



CONTACT:

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

3/4/2021

email savereidpark@gmail.org.
www.savetheheartofreidpark.org

SAVE THE HEART OF REID PARK RELEASES WHITE PAPER WITH CLEAR EVIDENCE THAT REID PARK ZOO PROCESS WAS DEEPLY FLAWED. HEARTFELT THANKS TO MAYOR REGINA ROMERO FOR SEEING THIS AND CALLING FOR A PAUSE TO THE DESTRUCTION OF BARNUM HILL AND THE SOUTH DUCK POND IN REID PARK

TUCSON, AZ, MARCH 4TH, 2021 – The members of Save the Heart of Reid Park extend our heartfelt thanks and deep appreciation to Mayor Regina Romero for recognizing that the process of zoo expansion has been deeply flawed and calling for an immediate pause in construction and establishment of an inclusive process to evaluate other options for Reid Park Zoo. Save the Heart of Reid Park is issuing a white paper of the research that the group has done on public process.

Both Reid Park and the Reid Park Zoo are resources that belong to the people of Tucson. They are managed in trust by the City of Tucson municipal government, which has chosen the Reid Park Zoological Society to manage the zoo for the people of Tucson.

To destroy the mature tree canopy on Barnum Hill, removing it from low-income Tucson families' access, to make it into a zoo attraction, would be an environmental and social injustice against our community.

In 2014 the Reid Park Zoological Society developed the "Central Area Master Plan Reid Park Zoo 2014," in which they described their plan to enlarge the Reid Park Zoo, decrease the size of Reid Park, destroy the trees on Barnum Hill and build a zoo enclosure there. They chose not to include that in the ballot they presented to voters.

The Society claims to have held 100 meetings presenting this plan in 2018 and 2019, after the vote. Our white paper will show you that they did not hold 100 meetings involving the public but worked with a very small, select group of people, most of whom were affiliated with the zoo. No matter how many meetings were held in 2018 and 2019 they had no effect on what the voters voted for in 2017. Moreover, the CEO of the Society told SHRP on November 14th, 2020, that she had spoken mostly with groups that invited her to speak. "That's not the same as getting the word out to everyone," she said. She later shared a list of 136 meetings. None was advertised to the public as a discussion of whether or not to decrease the size of Reid Park, destroy the landscape and trees of Barnum Hill or remove the south duck pond from Tucson families' access. Eighty of the meetings were one-on-one meetings with individuals, including corporate representatives and government officials but the RPZS would not share details of those meetings. The groups that received presentations were zoo donors, zoo members, and zoo volunteers as well as Rotary

Clubs, Lions Clubs and the Attractions Alliance, of which the Reid Park Zoological Society is a member.

In issuing her eloquent statement Mayor Romero leads the people of Tucson toward a win-win solution. Save the Heart of Reid Park respectfully requests a community-wide public stakeholder process and that a trusted non-profit community mediation organization be invited to mediate this process to help ensure that everyone participating in the conversation can be heard and understood. We also ask that the City of Tucson's robust community outreach resources be employed to make sure the invitation to be part of community dialog events gets out to everyone who would like to participate.

We also respectfully request that all proposed alternatives be examined, and that this process follow the City of Tucson's legal policy for public outreach, as set forth in Plan Tucson and the Open Meeting Laws, as well as following the guidelines of the Commission for the Accreditation of Park and Recreation Associations (CAPRA) guidelines. We also request that a public review and update of the Reid Park Master Plan be included in this process.

In her recent statement, Mayor Romero reminded the Tucson community that "[t]he ballot language approved by voters in 2017 was 'to fund capital improvements, operations, and maintenance,' and did not mention expansion."

Would it be legal to enlarge the zoo with funds that were approved for something that wasn't on the ballot?

The words of the propositions are plain and unambiguous. Both the Reid Park Zoological Society and the City of Tucson have acknowledged that "capital improvements" is separate from "land expansion" as set out in the management contract they signed. Again, in approving Props 202 & 203 the voters indicated that their will was "to fund capital improvements, operations, and maintenance." Enlarging the zoo is outside that set of purposes.

Prop 203 passed by only 633 votes. A large number of voters who voted "yes" on this proposition in 2017 understood the funds were to be used to improve the zoo as it stood when they voted, and to operate and maintain it. Nearly 300 people have delivered sworn statements to us saying they would have voted no on Props 202 and 203 if the sponsors of those props had said they were planning to use the money to expand the zoo into Reid Park.

Our goal is to "right" a process that has wronged the Tucson community, and to save a very special natural habitat that is prized by city-dwellers, migratory birds, and the animals who live there. We deeply appreciate what difficult decisions Mayor and Council have before them. In this opportunity for community dialog created by Mayor Romero through her decision to pause the destruction of Barnum Hill and the south duck pond, we stand by Mayor and Council to help create a collaborative, sustainable plan for Reid Park and stronger natural environments in all our Tucson parks.