

CALGARY ZOOLOGICAL SOCIETY, THE (CALGARY ZOO)

Mission: Take and inspire action to sustain wildlife and wild places.

Mandate: The Calgary Zoological Society, operating as the “Wilder Institute Calgary Zoo”, develops, operates and promotes an integrated Zoological, botanical, and prehistoric park for the combined purposes of conservation, education, recreation and scientific study.

Service Line: *Economic Development and Tourism*

Registered Charity

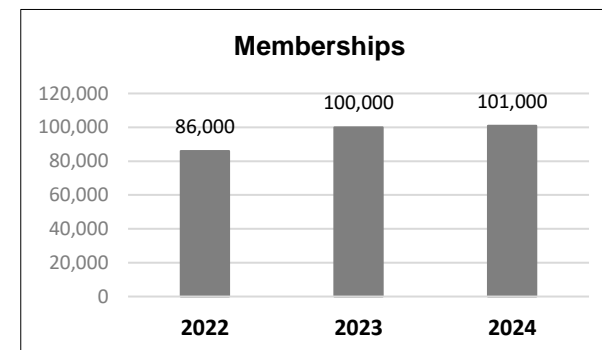
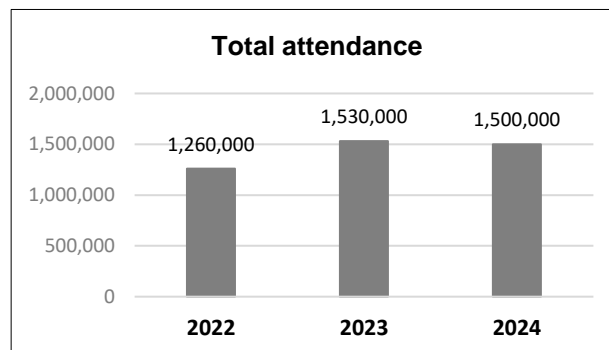
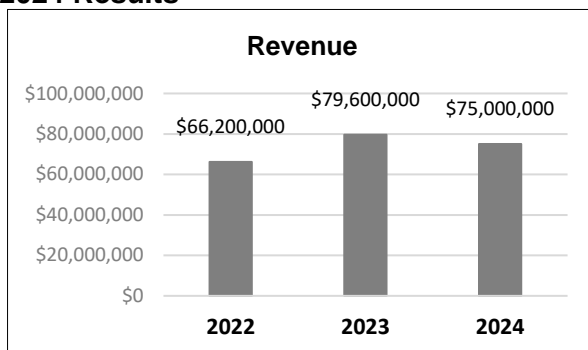
2024 City Investment

Operating Grant: \$9,109,657

Capital Grant: \$3,236,660

City owned asset

2024 Results



The story behind the numbers

- Strong attendance combined with a robust membership, contributed to a positive 2024 as the Wilder Institute Calgary Zoo embarked on its new strategic plan.
- The Wilder Institute Calgary Zoo continues to be one of the top tourist attractions in the city, province and western Canada, maintaining a strong attendance of 1.5 million and growing membership base reaching 101,000 paid members.
- In 2024, the Wilder Institute Calgary Zoo hosted the annual Association of Zoos and Aquariums conference, attracting over 2,300 delegates and their families from 22 countries to Calgary. This four-day event enhanced the reputation of the Wilder Institute Calgary Zoo and Calgary.

Benchmarks

A new strategic plan will guide the organization from 2025 to 2029, focusing on six strategic priorities: Grow Our Conservation Impact, Strengthen Capacity, Mobilize People, Transform Workplace Culture, Evolve the Zoo and Celebrate our Centennial. Multi-year initiatives will guide annual tactics which will inform our scorecard-based performance measurement system and be evaluated for annual planning.

Looking ahead: 2025 highlights

- Construction has started on the next major capital project revitalizing a significant section of the Asian zone. Introducing new habitats for snow leopards, dalmation pelicans, red panda and the addition of a new species, takin. The project will create new experiences and learning for visitors and replace aging infrastructure.
- Implementing the first year of a new strategic plan and focus. Key strategic priorities include evolving the zoo, preparing to celebrate the centennial in 2029 and mobilizing the community to act as part of a solution-focused movement for nature.



CALGARY ZOOLOGICAL SOCIETY, THE 2024 Civic Partner Annual Report

CD2025-0168
ATTACHMENT 11

Civic Partner Name: The Calgary Zoological Society

Legal Structure: Independent External organization (Societies Act)

Manage/operate a City-owned asset: Yes (Calgary Zoo)

Mission: Take and inspire action to sustain wildlife and wild places

Mandate: The Calgary Zoological Society, operating as the “Wilder Institute Calgary Zoo”, develops, operates and promotes an integrated Zoological, botanical, and prehistoric park for the combined purposes of conservation, education, recreation and scientific study.

1. What 3-5 key results did your organization achieve in 2024 that contributed to:

a) One or more [Council Strategic Directions](#)- economic resilience, social resilience, climate resilience?

Economic Resilience –Wilder Institute Calgary Zoo employed over 500 Calgarians in 2024. This significant spending supports area suppliers, contractors, engineers and trades creating direct and indirect jobs. Wilder Institute Calgary Zoo is our city’s most visited year-round tourist attraction and Canada’s most visited zoo with 1.5 million annual visits. Regional, national and international tourists represent about 20% of day admission visitors who also purchase from local restaurants and stores and stay in local hotels.

In 2024 the Wilder Institute Calgary Zoo hosted the annual Association of Zoos and Aquariums conference that brought over 2,300 delegates (in many cases with spouses and families) from 22 countries to Calgary for four days, which made a significant contribution to the city’s tourism in 2024. Many delegates commented on how polite Calgarians seemed and how welcome they felt.

Social Resilience – Our participation in the City’s fee reduction program resulted in over 31,000 low income Calgarians visiting the zoo with a 75% discount on their admission price, providing affordable accessibility for those families. Our conservation education department collaborates with multiple local community social service organizations to identify youth in need to receive full subsidy to attend a week-long camp program. This opportunity includes support to remove additional barriers by covering transportation costs when needed and providing lunch for supported attendees. We aim to serve 20-25 youth annually through this program. We expanded the equity for schools served through our subsidy programs with sponsors now supporting grades 7-12 with transportation and program fee offsets. A subsidy program for grades 1-6 was already in place and will be maintained. We offered 12-month unlimited access passes to refugees who immigrate to Canada. 221 of these free passes were issued in 2024.

Climate Resilience – In support of City climate initiatives, waste reduction through recycling and composting has reduced Wilder Institute Calgary Zoo’s waste to landfill by 87% and we will continue to work to improve that. All disposable food service containers and utensils we use are rated compostable and we continue to reinforce proper disposal with our guests. Through use of well water where possible, the zoo has reduced annual potable water use by 4.5 million litres.

Our annual Conservation Champions Festival, hosted at the zoo, has grown exponentially in the last five years with 1,905 students representing 82 classes from 20 schools preparing and presenting projects on biodiversity and conservation action in 2024. Our curriculum-connected education programs, which include climate change education, regularly reach over 35,000 attendees (students and adult chaperones) annually. We collaborate with Bow Habitat Station to

co-host the annual Alberta Biodiversity Festival which provides value-add programming for 13,000-15,000 guests over three days. Many interactive stations at this event focus on climate solutions to help endangered flora and fauna and preserve overall biodiversity in the city and province.

b) Your own organization's strategy?

- In 2024 we had our accreditation inspection (required every five years) by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA). AZA has the highest accreditation standards in the world. Not only did we achieve accreditation, we did so with very high marks. Our summary report included a page of commendations, no major issues and only a few minor issues were noted that were promptly resolved. The hearing to determine if accreditation would be received was brief and largely congratulatory on the achievements of the organization and quality of the zoo.
- We completed the Savannah Crossing and Plains capital projects (leveraging \$1.2M of civic partner infrastructure grant funding to complete an over \$7M combined project). This project replaced very outdated infrastructure, improved animal welfare for our giraffes, zebras and ostrich, created facilities suitable for hosting mountain bongo in the future as well as enhanced the visitor experience with new sightlines on the Savannah Plains and a chance to visit the animals indoors over the winter in Savannah Crossing. The project was on time and on budget.
- We completed a new 5-year strategic plan to take the organization through to our centennial year. The plan includes strategic priorities such as evolving the zoo, growing our conservation impact and celebrating our centennial in an impactful way. We also managed the retirement transition of our long-time CEO and recruited a new CEO (Dr. Kyle Burks) that is an established leader of the zoo community and Board member of AZA.
- We secured significant Federal government funding (\$9M) for our conservation work in Ghana. This 5-year project will represent a meaningful increase in scale of our international conservation work. This contributes to the reputation of Calgary as a green City that cares about nature and biodiversity and can be a point of pride for Calgarians.

2. Performance measures help demonstrate the return on The City's investment in a partner's operations, and support continuous improvement. What performance measures reflect your organization's impact in 2024?

	Performance Measure Name	2022 results	2023 results	2024 results	How does this measure reflect your organization's impact?
How much did you do?	Attendance	1.26M	1.53M	1.50M	We continue to be one of the top tourist attractions in the City, Province and western Canada setting an annual attendance record in 2023 followed by a solid 2024.
	Memberships	86K	100K	101K	The Wilder Institute Calgary Zoo continues to enjoy significant support from our community, maintaining 100K+ paid members for the first time since 2018.

How well did you do it?	Total Revenues	\$66.2M	\$79.6M	\$75.0M	Revenues reflect solid attendance and constantly striving to innovate and add to our earned revenues and fundraising.
	Likely to recommend	89%	94%	87%	Visitors consistently see value in their experiences with us.
	Conservation Awareness	60%	89%	80%	Our historic exit surveys say that supporting the Wilder Institute Calgary Zoo is a good way to support wildlife conservation, which is extremely important when identifying the total value that the Wilder Institute Calgary Zoo brings to the Calgary Community.
How are Calgarians better off?	City Operating Grant as percentage of revenue	12.8%	11.0%	12.5%	We significantly leverage the operating funding provided by the City allowing us to accomplish much more for Calgarians.
	Conservation Investment	\$4.5M	\$6.7M	\$8.0M	Having a local zoo at the forefront of wildlife conservation inspires Calgarians and bolsters the City's reputation of being progressive and environmentally focused.
	Operating Spend	\$36.1M	\$43.4M	\$47.4M	The Zoo continues to be a strong and reliable economic contributor to the Calgary Community.
	Capital Investment	\$16.1M	\$39.3M	\$18.5M	We reinvest to ensure the Zoo offers relevant, timely and engaging experiences to guests.
	Interpretive Participants	1M+	1M+	1M+	Our visitors are educated as much as they are entertained.

3. Are there any additional stories or information you wanted to share beyond performance measures that demonstrate the impact of your organization's programs or services?

- We are proud to offer substantial discounts for low-income families through our participation in the City's fee reduction program. 31,000 visitors received a 75% discount on their admission in 2024.
- We make a significant conservation education impact through our school programs which includes climate change education, along with instilling a love of nature and value of biodiversity. We have subsidy programs for lower income schools that now cover grades 1 through 12 that ensure broad accessibility. 30,000 students were educated through our school programs in 2024.
- At a thank you lunch held by the Make-A-Wish Foundation, we received the feedback that, at a national level, Wilder Institute / Calgary Zoo is felt to be "the best wish organization they work with". The Foundation went on to cite our degree of preparedness, flexibility, accommodation of special needs and attention to detail as the key reasons for this accolade.

4. Does your organization use benchmarks to evaluate and improve performance and operations, and increase your organization's impact?

a) Examples of benchmarks:

1. AZA Accreditation: As a member of the Association of Zoo and Aquariums (AZA) we are required to adhere to a rigorous set of standards around all aspects of operating a high quality, reputable zoo. From the welfare and well-being of the animals in our care, to how we train and mentor our staff, to the governance structures in place for the organization. Adherence to these standards is monitored by a week-long, in-depth inspection by a team of zoo professionals, every 5 years. A detailed report is then written, and a hearing is held with the senior management of the zoo and the accreditation committee, which includes the leadership of AZA, to discuss the findings in the report and determine if accreditation is achieved. AZA standards are the highest in the world, meeting and exceeding these standards provides valuable feedback across our zoo operation.

2. Attendance: We monitor our attendance levels relative to high quality peer zoos in roughly comparable markets across North America. We assess this attendance relative to the size of the local population. What we learn from this is the level of support and interest we have from our community. If we are addressing the needs of the community, then they will support us. We know our attendance is 80% driven by our local community, so attendance levels are a valuable benchmark.

3. Strategic Plan Scorecard: In 2024, we developed a new strategic plan to cover the five-year period from 2025 to our centennial year in 2029. We are driving this plan forward based on 6 strategic priorities: Grow Our Conservation Impact, Strengthen Capacity, Mobilize People, Transform Workplace Culture, Evolve the Zoo and Celebrate our Centennial. These strategic priorities are underpinned by multi-year initiatives and then further broken down into annual tactics. We will monitor and report our progress to our Board of Directors using a scorecard currently under development that measures our effectiveness in delivering on these priorities.

4. Work Place Safety Certificate of Recognition (COR): This certification administered by the Alberta Municipal Health & Safety Association (AMHSA) is awarded to an employer that has demonstrated it has a good health and safety management system in place. The health and safety of our staff is essential to our operation.

b) What is your current and targeted performance in comparison to these benchmarks?

1. AZA accreditation: Our most recent accreditation inspection was completed in 2024. The report noted 15 points of achievement, including major points such as excellent overall maintenance of the facility, significant efforts in conservation, a strong veterinary program and an engaged and supportive Board of Directors. There were no major concerns noted and no concerns outstanding from our previous inspection. There were only 5 very minor concerns noted, and they were remediated between the inspection in May and the hearing in September. At the hearing, accreditation was unanimously approved with little deliberation. An inspection outcome like this places us at the high end of AZA accredited organizations.

2. Attendance: The latest data available for our peer group of accredited zoos is 2023. In that year, our annual attendance (1.53 million) represented roughly 92% of the metro population of the Calgary metro area. This is an above average result vs. our peer group whose attendance averaged 86% of their respective metro populations over the same period. However, this result also shows room to improve as the top zoos from this peer group achieve over 100% of the metro population. We regularly review a heat map of the City and surrounding area to understand what neighborhoods our visitation comes from and where we can target strategies to increase the zoo's profile and accessibility.

3. Strategic Plan Scorecard: We are just beginning the first year of the strategic plan and thus have not yet completed our first reporting cycle. What we expect reporting against this plan give us is organizational focus and discipline and a longer-term road map to achieve outcomes that may take multiple years. We also view this plan as unifying the culture of our organization and the relationship with our community as everyone understands our purpose and vision and where we are going as an organization.

4. Work Place Safety Certificate of Recognition (COR): In our most recent COR maintenance audit completed in Q4 2024, we received an overall score of 98%. While the result of this audit was overwhelmingly positive, we did receive some minor improvement points about how we can continually refresh awareness of key policies and hazard assessments and communicate the work of the joint health and safety committee.

c) How this information is being used to support continuous improvement?

Covered in comments above.

5. How does your organization address equity, diversity or inclusion, or support racial equity?

Our DEI initiative is furthered by our IDEA (Inclusion, Diversity, Equity & Accessibility) Committee which is chaired by our Director of People & Culture and has sponsorship from a member of our executive team. In late 2024, the Committee and executive leadership undertook a benchmarking exercise (utilizing the Global Diversity benchmarking tool) across a broad range of dimensions of IDEA and jointly

established 5 year goals for improvement over our strategic plan. In 2025, we are mapping out our 5-year journey of IDEA advancement.

Recent highlights of improving IDEA for our staff and volunteers includes:

- Training for senior leadership, jointly attended with our IDEA Committee on core IDEA principles and concepts (i.e. privilege and power, intersectionality, and lived experiences)
- Training for all managers and supervisors across the organization on inclusive leadership
- Establishing inclusivity as a core principle in our 5-year strategic plan
- Ensuring accessibility benchmarks are achieved in all brand guidelines
- Organizing a staff event to celebrate Diwali
- Providing free menstrual products in all staff washrooms
- Work to incorporate pronouns in email signatures is underway.
- As well as the Truth and Reconciliation initiatives described in question 6 below.

For our visitors, we have undertaken many initiatives to promote IDEA, below are a few examples:

- Our Director of People & Culture has received specialized accessibility training and sits on all major project teams to bring that accessibility perspective right to the core of project decision-making.
- Offered sensory kits that can be used during day visits, ZOOLIGHTS, school programs and camps, which include learning tools such as wiggle seats, weighted stuffed animals, fidget tools, and more. During ZOOLIGHTS, we also offer a sensory story online to help neurodiverse visitors understand what to expect before they arrive.
- We added an adult change room.
- In support of Pride Week, we annually hold Drag brunches and dinners.
- Our Wild Canada zone features a fully inclusive play space in front of the polar bear viewing windows. The space can be navigated by wheelchair (rubber matting, maintained year-round free of snow and debris by our Facilities team) and tactile features are done at child wheelchair height. Our bronze statues and artwork were intentionally done at wheelchair height throughout Wild Canada.

We support financial accessibility in the following ways:

- Our participation in the City's fee reduction program means over 31,000 low income Calgarians a year receive a 75% discount on tickets
- Dynamic pricing allows visitors to book ahead and receive substantial savings
- Expanded the equity for schools served through our subsidy programs with sponsors now supporting grades 7-12 with transportation and program fee offsets. A subsidy program for grades 1-6 was already in place and will be maintained. We also offer some subsidies for our summery camp programs.
- Free or discounted attendance to special events or general admission for Attendants so they can come and support those they care for
- Offering a "Friends and Family" bundle that was an affordable option for family units of all varieties.
- Maintaining a basic "no frills" access pass as part of our membership offerings
- Offering 12-month unlimited access passes to refugees who immigrate to Canada. 221 of these free passes were issued in 2024.
- Visitors are free to bring their own food and drink from home

6. How is your organization advancing Indigenous Truth and Reconciliation? (For example addressing specific calls to action in the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action](#) report or [The City's White Goose Flying Report](#))

The following are key examples of how our organization is advancing Indigenous Truth and Reconciliation:

- A new elder in-residence program has been created and a Siksika elder has accepted the role. We expect this will lead to growth and deepening of our First Nations relationships and integration of more Indigenous knowledge and culture in our programs, interpretive experiences, conservation education and operations.
- Engaging staff, including senior leadership, in training and knowledge sharing around Truth and Reconciliation, the medicine wheel and land acknowledgments
- Holding a ceremony for staff to commemorate the life of our polar bear Baffin, led by an indigenous elder and incorporating indigenous ways of knowing to help guide our organization through its journey of healing.
- Our Conservation Education department hosts Indigenous Elders and knowledge keepers at the Alberta Biodiversity Festival each year to share stories with visitors and the team has developed and implemented Blackfoot Phenology lessons into Chevron Open Minds Zoo School.
- Under our MOU with Siksika Nation we recently presented to the Siksika Board of Education members and have had follow up dialogue about jointly working on elements in our curriculum-connected school programs to share program resources and student experiences. This initiative is through a joint Memorandum of Understanding that will continue to lead to shared knowledge and understanding, collaboration on conservation initiatives and conservation education programs.
- We formalized an honorarium policy to ensure that all Elders were properly and appropriately recognized and compensated for their time and wisdom.
- We have developed land acknowledgement guidelines to empower our staff respect and appreciate the traditional lands on which we operate.

RESOURCES

7. Please estimate how The City's operating funding was allocated in 2024.

64%	Salary, Wage & Benefits: 100% of cost of City employed, unionized zoo keepers, plus approximately half of the cost of essential operating staff (Facilities Maintenance, Security & Animal Care)
17%	Utilities: Approximately half of natural gas, electricity and water utilities
14%	Operating services, fees & supplies: About half of insurance premiums, animal care contracted services, training, tools & supplies, plus essential outsourced services (custodial, trash/compost/recycling, snow removal, tree inspections)
5%	Animal supplies: About half of animal food, medicine & enrichment
100%	<i>Total</i>

8. Did volunteers support your operations in 2024? (including board and committee members)

How many volunteers?	555
Estimated total hours provided by volunteers:	64,756

9. Did your organization receive any awards or recognition in 2024, or have any client or participant feedback that you want to highlight?

In 2024, the Wilder Institute/Calgary Zoo received multiple accolades recognizing our dedication to exceptional visitor experiences, conservation education, and community engagement.

We were honored in **Calgary's Child Magazine's Parents' Choice Awards 2023**, winning **Best Tourist/Family Attraction** and **Best Winter Event for Families (ZOO LIGHTS, presented by Olympia Trust Company)**, with an honourable mention for **Best Accessible/Inclusive Experience for Kids**. These awards reflect our ongoing commitment to providing engaging and inclusive experiences for families, making the zoo a cherished destination year-round.

Our unique event spaces also received recognition in **Avenue Magazine's public vote**, where we were named runner-up for **Best Unique Wedding Venue**, **Best Indoor Wedding Venue (under 100 guests)**, and **Best Outdoor Wedding Venue**. Similarly, in the **Calgary Herald Reader's Choice Awards 2023/2024**, we were recognized as the **Gold winner for Family Entertainment in Calgary** and **Bronze winner for Wedding Venue**, further solidifying our reputation as a premier destination for both family outings and special events.

The expertise and creativity of our **Visitor Engagement and Marketing Teams** were celebrated in the **Interpretation Canada Awards of Excellence**, where we received a **Silver award for Personal Interpretation** (Our performance troupe "The Wilder Bunch") and **Bronze awards for WildScapes/Dorothy Harvie Gardens Interpretive Signage and the Wild Canada Interpretive Plan**. These achievements highlight our commitment to immersive storytelling and education, enhancing the way visitors connect with wildlife and conservation.

We are incredibly proud of our team's dedication and passion, which continue to make the Wilder Institute/Calgary Zoo an award-winning destination that inspires people to take action for wildlife.

10. How did your organization address climate change in 2024, for example, operational or program changes that reduced green house gas emissions (GHG), air/water pollution, or waste that aligned with [The City's Climate Change Program](#) including Council's Climate Emergency Declaration?

In support of City climate initiatives, ongoing waste reduction through recycling and composting has reduced Wilder Institute Calgary Zoo's waste to landfill by 87% annually and we continue to work to improve that. All disposable food service containers and utensils we use are compostable and we continue to reinforce proper disposal with our guests. Through use of well water where possible the zoo has reduced annual potable water use by 4.5 million litres. Most of our membership categories include parking and quite a few members park at the zoo and take the LRT downtown thereby helping reduce downtown congestion and air pollution. As HVAC and other systems reach their end-of-life status they are being replaced where possible with higher efficiency systems.

11. Are there any projects, initiatives or plans for 2025 that you want to briefly highlight?

- Beginning construction of our next major capital project revitalizing a significant section of our Asian zone. New habitats for snow leopards, dalmation pelicans, and red panda, plus the addition

of a new species, takin. The project will create new experiences and learning for visitors and replace aging infrastructure.

- Undertaking the first year of our new strategic plan under the guidance of our new CEO, Dr. Kyle Burks. The plan furthers our vision of a future where people and wildlife thrive, together. Key strategic priorities include evolving the zoo, preparing to celebrate our centennial in 2029 and mobilizing our community to act as part of a solution-focused movement for nature.
- With funding from Environment & Climate Change Canada we will expand our impact through a “teach the teachers” initiative to improve environmental literacy by integrating environmental education into teacher training/educator professional development.
- Reinvesting in our staff with added office space, a new onboarding program, advancing our IDEA initiatives and enhancing training.

THE FOLLOWING SECTION IS FOR CIVIC PARTNERS MANAGING CITY-OWNED ASSETS

12. CAPITAL PROJECTS AND ASSET MANAGEMENT

Asset: *The Calgary Zoo*

a) How did you use The City’s capital funding in 2024?

Project	City Funding (2024)	Benefit (service improvement, efficiency, improved condition)
Giraffe Fence	\$705K	Improved/new condition
Tapir Filtration Upgrade	\$685K	Improved condition
Savannah Crossing	\$500K	Improved/new condition
Penguin Plunge Lifecycle Maintenance	\$463K	Improved condition
Penguin Plunge Cooling Tower	\$180K	Improved condition
Asphalt and Concrete Repair Program	\$111K	Improved condition
Fire Alarm Panel Upgrade	\$109K	Improved condition
Paint Maintenance Program	\$82K	Improved condition
Handrails & Fencing Repair Program	\$72K	Improved condition
Stucco Repair Program	\$66K	Improved condition
Various Smaller Repair/Maintenance/Replacements	\$263K	Improved condition