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11/10/17

Thanksgiving is just around the corner, and all of us at the zoo have a lot to be thankful for. On Tuesday, during local elections, our community passed a ballot measure for a 0.3% increase in the local county sales tax to pay for a number of projects in our community. These projects include a new shooting range where local law enforcement and private citizens can train, a new fire station on the east side of town, some improvements to Jennie Barker Road, and three zoo projects. I am thankful to live in a community that cares so much about our local zoo and its animal residents.

In case you hadn't heard, or still have questions about this tax increase, here are some basics. Our town is growing at a fast rate, and the need for a new fire station in the area of Schulman Crossing, where the city is expanding will be necessary to assist in saving lives and keeping the community's insurance rates low. The current police firing range is aged and needs to be replaced for the health of anyone training in the facility, and limits the type of training that can be done there. The Jennie Barker Road improvements will better suit the increased traffic in the area and improve safety with better road conditions. And now for the projects that I know the most about, the zoo projects. All three of these projects will help maintain our status as an accredited zoo with the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) and the quality of care we provide the zoo residents. At our last accreditation inspection, the hospital and quarantine areas were noted as needing improvement for the growing number of animals in our care. The habitat for the lemurs and spider monkeys was no longer considered to demonstrate best practices based on knowledge acquired since the building's construction in the mid-80's. Finally the flamingo area was also found to no longer match best practices for the care of the flamingos. If you would like more detail about the sales tax and the projects it will be funding you can visit

<http://www.garden-city.org/our-community/sales-tax>.

Now that I have briefly gone over what the sales tax covers, I'll tell you what we can expect to see from the zoo projects. We won't to be breaking ground on construction before the end of the year. The tax increase doesn't go into effect until April, and it will need to start generating funds before we can begin the projects. As we begin to accumulate funds for the projects a joint city and county board will plan out the order in which the projects will be done. For zoo projects, we will have to think about the logistics of animal care and housing during construction. We also have to look at the logistics of how these projects will affect our guests. After we get the go-ahead, we will need the construction

documents. You may have seen pictures of the conceptual plans for some of these projects, but those are just concepts. The conceptual plans give us an idea of what the design will be and where, but they are missing the guts and bones of the project. For that, we need architectural plans that will give us the materials to be used and how to put them together so that the structure is safe and operational. After the architectural plans are done we can put the project out to bid. Then we hire one of the construction companies that bid on the project and work out a construction timeline. I might not have dates for you, but we do know that the zoo projects are in the first round of projects in the next five years. So keep an eye out when you visit the zoo for these exciting changes down the road.

This has truly been a blessing for our community and all of our staff that work at Lee Richardson Zoo. The fact that our community shows so much support for our zoo and the animals we care for truly expands my heart, some may even say that it grew three sizes that day. Thank you to everyone in our community for the support and pride you have for Lee Richardson Zoo, we will continue to work towards meeting and exceeding our community's expectations. Thank you, and may you all have more things to be thankful for this Thanksgiving.