



**Zoological Society**  
10005 West Bluemound Road  
Milwaukee, WI 53226-4383  
P: 414-258-2333 F: 414-258-6311  
zoosociety.org

**Administration**  
P: 414-258-2333 F: 414-258-5958

**To: Peter Burgelis, Supervisor District 15**

**From: Penny Gutekunst, Interim CEO**

**Date: September 13, 2023**

**RE: Adventure Africa, File No. 23-781**

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Thank you very much for reaching out with your question on the Milwaukee County Zoo's Adventure Africa project. I'm sure you saw in her out-of-office response that our President & CEO, Jodi Gibson, is currently out on a medical leave of absence. In her absence, I have been appointed by the Zoological Society of Milwaukee Board of Directors as the Interim CEO and thus, I am happy to respond.

Let me start by saying that there may be some background information you may not be aware of that I would like to share with you. In addition, I also intend to respond to your questions by:

- clarifying the Society's overall financial commitment to Adventure Africa and the rhino exhibit;
- sharing our fundraising success and status;
- respectfully asking for your help so we can complete the final phase of Adventure Africa.

### **Background**

Not all that long ago, David Crowley's predecessor, County Executive Chris Abele, former Zoo Director Chuck Wikenhauser and Jodi Gibson, President & CEO of the Zoological Society (Society) held a press conference in front of the Zoo to announce "Adventure Africa" and the Society's commitment to raise \$25 million for the renovation of three major exhibits including elephants, hippos and rhinos. **Over a multi-year period, the Society executed the largest fundraising campaign in our history which ultimately exceeded the \$25 million goal and exceeded our original financial commitment to the County.**

Following many years of working on this, the funding gap for the rhino exhibit only became apparent this past year. Unfortunately, this project became a victim of extenuating circumstances including a 3-year delay in starting the design of this project and post-COVID economic factors such as inflation and cost-escalation realities. These factors resulted in a cost that went well beyond the original, mutually-agreed upon budget.

After a careful review of the financial ramifications to the County of not proceeding with this project in 2024 and awareness of the current fundraising status for the Society at this stage in the process, a decision was made to seek additional support from the County to complete the project as originally planned. While not unanimous, we were pleased with the support we have received from various County leaders and committees thus far as we strive to do what is in the best financial interest of the Zoo for the near and long-term. We hope we can earn your support as well by reinforcing our commitment to the Zoo and proposing a path forward.



### **Society's Financial Commitment to Adventure Africa and the Rhino Exhibit**

As stated earlier, the Society has raised more than \$25 million for Adventure Africa to provide new homes for the elephants, hippos and rhinos. **It may surprise you to know we do have a recent precedent for not sharing every project on a dollar-for-dollar or on a 50/50 basis. In fact, the Society covered 67% of the cost of the hippo exhibit while the County covered 33% of the cost.**

Given this allocation, when looking at the totality of Adventure Africa, including the already completed elephant and hippo exhibits and the proposed rhino exhibit, the cost sharing for the full scope of Adventure Africa would be approximately 56% for the County and 44% for the Society. With the estimated cost-savings and incremental fundraising noted below, the cost-sharing percentage would be closer to 52% for the County and 48% for the Society. We also anticipate this figure could approach even closer to 50/50 by the completion of the project as the Society continues to explore what additional funds it may contribute and the Zoo works to reduce the overall cost of the project.

Specific to the rhino exhibit, the Society has:

- committed \$6 million to the rhino construction;
- committed to allocate our portion of the anticipated cost savings from the redesign of the elephant LSS to the rhino project, estimated to be at least \$1.5 million; and
- projected we will raise an additional \$500,000 - \$1 million for the project which, when combined with the above, will result in \$8 - \$8.5 million for the rhino exhibit.

To address your request regarding borrowing funds to complete the project, I can share the following. While the Society maintains appropriate lines of credit for a nonprofit organization of our size, we are not in a position to secure a loan to increase our commitment to Adventure Africa.

### **Fundraising Success & Status**

We have worked hard to raise a record amount for Adventure Africa. It may surprise you to know many donors already have made multiple, significant gifts to Adventure Africa. Many gave to each of the three phases, and some have made 4, 5 or 6 gifts to the campaign in an effort to help us reach our stated goal. We have raised funds not only within Milwaukee County, but from surrounding counties as well.

While we continue to receive gifts for Adventure Africa, the size of the gifts and overall volume are much smaller at this point in a multi-year effort. To be candid, we are experiencing some donor fatigue after years of soliciting funds for Adventure Africa. Just so I'm clear, there is not fatigue for the Zoo – people love the Zoo and are very excited about our future vision and upcoming new exhibits, however, there is fatigue for this particular project. At this time, approaching our donors again for more money would be counterproductive. Many of them have already made multiple gifts to the campaign and we do not want to jeopardize future funding for upcoming capital projects.

Donors frequently ask us "what's next?" expressing their desire to do more to help the Zoo. Additionally, donors have different interests and we know our upcoming projects will appeal to both donors who gave to Adventure Africa and those who are waiting for something more aligned with their personal interest and passion. Donors tell us all the time that they feel good about giving money to the Society and Zoo. They know we will be good stewards of their gifts, that we will do what we say we will do, and we create beautiful exhibits the community and County can be extremely proud of.



**Need the County's Help**

The bottom line is that unfortunately, we find ourselves in a spot that was unanticipated. We have experienced escalating costs due to post-COVID economic conditions and the Zoo and Society need the County's help to see this through. I can't imagine going back to our donors, who in good faith have made very generous gifts, and tell them the project is not moving forward. The Society has met its original commitment, redirected funds and committed to raise additional funds for the project but we still need the County's help to finish what we started. We are committed to doing our part and hope that under these unique circumstances, the County will lend some additional support to complete the project.

Should you have an interest in coming to the Zoo and seeing this firsthand, Amos and I would be happy to give you a tour. Let me know if you have any questions on anything I have noted above. Thank you again for your inquiry.