

APPENDIX A:

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Program Interviews: Interest Groups

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**Program Meeting/Interviews Summary  
Grant Park Phase II  
Master Plan & Public Improvement Program**

**Interest Group:** Zoo Atlanta

**Contact/Interviewees:** Jeff Swanagan, Deputy Zoo Director; Michael Barnett, Landscape Architect/Curator of Horticulture; Cary Burgess, Vice President/Operations and Guest Services; Bill Cooper, Maintenance Director; and Scott O'Brien, Architect with Lord, Aeck and Sargent (Zoo Architectural Consultant).

**Facility Description:** Zoo Atlanta is situated on an approximate forty acre tract at the southern section of Grant Park. The two parking lots at Boulevard and Cherokee, which provide primary parking for zoo visitors, are not part of the lease. Zoo Atlanta has completed an aggressive improvement program since its founding in 1984. Approximately \$16 million was spent in the first few years and to date a total of \$40 million has been expended.

The first phase of construction included improvements at the gate and the construction of a commissary and a veterinarian clinic. The second phase of work included the creation of the African Rain Forest, the Asian Forest, food concessions, wildlife theater, the Savanna, the monkey exhibit, the tiger exhibit, red panda exhibit, maintenance area, playground and train in the Children's Zoo, and the special events and educational center. As part of this work, the bears and the sea lions were removed from the park.

It is estimated that there may be an additional \$25 million worth of potential, planned, or envisioned improvements for the park in the future. Improvements made to the Zoo since 1984 have strived to create more ecologically based exhibit areas in contrast to the traditional grouping of single species.

**Facility Operation:** Zoo Atlanta is a private organization with assets owned by the City of Atlanta. The Zoo is open every day of the year with the exception of Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day and New Year's Day. The Zoo is open from 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. on weekdays and from 9:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. on weekends. Annual visitation is approximately 750,000 with over 10,000 in attendance on peak days. The Zoo operates under a fifty-year lease with the City. Zoo Atlanta has a \$10 million annual budget with no subsidy from the City.

Zoo Atlanta is an accredited zoo with the American Aquarium and Zoo Association (AAZA). It is a five year accreditation program and Zoo Atlanta is one of 173 accredited zoos and aquariums across the county. In 1984, the accreditation was lost, which was the major impetus in making improvements to the Zoo. An emphasis of Zoo Atlanta today is conservation education.

The Zoo continues to expand its services and carries out educational programs in approximately 129 Georgia Counties. The Zoo is also currently assisting satellite facilities in Albany and Stone Mountain. In addition, Zoo Atlanta is exploring the feasibility of an aquarium for the City of Atlanta. They have staff members throughout the world promoting wildlife enhancement in wild places. There are approximately 1,000 animals in the park.

**Concerns/Comments Related to Grant Park Obtained During the Interview:**

- *Revenue Generation Potential* - Gate receipts are critical in generating the necessary revenues to run Zoo Atlanta. For that reason, any impact on visitation is detrimental to the operation of the Zoo. Activities that have impacted visitation include availability and security of parking; the closing of roads in the park, primarily to facilitate events; and the events themselves, particularly events planned during Zoo operation hours.
- *Park Management* - There appears to be a perception by many park visitors that Zoo Atlanta is in charge of management for the entire park. Due to twenty-four hour security and the availability of medical personnel, problems and medical emergencies in the park are typically directed to Zoo Atlanta.
- *Views to the Zoo* - There have been some complaints that visitors now miss the opportunity to view the bears and sea lions from a former overlook spot. The bears and sea lions, as noted above, were removed in past improvements. There is an issue of allowing views into the Zoo by non-paying visitors and also the issue of exposing animals to potential harmful actions by vandals. Overlook opportunities, several which were important elements in the original design of the park, exist or could be re-created. The balance between desirable views and security of the Zoo will need to be determined.
- *Signage* - There is currently a variety of signage types and styles. This diversity of signage leads to visual chaos and makes it difficult for visitors to find their way to and through the park. Zoo Atlanta staff emphasized the importance to create an identity for Grant Park through the use of graphics. The staff felt it was important to have a major sign that identifies Grant Park and lists Zoo Atlanta and Cyclorama as major tenants in the park. Banners were also suggested as an additional method of signage and potentially could be used on light standards around the periphery of the park, similar to what is currently in use at Piedmont Park. Banners would not only identify the park, but would also enliven the environment.
- *Pedestrian/Bicycle Access* - Discussion on pedestrian and bicycle access to the park from other locations was noted. The Path Foundation has added some bike racks to the Park and the master plan team was requested to explore other bikeway/pedestrian options to the park.

- There was also discussions about pedestrian access from the Stadium, Boulevard, Cherokee and from other locations in the City to Grant Park and the need to expand some of the streetscape improvements made as part of the Olympics. The expansion of the streetscape improvements would provide clear connections between Zoo Atlanta and other locations within the City.
- *Assembly Space* - There is a need for more assembly space at the Zoo. In the future, the expansion plan for the Zoo will likely remove existing assembly areas. Zoo Atlanta hopes that there might be some areas within the park where there can be multi-use by both the Zoo visitors and the general public.
- *Plaza Improvements* - The existing plaza space between the Zoo Administration Building, the Zoo entrance, and the Cyclorama should be improved to facilitate more functional use by all park visitors. A more aesthetic treatment would also create a more enjoyable space for park visitors.
- *Future Restaurant* - The addition of an “overlook” restaurant was suggested as a method of facilitating more evening use of the park. A potential “overlook” location in the vicinity of the Cyclorama and Boulevard parking lot was mentioned.
- *Neighborhood Issues* - Issues between Zoo Atlanta and the surrounding neighborhood include the location of dumpsters at the commissary, in view of surrounding homes, and the use of trailers as temporary housing for Zoo functions. It was noted that most of the temporary trailers have now been removed from the park.
- *Drainage Issues* - The two parking lots create major drainage problems in the park. The Boulevard parking lot floods into the Zoo, particularly when the catch basins have not been kept clean. Storm water and sanitary are combined, making the flooding a serious problem. Past flooding has caused damage to one of the buildings in the Zoo. Drainage from the Cherokee parking lot has caused flooding of the parking lot as well as major flooding in the circular area adjacent to the Plaza. This creates problems with visitor circulation in this area.
- *Sink holes* - Sink holes were noted as another major issue. There are three major sewer lines which run through the park and several sections of that line have collapsed at different times and have resulted in some damage to the Cherokee parking lot. It was noted by the Zoo Atlanta staff that there needs to be a resolution between the City and Zoo Atlanta on recurring issues such as the sink holes to allow a timely response to these problems in the future. In the past, it appears that unneeded time is spent on determining who is responsible for the problem. It is very important that problem issues be addressed expediently, otherwise visitation is impacted.

- *Water Line* - There is a question about the eight-inch water line which serves the Zoo and the Cyclorama. It appears this line may serve other areas of the park. Zoo Atlanta is currently trying to determine the extent of service by this line water line so that cost of water can be shared appropriately.
- *Bus Circulation* - School buses typically enter from Cherokee, travel to the drop-off zone in the circular area at the plaza and park along the loop drive. The Cherokee and Boulevard parking lots are not designed for buses and many times when buses are coming to the bus drop, they queue into the Cherokee parking lot, creating a backup situation.
- *Parking* - Most of the visitors come from I-20 on Boulevard. Zoo Atlanta has the ability to change directions to direct parking to either the Cherokee parking lot or the Boulevard parking lot. A plan has been worked out where overflow parking can be accommodated along Cherokee Street by closing a current travel lane for parking. A parking deck was designed in the location of the current Cherokee parking lot, but the cost and current visitation did not justify that expenditure.

Some of the approaches to address parking shortfalls in the past have included a shuttle from Fulton County Stadium to the park, which did not prove to be successful. There is currently a Marta bus connection (Zoo shuttle) from the Five Point Station, which will be changed in the near future to the West End Station. The staff noted that access to the Zoo through Marta did not seem to be feasible, due to the large number of families that come to the park and the amount of items they are required to bring, such as strollers, food, etc.

Zoo Atlanta spends around \$35,000 a year in managing the parking lots and providing security staff in the parking lots. Security has been and continues to be an issue. The Zone 3 Police Station provides little assistance in the park. It was noted that Zone 3 has the highest rate of crime of any zone in the City, so the Zoo staff expressed an understanding of the many pressures currently on this precinct.

Issues specific to the Boulevard parking lot include problems with illicit activities. It was noted that when Zoo Atlanta provided security to the Boulevard parking lot, the illicit activity moved to the restrooms. One parking plan that has been put into place that appears to be working is to close the upper terraces of the Boulevard block on slow visitation days. This allows one parking aid visibility to the two lower terraces. When the entire lot is opened, it is not feasible for one person to patrol the entire lot. Existing parking now includes over 800 spaces. Zoo Atlanta estimates that 1,500 spaces are needed to adequately address the needs of the park.

Enclosure of the parking lots was suggested as one method of addressing the security issues. Zoo Atlanta expressed a strong desire to have the authority by the City to manage the parking lots.

- *Pedestrian Circulation* - It was noted that there was no clear pedestrian access from the Cherokee parking lot to the Zoo. This creates a safety issue between pedestrians and vehicles.

There has been and continues to be a need for pedestrian circulation around the perimeter of the park. The current placement of the fence enclosure around the Zoo Atlanta tract makes a perimeter trail impossible. Zoo staff expressed a willingness to adjust the fence line if a feasible pathway could be identified.

- *Restroom Facility* - The restroom facility is vandalized quite frequently and for that reason is usually out of order. This results in many of the park visitors trying to find restroom facilities at Zoo Atlanta.
- *Events* - There was a great deal of discussion about events. There appears to be a major communication problem from the City of informing park users (Zoo Atlanta, Cyclorama, and others) of scheduled events. Many of the problems associated with events could be addressed by better communication from those booking the events.

A major issue is the closing of access points and internal drives to the park without adequate notice. The closing of internal streets makes the existing signage incorrect and confuses visitors. There is a "cruising" issue in the park with teenagers riding through the park. It was noted that by closing the streets for the events, the cruising opportunity is removed.

There were also discussions about the conflict with track events and some of the parking problems that are created when sports tournaments are held in the park. It was noted that at other times the ball fields did not create any problems with the park.

There was discussion as to what defined a good event in the park. According to Zoo Atlanta staff, a good event is one that began around three or four o'clock, after the peak visitation times to the Zoo. Some examples of good events were "Church-nick" and the Shakespearean Festival.

It was noted that some events, which were removed from Piedmont Park due to their destruction on this park, have now resulted in the scheduling of more events in Grant Park. It was noted that it would be a much better idea to consider the use of Centennial Park for these high visitation/impact events.

#### **Other Comments Obtained During the Interview:**

In the future, some of the improvement plans now under consideration at Zoo Atlanta include the following: (1) a probable re-working of the reptile building and the incorporation of the animals within the reptile building within a variety of exhibits throughout the park; (2) expansion of the Asian Forest, particularly the addition of an internal service road; (3) the creation of the Okeefeenokee Swamp and Marsh; (4) the creation of an island zone, possibly replicating the Galapagos environment including sea lions and reptiles; (5) a potential reworking of the Children's Zoo with a potential Australian theme, the additional of a carousel comprised of animals that reflect endangered species; (6) an expansion of the rhino area located behind the Cyclorama; (7) improvements to the vet clinic; and (8) a research facility and a quarantine area.

The Zoo staff agreed to review the accreditation standards of the AAZA and share with the master plan team any standards that would specifically apply to the master plan process. This would likely involve parking standards, physical requirements such as fencing and any other kind of required facilities or facility improvements.

The Central Park Zoo in New York City at Central Park was suggested as a potential case study in considering the issue of a Zoo being located in large, urban park areas.

Following the interview, a site inspection of the Zoo was made by the group. A visit was made to the Action Resource Center (ARC). It was noted that this building will have an auditorium to house 250 people, a distance learning studio, an exhibit area, and boardroom and office space. The design of the ARC building has been done in a manner that responded to the neighborhood by the scale and the use of materials in the building. A walk through the park near the Cherokee and Atlanta street intersection at the Zone Three Police Station highlighted problems between the police, Zoo and park maintenance who all have access at this point. A inspection was also made to the Boulevard side of the site to view drainage issues and a former entrance to the Zoo.

**Interest Group:** City of Atlanta  
Recreation Department

**Contact/Interviewees:** Martin Carter, Recreation Director

**Facilities Description:** Mr. Carter is responsible for the management of the tennis courts, ball fields, multi-purpose court and recreation center. These facilities are situated in the northern section of the park.

**Facilities Operation:** Mr. Carter manages these facilities with the assistance of three additional employees.

**Concerns/Comments Related to Grant Park Obtained During the Interview:**

- Recreation Center - Improvements to the gymnasium should be a priority in future work. The gymnasium is on the second floor, so there is an immediate need to address Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) issues. Some of the programs that currently take place at the gym include dance, karate, exercise training & weight lifting, and informal gymnasium use. There are also program sports activities in the gymnasium (winter basketball) and camp programs in the summer for kids.

The gym, according to Mr. Carter, is one of the oldest gymnasiums in use in the City. It appears to have been built in the early 1970's and many of the other gymnasiums built at that time have since been updated by the City or have been lost.

Mr. Carter noted that handball courts are another need that has been expressed by a number of people. The gymnasium weight room is used extensively.

- **Ball fields** - It is desirable to keep the current fields in a multi-purpose arrangement to better serve the community. The fields can be used for soccer, softball, baseball and tee-ball. The fields are extremely overused and require additional maintenance to keep them in good shape. Field maintenance is currently carried out by park staff. In the past, there were more fields and there were also lights. Some of the fields have been removed and the lights are non-functional, due to complaints from the neighborhood.
- **Tennis** - Tennis courts were noted to be substandard. The playing surface is in very poor condition. They are not lighted and there does not appear to be a need for lighting. There has been an increase in roller-blade hockey in the park. There is a need to provide an area for this new activity. Roller-blade hockey currently occurs on the tennis courts, adding to the deterioration of the playing surface.
- **Multi-purpose Courts** - Mr. Carter noted some conflicting feeling about the multi-purpose courts. He noted that the courts are used extensively by the kids in the neighborhood, but problems exist. He said unless there was better policing of this area, he felt that the courts should probably be removed.
- **Parking** - Parking is totally inadequate. There are currently around thirty spaces in the area of the gymnasium and tennis courts. Mr. Carter suggested that ninety spaces would be a more realistic number to provide. There are also break-in and theft issues in parking areas.
- **Events** - There was some discussion of events, but Mr. Carter did not have major problems with events. There are no events held at the ball field area. Any bus access to the park during tournaments typically takes place from the street.

Mr. Carter did note that one of the major event activities that occurs in his area of the park is family reunions. Family reunion groups rent the recreation center because of its kitchen. Some family reunions are very informal events with tents set up in the park on a first come, first serve basis.

- **Restroom Facility** - A restroom facility in this area of the park was removed, but there is a severe need to replace it.
- There is also a need for a jogging trail in the park.



**Interest Group:** Cyclorama

**Contact Person/Interviewee:** Ms. Pauline Smith

**Facility Description:** The Atlanta Cyclorama is owned and operated by the City of Atlanta and managed by the Bureau of Cultural Affairs within the Department of Parks and Recreation. This 30,000 square foot building is the home of the world's largest painting, the 1884 Cyclorama painting "The Battle of Atlanta." The painting has been owned by the City and located in Grant Park since 1898. The current building was constructed in 1921 and renovated several times.

In addition to the painting, this two story 30,000 square foot facility includes a 185 seat theater, the locomotive "Texas" (hero of the Great Train Race), numerous Civil War displays and a book store and gift shop.

**Facility Operation:** The Cyclorama conducts tours every thirty minutes between the hours of 9:30 am and 4:30 pm during the fall and winter seasons, and remains open until 5:30 pm in the spring and summer months. Evenings, the facility is rented for private meetings, receptions and dinners.

The facility has approximately 250,000 visitors annually. Approximately one-third of the visitors represent school groups that visit primarily from March to May, one-third of the visitors represent tourists, and the remaining one-third are local residents and other groups. The facility is primarily self-sustaining, and has resources for fifteen staff persons.

**Concerns/Comments Related to Grant Park Obtained during the Interview are as follows:**

- During the recent sidewalk project, an older sidewalk was removed that connected the east parking area at Boulevard to the area near the Cyclorama. This walk was heavily used, and a dirt/gravel path still remains somewhat visible. Visitors are continuing to use this path for access to the facility, and have been tracking dirt into the exhibit. It was suggested that signs be provided at the parking area to direct people to the proper sidewalk/access location, or that the sidewalk be replaced.
- Disruption to operations is evident during large events at the park. Of particular concern is the timing of the events, and the closing of the gates to block the driveway access points throughout the park without notice. In addition, it was noted that the gates are slow to reopen. It was indicated that the largest of the concerts/events that have historically been held at Grant Park will be moved to other locations such as Centennial or Piedmont Parks.
- Access and signs is of concern. Most of the traffic gains access from Boulevard from I-20. The need for more/better signs at Berne and Park Avenue was indicated.
- Five employees had damage to automobiles during a severe rain event where flooding occurred in the 'circular parking area' in front of the Cyclorama.

**Other Comments Obtained during the Interview are as follows:**

- It was mentioned that one of the cannons from the historic Fort Walker site resides somewhere at City Hall East.
- Future expansion of the building may be considered to provide a location for exhibits.

**Interest Group:**

**Park Maintenance**

**Contact Person/Interviewee:**

**Mr. Steve Waller**

**Facility Description:** The Parks Maintenance Department has a maintenance building and yard on the southern end of Grant Park between Zoo Atlanta and Atlanta Avenue.

**Facility Operation:** Mr. Steve Waller is the District Manager for the Southeast Park District for the City of Atlanta. (Lisa Parks is the Supervisor for Grant Park.) He has responsibility over approximately fifty-five employees and oversees 800-900 acres of park lands. Currently, there are three full time persons working in Grant Park with some part time staff also. There are currently eight vacancies for full time Grant Park staff. Grant Park hours are generally from 6:00 am to 11:00 pm daily.

For maintenance, a two man team mows the park grass over a three to five day period. A seven member trash pick-up crew works on weekends and holidays for 12 hours per day to collect trash left by park visitors. Chemical controls (Roundup) are used to kill weeds and grass around the base of trees and other areas. The primary reason for the use of chemicals is the lack of equipment ("weed eaters"), or equipment in poor repair, and the lack of staff members. The City Forester will cut down larger trees, but needs some 'prodding' to come out. The entire park is swept weekly.

The park contains concerts which begin as early as April and run through October, with approximately 2 events per month. Event attendance is estimated to be 20,000 for average gatherings, with over 100,000 attending large concerts. School field trips start in September and continue throughout the school year.

**Concerns/Comments Related to Grant Park Obtained during the Interview are as follows:**

- A major concern is the continually poor drainage throughout the park. While specific catch basins and locations were indicated, they are too numerous to accurately depict in text. It is fair to say that approximately 80% of the park has poor drainage due to clogged inlets or pipes, collapsed pipes, eroded/washed out structures or pipes, or other reasons. A map detailing drainage and erosion problems can be found in the report for this project.

Park visitors are continually dumping hot coals at the base of trees. Charcoal collection and recycling efforts have not worked in the past.

- The Pavilions that are rented to visitors generate approximately \$15,000 per year. The money collected goes to the general fund for the City of Atlanta. The Southeast Parks District has an annual allowance of only \$30,000/year for supplies such as grass and benches for the entire district. Large capital improvements are paid through a special fund. The Southeast Parks District has received grant money from the Department of Agriculture for projects in the past which have supplied "native plant materials." Mr. Waller often finds himself asking for materials from locations undergoing construction such as boulders, mulch, plant materials, or through the donation of materials from outside sources, such as Pikes Nursery which has donated items in the past.
- There has been no water or power to the 'picnic shelters' for 10 years or so. The power and water lines still exist. One shelter was destroyed when a tree fell on it. Another currently has no good access. He would like to see more picnic shelters added.
- Curb jumping is a problem that tears grass and plant materials. He suggested the use of larger curbing as in other parks.
- There are no handrails on the stairs at the upper parking lots along Boulevard, and there need to be better ways for people to get from the upper parking lots along Cherokee. Currently, there is poor access, and people are cutting down the embankment and killing grass and eroding the soil.
- The Fort Walker historic site needs upkeep/maintenance on the access road. There is little remaining to distinguish that the site exists. He would like to see the site renewed and opened.
- Steve would like to see some benches in the small grass area in the parking lot out in front of the Cyclorama parking area where lots of people stand while waiting to be picked up.
- Steve indicated that he would like to see the Fountain near the entrance on Cherokee across from Georgia Avenue restored. He noted the lack of maintenance on the drainage ditches (natural and man made) throughout the park. He wondered if it may be possible to somehow store water and circulate it through the drainage way (roughly running along Cherokee) to restore the water feature, and somehow also provide stormwater control.
- Steve has concerns over the maintenance of an area along Cherokee near the north end of the park which constantly remains wet. He indicated he would like to see the area dry.
- Manpower shortage is a major concern due to the intense maintenance associated with the park. He views their approach as reactive rather than proactive due to staff/equipment limitations. There is no equipment maintenance program, and he sees no real master plan for the park at this time.