

Transformation of the Honolulu Zoo Should Start Right Now

Increasing taxes to spend more on the current zoo will not save it

Our zoo is a beautiful treasure - right in the heart of Waikiki. Its 42 acres contain some of our most gorgeous heritage trees, shrubs, parkland and, of course, some wonderful animal and bird collections too. But this little urban zoo is now simply unsustainable. It has lost its AZA accreditation because it has unreliable funding and is unable to provide adequate costly housing for its largest wild animals.

Times move on and, like circuses can no longer use elephants for public entertainment here, small city zoos like ours can no longer continue to display large African wild animals in restrictive cages and concrete moated enclosures. There are many reasons - it's regarded as inhumane and dangerous today and unnecessary to show these sad imprisoned creatures to children who can learn much more about them from modern videos and online learning centers. Only large well-funded zoos can continue to house large animals under acceptable ethical conditions. In addition, it's impossibly expensive - the majority of Honolulu Zoo's expenses are caused by large-animal staffing costs and the huge water and sewer bills associated with their pools, moats and animal waste disposal.

And then there is the Elephant in the Living Room - City Politics. No zoo can sustain the endless cycle of elections, tax battles and revolving door leadership associated with such overt political control. Every year absurd ideas emanate from politicians, such as the latest one to cut down our precious heritage monkeypod trees in the zoo parking area and build a multi-story garage. This year voters are being asked to vote on more taxes for the zoo under Charter Amendment 9. It's time to vote No and to push instead for *Transformation of the Honolulu Zoo*.

It's not new, many zoos around the world are now transforming themselves to be more responsible and sustainable.

We suggest that the process start right away. Make a list of all the animals that we should no longer keep here. This includes elephants, giraffes, chimpanzees, rhinos, alligators, zebras, lions, cheetahs, African wild dogs, warhogs and some others too. Make a plan to slowly move them out and relocate them to more appropriate large zoos and sanctuaries. It's time to get over the fantasy that we must have all these animals here to show our keiki. It's *Game Over*. We explained circuses, now this.

What to do with the vacated animal enclosures? Expand what we can do best. More low cost walk-in bird sanctuaries and breeding colonies. More of the cool and peaceful mini-parks and arboretums that are so delightful for families to enjoy now. Costs will be dramatically lower and AZA accreditation will surely be regained. We can be one of the best small zoos, not the discredited worst.

A reminder, the zoo's 42 acres are not located on city land. It's a part of the 100 year old Kapi'olani Public Park that was allocated to the zoo in 1948. The city provides the park's mythical "trustees". Any attempt to commercialize or change Kapi'olani Park will be fiercely contested in the courts.

In the meantime, the zoo's staff work incredibly hard to keep our zoo in such excellent condition. They deserve our highest praise. Time to let them spread their wings with a truly transformed Hawaiian treasure zoo. Go and visit to see families enjoy it before it is burdened with more shackles.



Honolulu Zoo's mini-parks and trees are world-class. No need for visitors to travel out of town to the Foster Botanical Garden to admire them. And it's surprisingly cool here on a hot day.



A lone elephant imprisoned behind an electric fence? Really?



These large pools are unsustainable due to huge water, sewer and maintenance costs