

Miguel Avila
302-121 Kendleton Dr.
Etobicoke, Ontario
M9V 1V3

May 25, 2010

Re: A Citizens Advisory Committee For The Toronto Zoo

Dear Chair and Members of the Toronto ZOO Board of Management:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak again on the topic of forming a Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) for the Toronto Zoo.

My Name is Miguel Avila, a proud Latino-Canadian, resident of Toronto and someone very concerned about the present and future management of the Toronto Zoo.

Since the last deputation on this topic by Larry Perlman in May 2009, I have noticed the following improvements at the Toronto Zoo

1. Greater transparency through the posting of Board (and sub-committee) agendas and minutes on websites of the City and Toronto Zoo.
2. Including the Toronto Zoo in Sun Life's Museum Access Program (MAP)

I believe the Toronto Zoo could go even further to better connect with its patrons, fans and Torontonians as a whole.

For example, I am a strong supporter of the establishment of the Rouge Valley National Park (as are some members of the Toronto Zoo Board). Hopefully this initiative will also allow for the Toronto Zoo to be included in its proposal to the Federal Government at some point.

A CAC for the Toronto Zoo would be a great forum for public input in support this initiative.

In fact, I have spoken in support of establishing CAC's for ALL Agencies, Boards and Commissions (ABCs):

1. At a February 2010 meeting of the TTCI spoke in support of a CAC for the TTC
2. In my deputation to Toronto's Budget Committee of the City of Toronto in March 2010 I said: "Before I begin I would like to state that this year I am also on a mission to form a Citizen's Advisory Committee (CAC) for the Toronto Zoo, as I strongly believe that concerned Torontonians must have a voice in this important operation".
3. In the March 2010 meeting of Toronto Executive Committee I spoke in support of item "41.12" a motion to establish a CAC for the TTC. The item was well-received by most committee members.

I will continue to do the above at other ABCs, as I feel it will benefit the City as a whole.

In a recent article that appeared in the May 18 2010 edition of the Globe and Mail ("Putting a fresh face on Toronto's leadership"), we are seeing more public engagement in the business of the city, from the Toronto Police to the Toronto Zoo (knock on wood) . It is my hope that other similar articles in the future will help encourage people to join the CAC once this initiative takes hold. (See appendix one)

In order to "get the ball rolling" as-it-were, below is a suggested introduction for defining CACs in general:

What is a CAC:

Made up of a diverse cross-section of volunteers, a CAC would meet regularly, establish a forum for concerned residents to contribute complaints and ideas, and allow the CAC to provide recommendations to better connect the ABC with the needs of the City.

Why a CAC?

There are two reasons for establishing a CAC:

1. To encourage civic participation in our political process, and,
2. In order to help provide guidance on decisions made by ABCs, the CAC would use suasion and a "sober second thought" to improve processes and policies for the betterment of the ABC agency and City as a whole.

How would a CAC be formed:

For each qualified ABC, a request would be made to the Toronto Civic Appointments Committee and volunteers chosen through a formal selection process (typically between five and nine members, depending on the size of the ABC).

Technical advisors would be sought where needed, but would be considered non-voting members. The CAC would also be non-partisan and any connection between the CAC and ABC (such as cross-membership for example) discouraged entirely.

Where and when would CACs meet:

A CAC should meet as necessary but typically once per month at City Hall, or at the location of the ABC if outside City Hall. The location and frequency of meetings should encourage civic participation, and dates and times made available on the City's and ABC's website. Following Robert's rules and supported by the City Clerk's office, a CAC should also be structured to produce results. Decisions and minutes to each meeting should also be made available on the City's and ABC's website

I would like to quote some of the platform ideas from one Mr G. Smitherman Mayoral candidate that is in sync (not perfect some rough edges but still a good idea) with the ideas presented to you today:

“Newly Designated "Signature Parks", Citizen Advisory Councils and a City-Wide "Adopt-a-Park" Program will be at the Heart of the Recreational Renaissance”

“Modeled on the successful High Park Community Advisory Council, new Advisory Councils would be established”

“Local City councilors and City staff representing park operations and programs would sit as non-voting members of the Councils.

“While public participation in parks management would seem like common sense to most people, bureaucratic resistance at City Hall have all but killed previous attempts to promote similar programs”.... (See appendix two)

Thank You again for this opportunity.

Sincerely yours,

Miguel Avila