

Metro Hearing on Oregon Zoo Bond Measure

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Final Vote on the Oregon Zoo Off-Site Elephant Preserve 3.1 Resolution No. 16-4683

Janet Markley

I'm Janet Markley and I live at [REDACTED] in Portland, and I've been back to Portland for a one year now and I am so appalled and aghast at because I had seen your advertising. It called for a sanctuary not a place we can have more elephants. You guys lied, maybe not you in particular, but it was false advertising. Then when the ballot came everybody had already decided what they were going to do they wanted sanctuary for the elephants and then you come up with this. You should all be ashamed.

Metro

Thank you.

Catherine Barshaw 00:00:45

My name is Catherine Barshaw and I live at [REDACTED] in Portland. So I think I have some supporting documents which you all have that might answer some of the questions you just brought up. I have 9 examples which demonstrate that voters were made to believe that by voting in support of the bond, a remote elephant reserve would be built.

Example number one: An Oregon Zoo document from the public record dated spring of 2008, along with other zoo bond projects planned, it lists an off-site elephant center with project costs of \$13 million.

Example number two: An article published in *The Oregonian* on April 30, 2008, in which the Oregon Zoo Director Tony Vecchio (thank you) discusses the zoo bond and states that the planned off-site reserve would allow the elephants greater range.

Example number three: An article published in *The Oregonian* on May 9, 2008, titled "Metro Council OK's Bond Measure to Overhaul Oregon Zoo." It states: "Five acres would be added to the elephant compound giving them much more room and natural features to explore. Plans also call for buying a much larger off-site preserve for elephants."

(00:02:03) Example number four: A document from the public record dated May 29, 2008 entitled "New Elephant Exhibit and Off-Site Asian Elephant Facility Meeting." It states that

Mike Keele, the former elephant keeper, stated that the purpose of this meeting is to start brainstorming everything that might be needed should construction of an off-site facility and renovation of the on-site facility be approved through the upcoming zoo bond measure. It goes on to list ideas and considerations involving the off-site facility.

Example number five: An article published in *The Oregonian* dated June 22, 2008, which states zoo leaders will ask Metro area voters this November to approve a bond that would quadruple the size of the elephant exhibit and set aside \$12 million for an off-site elephant facility somewhere in the region. Further quoting Vecchio, "In an ideal world," Vecchio says, "the zoo's primary elephant facility would be off site and the elephants would visit their improved 6-acre home onsite.

Another article published both in *The Oregonian* and *Portland Tribune* quotes, "Tony Vecchio is declaring that would be living in an off-site reserve by his 50th birthday.

(00:03:17) Example number six: An article published in *The Oregonian* on August 26, 2008, entitled "Weighing the Zoo Bond Measure," states in November, "the region's voters will decide whether to support \$125 million bond measure that includes \$30 million to expand the zoo's cramped elephant quarters. In addition, the money would go towards creation of an **off-site elephant reserve** where animals could do more of what they do in the wild. It goes on, "We have to find another way to do it," Zoo Director Vecchio admitted in June with admiral candor, "or we'll need to be thinking about getting out of the elephant business."

(00:03:56) Example number seven: An article published in *The Oregonian* on October 16, 2008 entitled "Elephants Take Lead in the Zoo Bond Hopes," states another \$12 million is potentially earmarked to equip an off-site elephant reserve with a barn, care facilities, and fencing. In Vecchio's vision, most of the elephants would spend time at the reserve and individuals would be trucked to the zoo for special occasions.

Example number 8: An editorial published in *The Oregonian* on November 4, 2008 entitled "Metro Zoo Bond Passes," states about \$19 million is earmarked to expand the elephant exhibit at the zoo to 6 acres from 1.5 acres, an additional \$12 million is intended to equip an off-site elephant reserve with barn, care facilities and fencing.

And the final example, example number nine in an editorial published November 15th 2008 and *The Oregonian* entitled "How Did the Oregon Zoo Do It?" states, "During a serious economic downturn, no less, the zoo persuaded voters to upgrade quarters for some decidedly non-native species: Hippos, Monkeys, Polar Bears, and Asian Elephants. Even more astonishing about 10% of the \$125 million bond measure will likely go towards creating 100 to 150 acre off-site elephant reserve."

(00:05:13) So this is just a partial representation of what the paper and other organizations were saying during that time. So, I do believe the fact because I'm a 5th generation native Oregonian, 4th-generation Portlander, and I was here during 2008, and I voted on that because I believed that it was going to they have an off-site facility for the elephants. And most of the people that I've talked to also believe that. They're all kind of shocked that this is being taken off—off the table. They feel like they've kind of had a little bait-and-switch done on them and I thank you for listening to me.

Metro

Thank You. Ah Doug.

Doug 00:05:58

For the record my name is Doug Steve's. Council President, members of the council I am here today for myself and as a citizen steward to the elephants to voice my concerns, my opinions relating to the elephants at the zoo and resolution number 16-4683.

It is my belief that the \$7.1 million of the original 12 is not going to be used in good faith for the promised off-site elephant facility. It should be used as a spirit of that promise to transport Packy and as many of the other elephants as possible to one of the U.S. sanctuaries such as PAWS.

Now I voted for the bond measure in 2008, but I feel like it was a mistake. I thought the AZA and the Oregon Zoo stood for actual conservation and education related to the elephants and I was wrong.

To all our council members you already heard the many issues at the Oregon Zoo, those raised by citizens coming in repeatedly to council meetings to call your attention to them. And while I won't go into detail on that I think you would agree having an Oregon Zoo baby elephant contractually owned by a company that rents animals for entertainment purposes is an interesting take on the word conservation and the idea of breeding for conservation.

00:06:54 See, I hear facts like that I feel misled by all the words of self praise from the zoo regarding its world-class status and the words from nearly blindly supportive Oregonian newspaper articles, which frankly, read more like advertisements. And I heard the Metro Council meetings, now I heard citizen complaints followed by praise for the zoo and then I heard citizen evidence of unhealthy practices with the elephants followed by praise for the zoo.

00:07:18 This is the forum for the zoo for people to express their concerns, with regards to the zoo, with the body of people with the power to impact what happens and I genuinely don't think dissenting opinions regarding the zoo and its practices are truly heard. I'm not anti-zoo, I am pro-elephant. I care about their health and well-being as much, if not more, than many of the board members who profess the same.

So it's frustrating when there are genuine and valid concerns from the public that demand detailed response and instead receive empty words to pacify and dismiss and distract. The people voicing their concerns don't deserve to be marginalized or dismissed, no matter the way they

deliver the message. We're all stewards, even if the financial decisions lie with our elected officials.

And there is a pressing need for more ethical actions on the part of the zoo and the AZA, for the council to not just rubber-stamp approvals. We need you. But we also need more visibility and information. Now the council's informed the public about how the zoo allows for the very best possible care of the elephants. I don't understand the position because I'm not clear from the council on what the input is based on and why the council believes it. What facts, what experts, what organizations does the council look to? Are they all from the Oregon Zoo or AZA-accredited facilities or do any of them provide a strong contrary point of view to challenge what people think that they know?

00:08:24 What does conservation for elephants mean to the council in practical terms? What are your measurables for success like with Elephant Land and how have you shared that with the public? What are your risk management plans if you don't meet your measurables?

The stories of meeting people who love the zoo are nice but they're not evidence confirming the well-being and care of the elephants. Neither is referenced to Lily running around Elephant Land. Children play in the most poverty-stricken situations whether human or baby elephant. Please consider this. Maybe an inability to see how anyone could see it differently is part of the problem here. How does citizens and council get past monologues and engage in viable dialogue? How can anyone who has a contrary, yet strong and science-fact-based opinion have any chance of changing your minds or influencing your opinion if how you come to your decisions is not made clear to the public?

00:09:13 It makes a citizen wonder what they have to do in order to gather the conscious attention of elected officials. Thank you.

Metro

Thank you.

Kimberly Turner

Hello my name is Kimberly Turner, and this is my first time speaking in your presence. I felt compelled to do so because a great injustice has been done to the elephants at the Oregon Zoo and to the community.

I personally live in Vancouver, Washington but I was optimistic that the preserve would be created, although I was unable to vote for it, I was well aware and I supported it. All of my family and several of my friends call this beautiful city home. When they heard that the preserve was not actually going to take place they were heartbroken. They felt as though the elephants had been let down.

They remember voting on this bond and felt a better future for the elephants was in store. Now they are asking why. They want to know where the money's going, and they feel deceived and they feel lied to. I, too, wanted the preserve and feel let down. The community that you call home feels let down. It was meant as a place for retirement for the elephants so they no longer

have to be on display simply for the dollar signs on their heads. It's clear that you are proud of the zoo habitat that you've created but its not enough. I implore you to educate yourselves on the needs of the elephants and then you will truly understand just how important the preserve really was.

And, excuse me, I'm a little nervous so forgive me.

Metro

You're doing great.

Kimberly Turner

I would also like to respond to a couple things that were said. One of them being, um...it was mentioned that there was a task force...I am an elephant ambassador for the Tennessee Elephant Sanctuary and I gave you the newsletter when I came, I believe it was January 14, and I hope that you all took a look at it because if, to me, if there's going to be a task force put together it should be people like that who have already put together a successful sanctuary for the elephants.

And as far as them being able to roam free, they have 2700 acres to roam on so on the days when its cold they go into the barn which is heated by the rainwater and they are able to go out on the nice days and roam around so that they are staying healthy that their legs and their feet, um, aren't having problems that they have when they're just standing in stalls or very small confinement. Thank you very much.

Metro 00:11:54

Thank you.

Nancy Shaw

Good afternoon, my name is Nancy Shaw. I live in Vancouver. This is the testimony from Balla Sashay SayYe from Portland. It's unfortunate that Metro decides to hold its public testimony at a time it's inconvenience most for the working people who have to sacrifice work if they want to be heard. And yet, we continue to give these testimonies.

We have seen the charade a number of times, Any criticism of the zoo by us is met with a blanket statement that you love the elephants. End of story. You refuse to make public the elephant's vet records, and demand obscene fees to answer any questions we put forth. Your lack of respect for the public was demonstrated by your staff Jim Middaugh who bullied a reporter on camera for trying to ask a question and faced no consequence for his offensive behavior.

00:13:04 You have no respect for anything promised in the zoo bond measure as demonstrated by the off-site reserve cancellation. And yet, we continue to give these testimonies only for one reason: we want to register our objections as records for the next generation. When they judge us harshly for exploiting intelligent animals for money and cheaply calling it conservation, we want them to know that many of us stood on the right side of history and demanded changing of the system, unlike their cynical bureaucrats who profited from suffering.

And I just want to say that Elephant Lands started out as a retirement area so now I'm glad it's not going to be built because they're planning on breeding there. That was never the understanding of the public and um, talking about the committee that represented...all the back-slapping and back handing is ridiculous, I could have been on there. A CEO who builds buildings knows nothing about elephants and what they need. And I always just want to let you know that.

00:14:37 And one of the last times I was at the zoo and I've asked you before when the last time you were there, I've asked about 60 people did they go look at the warthogs and three people said yes and I know one was lying because I said what side of the zoo are they on and that is my challenge to you. The next time you go to the zoo, go look at the warthogs.

No name

Um...I had the good fortune to go to South Africa as a volunteer to study wild elephants and work with scientists who were conserving them so from that experience um, I view the zoo from a different perspective than I view and observe the elephants here and with the disturbing and troubling kind of conditions that the elephants live in, in their restricted environment I chose to go to a preserve, one of the two highly reputable preserves in U.S. – the performing animal welfare society (PAWS) and I brought pictures I would like you to see.

It's the kind of thing that you and the zoo were hoping to create as a solution and I just want to say that I think we all will fail to truly preserve and protect these elephants if the preserve is abandoned. What I found in nature is that elephants forage on natural substrate, on trees and grasses, they move in herds, very complex social units, and they move 18-30 miles a day. The zoo simply cannot or will not...it's just impossible for them to provide those kinds of conditions for elephants.

00:16:41 As a result they have suffered, and they have disease and they have foot problems and those foot problems cause premature death which I'm sure you're aware of, two of our elephants died from bone fragility and from serious foot and arthritic disease so that is one of the things we encounter with elephants in zoos.

But Packy, and a majority if not all of the elephants are also suffering from severe psychological distress and what children and sometimes parents think is frivolous and funny when an animal bobs and moves back and forth for hours on end really with vacant stares found that you have severe psychological damage to animals so how do you find a solution to this and what I would propose is that you put this preserve on hold and not to abandon it but to consider building it whether its now or ten years from now. And it will provide the space in the natural living area that such a preserve is known for and PAWS, this Performing Animal Welfare Society and it will have a positive impact on rehabilitation and recovery of our known system of elephants.

00:18:17