

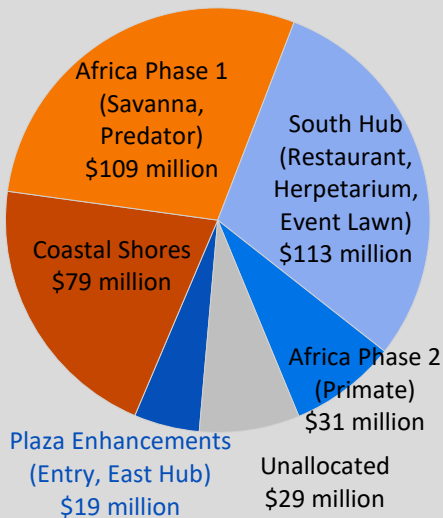
Oregon Zoo Bond Implementation: Stronger oversight needed to meet commitments

Why this audit is important

The purpose of this audit was to evaluate the Zoo’s preparedness to implement the 2024 bond. In May 2024, voters approved Ballot Measure 26-244, authorizing \$380 million in general obligation bonds for improvements at the Oregon Zoo. It promised voters that funding would be used for animal wellbeing, weather protection, sustainability, accessibility, education, and conservation.

In September 2024, Metro Council approved a Campus Plan, which included five bond funded projects.

Five projects were expected to be completed.



Source: Auditor’s office analysis of bond distribution by project dollars as noted in the 2024 Campus Plan.

The ballot measure required a community oversight committee to monitor bond spending and issue annual reports to the public and Metro Council. Their first meeting was in February 2026.

What we found

The audit found that the Zoo was not prepared to implement the 2024 bond measure. Ineffective oversight led to significant changes to the first project’s scope of work. As a result, the first project will improve some areas that were built with the previous bond while the Zoo’s entry that was prioritized in the Campus Plan has no budget or timeline for completion.

The Zoo needs to strengthen its management tools to ensure the Campus Plan is followed. Tools to manage the bond were not finalized before construction began. The Zoo may not be setting enough financial reserves aside based on their own guidance and lessons learned from the previous bond. This increased the risk that the Zoo may not be able to complete the bond’s planned projects or may deliver smaller projects than what was envisioned in the Campus Plan.

Tools were available for the categories of program and project management we reviewed, but some were in template or draft form.

Category	Description
Alignment	Coordinates activities to achieve goals
Scope	Ensures the project includes only the required work
Schedule	Manages timely project completion
Cost	Ensures project is completed within budget
Governance	Manages resources and identifies decision-making structures
Stakeholder	Identifies stakeholder needs and manages communications
Risk	Helps plan, monitor, and respond to risk

Source: Auditor’s Office interpretation of Project Management Institute program and project management standards.

Performance measures were not in place to show progress on commitments made to voters. Potential measures were available for three of the seven commitments. Adequate measures were not available for the other four. Outcome measures were needed to help oversight bodies and the public understand what the bond achieved.

The weaknesses found during the audit had three root causes. The first was the absence of effective controls to manage project scopes, cost forecasts, schedules, and contingency allocations. The second was the scale of what the Zoo set out to accomplish. The third was an incomplete bond team.

What we recommend

The audit included 10 recommendations. Three were designed to ensure careful stewardship of public resources and set expectations for the Zoo Bond. Seven were focused on increasing transparency and accountability.