Submission to The City of Winnipeg
Executive Policy Committee
July 19, 2006

Introduction

On behalf of the Board of Directors and staff of the Zoological Society of Manitoba (ZSM), it is my task today to present our position on the recommendation of the Department of Community Services for the City Council adoption in principle of a new governance model for the Assiniboine Park.

I would like to thank the Executive Policy Committee for this opportunity to present.

Facts on the Zoological Society of Manitoba

For the past 50 years, the ZSM has been a non-profit organization whose purpose is the betterment of the Assiniboine Park Zoo.

For clarity, The City of Winnipeg currently runs the operations of the Zoo.

The ZSM operates the Zootique Gift Shop and Animal Track Café. In addition, we manage over 6,000 members as well we provide the Zoo education program for 4,500 children every year. We also perform many fundraising events every year and this year have begun a volunteer program.

The ZSM is a $1,500,000 operation that has run successfully for many years.

In fact, our surpluses over the years have generated significant financial contributions to Zoo going towards:

- Zoo Reserve Fund
- Enhancements to Zoo Assets
- Special Projects

In 2006 alone, we will contribute in excess of $350,000 to the Zoo with over $2,500,000 contributed in past 10 years.

ZSM Position

The ZSM supports the Assiniboine Park Conservancy Model of Governance (Option II from the submitted Report).

ZSM Historical Perspective on Assiniboine Park Zoo Governance

The ZSM has a long established history of recommending a new way of operating for the Assiniboine Park Zoo.

Our organization's involvement in the original Assiniboine Park Zoo Master Plan and the subsequent commissioning of the KPMG study on new ways of operating Assiniboine Park Zoo are evidence of that commitment.

Our dedication to that pursuit long predates our current Board efforts and dates back to the early 1990's relating to the original discussions of a Special Operating Agency or Public / Private partnership model for the Zoo.

All of these discussions and plans came to the same inevitable conclusion. In order for the Zoo to meet the objectives of its exciting and ambitious new goals, it would require funding and capital well beyond that provided by the City.

Subsequently evaluations of the market place for sources of funding at the Federal, Provincial and private levels very clearly identified the need for a self sustaining economic model that have the flexibility and capacity to capture this funding in an arms length entrepreneurial model.

There was simply no appetite to provide funds to a municipal attraction that could not guarantee that those funds would not be absorbed into a myriad of other municipal financial requirements.

It was recognized that given the City's fiscal reality, the Zoo would be faced with a different future than that envisioned by our Board and those that endorsed and supported a new vision for the Zoo.

That vision stalled, faced with the reality of what that meant financially and politically.

Recently, the opportunity to become involved in a more enhanced approach to Assiniboine Park as a whole through the stewardship of the Assiniboine Park Enterprise in concert with the other non-profit entities in the Park, where not only the Zoo, but all related Park amenities and attractions were to be considered in a more wide ranging Park governance model, became an appealing prospect.

The results of that process and the recommendation of the Conservancy Model Option II has the unanimous and enthusiastic support of our entire organization.

We have come to realize through this process that the future of the vision that we see for the Zoo has it's beginnings in a new and dedicated Park Governance Board with a capacity to develop, capitalize, and sustain a bold new vision for not only the Zoo but the entire Park as a world class destination and attraction.

At the same time we are confident in the new Board's commitment to the Park Framework Plan which we were proud to be part of and that clearly delineates the guiding principles for any future Park development.

Zoos in every major city are leading tourist attractions and revenue generators for those cities. Studies have shown that for The City of Winnipeg, the Assiniboine Park Zoo is one of our city's major tourist attractions, education centre and is the only revenue generating asset in the Park. In fact, the KPMG Study showed that the investment opportunity in the Zoo Master Plan is both economically feasible for the City and will make our Zoo a World Class tourist destination.

We believe **what is Good for the Park is Good for the Zoo**

In that respect, we recognize the importance of each non-profit's contribution to the Assiniboine Park:

- Partners in the Park - Capital Funding Raising successes
- Friends of the Conservatory – Volunteer Activities successes
- Zoological Society of Manitoba – Operational Management and Surpluses successes

The combination and coordination of these organizations provides our Park with the formula needed for long-term success for our City.

ZSM Position

It is our Board's unanimous position that **Conservancy Option II** is essential for the Assiniboine Park success. We believe the following are necessary requirements for that success:

1. A provincially incorporated not-for-profit organization with an independent board.
2. New organization must work within the guidelines of the Assiniboine Park Framework Plan.
3. All the existing non-profit organizations in the Park must work together along with Assiniboine Park Enterprise, the City of Winnipeg and the Province of Manitoba governments to establish and activate this new governance structure.
4. The new Conservancy Option II's Governance Board should be established immediately and be responsible for the initial staffing, resourcing and budgeting activities of the new organization.
5. The CEO position must be created and hired immediately upon having established the new Board. This individual working with the new Board must prepare the business plan for the Park, not the "Transition Committee" as outlined in the original report.
6. Each existing non-profit Board have numerous responsible citizens of Winnipeg who have a passion and high level of involvement in each of their areas of the Park. These individuals must remain involved with the new organization.
7. The initial Board must be made up of members of each non-profit Board, however, we further recognize that the Board must evolve in order for the Park to perpetually have the strongest Board members representing the interests of the entire Park.

8. The City of Winnipeg must establish a long-term contractual commitment to the new entity in order to ensure the operating requirements for the Park are not impacted by the City's annual budget process.

While the creation of the Conservancy Option II organization is essential as we have outlined, it is our position that of equal importance The City of Winnipeg must commit to their share of the capital requirements for the Park and Zoo as outlined in the Assiniboine Park Framework Plan in order for the Public / Private partnership to succeed. This commitment by The City of Winnipeg is the only way any of the capital fund raising will succeed and the only way the Park and Zoo will survive.

Many studies have shown that private sector fund raising of any significant magnitude will only happen if there is a separate arms-length organization responsible for those funds being managed and not government organizations. The private sector fund raising for the Assiniboine Park is no exception.

This is a proven model with other Zoos and Parks.

Without The City of Winnipeg commitment to their share of the capital requirements for the Assiniboine Park, the new Board and the Conservancy Option II organization will fail.

Closing

It is this NEW organization that must lead in development of strategy for the success of Assiniboine Park.

New governance and The City of Winnipeg commitment for ongoing operating and capital requirements for the Park Framework are absolutely essential.

Otherwise, our Park, our Zoo, the citizens of The City of Winnipeg and the Province of Manitoba will miss our one opportunity to achieve our full potential.

We ALL must make Assiniboine Park – OUR Priority.

In our capacity as representatives of our thousands of Zoo members and dedicated citizens that love and respect the magnificent Assiniboine Park, we thank you for this opportunity to present our position.

The Zoological Society of Manitoba is ready to move forward with the new Assiniboine Park.

Respectfully submitted by

Mike Stevens
President
Zoological Society of Manitoba