

CITY OF LOS ANGELES
INTER-DEPARTMENTAL CORRESPONDENCE

COUNCIL FILE: 17-0453

DATE: June 13, 2018

TO: The Honorable Members of the
Arts, Entertainment, Parks and River Committee

FROM: Sharon M. Tso, Chief Legislative Analyst *Sharon M. Tso* WAS No. 18-06-0546
Richard H. Llewellyn, Jr., City Administrative Officer *Richard H. Llewellyn, Jr.*

SUBJECT: **Study of the Health and Well-Being of Billy the Elephant**

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the City Council, subject to the approval of the Mayor:

1. Authorize the City Administrative Officer and the Chief Legislative Analyst, with the assistance of the Zoo Department, to seek advice from licensed veterinarians certified by the American College of Zoological Medicine (ACZM) who have at least five years of full-time experience in zoo medicine specifically providing veterinarian care for the unique needs of Asian elephants and advice from subject matter experts, and report with findings in response to the Arts, Entertainment, Parks and River Committee questions (Attachment 1).
2. Authorize the CAO and CLA to execute personal services contracts and expend up to \$75,000 total for expenses related to consultation with medical and subject matter experts who can assist with the completion of this study.
3. Instruct that, upon completion of this study, the CAO and CLA submit a written report to the Arts, Entertainment, Parks and River Committee detailing the results of this study on the health and welfare of Billy the Elephant housed at the Los Angeles Zoo, as well as responses to the supplemental questions posed by the Committee.

BACKGROUND

On January 24, 2018, the Arts, Entertainment, Parks and River (AEPR) Committee held an extensive hearing in response to City Council Motion (Koretz-O'Farrell) (CF 17-0453) regarding Billy the Elephant who is housed at the Los Angeles Zoo. The Motion expressed concerns regarding the health and welfare of the elephant and proposed to relocate the animal to a sanctuary. Following the AEPR Committee hearing, the Committee instructed the Chief Legislative Analyst and the City Administrative Officer to report on the feasibility of convening a three-person panel of medical experts to "independently study the safety, health, and environment of the elephant, Billy at the Los Angeles Zoo" and respond to a series of questions posed by the Committee (Attachment 1).

It is feasible for the CLA and CAO to identify and confer with medical experts who will examine Billy and respond to the Committee's questions. We note that the Committee's instructions focused on a review of the elephant's health and well-being while housed at the LA Zoo. Given these instructions, the initial focus of the medical experts' study must be a determination if the elephant is healthy and receiving the proper care in his current environment. The CLA and CAO will work with experts to respond to the supplemental questions posed by the Committee that will provide insight into elephants health and experiences when housed at sanctuaries, should the City subsequently determine that Billy is in need of alternative living arrangements.

The CLA discussed the proposed study with zoo experts in Los Angeles, San Diego, and other locations to identify medical experts with the appropriate expertise. It was determined that experts to be consulted on this study should be licensed veterinarians certified by the American College of Zoological Medicine (ACZM) with at least five years of full-time experience in zoo medicine specifically providing veterinarian care for the unique needs of Asian elephants. Care of African elephants, or other animals, would be less relevant and useful to this study.

Given this criteria, the CLA and CAO have identified a list of medical professionals who could assist with the completion of this study. This list was developed with the assistance of the Director of the Los Angeles Zoo, the San Diego Zoo, and recommendations from multiple Council Offices, including some suggestions from Council District 5. The nominations from Council District 5 also incorporated input from professionals with experience in the field of wild animal welfare. We note that, when discussing the proposed study with experts, a recommendation was made to not only consult with medical experts, but also subject matter experts on elephant husbandry and well-being given the types of questions posed by the AEPR Committee.

Each of the medical professionals and subject matter experts suggested by the Council Offices and those recommended by Zoo experts are qualified to participate in this study. To determine interest in participation, the CLA has contacted several of the suggested experts and found that there is great interest in assisting the City to review and assess the health and well-being of Billy. Given the extensive expertise of many of the potential candidates, expedited scheduling of the study becomes difficult. If the recommendations in this report are approved, the CLA and CAO will make every effort to expedite this study and reporting of results to the City Council.

We estimate that modest funding will be required to cover expenses related to this project, such as travel and time expended by experts on this study. For purposes of comparison, in 2005, the City of Los Angeles hired Dr. Kay G. Mehren, ACZM Veterinarian Emeritus from the Toronto Zoo to evaluate the health condition and needs of each of the elephants at the Los Angeles Zoo in connection with the City's evaluation of the Zoo's ability to meet the needs of those elephants in a proposed new exhibit. At the time, the City provided a flat stipend of \$7,500 to cover Dr. Mehren's travel and lodging expenses and to conduct a study over a five day period. Therefore, we anticipate that the total cost of consulting with both medical and subject matter experts should not exceed \$75,000 total. Upon approval of the recommendations in this report, the CLA and CAO will work with the Zoo Department to identify a funding source to cover the cost of these stipends.

FISCAL IMPACT

Approval of the recommendations in this report will result in the expenditure of up to \$75,000 for costs associated with the requested study. The CLA and CAO will work with the Zoo Department to identify existing funding that may be used to cover these expenses.

CC: Karen Kalfayan, CLA

SMT:RHL
Attachment

**QUESTIONS POSED BY THE
ARTS, ENTERTAINMENT, PARKS AND RIVER COMMITTEE**

1. What does accreditation mean to the Zoo in relation to the possibility of Billy being sent to a Sanctuary, but retaining the other elephants?
2. Sanctuary:
 - a. What is the impact on accreditation if we move Billy to a sanctuary? Under what scenarios has the LA Zoo moved animals to a sanctuary in the past?
 - b. What would the process of moving Billy to a sanctuary look like? Give examples from other Zoos that have moved elephants to a sanctuary?
3. What permissions, if any, would need to be obtained from the AZA?
4. Financial impact of losing accreditation?
5. What is the annual cost of supporting an elephant at the LA Zoo?
6. What is the status of the captive breeding experience with Billy?
7. How are Billy's feet inspected and cared for to prevent Osteomyelitis and what risk, if any, is he at of currently having or obtaining it?
8. What modifications have been made to the LA Zoo's Elephants of Asia Exhibit to increase levels of care and comfort for the Zoo's elephants?
9. Describe the seminal fluid collection process used with Billy.
 - a. Why does the Zoo and AZA believe this process is necessary?
 - b. Is Billy able to voluntarily leave or stop the process? How? Has he ever voluntarily opted to leave? Has he exhibited signs or evidences of enjoying or not enjoying the process?
10. How often is the soil at the exhibit rototilled? What logs or data exist to document this?
11. How often are the elephants exercised? What logs or data exist to document this?
12. Conservation:
 - a. Are Asian Elephants on the endangered species list? If so, at what level and are there estimates for when the species could go extinct in the wild?
 - b. How do Species Survival Plans (SSPs) work at the LA Zoo? What are Global Species Survival Plans and how do they differ? How do SSPs work for sustaining global populations in the wild?
 - c. What animal species have been specifically saved or assisted by LA Zoo efforts, and by Zoos in general? How has the California Condor program worked to rehabilitate this species?
 - d. How does the LA Zoo work to support local elephant programs in Asia?
13. What is the typical lifespan and age and mortality of elephants in zoos and sanctuaries?
14. What is the practice of other zoos in keeping their bull elephants separate from other elephants? (How do other zoos manage elephant social interaction?)
15. What are typical practices in zoos in captive environments and interaction of a bull elephant in the wild?
16. What is the typical range of an Asian elephant in their natural habitat? (include a family, clan or herd in square mileage).
17. What is the range of an Asian Bull elephant in the wild compared to captivity?
18. Please compare Billy's experience to elephants in zoos across the country (and world).

19. What is the health and wellbeing of an elephant at a sanctuary compared to a zoo?
20. What are the typical reasons for a Zoo to move an elephant to a sanctuary? At a sanctuary, what level of staffing and medical care is available? What connection would Bill be able to have with other elephants?
21. What is the social and psychological life of an elephant bull in the wild v. in captivity?
22. How does the LA Zoo's elephant of Asia Exhibit compare in size, complexity, and enrichment to other AZA elephant facilities?
23. How does Billy's feet compare, in appearance of the pads and nails, to Asian elephants in the wild and in captivity of a similar age and gender?
24. Regarding Billy's head-bobbing.
 - a. What is stereotypic behavior and how does it evolve? How did Billy come to develop stereotypic behavior and what efforts have been made to mitigate the behavior?
 - b. What evidence is available to show when Billy's stereotypic behavior developed and why the Zoo believes the behavior is a sign of anticipatory behavior rather than boredom or stress?
25. How does Billy rank amongst AZA Asian elephants for genetic diversity?