

City Council Member, District _____
Oakland City Hall
1 Frank H. Ogawa Plaza
Oakland, California 94612

Copy to: Rebecca Kaplan
Council Member-at-Large
(all districts)

Dear Council Member _____:

I am writing out of deep concern about the Oakland Zoo's expansion plan in Knowland Park. This environmentally and financially destructive project has gone from bad to worse, and it is time to stop it.

The destruction of sensitive natural resources is unnecessary—the result of the Zoo's ill-conceived choice, with the City Council's agreement, to locate the project on Knowland Park's western highland ridge, despite the availability of less destructive alternative locations. And we now know that the Zoo is seeking to block off public access and enjoyment of additional acres of parkland as mitigation for the permanent destruction of the habitat within the 56-acre project site.

The State of California gave Oakland this park in 1975 on condition that it always remain a public park. For years, the City and the Zoo have hidden Knowland Park from the public, treating it as surplus land. As more and more people have learned about this wonderful public resource and its imminent destruction, opposition has grown, and they are asking the obvious question: What city destroys such an amazing gift? The Zoo has billed the development as a conservation exhibit, but not a single East Bay conservation organization has endorsed it. Instead of this expensive, out-dated, artificial conservation exhibit, the Zoo could build a true science-based program using docent educators to guide kids to explore the park's rich natural resources without destroying it.

The project's negative financial impact has also been hidden from the public, and papered over with false promises by the Zoo. The Zoo operates with virtually no public oversight. Oakland taxpayers provide significant public funding for the Zoo annually, yet the City Council makes Zoo funding decisions privately, outside of public budgetary hearings. Why? The City Council has supported a Zoo expansion concept as it has grown into the luxury ridgetop project it is now, even though the Zoo has not met its contractually mandated requirements to submit regular financial statements and construction contract proposals to the City. No independent financial feasibility analysis has been produced for this project. With no basis for doing so, the City Council has accepted the Zoo's sales pitches time after time. But as owner of the Zoo and the park, Oakland will eventually be saddled with more long-term debt associated with increased operating costs for this unneeded expansion, and east Oaklanders will bear the brunt of the increased traffic and pollution. Will the City support another Zoo ballot measure asking Oakland taxpayers to fund this expensive project when there isn't enough money to pay for basic services and infrastructure?

I join others in urging the City Council to end this long string of bad decisions and refuse to grant the Zoo any conservation easements on more acres of park land. It is time to push the reset button on this project, and stop giving away the public's resources.

Sincerely,

(print name) _____

(date) _____

(address) _____