



MAYOR

*Regina Romero*

March 3, 2021

A Message from Mayor Regina Romero -

Throughout this last year, our experiences living through a global pandemic and quarantine has deepened the way our community values our public spaces and, especially, our parks. Recently, Mayor and Council have received feedback from Tucsonans who have voiced concerns about expansion of the Zoo to the South Pond and Barnum Hill area. We have also heard from community members, who value the educational and recreational opportunities that our Zoo provides to our community. As someone who has been an outspoken proponent for open and accessible green spaces, as well as a mom who enjoys taking her children to the Zoo, I recognize the complexity of this issue.

I have provided the privilege to the Council Member representing the area, and the Reid Park Zoological Society to reach a resolution with community members. However, it has become clear to me that resolution to this issue is not on the horizon. This is why I am compelled as Mayor to help find common ground by calling for a pause on this project so that the different parties can come to the table.

It is important to distinguish the two separate, although related, concerns at hand. The first concern is the proposed expansion area itself: the loss of a cherished area frequented by many Tucsonans, the destruction of trees, and an overarching concern about access to public green spaces. The second is whether the process that the Zoological Society carried out was transparent, and whether sufficient engagement with a representative and diverse group of community stakeholders was conducted.

This issue is fundamentally about the trust that Tucson voters place in their local government, specifically the institutions that use their tax dollars. The ballot language approved by voters in 2017 was "to fund capital improvements, operations, and maintenance," and did not mention expansion. All public meetings to discuss specific expansion plans, which by almost all accounts were poorly attended due to insufficient outreach to surrounding neighborhoods, were conducted in 2018 and 2019, after the tax was approved by voters.

Many have also made the argument that we should proceed with expansion since dollars have already been spent for preliminary planning. Unfortunately, that is the potential cost of poor community engagement. Involving the community must not be viewed as inconvenient; instead, it must be intentional and representative of community stakeholders. When organized correctly, it can actually improve the results.

**City of Tucson**

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I am calling for an immediate pause on this project and asking the Zoological Society, City administration and community stakeholders to come to the table in order to find a solution that works for all. At the end of the day, we all want beautiful open spaces available to everyone in our community AND we want an amazing zoo.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Regina Romero", is written over a light blue horizontal line.

Mayor Regina Romero  
City of Tucson