ARTS, PARKS, & CITY FACILITIES

MOTION

The 2025-2026 Los Angeles County Civil Grand Jury found that household membership at the Los Angeles Zoo declined 23% in less than one year, that insufficient funding and deferred maintenance have led to multiple exhibit closures and have left much of the Zoo's exhibits and structures "tired and worn." The Civil Grand Jury urged the City to transition the Zoo to a public-private operating model in order to attract the funding and expertise needed to modernize and sustain it.

Current scientific research establishes that elephants are highly intelligent, deeply social animals that naturally travel great distances and have complex physical, psychological and social needs that cannot be adequately met in urban zoo environments. Against this backdrop, 43 zoos across the nation have closed their elephant exhibits in recent years.

There is an alternative. State-of-the-art immersive technology can now create life-size, three-dimensional virtual animals and habitats through holographic projection and interactive environments, bringing elephants and their natural habitats vividly to life without live-animal confinement, and a ticketed pilot at the Australian Museum in Sydney, Australia attracted more than 25,000 visitors and, according to the technology provider, generated approximately A$550,000 – about US$390,000 – in just 42 days, demonstrating substantial public interest and revenue potential.

Los Angeles is a global capital of storytelling, filmmaking, and visual effects, and, with no elephants currently at the Los Angeles Zoo, it is uniquely positioned to draw upon those strengths to create an immersive virtual elephant experience at a city-operated zoo as a humane and educational alternative to exhibiting live elephants, while giving children and families meaningful opportunities to experience, understand, and learn about these magnificent creatures and their natural habitat;

Moreover, the 2028 Olympic and Paralympic Games will place Los Angeles at the center of worldwide attention, making this an ideal moment to launch this pioneering attraction – potentially the first of its kind within any city-operated zoo – and reinforce Los Angeles's reputation as a national leader in creative and compassionate innovation;

I THEREFORE MOVE that the Council instruct the City Administrative Officer and Chief Legislative Analyst, with the assistance of the Zoo Department, to report within 60 days with a feasibility and implementation plan, including the specific actions required to move the project forward, for creating a dedicated immersive virtual elephant experience at the Los Angeles Zoo, with the goal of opening the exhibit in time for the 2028 Olympic and Paralympic Games;

I FURTHER MOVE that the Report be developed through outreach to qualified immersive-technology companies, elephant-welfare experts, nonprofit and philanthropic organizations and individuals, potential sponsors and private partners, and interested members of the public, including a 30-day period for written submissions commencing no later than 10 days after adoption of this Motion, without extending the 60-day reporting deadline; and that it evaluate preliminary capital and operating costs, public-private partnership and financing options, potential funding sources that would minimize or avoid reliance on the General Fund, and a schedule for completion before the 2028 games;

PRESENTED BY: _____ SECONDED BY: _____

BOB BLUMENFIELD
Councilmember, Third District

OCT 14 2026

ORIGINAL