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IE30.16

Interim Report for the High Park Movement Study

Friends of High Park Zoo (FHPZ) was formed in 2012 to raise money and bring awareness to the fact that the Zoo in High Park was under the threat of closing. We were able to raise \$342K, which we donated to the City to cover a year and a half of operating costs. We also generated a petition with over 30,000 signatures presented to City Council. In 2014 the operating costs were reinstated into the City Budget. Since then, our group of volunteers (we have no paid staff) has continued to create awareness about the Zoo, to host events at the Zoo for the thousands of visitors who come and we've raised money for improving the Zoo.

FHPZ are just completing Phase 1 of our Master Plan in partnership with the City with the new log cabin built as a home for the Llamas and Capybaras for which we have put in just over \$300K. Construction of Phase 2 is due to start Spring 2023. The FHPZ have committed \$200K towards this project. In partnership with the City we were able to secure \$2.6M through the Canada Infrastructure Program Grant from the Federal and Provincial Governments, but we still need to raise about \$70K. We have a five-year license agreement with the city allowing us to fundraising within the Zoo.

The principal way that we do this – raise money - is by hosting family-oriented events, at which people can make donations if they choose to. We've had many wonderful activities, like our Grandparents Day event, a Chalk Art Competition we hosted, our Halloween "Zoo Boo" activity slate and we've even brought in a tree harpist. In addition to these types of events, most every weekend we host very popular llama pen activities for kids and adults. We rely on 15-80 volunteers for these events to take place. Parents will sometimes even drop their kids off for a while and Seniors often drive up to the Zoo gates ensuring they have a short distance to travel inside to the Zoo.

The Zoo was closed over a 12-month period during the first 2 years of COVID. This has had a big impact on the number of visitors to our Zoo and our ability to fundraise. We could not run any events or programs and people could not make donations at the Zoo using our yellow donation boxes.

But leading up to Christmas, we decided we could run an event where families and visitors could enjoy being at the Zoo while social distancing. For the month of December, we hosted our first Holiday Tree Event. People were very excited about it. We had 13 local businesses sponsor a tree which they and their team could decorate. We tried to arrange for them to be at the Zoo during the week when the Zoo is open (between 9am-5pm) but many could only decorate over the weekend. This was also true for us, because as a volunteer group without paid members (our members work during the week) weekends become the best time we can operate Zoo events.

It was very challenging for us and our decorators to bring in the required decorations, ladders, lights and other supplies we needed because the roads into the park were closed. We obtained special permission to bring vehicles into the parking lot next to the Zoo during certain hours. (We do not have a building that we can store supplies in so have to bring everything in for each event. We do have a small space to keep our supplies for our llama pen activities but only have access to this during the llama pen opening hours when the Zookeeper is there.)

Visitors were able to see the amazing decorations on the trees during the month of December and we also arranged for two Snowflake Walks on Sunday evenings from 5pm-6pm where visitors could experience the trees lit up in addition to some festive lights around the Zoo. Staff of Colborne Lodge came to teach people about how sleigh bells had been used in the park and Santa joined us to walk around and talk to families and put smiles on many faces.

However, many people could not enjoy our event. The distance from the barricaded entrance gates (1.3Km round trip from the Bloor Street entrance and a shorter walk from Parkside Drive) was impassable for many. Seniors particularly face challenges parking so far from the park and then having to walk in. The fact that it was so dark also made families with young children, and some women uncomfortable on foot entering the park. Even our Santa, a woman on our Board at the end of the evening had another Board member, a man, walk her to her car outside the park and the barriers.

The logo for Friends of High Park Zoo is a green circle containing the text "Friends of High Park" at the top, a large stylized "ZOO" in the center, and "Since 1893" at the bottom. The "Z" is white, and the "OO" are green with white outlines. The "O"s contain icons of a bird and a tree. The logo is set against a background of colorful abstract shapes in blue, orange, pink, and yellow.

Friends of High Park



When we started planning this event back in September 2021, we believed that by December 2022 the park would be open to vehicles; on the website it said that “in spring of 2020, the City launched ActiveTO in response to the COVID-19 pandemic to provide pedestrians with space to physically distance on major roads throughout the city, including High Park.” The City was apparently opening up as were businesses, ActiveTO had finished for the season, there were far fewer people using the park and therefore it was no longer needed for people to social distance.

This has not proved to be the case. The barriers are still being put up on Fridays around 11pm and not opening until Monday 7am. We requested that the road be open at 4pm on the Sundays to allow everyone access to our events and so we could bring in our tables, chairs, ladder, donation boxes and other supplies that we use at the Zoo. FHPZ pride ourselves in making all of our events accessible to everyone but we have no control over how people actually get to the Zoo. Closing the roads has effectively closed off many of our visitors. But we have not been granted access. Recently, when we were selling skeins of wool spun from our llama fleece, we felt we had to find a location *away* from the Zoo because many of those travelling from around the city would not have access to the park.

The barriers also pose a safety concern. Parkside Drive is the closest entrance to the Zoo but there is limited parking on Parkside and only three places to cross with a traffic light between Lakeshore and Bloor Street. People tend to cross mid-block which is extremely dangerous.

In closing, FHPZ is participating with the Movement Study consultation webex meetings. We support installing road infrastructure like speed bumps and other traffic calming measure to reduce the speed of cars and cyclists along with enforcement. We do not support the continued road closures on weekends and statutory holidays as this prevents many people from having access to the Park and particularly activities near the middle of the Park. It prevents us from having access to be able to host free and fundraising events at the Zoo. All of the funds we raise go towards running programs or back to the city for the capital projects.

We feel that the Interim report does not reflect the concerns of organizations that call High Park home such as FHPZ, Shakespeare in the Park, the baseball, soccer, ball hockey and hockey teams together with the K9 and allotments gardeners. There were about 36 groups who

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Friends of High Park



participated in the engagement meetings with about 18 actually calling High Park home. The organizations within High Park who are being negatively affected by these closures must be taken into consideration otherwise they may not survive.

Sincerely,

Simone Stock

Vice Chair, Friends of High Park Zoo