

Measure 26-244

Referred to the people of the Metro Region by the Metro Council

BALLOT TITLE

Bonds to protect animal health; provide conservation, education; increase sustainability

Question: Shall Zoo protect animal health; save water, energy; provide conservation, youth education; issue bonds estimated not to increase tax rate?

If the bonds are approved, they will be payable from taxes on property or property ownership that are not subject to the limits of Sections 11 and 11b, Article XI of the Oregon Constitution.

Summary: This measure authorizes \$380 million in general obligation bonds for the Oregon Zoo to:

- Protect animal health and well-being by updating aging exhibits with more natural, modern habitats, including but not limited to penguins, sea otters, giraffes.
- Improve facilities to enhance educational opportunities for children and other zoo visitors to learn about animals and habitat conservation.
- Conserve water and energy in zoo operations and updated infrastructure.
- Improve facilities supporting the zoo's conservation work protecting and restoring threatened/ endangered species in the Northwest and beyond.
- Increase accessibility for visitors of all abilities, including improved paths and exhibits.
- Improve protection from heat and extreme weather for animals, visitors.
- Improve facilities to prepare for animal care in a natural disaster or emergency.

This measure is estimated not to increase current bond tax rates, due to scheduled debt service reductions. Bonds may be issued in multiple series and mature in no more than 30 years. The estimated average rate is 8.5 cents/\$1,000 assessed value.

Requires annual financial audits, and annual reports to Metro Council by community oversight committee.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

Measure 26-244 would continue funding for the Oregon Zoo to replace outdated animal habitats, improve educational exhibits, conserve water and energy, and make the zoo more accessible for people of all ages and abilities.

Nearly 1.3 million people visited the zoo in 2023, including more than 400,000 schoolchildren. The zoo is a hub for science, conservation, education and animal well-being, delivering the highest quality of care to roughly 1,200 animals.

In 65 years at Washington Park, the zoo has needed to upgrade habitats and facilities to keep up with high standards for animals and visitors. These upgrades have depended on public support.

Voters approved a zoo bond in 2008, funding habitat

overhauls for elephants, primates, and polar bears, the veterinary medical center, and the education center – about 40 percent of the campus. These investments helped make the zoo one of two zoos worldwide with 50 years of accreditation by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums.

However, there is more to do. The 2008 bond citizen oversight committee's final report noted the bond's projects were "completed on schedule and within budget," but also recognized more "habitats in need of improvements, aged buildings in need of replacement, and infrastructure in need of upgrading."

Priorities

Measure 26-244 would continue funding to address these identified needs, including some of the zoo's oldest existing habitats, facilities and infrastructure.

Measure 26-244 proposes these investment priorities:

- Protect animal health and well-being by updating aging animal areas with more natural, modern habitats, including but not limited to penguins, sea otters and giraffes.
- Improve facilities to enhance educational opportunities for children and other visitors to learn about animals and habitat conservation.
- Conserve water and energy in operations and updated infrastructure.
- Improve facilities supporting the zoo's conservation work protecting and restoring threatened and endangered species in the Northwest and beyond.
- Increase accessibility for visitors of all abilities, including improved paths and exhibits.
- Improve protection from heat and extreme weather for animals and visitors.
- Improve facilities to prepare for animal care in a natural disaster or emergency.

No estimated increase in current tax rates

Measure 26-244 is not estimated to increase current bond tax rates, as debt service on previous bonds is completed. The measure authorizes \$380 million in general obligation bonds. The average estimated tax rate is 8.5 cents per \$1,000 of assessed property value, roughly \$1.95 monthly for a property with assessed value of \$275,000. Bonds may be issued in multiple series and mature in 30 years or less.

Investment timeline

Measure 26-244 prioritizes the most significant needs from the long-range Oregon Zoo campus plan, identified by zoo staff, community members and animal health experts. Investments are expected to be complete in ten to fifteen years. If the measure passes, zoo staff will present a detailed bond implementation plan to Metro Council in fall 2024.

Accountability

A community oversight committee will monitor bond spending and issue annual reports to the public and Metro Council. Measure 26-244 requires annual financial audits of revenue and spending.

Learn more: <http://oregonzoo.org/bond>

Submitted by:

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