

# White Paper in Support of Halting Expansion of Reid Park Zoo onto Barnum Hill and the South Duck

Save the Heart of Reid Park  
[www.savetheheartofreidpark.org](http://www.savetheheartofreidpark.org)

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## Executive Summary

Save the Heart of Reid Park (SHRP) respectfully requests that the Mayor and Council immediately put a halt to the zoo expansion that would destroy the current landscape of Barnum Hill and the south duck pond, and that they examine other alternatives to alleviate current over-crowding in the Reid Park Zoo. In addition, we are asking that Mayor and Council (not the Reid Park Zoological Society or an outside contractor such as Shultz and Williams) direct the staff of the Tucson Parks and Recreation Department to implement a public process to look at all proposed alternatives, and that this process follow the City of Tucson's policy for public outreach, as set forth in Plan Tucson and in the Commission for the Accreditation of Park and Recreation Associations (CAPRA) guidelines. Included in this process needs to be a public review/update of **the Reid Park Master Plan.**

SHRP, a recently incorporated not-for-profit, coalesced in November 2020 when a group of inner-city residents and park goers first discovered that the City of Tucson (the City) had allowed the Reid Park Zoological Society (the Society) to make plans for enlarging the Reid Park Zoo onto 3.5 acres of the park's most treasured open space. The word spread like wildfire on social media and within weeks thousands of people had signed a petition to halt the proposed destruction of Barnum Hill and the south duck pond. Within months that number had grown to 30,000 outraged folks who couldn't understand how such a thing could happen without anyone hearing about it or being able to voice their objections.

The City and the Reid Park Zoological Society have insisted all along that nothing was ever hidden from the public, as well as:

- 1.) That people voted for this project; and
- 2.) That 100 meetings were held, with the implication that these were public meetings
- 3.) That the majority of people in 100 + meetings supported this project. (See City Manager's 1/29/21 memo)

Save the Heart of Reid Park disagrees. After four months of combing through hundreds of City and Society documents to get to the bottom of how Barnum Hill and the duck pond could've gotten on the chopping block with so few surrounding neighborhoods and no park goers knowing about it, our research proves:

- 1.) Clearly the voters had no access to explicit information—either before the election or on the ballot—saying that a “yes” vote on Prop 203 would mean

the destruction of Barnum Hill and the south duck pond—though the Zoological Society had intended to accomplish just that since 2014. What voters said “yes” to was funding Zoo “capital improvements, operations, maintenance,” along with “free zoo admission for reserved school groups.” Also, in April 2015, in speaking about upcoming Zoo improvements, a narrator for Tucson City News in Review stated that “the project would not expand the footprint of the Zoo,” and Zoo administrator Jason Jacobs added, “At this point we’re looking at renovating structures within the zoo for the next 10 to 15 years.” There were no townhalls or public hearings on any proposed changes to the Reid Park Master Plan, to help insure that the public knew what they were voting for. And even if a Tucson resident could access the right link online, the Reid Park Zoo Master Plan was not available through the City of Tucson website.

- 2.) The general public, the real stakeholders for the Park, were kept in the dark about the proposed destruction of Barnum Hill and the duck pond. As you’ll find in this document, the Reid Park Zoological Society communicated with its own stakeholders about this proposed plan. No meeting notices explicitly citing the destruction of Barnum Hill and the south duck pond were ever posted in or around the park. The only outreach to surrounding neighborhoods, described by the Reid Park Zoo Project Manager in a Nov. 14<sup>th</sup>, 2020, meeting with SHRP, as the Zoo’s “big push in communicating to the public,” was a Nov. 2019 Open House that was announced to the public as an opportunity to learn about proposed Reid Park bond projects—“new splash pad, new playground, DeMeester Outdoor Performance Center improvements, walking path improvements”—and the Zoo Master Plan. 32 people left comment cards. Clearly most residents did not connect the aforementioned plan with the destruction of anything in Reid Park.

In the end very little public debate was heard. At the one public open house there were no public officials to answer questions. There was nothing on the Reid Park Zoo or City of Tucson website directly related to land use changes in Reid Park—i.e. the destruction of Barnum Hill and the duck pond. Yet clearly when Councilmember Kozachik spoke about the proposed expansion in 2017, he knew that the loss of Barnum Hill and the duck pond would have a heavy impact on the community: *“The geography of the expansion needs to be nailed down with some specificity.[....] That’s not a trivial detail since it impacts public open space now being heavily used.”*

In research going back to 2014, SHRP can find no meeting advertised as a discussion of the removal of Barnum Hill and the duck pond from Reid Park, and a change in the land use of this area from parkland to zoo usage. In fact, no mention of changing the **Reid Park Master Plan** has been found at all.

SHRP has never wanted to harm the Reid Park Zoo. Many of us are zoo members ourselves and/or voted in 2017 to increase funds to improve the Reid Park Zoo and the lives of all animals therein.

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 urbanites, native critters, and migratory birds alike. We deeply appreciate what a difficult decision you have before you. Please know that when you decide to halt the destruction of Barnum Hill and the south duck pond, we are ready to stand by you, and, going forward, to help create a more sustainable vision for Reid Park and stronger natural environments in all our City parks.

#### Current Situation:

- Starting in 2014 the Reid Park Zoological Society had documented plans to expand into Reid Park and did not let the voters know. There is evidence this plan had germinated as early as 2012.
- No public hearings on the Reid Park Master Plan and the Reid Park Zoo Master Plan as outlined in Open Meetings laws and Plan Tucson have been held.
- The area of Barnum Hill and the south duck pond constitute 3.5 acres of public open green space. The plans to destroy the tree canopy on Barnum Hill were made pre-COVID. With the COVID pandemic green spaces have become absolutely crucial. They are non-negotiable in cities and they cannot be taken away.
- In September 2020 the Tucson city council called a climate emergency for Tucson, described as the 2nd hottest city in the US, and said the city government would proactively follow global climate conventions even though the US as a whole was not doing so. One of Tucson's climate-related policies is to maximize tree canopy. There is also a "plant a million trees" campaign. Another policy is that in a power outage during Tucson summer, which can exceed 115 degrees F, if air conditioning fails Tucsonans should go to the nearby park to seek the heat mitigation relief provided by tree canopy. The proposed destruction of the mature tree canopy on Barnum Hill and taking this area away from Tucson families in a Latino area to make it into a zoo attraction is an issue of social and environmental injustice.
- Propositions 202 and 203 funded “capital improvements, operations and maintenance” as well as “free zoo admission for reserved school groups.” The language of the initiative is plain and unambiguous. Nowhere in the propositions is there any mention of expanding the zoo, and the 2018 document “Reid Park Zoo Management Agreement between the City of Tucson and the Reid Park Zoological Society,” which both of the parties named in the title have signed, lists “capital improvements” as a separate item from “land expansion,” so both parties have indicated that they understand that “capital improvements” is not the same thing as “land expansion.” We’ve been told by election law attorneys that it is unlikely that a court would resort to extraneous information to interpret this language. The following is from a 2019 case interpreting an initiative: “When interpreting a statute, courts first look to the statute’s plain language as ‘the most reliable indicator of its meaning.’”

- The Reid Park Zoological Society spent \$2 million dollars of the public's money for a purpose that falls outside the uses for which the funds were designated by the will of the voters as expressed in their approval of Propositions 202 & 203, 2017, Tucson City Election, i.e. architectural plans for an expansion of Reid Park Zoo onto Barnum Hill and the south duck pond area which would involve changing the land use of this part of Reid Park from parkland to zoo, a change that has not been properly noticed or carried out according to Plan Tucson and the Arizona Open Meetings Laws. In addition to the fact that commissioning these plans does not constitute a proper purpose for these funds, they are based on a concept for which no thorough process for seeking public input was carried out.
- The outreach concerning the planned expansion of the Reid Park Zoo onto Barnum Hill was entirely led by the Reid Park Zoological Society. On November 14<sup>th</sup>, 2020, Nancy Kluge, CEO of the Reid Park Zoological Society, said in a meeting with members of Save the Heart of Reid Park that the Reid Park Zoological Society plan to create a zoo attraction on 3.5 acres Barnum Hill was not made until 2018, the year after the 2017 vote on Propositions 202 & 203 regarding funding for the Reid Park Zoo, and that her outreach began in that year. On November 20<sup>th</sup>, 2020, Ward 6 council member Steve Kozachik wrote that the Reid Park Zoological Society had been doing outreach on the Reid Park Zoo Master Plan since 2014.
- Neighborhood Associations around Reid Park have written a letter to Tucson's Mayor & Council asking for a halt to the above plan in order for there to be a public process, as have thousands of Tucsonans.