

STAFF REPORT

FOR THE PURPOSE OF APPROVING THE PURCHASE OF CERTAIN REAL PROPERTY IN WASHINGTON PARK FOR USE BY THE OREGON ZOO

Date: March 25, 2025
Department: Oregon Zoo
Meeting Date: April 10, 2025

Presenter(s): Heidi Rahn, she/her, Zoo Director,
Utpal Passi, he/him, Deputy Director
Oregon Zoo

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Length: 20 minutes

ISSUE STATEMENT

Council will have the opportunity to decide if Metro should purchase property adjacent to the Zoo for future Zoo purposes, so long as all due diligence conditions are met, and the acquisition of the property presents no undue risk to Metro.

ACTION REQUESTED

Metro Council approval of the execution of a Purchase and Sale Agreement with the City of Portland and purchase of the former Children’s Museum 2 Property in Washington Park (“CM2 Property”).

IDENTIFIED POLICY OUTCOMES

This property purchase invests in the future of the Zoo as a vibrant and growing institution and potentially allows for more flexibility of 2024 Zoo Bond Measure construction inside the current Zoo footprint. Inside the current Zoo campus, nearly all available area is occupied with habitats, guest areas or service areas. Very little unoccupied land remains.

POLICY QUESTION(S)

Should Metro purchase the specified property for future Zoo purposes?

POLICY OPTIONS FOR COUNCIL TO CONSIDER

Purchase the CM2 Property for future Zoo use, incorporating it into the Zoo Campus and its Conditional Use Master Plan, expanding the Zoo’s area,

or

Forego purchasing the CM2 property. The City will continue to own the property, and the Zoo Campus will not grow in size.

STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS

Staff recommend approving the real property purchase.

STRATEGIC CONTEXT & FRAMING COUNCIL DISCUSSION

The Oregon Zoo stands in the midst of Portland's Washington Park, a "crown jewel" legacy recreational natural area. The Zoo is bounded on the southeast by the steep ravines and forested slopes of Washington Park, on the south by Highway 26, on the West by the Washington Park parking lot and on the North by the Veterans Memorial and portions of the Hoyt Arboretum. As such, it is effectively "land locked" with limited opportunity for territorial expansion. Meanwhile, inside the Zoo campus, nearly all of the developable land is in use or is planned for redevelopment into animal spaces. Beginning as far back as when OMSI moved to the Willamette waterfront in 1992, the Zoo expressed interest in acquiring the property vacated by OMSI across Knights Boulevard to the southwest. However, in 2001, the Children's Museum 2 occupied the property. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Children's Museum 2 closed, and the CM2 Property sat vacant for nearly 5 years. The Zoo and Portland Parks now see the sale of the CM2 Property to the Zoo as an important cooperative step in pursuit of their mutually beneficial missions inside Washington Park.

The CM2 Property is approximately 3.4 acres and is occupied by a 75,250-square foot building plus surrounding service areas. It was first constructed in 1959, with additions in the 1970s and early 2000s. The building is not a viable candidate for rehabilitation and restoration or adaptive reuse for the Zoo, due its configuration, means of construction, seismic deficiencies and advanced stage of deterioration. Because of its size, the cost to demolish the building will be significant.

The separation of the CM2 Property from the larger portion of Washington Park and incorporation into the Zoo's parcel will be accomplished by property line adjustment. It is likely that the property line adjustment will trigger a Type II amendment to the Zoo's Conditional Use Master Plan to incorporate the site. Staff will submit an application with Portland Permitting and Development during the due diligence period, and the approval will likely be needed prior to closing. Such an amendment process represents a longer-term effort and involves quasi-judicial land use processes.

Portland Parks has conditioned the sale upon the lease back of 1,800 square feet of office space and 6 parking spaces on a 25-year term to Portland Parks in any redevelopment the Zoo may build on the CM2 Property. The lease will be at market rates, on commercially reasonable terms. The leaseback is indirectly advantageous to the Zoo as it will allow Portland Parks a hub around which to deploy park rangers and other parks personnel responsible for public safety in the parking lot, patrols around the Zoo boundary in the park, and for park maintenance.

The purchase will provide the Zoo with additional area in which to operate and will ultimately result in upgraded levels of service to the public.