

Proposed Budget - Department Overview

FY2026-27

Oregon Zoo, April 2026



Summary of Department Budget for FY26-27 Proposed Budget

The Oregon Zoo's FY2027 proposed budget reflects a strong commitment to financial sustainability, operational efficiency, and alignment with the organization's strategic plan. Building on the accomplishments of FY2025, the zoo continues to prioritize transforming its campus, expanding its conservation impact, and enhancing the visitor experience. Six core program areas remain funded primarily through a mix of permanent property tax revenues (approximately 38%), charges for services such as admissions and events sales (approximately 54%), and contributions from the Oregon Zoo Foundation (approximately 5%).

In FY2025, the zoo welcomed 1.44 million visitors, a 9% increase over FY2024, and celebrated several milestones, including the birth of Asian elephant Tula-Tu and the completion of the three-year Strategic Plan. These achievements underscore the zoo's role in the region, while maintaining a balanced budget and reserves above target levels. Roughly 1.4 million visitors are projected for FY2026, with continued growth through FY2028, supported by major events including Tula-Tu's first birthday and record Zoolights attendance.

For FY2027, the zoo proposes a total operating budget of approximately \$59 million, an increase of about \$2.3 million over FY2026. Attendance is projected at 1.45 million visits, a 4% increase over FY2026 projected, with no planned ticket price increases. However, this growth comes with several key risks that we must proactively mitigate. These include market saturation pressures, ongoing construction that may disrupt access and effect guest experience, and—most significantly—limited parking capacity, which remains our highest-impact operational constraint. Addressing these challenges will be critical to sustaining growth while maintaining a positive guest experience.

Ongoing Department Growth and/or Reductions included in FY26-27 Proposed Budget

Personnel costs are expected to rise modestly by 3.79%, reflecting cost-of-living and step increases, but no new FTEs are proposed for FY2027. The zoo will maintain staffing at 199.5 FTEs, which includes positions across animal care, conservation, operations, and administrative functions. Significant work has been undertaken across teams to evaluate the cost effectiveness of programs and identify opportunities for greater efficiency. This includes reviewing resource allocation, streamlining processes, and ensuring programs are aligned with organizational priorities and financial targets. Importantly, this is not a one-time effort—these evaluations and optimization initiatives will continue into FY27 as we refine our operating model to ensure long-term sustainability.

The zoo's financial structure for FY2027 also includes three major capital-related funds. Zoo Bond 2024 (321) anticipates \$58.8M in available resources remaining from the first bond sale. Our Capital Asset Funds (325/326) are anticipated to carry over \$13.6M from prior year investments out of zoo operating revenue. These allocations reflect a strategic approach to maintaining and improving infrastructure while preparing for bond-related construction impacts.

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Fund	Budgeted Expense	Contingency	Unappropriated	Major Projects
321 – Zoo Bond 2024	\$14.8M	\$12.9M	\$31M	Cascade Terrace, Wildlife Pavilion, Elephant Plaza, Coastal Shores and Carousel Design
325 – Capital Projects	\$6.6M	\$2.5M	--	Children’s Museum Acquisition, Electric Train
326 – Renewal & Replacement	\$2.9M	\$1.6M	--	Aviary Café Modernization, East Campus Generator Replacement, Animal Care Building Renovation

Zoo Bond 2024 continues to move forward successfully, with the first phase, Plaza Enhancements, breaking ground in January 2026. As these plazas come online through FY2027, they will enhance our ability to create a more welcoming environment and support future revenue growth through expanded event opportunities. The Zoo Bond Oversight Committee will continue monitoring progress and financials and report annually to Metro Council.

Highlighted Significant Changes from FY25-26 Budget

Significant changes from the FY2026 budget include one-time costs such as hosting the AZA Annual Conference (\$750,000), equipment replacements, and lighting upgrades for the new Polar Plaza ZooLights installation. These investments support the zoo’s strategic goals for industry leadership and visitor engagement. Capital priorities remain consistent with the zoo’s long-term plan and AZA accreditation standards, with contingency funds in place to support long-term reinvestment strategies.

The zoo is well-positioned financially, with an anticipated beginning fund balance of \$25 million and strong reserves. However, aggressive assumptions regarding attendance and revenue growth prior to bond construction represent a key risk, emphasizing the importance of closely monitoring revenue trends. As the Oregon Zoo looks for long term success in a future with many unknowns, flexible contingency is necessary to ensure consistency in animal care, guest experience, and continued investment in infrastructure. Additionally, the zoo’s partnership with the Oregon Zoo Foundation remains critical for advancing education, animal well-being, and conservation programs.

Any Other Overall Impacts that Require Council Direction and/or Attention

Overall, the FY2027 proposed budget reflects thoughtful planning, and it positions the Oregon Zoo to deliver on its mission while navigating future challenges and opportunities. No council action is required beyond approval of the proposed budget, which supports ballot measure commitments and ensures the zoo’s ability to maintain excellence in animal care, conservation, and guest experience.