

COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE
Inter-Office Communication

Date: 4/12/2024

To: Marcelia Nicholson, Chairwoman, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors

From: Zoological Department/Amos Morris, Executive Zoo Director

Subject: Zoological Department 2023 Annual Report

File Type: Informational Report

This informational report provides a report on how the Zoological Department set and achieved its 2023 goals.

POLICY

This report aligns to Chapter 108: Achieving Racial Equity & Health.

Milwaukee County Code of General Ordinances:	Chapter 108: Achieving Racial Equity & Health
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BACKGROUND

[File 22-104](#) amends Chapter 108 to require that “annually, by April 30 of each year or sooner, each Milwaukee County department leader and/or their designee(s) shall provide a written and oral report outlining their year-end results to a Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors committee. The reports shall, at a minimum:

- (a) Indicate the year-end goals the department set in the prior year.
- (b) Share the rationale and relevance of the department’s performance metrics (i.e. explaining why they are “SMARTIE” goals (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, timely, inclusive, and equitable) and how they align to the county’s racial equity strategy, if applicable).
- (c) Report the department’s year-end results relating to the goals it had set, and
- (d) Provide a thorough analysis clearly articulating why goals were significantly exceeded, met, or not met.
- (e) Explain the department’s progress in creating a departmental-level strategic plan that aligns to the countywide strategic plan and provide an update about future plans to revise and enhance the departmental-level plan in the year ahead.”

ALIGNMENT TO STRATEGIC PLAN

- 1A: Reflect the full diversity of the County at every level of County government
- 1B: Create and nurture an inclusive culture across County government
- 1C: Increase the number of County contracts awarded to minority and women-owned

- businesses
- 2A: Determine what, where, and how we deliver services to advance health equity
 - 2B: Break down silos across County government to maximize access to and quality of services offered
 - 2C: Apply a racial equity lens to all decisions
 - 3A: Invest “upstream” to address root causes of health disparities
 - 3B: Enhance the County’s fiscal health and sustainability
 - 3C: Dismantle barriers to diverse and inclusive communities

Alignment to the above strategic goals is articulated in response to the questions below.

BODY

The Zoo aligns to the County’s vision by providing a solid, strong cultural institution, which is vital to a vibrant, healthy, and thriving community. We serve as an educational facility for the public and school children, provide an economic boost for Southeastern Wisconsin and care for animal species and their habitats to prevent extinction of wildlife. The Zoo serves over 1.2 million guests on an annual basis.

Zoo management established Zoo-wide priorities centered around Animal Welfare and Conservation, Fiscal Responsibility and Customer Service/Experience. These priorities are used in the development of staff performance evaluation goals. Division and employee goals are developed in harmony with the County’s values of Inclusion, Influence, and Integrity. Management overlays these values so that all employee goals align with Zoo priorities and positively impact the County’s values.

1. **What were the top 3 goals of your department/office 2023? Please explain why they are “SMARTIE” goals (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, timely, inclusive, and equitable) and how they align to the county’s racial equity strategy.**
 - Goal 1: Animal Welfare and Conservation – Optimal animal welfare is a key part of our mission and the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) accreditation standards. The Zoo assesses animal welfare through regular assessment processes and positive welfare is supported through an environment that promotes natural behaviors and social groupings, provides opportunities for choice and control, training and enrichment, habitat complexity, nutrition, and health care. Welfare is further investigated through deeper evaluations of health and behavior, and implementation of best practices and advancements.

Additionally, the Zoo collects feedback from guests about their perceptions of Zoo animal welfare. This feedback informs our decisions on interpreting animal care to Zoo guests and supports our wildlife conservation messages as well.

The County’s values of Inclusion, Influence, and Integrity were intertwined using the strategic focus areas of Creating Intentional Inclusion, Bridging the Gap, and Investing in Equity. By doing this, we inspire empathy for animals and wildlife in

all guests and program participants; promote conservation by mission, vision, and example, and make animal welfare the hallmark of the Zoo's operations. Additionally, this work fulfills AZA accreditation standards and abides by the AZA's code of ethics.

- Goal 2: Fiscal Responsibility – Fiscal health is critical to our operations and can be achieved in multiple ways including increases in revenue and attendance, partnerships, expense savings, and efficiencies that increase productivity.

The County's values of Inclusion, Influence, and Integrity were intertwined using the strategic focus areas of Creating Intentional Inclusion, Bridging the Gap, and Investing in Equity to broaden accessibility opportunities for all in MCZ's admissions and Zoological Society of Milwaukee (ZSM) programs and memberships. The practice of sound fiscal responsibility is part of every decision.

- Goal 3: Customer Service/Experience – Zoo guests are clearly our customers, but our broader definition of customer is: EVERYONE you encounter every day. Strong partnerships across divisions and within teams contribute to a positive experience for both internal and external customers. Activities that align to this priority include the following: Reviewing guest feedback for quality control; proactively engaging guests in a positive way; creating inspirational experiences and environments; considering the impact of daily decisions on the guest experience; and implementing innovative programs that continue to engage our community, supporters and guests and attract new interest from these groups.

The County's values of Inclusion, Influence, and Integrity were intertwined using the strategic focus areas of Creating Intentional Inclusion, Bridging the Gap, and Investing in Equity and were linked to a customer service policy that welcomes all and focuses on inclusion as an integral part of the Zoo's Guest Experience Committee.

2. To what extent were these goals accomplished in 2023? Please explain.

- *Goal 1: Animal Welfare and Conservation*
 - i. Maintained AZA Accreditation and USDA Standards: Every five years, AZA evaluates the Zoo to make sure it meets AZA standards for animal care, veterinary care, conservation, education and interpretation, scientific advancement, governing authority, staff, support organization, finance, physical facilities, safety/security, guest services, and strategic. In 2023, the Zoo began compiling the needed information for submission in 2024 as part of the Accreditation renewal process. The Zoo was re-licensed by the

USDA for the 2024-2027 cycle, following an on-site inspection. In 2023, USDA included birds on their inspection list. Many zoos did not pass their first inspection, but MCZ was relicensed following the first inspection, with no non-compliances noted.

- ii. Animal Species – Milwaukee County Zoo is home to more than 2,200 animals representing over 340 species. The Zoo serves wildlife and their habitats by working to conserve animals and providing them with exceptional care. This does not include the animals out on loan to other zoos. The zoo has 14 species (33 specimens) out on loan to other zoos.
- iii. Conservation Breeding Births & Hatchings: In 2023, the Zoo had significant animal births/hatchings for wildlife listed on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species:
 - Critically Endangered Northern Spider Tortoise
 - Endangered Waldrapp Ibis chicks.

The Zoo also hosted the births/hatchings of a Victoria Crowned Pigeon, a Black-naped Fruit Dove, a Cinereous Vulture, Inca Terns, a Crocodile Bird, a Nicobar Pigeon, a Prehensile-tailed Porcupine, a Sunbittern, a White-rumped Shama Thrush, a Greater Kudu, a De Brazza's Monkey, a Bactrian Camel, Nigerian Dwarf Goats, and cows (Brown Swiss and Holstein).

- iv. Wildlife Conservation/Research: Our collaborations with other conservation-focused organizations are of significance. In 2023, Zoo staff participated in 29 significant conservation programs from the Zoo's Motus tours for track migrating birds to participating in jaguar conservation SAFE program just to name a few.
 - v. Family Farm Internship Program: In 2023, the Animal Division continued the Family Farm Internship Program in partnership with Vincent High School to provide opportunities for job training and create interest in zoo careers.
 - vi. Exit Survey Results – Animal Care: The annual exit survey includes an important question of "How would you rate the overall quality of animal care at the MCZ?" Survey results showed 98% of respondents gave the top two ratings and the average rating was 4.7/5.
- *Goal 2: Fiscal Responsibility*: Below is a table showing the Zoo's revenue categories, expenditure savings, net surplus (deficit) and attendance performance for 2023.

Account Groupings	2023 Adjusted Budget	2023 Actuals	Variance
General Visit Revenues	\$ 11,829,068	\$ 10,492,503	\$ (1,336,565)
Events	\$ 2,526,922	\$ 1,920,629	\$ (606,293)
Group Sales	\$ 1,717,093	\$ 1,656,319	\$ (60,774)
Society Funding	\$ 3,423,554	\$ 3,481,292	\$ 57,738
Sponsorships	\$ 421,500	\$ 315,839	\$ (105,661)
Exclusivity Donations	\$ 147,000	\$ 130,000	\$ (17,000)
Miscellaneous	\$ 404,700	\$ 463,356	\$ 58,656
Total Revenues	\$ 20,469,837	\$ 18,459,938	\$ (2,009,899)
Expenditures	\$ 24,329,956	\$ 21,731,895	\$ 2,598,061
Net Surplus (Deficit)			\$ 588,162
Attendance	1,351,500	1,201,843	(149,657)

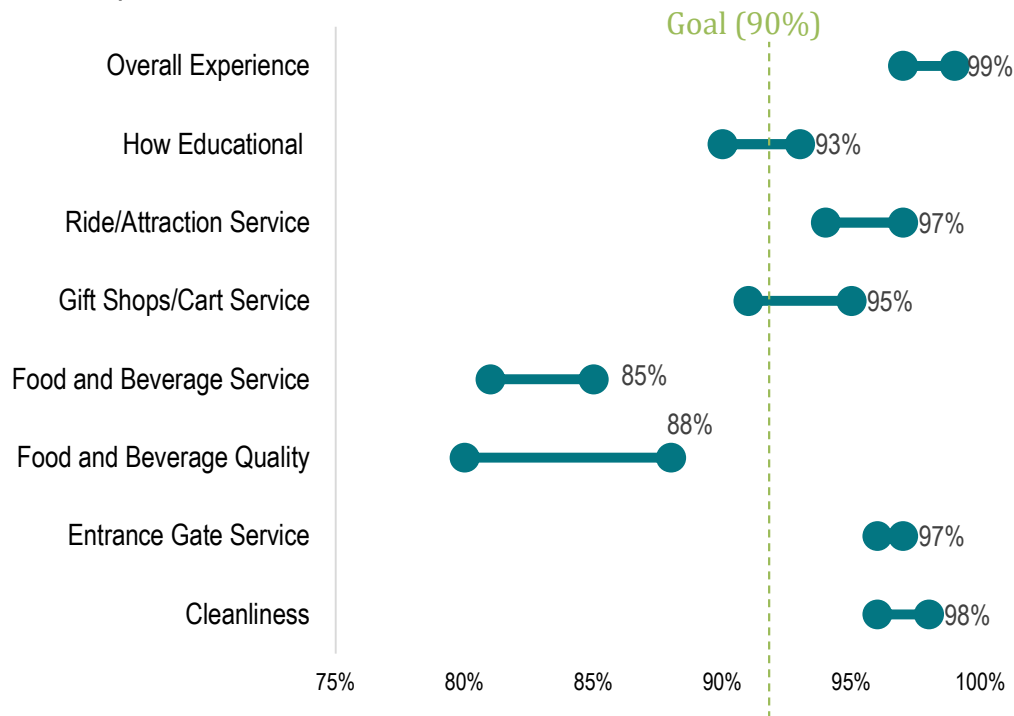
The year 2023 concluded with a surplus of \$588,162. Despite revenues falling short by \$2,009,899 compared to the budget, the Zoo was able to save \$2,598,061 in expenditures, which exceeded the shortfall amount. As a result, the Zoo was able to carry over \$500,000 in major maintenance funds into 2024 to continue addressing deferred maintenance and prepare for the 2024 AZA accreditation inspection. With the carryover, the Zoo's 2023 budget ended the year with a surplus of \$88,162.

The Zoo continues to annually grow revenues. In 2023, the Zoo saw a revenue growth of 7% as compared to 2022. The table below shows the breakdown of revenue account groupings.

Account Groupings	2022 Actuals	2023 Actuals	Variance
General Visit Revenues	\$ 9,844,724	\$ 10,492,503	\$ 647,779
Events	\$ 1,504,782	\$ 1,920,629	\$ 415,847
Group Sales	\$ 1,644,801	\$ 1,656,319	\$ 11,518
Society Funding	\$ 3,385,567	\$ 3,481,292	\$ 95,725
Sponsorships	\$ 395,645	\$ 315,839	\$ (79,806)
Exclusivity Donations	\$ 135,000	\$ 130,000	\$ (5,000)
Miscellaneous	\$ 403,151	\$ 463,356	\$ 60,205
Total Revenues	\$ 17,313,670	\$ 18,459,938	\$ 1,146,268

- i. Programming & Revenue highlights:
 - 1. Revenues that exceeded budget included parking fees, picnic permits, carousel and sky rides and general admission, private donations, Society memberships, revenue share for face painting, and concessionaire and retail commissions.
 - 2. The 2023 Boo at the Zoo event surpassed revenue goals, with 19,753 guests and \$326,593 in revenues.
 - 3. Milwaukee A la Carte was back in full swing in 2023. Attendance was down but revenues met projected goals.
 - 4. Wild Lights, now in its third year, had a successful revenue-generating event with over 42,000 attendees during 25 nights in December, including five new drive-thru nights.
 - ii. Efficiencies/Improvements/Facilities Accomplishments: The Zoo completed 35 deferred maintenance projects in 2023 and multiple efficiencies were gained zoo-wide through process improvements, streamlining communication methods, and reducing waste.
 - iii. DBE/TBE Participation: In general, the County has set a goal of 19% of all construction work to be performed by Disadvantaged Business Enterprises and/or Targeted Business Enterprises. The Zoo exceeded this goal by achieving a 74% rate with a significant reduction in cost per job.
- *Goal 3: Customer Service/Experience:* Below are the various ways we measured the Zoo's success in customer service/experience.
 - i. Social Media Reach: Impressions were at 128,601,087 with engagement at 8,718,291. The Zoo gained 44,619 followers in 2023 with a total of 402,671.
 - ii. Attendance at Animals in Action and Farm Animal Encounter talks: Six Animal talks were free with Zoo admission between Memorial Day and Labor Day and 47,739 guests participated.
 - iii. Annual Exit Survey Service Results: Our goal is for 90% of survey respondents to give the highest two ratings on a scale of one to five. The chart below shows how much each metric improved between 2021-2023.

The percentage of guests who gave the top two ratings for each performance metric increased between 2021 - 2023.



iv. Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion (DEAI): The Zoo promotes diversity, equity, access, and inclusion. Our programs are proactive and transparent, with measurable goals for assessing progress. Here are some of the ways we measure our progress.

1. Annual Exit Survey Demographics: The exit survey includes demographic questions that help us understand who we are serving and identify any gaps if they exist. Thirty-eight percent of the survey respondents who shared their zip code reported visiting from Milwaukee County. The average overall experience rating remained high for this subsample and was 4.8/5 (vs. 4.9/5 in 2022).

Survey respondents visiting from Milwaukee County are more diverse than the total survey sample and more closely match the actual demographic of the County based on the census data.

2. Accessibility Programs: As of 2023, there were 36 accessibility programs available, which were estimated to have a Zoo value to the community of \$1,409,202. See attachment #1.

3. Zoo's Guest Experience Committee (GEC): The GEC brings together employees from all departments at the Zoo, Society and SSA. Continue as a Certified Sensory Inclusive venue with KultureCity and many other improvements.
4. Community Events: The Zoo is proud to partner with Milwaukee County in Community Events such as Juneteenth Day. We also partnered with MPS and hosted job booths at two high school job fairs.
5. Finance Youth Apprenticeship Program: The Zoo partnered with Milwaukee Public Schools on a youth apprenticeship program through the State Department of Workforce Development. A high school student was hired to assist the accounting department and earned high school credits while obtaining on-the-job training for the 2022-2023 school year. The student was dually enrolled at Bradley Tech High School and UW-Green Bay, graduating from both in May 2023. The student is now furthering his education at Marquette University.
6. 2023 Marketing Strategy: In 2023, the Zoo earmarked 20% of its advertising budget to outlets that are most used by underserved communities. In addition to these targeted efforts, the Zoo's radio, pre-roll, and digital ads were translated into Spanish.
7. Empathy Program Advisory Committee: Zoo staff joined the Zoological Society's Empathy Program Advisory Committee. The group advised the Zoo on integrating diverse and culturally responsive practices into programming through an empathy-building lens. Three meetings were held in 2023.
8. In 2023, the Zoo hosted the Black, Indigenous, Person of Color (BIPOC) Birders Club for a workshop at the Zoo.

3. What factors *enabled* progress toward accomplishing these goals?

- Dedicated Zoo employees who stepped up to cover staff shortages and vacancies in essential roles.
- Group Sales rentals continued to rebound from the impact of the COVID pandemic on private events.
- The Zoo's strong partnerships with the Society, SSA and revenue share partners.
- Expanded our busy season offerings including adding Bat and Gorilla Animals in Action talks back to the schedule and expanding the season and opportunities for Veterinary Views.

4. What factors *hindered* progress toward accomplishing these goals?

- Balancing revenue generation and the quality of the guest experience.
- The impacts of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza on wild bird populations
- The delayed timeline for compensation study completion
- The Zoo received funding last year to redesign the east entrance. Until the design is complete, and the construction phase is funded, the Zoo's east entrance continues to be a challenge as it's no longer an efficient way to process guests entering the Zoo.
- Public transportation is a real challenge for guests and employees. Since the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) rollout, the closest bus stop is now a 10–15-minute walk to the Zoo. We want to remain accessible to all demographics and economic income levels; however, that is difficult without accessible public transportation. The Zoo's Executive Leadership Team has reached out to the Executive Director of Transportation to collaborate on potential solutions.

5. What is the status of your department/office in developing its strategic plan? If complete, please upload your plan with this report.

The enterprise-wide Milwaukee County Zoo and Zoological Society's strategic plan is near completion and is being refined before it's formally unveiled and will be launched later this year. To date, the vision, mission, key commitments, and values have been completed and are included as an attachment. The strategic plan narrative and action plans continue to be refined to fulfill our vision and mission. When completed, we will have a formal document to unveil later this year.

FISCAL EFFECT

The report is informational only and there is no fiscal impact.

VIRTUAL MEETING INVITES

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PREPARED BY:

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APPROVED BY:

Amos Morris, Executive Zoo Director

Amos D Morris, Jr.

ATTACHMENTS: Milwaukee County Zoo 2023 Accessibility Programs (PDF),
Milwaukee County Zoo Strategic Plan Graphics (PDF)

cc: Kelly Bablitch, Chief of Staff, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors
Janelle M. Jensen, Legislative Services Division Manager, Office of the County Clerk
David Crowley, County Executive
Mary Jo Meyers, Chief of Staff, County Executive
Scott Manske, Comptroller
Aaron Hertzberg, Director, Department of Administrative Services
Joseph Lamers, Director of Performance, Strategy & Budget
Steve Cady, Research and Policy Director, Comptroller's Office
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