

# Forests for All Experience, Woodland Park Zoo

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**Vinita Sidhu**, Chair

**Elaine Wine**, Vice Chair

**Matt Aalfs**

**Adam Amrhein**

**Erica Bush**

**Elizabeth Conner**

**Jill Crary**

**Amalia Leighton-Cody**

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**Commissioners Present**

Vinita Sidhu, Chair

Elaine Wine, Vice Chair

Matt Aalfs

Adam Amrhein

Erica Bush

Elizabeth Conner

Jill Crary

Amalia Leighton-Cody

Puja Shaw

Molly Spetalnick

**Commissioners Excused**

Adam Amrhein (9:00-11:20 am)

Matt Aalfs (periodic absence due to  
technical failures)

**Staff Present**

Michael Jenkins

Valerie Kinast

Windy Gay

Juliet Acevedo

Elander Steyn

**Recusals and Disclosures**

Adam Amrhein is recused.

**Project Description**

Woodland Park Zoo is proposing to redevelop a 1.2-acre site within the Zoo's gated area for a new exhibit - Forests for All. Until 2016, the site was the location of the Zoo's Day and Night Exhibits. The structure housing those exhibits suffered significant fire damage and is not longer operable. The new Forests for All exhibit will expand Woodland Park Zoo's efforts to highlight global conservation.

The site is located just east of the West Entrance and the Penguin Exhibit, along the main loop trail (*see Figure 1*). The goal of the design concept is to motivate visitors to conservation action.

**Meeting Summary**

This is the Seattle Design Commission's (SDC) first review of the Forests for All project. The purpose of this meeting was to review the concept design phase (30% design) for the project. The SDC voted 7-0 to approve the concept design for the Forests for All with several recommendations. The project will be reviewed again at the schematic design phase (60% design) and the design development (90% design) phases.

**Summary of Presentation**

The Woodland Park Zoo and their project designers presented information about their history as an innovator in zoo development and design. They explained the innovative approach to the new Forests for All exhibit and the goals of the project. The vision of the project is to

- create a social movement for conservation;
- reframe the zoo experience around conservation;
- facilitate empathy-building experiences with unique animals that receive extraordinary care
- and facilitate a flexible, long-term framework.

**May 5, 2022**

9:00 am - 3:05 pm

**Project Type**

CIP

**Phase**

concept design

**Previous Reviews**

none

**Presenters****Katie Bang**

Woodland Park Zoo

**Osama Quotah**

LMN Architects

**Jennifer DuHamel**

LMN Architects

**Scott Crawford**

LMN Architects

**Lara Rose**

Walker Mercy

**Gregg Leicester**

CLR Design

**Attendees****Sheri Horiszny**

Woodland Park Zoo

**Mario Madayag**

Walker Macy

**Sarah Valentine**

Woodland Park Zoo



Figure 1: Project location.

An organizing value for the design team is that the site, and the larger Woodland Park Zoo, are located on the lands of Indigenous peoples who have been and continue to be the stewards of this place.

The theme of forests was chosen as an organizing principal for the exhibit because of their importance in solving that climate change challenge and their relevance to the Pacific Northwest. A geographic biome will not be created, but instead forests in general are the guiding typology. The site is currently forested with several exceptional trees, as defined by the City of Seattle (see Figure 2). These trees will provide the basis for developing a larger forest system where the story of the symbiosis of various organisms, animals, and people are experienced and managed. Besides the forest floor level, visitors will be invited into the below ground level as well as into the tree canopy.

The exhibit will be designed to be participatory in nature, assisted by technology, to inspire action in climate change and social justice. It is intended to link with other exhibits and the zoo and connect outward into the Pacific Northwest region (see Figure 3). A thematic connection is also intended to be made with forested lands and people in Papua New Guinea.

The project team explained their plan for outreach and the emphasis on facilitating design participation of underrepresented groups including the local Indigenous communities. It builds on extensive conversations in focus groups with zoo staff (including animal keepers), volunteers, and international zoo and aquarium leaders. The project team is working extensively with the Indigenous community members in recognition of their role as stewards of the place.

The context of the site within the zoo was presented. The site sits on the main loop trail east of the West Entry and penguin exhibit, south of the Meadow, west of the Banyan Wilds exhibit, and north of the Tropical Rainforest.

The designers described the way habitat will be developed for the experience of animals, guests, and workers. They presented story boards with conceptual ideas that aim to achieve the goals of weaving animal and staff environments with guest areas to create a dynamic environment for visitors. One concept is to place stations and hubs for feeding and monitoring in a way that animals, guests, and staff can all circulate to them. Another concept was presented where “conservation commerce” would provide a place for guests to gather and linger within a forest settings, near the animal habitat. Another concept would provide guests with a covered seating area surrounded by habitat where animals could sequence in and out by choice (see Figure 4). No preferred concept was presented.

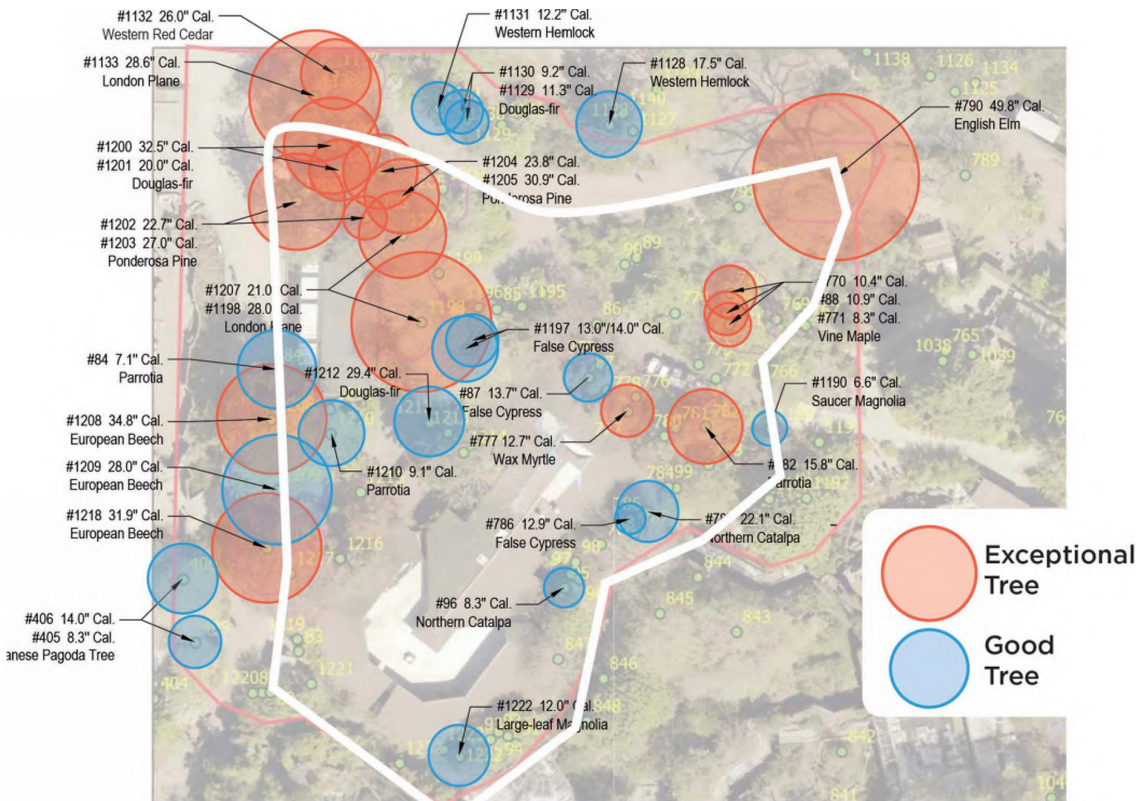


Figure 2: Exceptional trees on-site.

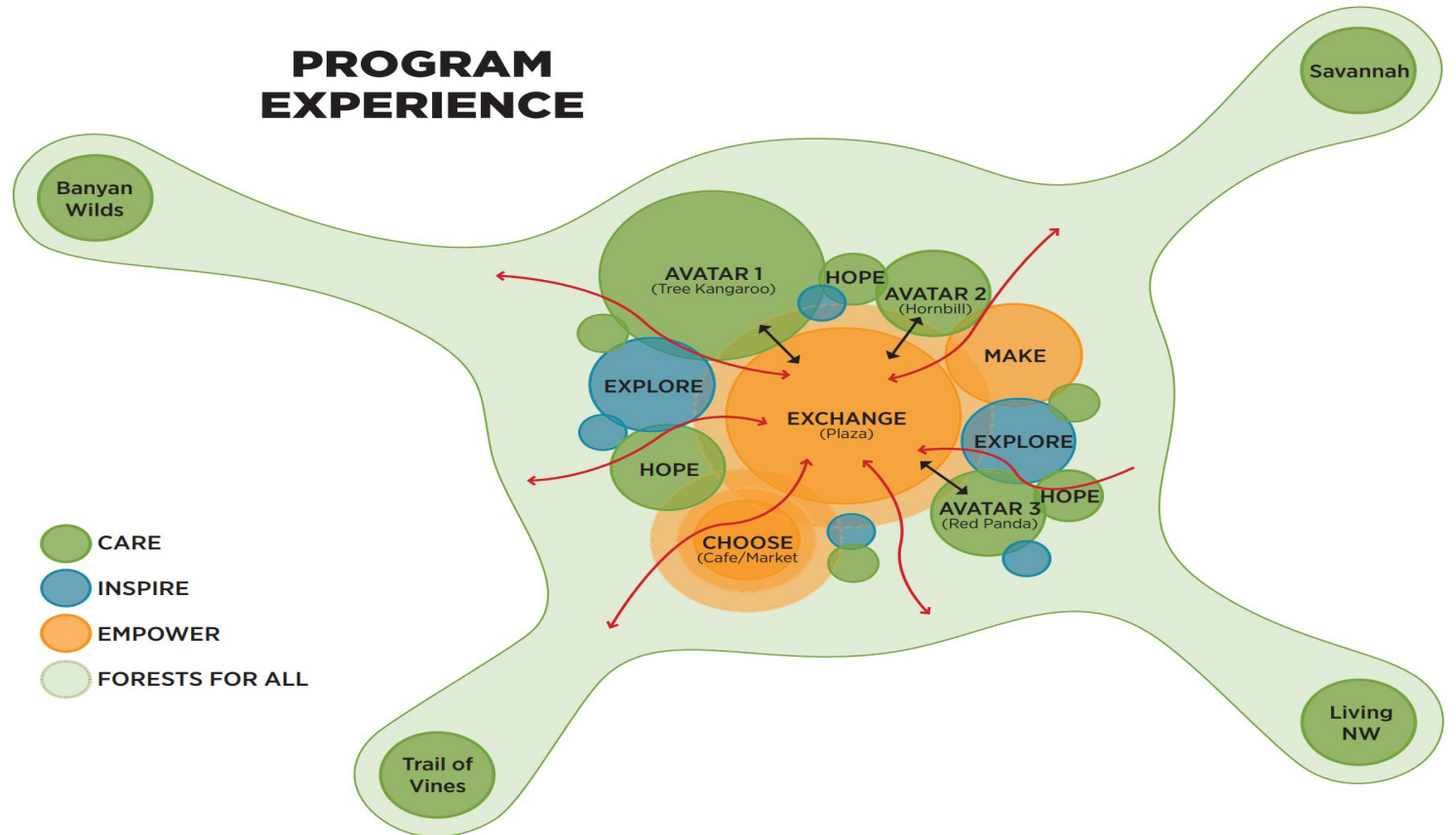


Figure 3: Thematic links to other exhibits and the region.

**Agency Comments**

None

**Public Comments**

None

## Summary of Discussion

The topics of architecture of architecture, equity, program, and circulation were discussed.

### Architecture

The Commissioners discussed the role of this project in the context of a variety of architectural styles and zoo design approaches that have evolved over time at the Woodland Park Zoo. The landscape is the connective tissue between the various architectural and programmatic pieces of the zoo. Commissioners appreciated that the architectural concept emphasized a minimalistic structure. The Commission supported maximizing the amount of transparency between visitors, animals, and caretakers. They recommended that the team consider expanding the amount of transparency, including physical, visual, and conceptual throughout the site and structure. They did question the size of the structure. They suggested aligning better with the goal of highlighting the interconnectedness of people, forests, and animals by making it pervious in selected locations, perhaps relying on trees for weather protection (see Figure 5). They asked for information on the impervious area of the zoo overall and of this exhibit at the next presentation.

### Equity

Commissioners noted the team's equity strategy. They asked that the team broaden and deepen this to achieve substantive, measurable outcomes regarding use of the facility. They would like to see clear leadership of design and ideas by members of underrepresented communities throughout the project in all phases. The lack of access for communities in less affluent neighborhoods of Seattle, or other communities in the region, who cannot afford the high cost of entrance should be studied and addressed by the overall zoo policy. Commissioners advised the zoo to assess and monitor progress by collecting data on such measures as who is served, how well they are served, and the level of community involvement in programming. People in underserved communities should play active, meaningful roles at the table during design, construction, and long-term operations, and in future programming. At the next presentation, Commissioners would like the project team to explain how this will be achieved and where equity drives and is visible in the design. Tacoma Parks was noted as an example of equity in design and monitoring of progress.

### Program

Commissioners appreciated but also voiced concern about the ambitious programming. Commissioners asked if perhaps some of the program elements, such as retail, could be accommodated in other nearby parts of the zoo. They questioned the programmatic need to allocate so much space to the Exchange area. They felt the focus should be on education and the immersive experience, and that the amount of forest should be maximized to meet the goals of the project. Related to this was a concern, mentioned above under Architecture, about the size and extent of impervious area of the structure.

The Commission has concerns about the retail component. Commissioners noted the necessity to support the mission of the zoo financially but wanted to understand whether profits would be going anywhere other than the zoo. They asked the project team to consider whether the retail component could be located in a more appropriate place nearby, such as the West Entrance. This might even be a way to connect the exhibit outward. Commissioners asked the team to carefully develop the messaging in the retail space so that it does not mimic existing retail chains and that it is truly serving the greater goals of equity, motivating people toward conservation and communicating the mission of Woodland Park Zoo.

### Circulation

The less linear, sequential mode of circulation was discussed. While the Commission acknowledged that this is meant to be a space for people of all ages and not primarily children, they asked that the hierarchy of paths be clarified. There may be pinch points where circulation to the central areas of the site by people in wheelchairs or with strollers is impeded. Also, in anticipation that many people with children will come to the exhibit, consider how a child can be safe with minimal supervision.

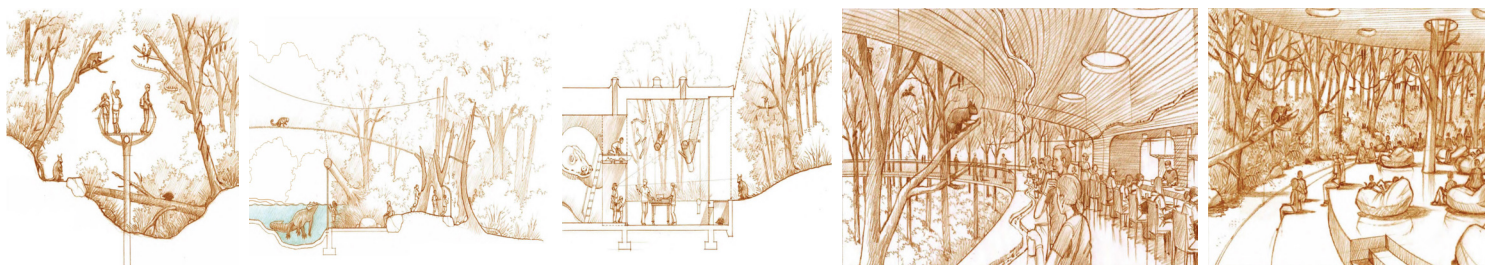


Figure 4: Initial concept sketches.

May 5, 2022

## Action

The SDC thanked the team for their presentation of the concept design for the Forests for All Experience at Woodland Park Zoo. The SDC expressed appreciation for the forward-thinking approach to the project, built on the goal of motivating visitors to conservation. Commissioners appreciated the Zoo and their consultants investing in outreach with impact to address longstanding inequities in access by underserved communities. Commissioners were excited to advise on the creation of immersive experience that blurs the lines between visitors, animals, and caretakers.

The SDC voted 8-0 (Matt was absent because of technical difficulties) to approve the concept design phase of the Forests for All with the following recommendations:

1. Continue with the idea of a more minimalist expression of the architecture, supporting an experience driven by programming and meaningful movement through all spaces instead of specifically focusing on the building character. There is already a variety of architectural expressions at the zoo, so the approach of creating a simple, porous structure that is light on the landscape is welcomed.
2. Be judicious in continuing to refine the program. Focus and narrow the options, eliminate details that do not support overall concepts; don't try to do too much. Consider what is happening in each space. Explore modifying other nearby zoo spaces to accommodate some program elements in the interest of maximizing trees, forest, and pervious surfaces on the project site.
3. Reconsider the size, function and meaning of the Exchange space. Right size it for the program, or move elements elsewhere, in the interest of providing as much forest as possible,
4. Explore materials and design of the structure that relate to conservation, physical interaction, and sustainability, while supporting and telling important stories. Consider green roofs on all structures. Make choices that acknowledge the relationship of the buildings to the greater watershed the site sits in.
5. Think critically about the retail function and its relationship to equity and encouraging forest conservation.
6. Continue, broaden, and strengthen the outreach strategy and further develop the plans according to input. Explore how BIPOC community members can lead actively in both design and programming immediately and long-term. At the next presentation be prepared to demonstrate ways in which the design is welcoming to underrepresented groups. Provide for access to transportation options, and events and educational opportunities that are meaningfully developed by members of BIPOC communities.
7. Be clear in how the program of this space supports and serves greater strategic initiatives of the zoo, particularly in regards to community engagement and participation.

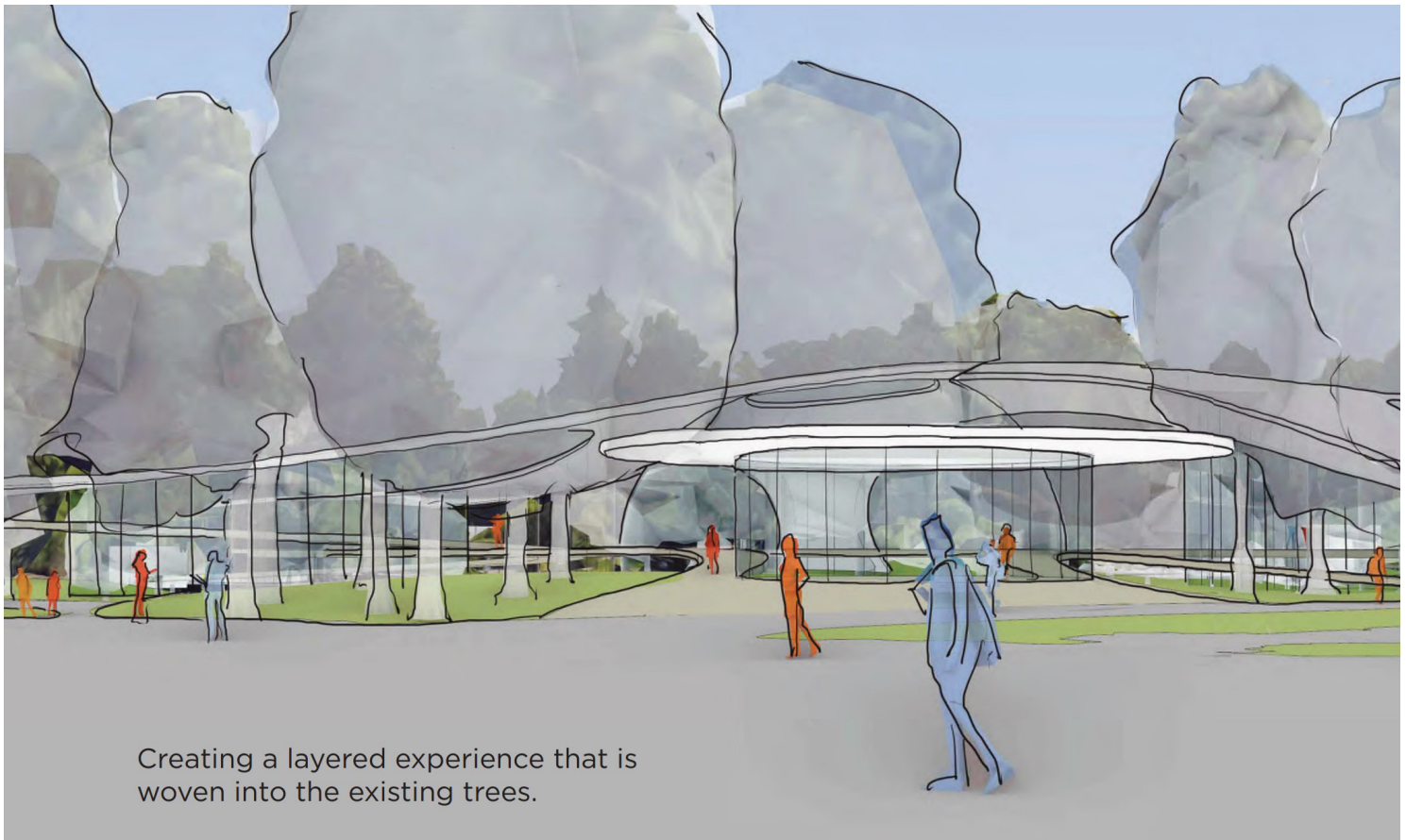


Figure 5: Early massing strategies.