning process that would provide a strategic roadmap for the Zoo for the near future and campus-wide exhibit concepts for the longer term. The project began in the summer of 2017 and concluded in fall 2018, led by principals and senior consultants from both firms. A companion project, the Sunset Zoo Wildlife Conservation Plan, was concurrently developed by GLMV; goals were coordinated with the strategic master planning and a separate document is being submitted by GLMV Zoos.

## DEVELOPING THE PLAN

The strategic planning process comprised four phases: Discovery (where are we now?), Dreaming (given no boundaries, where can we go?), Reality (what can we accomplish?), and Action (how do we get there?). Each phase included a site visit with workshops and leadership team meetings, with conference calls to review progress and confirm direction in between site visits.

At the outset of the process, Zoo Advisors worked with Sunset Zoo leadership to identify a planning team that would help guide the process and keep it grounded. This team supported plan development, served as liaison with other staff and board, managed logistical needs, participated in all workshops, and regularly communicated with Zoo Advisors via phone/email to ensure that the process remained on track. The Zoo team included the following members; Wyatt Thompson, Assistant Director Manhattan Park & Recreation, also participated in several workshops representing the City of Manhattan.

- Scott Shoemaker, Zoo Director
- Jared Bixby, Curator of Education
- Brian Davoren, Curator of Horticulture & Facilities
- Courtney Dehn, Events & Guest Services Manager
- Rachel Herrod, Marketing & Development Officer
- Tammy Jones, Administrative Assistant & Membership Coordinator
- Kirk Nemecek, Curator of Animal Care
- Nicole Wade, Programs & Education Animals Manager

For GLMV Zoos, Lori Guthridge served as project lead, and David Walsh and Kathy Wagner led the Zoo Advisors team.

The following sections describe the process in greater detail, beginning with our extensive community outreach.

## Listening to Our Community

Through workshops, interviews, all staff sessions, board meetings, conference calls, an on-line survey and public meeting, a broad spectrum of stakeholders engaged in an inclusive and iterative process to reaffirm the Zoo's mission; discuss vision concepts; identify opportunities; develop strategies and exhibit/experience concepts; and determine strategic goals and priorities, leading to a bold plan for a sustainable future.

More than a dozen personal interviews were conducted with representatives from the City of Manhattan, Chamber of Commerce, Convention and Visitors Bureau, Kansas State University, Friends of the Sunset Zoo, Sunset Zoological Park & Wildlife Conservation Trust, Greater Manhattan Community Foundation, plus additional informal interviews with Zoo staff. To broaden our reach into the community, an online survey was later distributed to more than 3,000 individuals and via several social media channels through the City, School District, and community groups.

Results from this extensive outreach yielded the following information and interests of the varied stakeholders:

**Sunset Zoo is a valued community asset**

- Good relationships with City, State, local organizations
- Kansas State University partnerships exceptional
- A great place to take out-of-town guests
- Excellent education programs, especially pre-school Sprouts
- A beloved tradition, but needs bolder vision

**Larger, more charismatic animals; larger spaces for animals**

- Giraffes
- Big Cats
- Penguins
- Primates
- Children's areas

**Engaging experiences**

- Nature play
- Walk-through aviary
- Animal feeding; talks
- Touch tank
- Carousel

**Greater guest comfort**

- Accessibility
- Improved, more diverse food choices
- Climate-controlled spaces

**Programming**

- Programs for older adults, special needs individuals
- Additional rental opportunities for local organizations
- More animal presentations/talks
- More close-up opportunities with animals

These findings, together with background organizational data, ultimately informed the development of goals and objectives.

## IMAGINING THE FUTURE OF THE ZOO

Early in the project, the team revisited and reaffirmed the Zoo’s mission statement and developed a bold vision for the future of the Zoo—a vision that influenced the organization’s goals and is especially evident in the transformative design concepts in the master plan. Another important part of the process was the development of core values—an activity that invited all Zoo staff to help draft a set of values that would guide how the organization does business; how staff and volunteers treat each other and their constituents—those beliefs the organization holds at its very core.

Guided by the mission, vision and core values, and informed by stakeholder input and organizational data, the team identified a number of issues that were then shaped into six goals over the course of a series of workshops and meetings. These six strategic goals influenced the ultimate master plan design concepts, ensuring a fully-integrated document reflecting a clear and compelling strategic master plan for the future of the Sunset Zoo.

The Sunset Zoo’s Strategic Plan is one component of a three part-planning initiative that is intended to define strategic direction, provide master plan site concepts, and outline a future for conservation. Companion documents are the Sunset Zoo Master Plan and Wildlife Conservation Plan.

**MISSION:**

*To inspire conservation of the  
natural world.*

**VISION:**

*Creating a community of champions  
in the fight against extinction.*

## CORE VALUES

These six values influence the daily lives and work of the Sunset Zoo team and reflect the thoughtful input of staff from all areas of the Zoo.

### LEARNING

We believe in creating learning opportunities for all.

### SUSTAINABILITY

We strive to be an example of sustainability for our community and guests—through our business practices, animal care, and guest experience.

### COMMUNITY

We strive to be a point of pride for our community, to be active partners in the welfare of our community, and to inspire our community to care for the wild world around them.

### CARING

We deliver the highest level of care to our animals, putting their welfare and care above all else.

### EXCELLENCE

Excellence is a hallmark of everything we do, especially in our care for our animals. We take pride in our work and always aim high.

### STEWARDSHIP

We strive to be good caretakers for all that's entrusted to us—our planet, our animals, our Zoo, our coworkers, and our partners who have invested time, care and resources.

# STRATEGIC GOALS

**I. BUILD A COMPELLING ANIMAL EXPERIENCE THAT MEETS THE HIGHEST STANDARDS OF ANIMAL WELFARE**

**II. ENSURE A SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS MODEL**

**III. ENHANCE GUEST EXPERIENCE AND LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES**

**IV. INCREASE CONSERVATION IMPACT**

**V. FOSTER GREATER COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

## GOAL I: BUILD A COMPELLING ANIMAL EXPERIENCE THAT MEETS THE HIGHEST STANDARDS OF ANIMAL WELFARE

Manhattan residents and visitors value the Zoo, with its manageable size, friendly atmosphere, and interesting animals, but they want more: more and “bigger” animals, more opportunities to get close to the animals and more interactive experiences. The Zoo’s location and topography offer some surprising and expansive views along with some real challenges to access and exhibit design. New master plan concepts and strategic goals address these issues and reflect innovative ideas and trends in zoos, aquariums, and related attractions across the county.

- A. Develop Master Plan to feature diversity of species; more larger animals, more charismatic animals.
- B. Increase conservation relevance of animals and exhibits.
- C. Ensure best animal care; create greater transparency and highlight the work of keepers.
- D. Develop engaging animal encounters.

## GOAL II: ENSURE A SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS MODEL

Analysis of historic trends in Sunset Zoo attendance, membership, and revenue areas reveals several areas of significant opportunity. Attendance has been on a steady upward trend since 2010, but still falls toward the lower end of both national and Kansas benchmarks. In addition, there's room for growth in per capita concessions and admission revenue. The staunch support of the City's Parks & Recreation Division over the years has provided a solid basis for operations; however, revenue growth has been outpaced by expenses, and with implementation of a new master plan and improvements to existing facilities needed, increased fundraising is essential. The future success of the Zoo is compromised without a more sustainable business model that includes both public and private funds, with an increase in earned and contributed revenue.

- A. Increase earned income: admissions fees, program fees, rentals, concessions.
- B. Add revenue generating experiences/amenities early in master plan phases.
- C. Explore future bond initiative or other financing to support Master Plan.
- D. Increase fundraising capacity and activities of Sunset Zoo Trust and FOSZ.
- E. Consider small events/activities with good ROI and low staff impact to showcase the Zoo, increase awareness and revenue.

### GOAL III: ENHANCE GUEST EXPERIENCE AND LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

The Zoo's education programs have demonstrated success on a number of fronts: their popular Sprouts childcare program regularly exceeds demand; STEM initiatives with Kansas State University put zoo science front and center and attract national recognition; and education revenue has surpassed admissions revenue since 2014, rare in the world of zoos and aquariums. The focus for the next few years will be to build on this success and create a compelling learning environment for Zoo visitors that's fun—an experience that inspires them to explore and discover science and return in the future. A critical component of this goal is enhancing guest comfort and satisfaction by improving amenities and providing easy access throughout the site.

- A. Expand Sprouts programs.
- B. Build strategic partnerships with select school districts.
- C. Enhance guest learning experiences - encounters, shows, and more.
- D. Improve wayfinding and accessibility.
- E. Add new guest amenities such as restrooms, seating areas, food and gift concessions.
- F. Improve interpretation at current exhibits and increase opportunities for interaction Zoo-wide.

## GOAL IV: INCREASE CONSERVATION IMPACT

The companion Wildlife Conservation Plan details specific conservation programs, priorities, and strategies for expanding and implementing the Zoo's conservation program, while the strategic plan and master plan provide "big picture" goals and site concepts for conservation initiatives. Developing and adopting this trilogy of plans concurrently ensures the best integration of organizational goals, site concepts, and conservation programming with best use of limited human and financial resources. The Sunset Zoo should be proud of their place among a small but growing number of zoos who have dedicated resources to in-depth conservation planning.

- A. Align Wildlife Conservation Plan with strategic plan and identify resource needs.
- B. Integrate conservation initiatives with animals, exhibits, programs, communication.
- C. Increase funding for conservation.
- D. Implement/advance sustainable practices/resource management.
- E. Develop strategies to increase awareness of Sunset's conservation program.

## GOAL V: FOSTER GREATER COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Zoo is already a valued part of the Manhattan community-- a community that values time spent with family and friends, being outdoors, attending events at K-State and other venues—a community with growth in its future. Partnerships thrive with K-State, and with NBAF nearing completion, new opportunities for programming, visitation, staff engagement, and facilities are possible. The Sunset Zoo enjoys a strong relationship with the City and has benefited from sustained funding commitments for decades. The City, K-State, and community leaders have been part of the planning process, and as the Zoo grows, their support will be even more essential.

- A. Explore additional/expanded partnerships with K-State, Discovery Center/libraries, others.
- B. Explore additional opportunities with Ft. Riley, NBAF communities.
- C. Promote Zoo as “civic commons” - meeting space, “town hall” for all.
- D. Explore membership strategies to increase revenue, enhance member participation, and further engage the community at large.

## MASTER PLAN

The Zoo's master plan is built on six guiding principles that reflect the strategic plan and drive phasing of projects:

1. Attendance and revenue growth
2. Animal welfare and conservation impact
3. “Marquee” exhibits/experiences
4. Mix of guest amenities, play spaces, interactive experiences
5. Cost-effective design/construction staging and implementation
6. “Projects of opportunity” —lower cost, can stand alone, and deliver visible impact.

The plan is designed to be implemented in phases over 20-30 years, with the estimated capital cost for the three phases and projects of opportunity at approximately \$51 million. An optional longer-range component includes several projects that require additional resources and are possibly more challenging to implement. Each of the phases includes at least one “marquee” exhibit; conservation project opportunities; guest amenities, interaction and educational experiences; and significant revenue generation initiatives.



Highlights of the plan include Expedition Asia (fully funded outside of the plan and the first project to be implemented), giraffe exhibit and feeding, new Children's area, butterfly house, African savannah and lion lookout event plaza, new education and nature play space, and Australian walkabout. New revenue and experience opportunities include a carousel, children's adventure course, budgie feeding, nature theater, and camping.

Implementing the master plan will enhance the education and conservation mission of the Zoo and position it as a vital, re-imagined regional asset.

## ACTION STEPS

Developing specific action steps or tactics is the final step in the planning process. Action steps created for each objective in the plan provide the detail of the individual responsible; the specific action to be taken; the timing of the action; the resources required; and the metric for success. At this point, the process shifts to staff teams who develop the action templates for final implementation. Full cross-organization, cross-department participation in this stage is critical to implementing a plan that works—a plan that is aspirational but realistic and achievable.

## CONCLUSION

A fully-realized strategic plan is not only a roadmap for the future, but a yardstick against which organizational and individual performance can be measured. Similarly, core values and organizational goals and vision can become a tool in the hiring process to recruit and employ individuals who share our vision and embrace our values. The Sunset Zoo's strategic master plan lays out a bold future—a future that reflects the vision and commitment of the staff, the City, and its community.

