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TO:	CHAIR AND MEMBERS COMMUNITY AND NEIGHBOURHOODS COMMITTEE MEETING ON JANUARY 23, 2012
FROM:	WILLIAM C. COXHEAD DIRECTOR OF PARKS AND RECREATION COMMUNITY SERVICES DEPARTMENT
SUBJECT:	STORYBOOK GARDENS BUSINESS PLAN UPDATE ZOO ANIMAL TRANSFER TO NEW FACILITIES

RECOMMENDATION

That, pursuant to the implementation of the Storybook Gardens Business Plan (2008) strategic objective to move towards the elimination of the zoo component, City Council **BE ADVISED** that the Civic Administration is proceeding with plans to relocate the remaining zoo animals by the Summer of 2012, as follows:

- a) 4 harbour seals to a new exhibit at the St. Louis zoo, Missouri
- b) 4 raptors to the Sandy Pines Wildlife Sanctuary in Nepean Ontario
- c) 2 Lynx to the PAWS Wildlife Sanctuary in Galt, California
- d) 1 otter and 2 beavers to the Aspen Valley Wildlife Sanctuary in Rousseau, Ontario

It being noted, that in the past three years, 14 other animals have been transferred to much better environments while 2 animals have died of natural causes at Storybook Gardens; and it being further noted that these transfers have and are being completed in cooperation with Zoocheck Canada Inc at no cost to the City of London; and it being further noted that the Civic Administration will proceed with the planning and implementation of new attractions in accordance with the Business Plan and within funding outlined in the 10 year Capital Plan for the Park.

PREVIOUS REPORTS PERTINENT TO THIS MATTER
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Community and Protective Services Committee

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| November 2, 2009 | Storybook Gardens – Business Plan Update |
| December 8, 2008 | Storybook Gardens Business Plan |
| February 11, 2008 | Storybook Gardens Business Plan and Financial Projections |
| April 17, 2008 | PKF Assessment of Storybook Gardens |
| November 14, 2005 | Storybook Gardens 2005 Update |

EMERGENT NATURE OF THIS REPORT

The 2008 Business plan contemplated the eventual elimination of zoo animals/wildlife from the Storybook Gardens over a protracted period of time as animals died off or suitable homes were found. What is best for the animals was top of mind when looking at the zoo animals and their habitats. Changing standards, space requirements and cost of creating suitable habitats was then, and still is, prohibitive resulting in the attrition and relocation strategy.

To this end many of the animals have left the park for new homes. Before Christmas animal welfare groups concerned about the current state of affairs for the remaining zoo animals suggested that the City move more quickly with animal relocation from their current substandard habitats to better homes to be had elsewhere.

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Zoocheck (animal welfare advocacy group) has found superior new homes for all the remaining zoo animals, in particular our harbor seals. In early January Zoocheck found, in St Louis Missouri, an amazing home for our 4 seals in a new 18 million dollar sea mammal exhibit. The St Louis Zoo has expressed interest in our seals and need them to be on location when the exhibit opens. Our seals are likely never to find a better home and continued housing in our substandard facilities is not desirable. Zoocheck is prepared to facilitate and pay for the relocation of the seals and remaining zoo animals with no cost to the City.

The seal relocation is a time sensitive matter and the reason to advance this to Committee and Council as an added communication and agenda item to this Community Services Committee Agenda. It will take up to 4 months to process these seals across the border and in the event that our seals cannot be relocated in time for the opening the St Louis Zoo will pursue other animals from other locations and this opportunity will be lost.

BACKGROUND

2008 STORYBOOK GARDENS BUSINESS PLAN DIRECTION FOR THE ZOO

In February 2008 Storybook Gardens presented the 2008-2010 Business Plan, which outlined the future direction of the park and put forward suggestions for addressing the financial challenges the park was facing at the time. Included in this report was a summary of the zoo operations which outlined a number of the significant challenges the zoo faces:

- The Storybook Gardens zoo is the **smallest municipally operated zoo in Canada**.
- It is the only municipally operated zoo that is **not accredited** by the Canadian Association of Zoos and Aquariums.
- It is the only municipally operated zoo in Canada that **does not receive some form of operating subsidy** either from the municipality or other sources, which for the other zoos, ranges from 50-80% of the operating budget.
- The zoo animals are a traditional part of Storybook and are popular with visitors, however the **majority of visitors in fact spend very little time at the animal exhibits** before moving on to the other attractions.
- While the animals at Storybook receive good care and are well attended by staff, the Storybook Gardens **zoo enclosures are out of date and overall do not meet current best practices** for captive wildlife enclosures.
- As a municipality it is imperative that the zoo be operated at a high standard; for this standard to be met at Storybook, significant capital funding would need to be invested in enlarging and enriching the enclosures to bring them up to date. The alternative option is to **pursue a "modified zoo" option, by reducing the number of animals housed at Storybook through transfers to other facilities and by focusing resources on improving the standards of a few remaining exhibits.**

In the discussion that followed the presentation of the business plan, the members of committee indicated that the kind of funding required to upgrade the zoo would not be available, and that it may be time for the City of London to consider transitioning out of the business of operating a zoo.

Council directed staff to proceed with implementation of the plan and to hold public consultations on the future operations of Storybook Gardens based on two primary options with a report back in time for the 2009 budget process:

- *"Option 1, a Year Round Operation which retains the winter use of the trail artificial ice rink and a modified zoo with emphasis on fewer, well done aquatic and animal displays..."*
- *"Option 2, which would establish Storybook Gardens as a Seasonal Operation which closes for the winter months, eliminating outdoor ice skating while retaining the modified zoo."*

Results from the **public consultation strongly favoured pursuing Option 1**, with continued year-round



operation and a modified zoo. As part of the consultation process, a group of volunteers from the community came together to form an ad hoc advisory task force, to work cooperatively with staff to develop recommendations for the future direction of the park. At the end of this process, eleven **key recommendations were put forward by the task force and adopted by management; four of these recommendations pertained to the Storybook animals:**

- The transformation of the barn area into an interactive Old MacDonald's "Green" Farm with a petting zoo, market garden, teaching greenhouse, composting area and some form of alternative energy display to be an attraction for visitors and programming space for school groups. (As funding becomes available and animals are relocated.)
- **Take immediate and low cost steps to improve conditions** for the animals at Storybook as funding or sponsorship becomes available. (Plan and source of funds being investigated.)
- Bring **no new animals to the park** even though customer survey suggests animals could be a great attractor. Farm animals may well be seen as acceptable as they complement the petting zoo concept. (Agreed by management)
- Any animals leaving Storybook must be **transferred to an equal or better environment**. Members of the committee will continue to assist in the sourcing of alternative homes for specific animals as prescribed by management (Underway)

The reduction in the size of the zoo was to take place through attrition, by not replacing animals as they passed away naturally and through transfers of animals to other suitable facilities, identified and vetted by the Storybook staff and animal welfare volunteers.

Since early 2009, **staff, with the assistance and input from animal welfare advocates, proceeded to arrange for the transfer and re-homing of more than half of the Storybook exotic/zoo animals.** The

animals were transferred to suitable zoos and sanctuaries across Ontario, Quebec and New Brunswick.

The majority of animals transferred to date have been animals that were used for educational programs but were not in display for visitors.

Species	Number	Status
Beaver	2	At Storybook
Black rat snake	2	Transferred to Quebec Ecomuseum
American kestrel	1	Transferred to Sandy Pines Wildlife Sanctuary
Red-tailed hawks	3	At Storybook
Broad-winged Hawk	1	At Storybook
Porcupines	4	Transferred to Parc Omega, Quebec, and to Sandy Pines Wildlife Sanctuary
Skunks	2	1 deceased of natural causes, 1 transferred to Science North, Sudbury
Seals	7	3 transferred to Huntsman Marine Discovery Centre, New Brunswick
Otters	2	1 deceased of natural causes, 1 at Storybook
Lynx	2	At Storybook
Turkey Vultures	2	Transferred to Muskoka Wildlife Centre
Great Horned Owl	1	Transferred to Ecomuseum, Quebec

In addition, two domestic animals were transferred out of the Storybook farmyard: the Suffolk Punch draft horse, and the Short-horned cow. Both animals were felt to be too large to be comfortable in the smaller paddocks and limited pasture space available at Storybook, and they were transferred to a horse sanctuary in eastern Ontario.

Currently the Storybook gardens zoo includes five exhibits:

Exhibit	Number of Animals
Seal Pool	4 female harbour seals



Otter Enclosure	1 North American River Otter
Beaver Enclosure	2 Beavers
Lynx Enclosure	2 Lynx
Raptor Enclosure	4 raptors (3 red-tailed hawks, 1 broad-winged hawk)

ZOO ENCLOSURE DEFICIENCIES

The enclosures housing the remaining 13 zoo animals are a mixture of very old and newer; the seal pool was originally constructed when the park opened in 1958, while the beaver enclosure was constructed in 2007. The Storybook Gardens zoo is licensed by the Ministry of Natural Resources and during the most recent inspection of the zoo by Ministry officials in 2008, no major concerns were noted concerning the enclosures. However, **overall, the zoo enclosures do not meet up to current development standards and best practices for housing captive wildlife. For the most part they are too small and are not sufficiently naturalized and/or appropriately furnished to present the animal in a naturalized setting for the visitor, or to properly meet the husbandry needs of the animal.**

The main concerns are with the enclosures for the aquatic animals: the seals, otter and beavers:

- The **seal pool is undersized**, barren of variety of depth or features to provide enrichment for the animals, contains inadequate haul-out space, and no sheltered land space;
- The **water quality** in the seal pool (and the otter pool and beaver pool) is natural groundwater collected in a nearby open-water pond, and is not filtered or purified in any way. Therefore the water quality is subject to weather conditions and can be negatively impacted by severe weather and other influences on the collection pond;
- The **otter enclosure is too small**, has an insufficient water-land ratio and is mostly concrete, with very little variety in substrate, few natural plantings and very little complexity;
- The **beaver enclosure is too small**, and although it has a natural grassy floor, it has no natural features or plantings and bears **little resemblance to a beaver’s natural environment.**

RENOVATION OF EXISTING ENCLOURES - EVALUATED

The modified zoo option was presented and endorsed in 2008 recognized that the Storybook Gardens zoo enclosures are aging and do not meet current best practices and public expectations for the housing of captive wildlife. The “modified zoo” approach anticipated maintaining the seal pool and possibly as many as 2-3 other main exhibits, the remaining exhibits were to be enhanced and improved as funding allowed. **Subsequent investigation into renovation of the existing enclosures to bring them up to current standards is estimated to be in the millions of dollars and far exceeds available funding.**

By comparison, some of the most recent installations in larger zoos across North America have been a \$16.5 million seal/sea lion pool at the Edmonton Valley Zoo, and an \$18 million pinniped pool under construction in St. Louis. While these are larger installations that Storybook’s seals would require, current estimates for the required upgrades to Storybook’s seal pool are in the range of \$1 million.

To look at a comparably sized facility, Riverview Park in Peterborough Ontario recently constructed a new state of the art otter enclosure at a cost of @ \$750,000. **In short, the cost of upgrading even the small number of remaining animal enclosures is beyond existing financial resources and the cost benefit of building and maintaining new enclosures.**

RAPID TIME LINE – Opportunity for superior new homes for seals and other animals in spring 2012

In December 2011 representatives of Zoocheck Canada Inc., a Toronto-based animal welfare registered charity, and Friends of Captive Animals, a London-based animal welfare group, met with senior officials to recommend that Storybook Gardens move ahead with the transfer of the remaining zoo animals to other suitable facilities, and to **offer assistance both in identifying these facilities and also in covering all associated costs for transfers, veterinary costs, and if necessary, construction or modification of new housing to accommodate the Storybook animals at other locations (wildlife sanctuaries).**



Representatives from both Zoocheck and FOCA were involved in the 2008 Business Plan public consultation and recommendation process and both organizations are well familiar with the Storybook site and animal enclosures.

While staff agree in principle with the overall direction of transferring out the zoo animals, there was significant concern with the speed of the proposed timeline, in that it gives little time to prepare for alternate attractions to be planned and implemented to replace the animals once they were gone. Staff wished to avoid a scenario where the animals would be removed prior to the summer season, leaving empty pens and enclosures that would also have a negative impact on the visitor.

Of primary concern is the seal pool; Londoners have a strong emotional and traditional connection to the seals and the story of Slippery the Sea Lion is an integral part of the history of the park and of the City. However, the seal pool is arguably the Storybook enclosure that is furthest behind standard; it is essentially unchanged from when it was first constructed in 1958.

During this initial process, Zoocheck made contact with the **St. Louis Zoo in Missouri, who are nearing completion of a new \$18 million, 10,000 square foot pinniped (sea mammal) exhibit that, when completed, would be one of the premier facilities of its kind in North America.** St. Louis has agreed to receive the Storybook seals for their new pool, provided they could arrive in the spring of 2012, so that the pool would be inhabited when the new exhibit opens to the public. **If our seals cannot be sent this spring, St. Louis will source the seals elsewhere and the opportunity will be lost.** Zoocheck is strongly in favour of having the Storybook seals transferred to this new, state of the art facility, thus necessitating a tight timeline.

After weighing the options, staff have concurred that if the seals are to depart in the spring, that it would make sense to cooperate fully with Zoocheck and to accept their assistance with relocating all of the animals, and to begin work on replacing the animal enclosures with alternate attractions.

Zoocheck has identified new homes for all of the remaining zoo animals; all of the receiving facilities are of high quality and will guarantee high quality enclosures and care for the Storybook animals for the rest of their natural lives. Zoocheck would cover all associated costs for the transfer of the animals, resulting in no cost to the taxpayer. Zoocheck will also fund construction and/or renovation of housing at the receiving facilities to specifically accommodate the Storybook animals, ensuring that the animals are housed in high quality enclosures.

Facilities Identified to Receive the Storybook Animals

Raptors	Sandy Pines Wildlife Sanctuary, Nepean Ontario
Lynx	PAWS Wildlife Sanctuary, Galt California
Seals	St. Louis Zoo, St. Louis Missouri
Otter and Beavers	Aspen Valley Wildlife Sanctuary, Rousseau Ontario

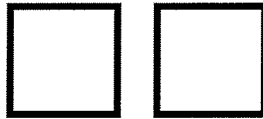
TIMELINE FOR ANIMAL TRANSFERS

Permits are required to transport the lynx and seals across the border into the United States. The permit **process can take 3-4 months.** The permit process has been initiated, with a target date for movement of the lynx and seals tentatively to take place in May. The other animals - the raptors, otter and beavers, could be moved at any time as they would remain in Ontario and facilities are available for them now.

The domestic farm animals in Old Macdonald's Farm – the donkeys, sheep, goats, rabbits and fowl – would remain at Storybook, as they are appropriately housed in the barn and paddocks and farm animals are appropriate for the park's Storybook theme.

VISITOR IMPACT – VALUE OF EXPERIENCE

While many park visitors are nostalgic about the animals and feel a strong sense of historical affinity for them, there are also many Londoners who feel equally as strongly that the zoo animals are not appropriately housed. From survey results and observation of visitors in the park, it appears that



overall the zoo is not believed to add significant value to the majority of Londoners, nor does it fit the current mandates.

SAYING GOODBYE AND THE “NEXT CHAPTER”

Through such a transition it will be important to acknowledge and respect Londoner’s emotional connection with these animals, and to ensure that we are adequately **communicating the good news that they are being moved to excellent new homes**, while also providing opportunities for Londoners to visit one last time to say their goodbyes before the animals leave.

With an anticipated spring target date for the transfer of the remaining animals, staff would **ensure that park visitors have ample opportunity to visit the animals** one last time and to wish them well on their departure. A “Celebration Weekend” would be offered in the spring to invite Londoners to visit the seals before they go, to learn more about their new home through displays and information panels, to celebrate the 54 year history of zoo animals at Storybook, and to learn more about the “Next Chapter” of Storybook Gardens with the unveiling of the coming activities and attractions.

With the closure of the animal exhibits, **staff will, within existing capital budgets, redevelop new attractions and activity areas to provide alternate experiences for park visitors**. The closure of the zoo presents an opportunity to more closely align Storybook Gardens’ activity areas with the current priorities of interactive play, emergent literacy, and the natural world, and to introduce new activity areas that would more fully engage children and their families.

Storybook Gardens has made significant progress in recent years, with consecutive years of attendance increases and achieving its best financial performance in 2011, finishing ahead of budget and with a drastically reduced operating deficit, approaching a break-even operating position for the first time since the park was renovated in 2003. **While the closure of the zoo operation in 2012 is unexpected and presents some significant operational challenges, staff are confident that the challenges can be managed. Ultimately this move is in the best interests of the animals, and will also present exciting new opportunities for Storybook Gardens to develop and grow, and to continue to provide amazing experiences for children and their families.**

GO FORWARD OPTIONS CONSIDERED

Option A: Work cooperatively with Zoocheck to transfer the zoo animals to new homes by spring 2012

Pros

- There is no funding available to upgrade the zoo enclosures at Storybook Gardens to the extent required. The enclosures are aging and will continue to age, falling further and further behind current standards.
- This is a good news story, where the City of London acts in the best interests of the animals in its care.
- Although many would be sad to see the animals leave, there would hopefully be some consolation in seeing the animals go to excellent homes and knowing that they will be well cared for, with the seals especially going to a premier facility.
- Reduction of operating costs and rededication of time and resources at Storybook Gardens to meet other priorities and to better serve current mandates.
- No additional operating costs / tax burden as Zoocheck would cover all transfer costs

Cons

- The rapid timeline presents challenges for the implementation of new attractions / activity areas to replace the animal enclosures
- Emotional reaction by Londoners to the departure of animals that have been part of Storybook’s tradition and history
- Potential for negative impact on attendance and revenue if new attractions cannot be implemented in time for the summer season

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Option B: Decline to transfer the animals at this time

Pros

- Seal pool and possibly other enclosures remains in operation for the 2012 summer season
- Provides additional timing for planning, implementation and possibly fundraising for new attraction areas to be implemented at a later date
- Will be appreciated by some Londoners who wish to maintain historical presence of animals and who see no problem with existing enclosures

Cons

- The possibility of increased negative attention and potentially national or international media focused on the wildlife enclosure conditions, which could impact attendance and revenue and reflect poorly on Storybook Gardens and the City of London
- Does not address the core issue: aging and substandard animal enclosures
- Miss the opportunity to send seals to St. Louis zoo; any alternate facility that could be identified in the future highly unlikely to offer the same calibre of opportunity for the seals.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Capital Costs Avoided

The zoo component of Storybook Gardens does not currently offer full value to Londoners. While the animals are well cared for, the enclosures are for the most part similar to what would have been in place at the park and at many other zoos in the 1950's and 1960's. Redevelopment of the existing animal enclosures would be prohibitively expensive estimated in the millions of dollars. Transfer of zoo animals from Storybook to superior facilities avoids the necessary costs of capital development of adequate enclosures not contemplated in the 10 year capital budget.

Operational Cost Savings

The zoo represents a significant portion of Storybook's annual operating budget. Removing the zoo operation would result in some direct savings in food, fodder and purchased services, and would also allow for repurposing of a percentage of staff time to address other priorities and to meet the current vision of the park as it moves into the "next chapter" of introducing new interactive attractions.

CONCLUSIONS

During the major renovation to Storybook Gardens in 2003, the zoo was reduced in size and focused specifically on North American species. A number of exotic wildlife animals, including lemurs, sika deer, mouflon sheep, a monkey and an alligator among others were transferred from Storybook to other suitable facilities since the approval of the 2008 Business Plan. A number of the animals at the park have remain because it has been difficult to find a suitable facility willing to receive them, due to the age of the animal or to the presence of a permanent, visible physical injury.

In the past the enclosures for these animals would have met standard and would have been considered satisfactory, but not anymore. The cost to upgrade or renovate the zoo enclosures is estimated to be in the millions which is beyond the ability of the city to fund at this time when it is faced with many other pressing priorities.

Excellent new homes have been identified for all of the remaining animals, in particular for the seals. There is a time-limited opportunity to relocate the animals to these homes, and therefore there is a need to move ahead with expediency.



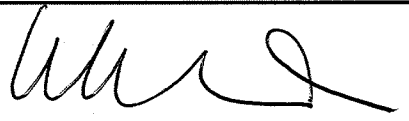
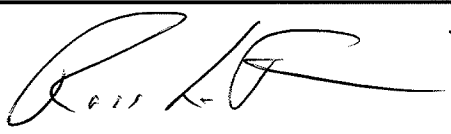
As a result, the following actions will be taken:

1. The Administration will work cooperatively with Zoocheck Canada Inc. to transfer the remaining wildlife animals to new homes prior to the 2012 summer season, it being noted

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that the majority of the costs associated with these transfers will be borne by Zoocheck and present no additional burden to London taxpayers and;

2. that the Administration will proceed with the planning and implementation of new attractions and activity areas to replace the wildlife enclosures at Storybook Gardens, for the enjoyment and entertainment of the park visitors, it being noted that the new attractions will support the current Parks & Recreation Master Plan and Storybook Gardens vision to inspire the imagination of visitors through interactive play and learning in an enchanted story book environment, and that funding for the new attractions is identified in the Storybook Gardens 10 year capital plan.

SUBMITTED BY:	SUBMITTED BY:
	
JOHN RIDDELL MANAGER, STORYBOOK GARDENS DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY SERVICES	LYNN LOUBERT DIVISION MANAGER, AQUATICS, ARENAS AND ATTRACTIONS DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY SERVICES
RECOMMENDED BY:	CONCURRED BY:
	
WILLIAM C. COXHEAD DIRECTOR, PARKS AND RECREATION DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY SERVICES	ROSS L. FAIR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY SERVICES

- c. Zoocheck Canada Inc.
Friends of Captive Animals