

# Trouble at City Zoo

City Zoo has been an important visitor destination for generations of children. Locally, provincially, and nationally, City Zoo has had a remarkable reputation for providing a high quality environment for its animals while enabling children of all ages to learn about animals and see them in natural environments. The zoo operates with a dedicated staff, as well as a large number of volunteers. Over half of its revenues come from a special tax levy on city property owners who vote on whether to renew the levy during city elections held every three years.

Despite its sterling reputation, the zoo went through a year of unpleasant publicity in 2005, after the board of directors dismissed head veterinarian Tim Bernardino. Newspaper reports of the dismissal suggested that Bernardino had been dismissed for speaking up about harm to some of the zoo's animals. The publicity forced zoo management to respond to many tough questions regarding its practices and operations regarding both animals and staff. City Council acted swiftly in the face of continued negative press coverage of the zoo, feeling a responsibility to the taxpayers. In order to answer all of the questions raised by the press, council created a special Citizens' Task Force to review the zoo's finances and operations, including animal care.

It is February 2006, and Emma Breslin has just been hired by the board of directors to take over as executive director of the zoo. She is reviewing the many concerns raised by the task force and wondering how she might restore employees' and the public's confidence in the zoo. She will be meeting with the board in two weeks to present her recommendations for moving forward. The board has asked her to act quickly because city residents will vote on the next tax levy in just three months. A "no" vote would substantially reduce the zoo's revenues for the next several years. (Exhibit 1 outlines the revenues and expenses of the zoo for fiscal year 2005.)

## Background

The City Zoological Gardens got its start in 1905, when Samantha Fraser donated a hedgehog to the city's Parks Board. Building on that first donation, the zoo has grown to be one of the most comprehensive zoological institutions in the country. The zoo's African Savannah recreates the look of Africa's plains and jungles. The Savannah houses the world-famous Hippoquarium, the first natural hippo habitat to be created in a zoo. The zoo includes exhibits for Siberian tigers, Asian sloth bears, and the endangered African wild dogs. The zoo has also renovated the Aviary and the

Primate Forest. More recent improvements include a new parking lot and gift shop. The zoo is a top tourist attraction for the city, and the number of annual visitors to the zoo has nearly tripled from 1982 (364 000 visitors) to 2004 (more than 1 million visitors). In the past five years, the zoo has twice been ranked as one of the top 10 zoos in North America for children and families. It was also voted one of the top five zoos in North America in the "North America's Favorite Zoo" contest sponsored by Microsoft. The zoo's vision and mission statements (see Exhibit 2) are widely credited with helping the zoo achieve these awards.

Until 1982, the zoo was run by the city. That year, ownership was transferred to the City Zoological Society, a private nonprofit organization. Because of its dedication, the Society was able to introduce a number of improvements that the city had not been able to accomplish. The zoo has since doubled in size and now contributes significantly to the local economy. A recent study by a local university found that the zoo generates almost \$8 in local economic activity for each tax dollar it receives.

The zoo employs 157 full-time staff members and more than 550 part-time and seasonal employees. There are also more than 300 volunteers who assist with programs, events, and community outreach. Donors and members provide financial support for animal conservation and educational programming.

## The Ministry of Natural Resources Inquiry

### The 2001 Inquiry

In December 2000, Medusa, a female sloth bear mistakenly believed to be pregnant, was put into isolation, where it died. Zoo officials later admitted that they had misunderstood how to properly care for sloth bears. Tim French, the curator of Large Mammals at the time, made the decision to put the bear in isolation on his own, without reporting this to his supervisors. The bear's zookeeper, Melissa Fox, who reported to French, objected to his decision, but no one would listen to her, including acting head veterinarian Wynona Singh (who was in charge while Dr. Bernardino was away on research). Fox's daily notes, which she was required to file with her supervisor, described her worries about the bear. Fox finally became so upset with the bear's condition that she asked to be transferred to another part of the zoo. French resigned after the bear's death.

As a result of the investigation, the zoo was fined \$1450 by the Ministry of Natural Resources for violating federal

**EXHIBIT 1** City Zoo Revenues and Expenses, Fiscal Year 2005

<b>Public Support</b>		
Property Tax Levy Receipts		\$6 466 860
Grants		\$174 780
Education Program Revenue		\$344 110
<b>Total Public Support</b>		<b>\$6 985 750</b>
<b>Development Revenue</b>		
Membership		\$3 903 420
Friends of the Zoo		\$214 397
Annual Fundraising		\$130 852
Corporate Support		\$302 952
Development Events		\$391 565
<b>Total Development Revenue</b>		<b>\$4 943 186</b>
<b>Earned Revenue</b>		
Admissions		\$3 253 355
Advanced Sales		\$337 908
Gross Revenue From Concessions and Gift Shop Operations		\$7 153 483
Rides, Parking, and Tours		\$1 560 727
Facility Rentals		\$116 520
<b>Total Earned Revenue</b>		<b>\$12 421 993</b>
<b>Other Revenue</b>		<b>\$34 956</b>
<b>Total Public Support and Revenue</b>		<b>\$24 385 885</b>
<b>Expenses</b>		
Cost of Goods Sold		\$2 448 164
Wages and Benefits		\$13 900 524
Supplies, Maintenance, and Utilities		\$4 387 642
Professional Services		\$2 246 560
Other Expenses		\$714 487
Conservation—Project Support		\$45 093
Animal Purchases		\$76 542
Special Exhibits		\$293 630
<b>Total Operating Expenses</b>		<b>\$24 112 642</b>
<b>Excess (Deficit)</b>		<b>\$273 243</b>

animal welfare regulations. The zoo also agreed to create an animal reporting system so that employees could raise any concerns they had about animal welfare, although nothing ever resulted from this agreement.

### The 2004 Inquiry

In February 2004, the Ministry of Natural Resources began an investigation of animal deaths that had occurred at the zoo over the past several years:

- Cupid, a hippopotamus, died in the summer of 2003 at the age of 49. While the veterinary staff

raised some questionable circumstances concerning the death, zoo officials dismissed the animal's death as "old age."

- George, a 14-year-old giraffe, died in 2001 from tetanus three weeks after he was gored by a kudu when the two were put in an enclosure together.
- Medusa, the female sloth bear, died in December 2000.

Zoo officials were puzzled about why the Ministry of Natural Resources had decided to investigate these deaths.

## EXHIBIT 2 City Zoo Vision and Mission Statements

### Vision Statement

To be one of the world's outstanding zoological institutions.

### Mission Statement

Our mission is to provide excellent animal management, educational programs, and scientific activities and to provide visitors with an enjoyable, educational, and family-oriented experience.

Objectives to achieve mission statement:

- Animal exhibits that reflect natural habitats
- Educational programs to help visitors understand the relationships of wildlife and the environment
- Refuges for rare and endangered species to protect and propagate them
- Scientific programs that contribute to greater understanding of animals and their habitats
- A clean, safe, and pleasant facility for visitors and employees
- A broad base of community support and involvement
- Operating on a sound business basis

"Initially, my gut reaction was that the Ministry of Natural Resources was just stepping things up because of what had transpired at that other zoo," a zoo spokesperson said. The spokesperson was referring to several suspicious animal deaths, including an orangutan euthanized by mistake, at a large zoo in another part of the country.

As the Ministry of Natural Resources investigation progressed, however, many zoo staff became nervous about the way it was being conducted. Inspectors did not reveal the exact reason for their inspection, but they asked specific questions about the giraffe and the hippopotamus. The inspectors requested to speak to some employees, while refusing to speak with others. Zoo officials later said the surprise inspection was "unusual, unprecedented, and aggressive."

"As you can imagine, it was a very upsetting and confusing time. We've never had this kind of inspection, and the frustrating thing was they would not tell us what they were inspecting for," said William Lau, the zoo's executive director.

Before the Ministry of Natural Resources could issue a report, zoo officials decided to conduct their own internal investigation into the deaths of George, the giraffe, and Cupid, the hippopotamus. Officials were concerned that someone at the zoo had made a call to the Ministry of Natural Resources that led to the surprise inspection. Lau claimed that the investigation was not a "witch hunt," and

that officials were not trying to find out if anyone had acted as a whistle-blower. "We simply want to understand what the Ministry of Natural Resources is worried about," he said.

The Ministry of Natural Resources issued a report on its investigation the following month. In it, the inspectors noted that the zoo had ignored the warnings of Dr. Tim Bernardino, City Zoo's head veterinarian, about animal care. "From the review of numerous documents and interviews, it is clear that these veterinary recommendations from the attending veterinarian [Dr. Bernardino] have not been addressed in a reasonable time. The licensee [the City Zoo] has failed to provide the attending veterinarian with adequate authority to ensure the provision of adequate veterinary care," the report stated.

## Zoo Management

### Board of Directors

The board of directors oversees City Zoo's business affairs and strategic plan, but day-to-day operations are left in the hands of the executive director. There are 18 people on the board. Each board member serves a three-year term. The term can be renewed up to two times, if the board member is nominated by the Nominating Committee and approved by the board of directors. The board in recent years has been mostly hands-off, allowing the executive director a great deal of latitude in running the zoo.

### Executive Director

The executive director is effectively the CEO of the zoo, carrying out the strategic plan of the board. William (Bill) Lau was appointed executive director in 1980, when the zoo was still run by the city. Under his leadership, the zoo expanded considerably, won numerous awards, and significantly increased its revenues.

Lau did a good job of raising the zoo profile externally, particularly in leading fundraising efforts that brought numerous exotic animals to the zoo. He was not necessarily seen as a good internal leader, however. The board's Executive Management Committee reported at a March 13, 2002 board meeting that the zoo's work environment was characterized by numerous disagreements. The minutes of this meeting showed that the board discussed "'open warfare' between managers; backbiting and rude behaviour during meetings; and problems in managers' relationships with Mr. Lau." The minutes also reported that "Working with Bill is experienced by some as difficult, intimidating, or scary." Some staff had complained that Lau frequently yelled at staff and failed to acknowledge their value. "There is a fear of repercussion, and some

people are afraid they will be... seen as stupid, belittled in meetings, [and] blamed and shamed in front of others," the minutes state.

## Chief Operating Officer

The chief operating officer (COO) is second in command at the zoo, reporting to the executive director. The COO responsibilities include most of the operational functions of the zoo: finance, human resources, maintenance and horticulture, interpretive services, and education. The Department of Veterinary Care was the only nonoperational function that also reported to the COO. All other animal-related departments, including the curators, reported to the executive director.

In early 2002, the zoo hired Robert (Bob) Stellenbosch to be the new COO. Unlike the COO he replaced, Stellenbosch had no animal care experience in his previous positions. Before coming to the zoo, he had been executive director of the National Funeral Directors Association for 14 years. Prior to that, he had been executive director of the Provincial Bankers Association. Nevertheless, veterinary care still fell under Stellenbosch's mandate, and the head veterinarian reported to him. Stellenbosch did not see this as a problem. As Stellenbosch pointed out, he often had to oversee "departments in areas I know very little about. The secret [is] having a strong line of communication with the people who report to you."

The zoo's executive director also did not see Stellenbosch's lack of animal-care experience as a problem. "We were looking for anybody with a background that could run a zoo on a day-to-day basis. We didn't find anybody with an animal background who could do that. We chose Bob Stellenbosch because he was the best candidate," Lau said.

## Caring for the Animals

Three sets of employees work closely with the animals: veterinarians, curators, and zookeepers.

### The Veterinarians

#### Dr. Tim Bernardino

Dr. Tim Bernardino, Director of Animal Health and Nutrition at City Zoo, was the zoo's head veterinarian, and had been a zoo employee for 22 years. Eight full- and part-time employees in the animal health and nutrition department reported to him. Veterinarians are responsible for the health care program for the animals, and they also maintain all health records. Bernardino was also the "attending veterinarian" for the zoo, a position that carries with it the responsibility to communicate on a regular basis with the Ministry of Natural Resources. Part of this responsibility involved bringing questionable ani-

mal deaths to the attention of the Ministry of Natural Resources.

Bernardino was well respected by the international veterinarian community, and well-liked by the zookeepers. He was known to deeply care for all of the animals in the zoo, and kept up with the latest literature on the best ways to manage and display animals to maximize their comfort and well-being.

Bernardino's performance as head veterinarian was generally applauded by senior management. He had received glowing ratings in his annual performance reviews throughout his career. For instance, at the end of 2004, Bernardino received one of his best performance reviews ever. Robert Stellenbosch, his direct supervisor, wrote that Bernardino maintained "the highest quality of work!" He also wrote that "Tim is well respected throughout the zoo." Stellenbosch praised the veterinarian's technical skills, his dependability, and his tremendous work ethic.

There were occasional negative comments in his reviews, although these did not seem to weigh heavily in his overall evaluations. For instance, in his 2000 review a former supervisor wrote, "Tim can be intense and inflexible, causing strained relations with fellow employees." Still, the supervisor noted that Bernardino "gets along reasonably well" with other zoo employees. In his 2004 review, the veterinarian was specifically asked to "focus more on people skills in the department and with curators." The review also noted that "Tim is strong in his beliefs, and sometimes needs to temper that once a final decision is made."

The negative performance appraisal comments were related to Bernardino's relationships with the curators and zookeepers. He was well respected by the zookeepers, and maintained good relations with them because their observations of the animals helped the animals stay healthy. However, some of the curators felt that Bernardino empowered the zookeepers too much, so that the zookeepers would sometimes go around their curators to make complaints about animal care. Bernardino worried that some of the zookeepers were disciplined by their curators when they spoke with him about their concerns regarding the animals. "People don't feel free to be open. Discussions don't happen. [There is] control of information, control of communications, control of decision making [by the curators]," he said.

Beth Else, curator of Conservation Research, saw it differently. "I think he empowered the keepers to go around the supervisors and go to him when they didn't get the answer that they liked," she said, echoing comments of the other curators.

Despite his generally good reviews, Bernardino also felt that he was "alienated from the decision-making process... with the curatorial staff and with other administrators." He sometimes complained the curators were given more weight than the veterinary staff in decision making about

the animals, even when the health of the animals was in question. He also felt that his role as attending veterinarian, where he was accountable to the Ministry of Natural Resources, was “not well defined or understood by those in the zoo community.”

Bernardino’s reviews took a turn for the worse after the Ministry of Natural Resources released the report of its 2004 surprise investigation. Just two months later, in May 2004, Stellenbosch gave Bernardino, in writing, what was termed a “verbal” reprimand about his performance. “We need to have team players, and you need to work through these issues in a more professional, less ‘attacking’ manner,” the COO’s warning stated. Bernardino was also told that he lacked “team attitude, professionalism, and judgment.”

This warning was closely followed by the announcement that Bernardino would share the “attending veterinarian” position with two others: his subordinate, veterinarian Wynona Singh, and Mammals curator Randi Walker. Though Walker was also a veterinarian, she was not licensed to practise as one in the province. In August 2004, Bernardino was told that he would no longer serve as an “attending veterinarian,” and that Singh would be the sole “attending veterinarian.” At about the same time, Bernardino received a written reprimand, in which he was accused of “steadily undermining animal curator Dr. Walker, poor communication skills, and intimidating other employees.”

### Dr. Wynona Singh

Dr. Wynona Singh, who reported to Dr. Bernardino, had been a full-time veterinarian at the zoo since 1999. She first joined the zoo in 1989 as a part-time veterinarian. Singh was the veterinarian on call when the giraffe died in 2001 and the sloth bear died in 2000, although she was not implicated in either death.

Bernardino and Singh often butted heads. In his 2003 evaluation of her, Bernardino recommended that she receive no salary increase. In January 2004, Bernardino told the zoo’s human resources director that “if she doesn’t improve and we keep her, I’m out of here.”

Bernardino was reflecting on a survey of her performance he had conducted with the veterinary and animal food staff. Only 29 percent of them gave her favourable ratings, while 61 percent noted that she had big communication problems. The zookeepers specifically complained that Singh did not relate well to them and was not always open to their concerns. This led Bernardino to tell her that she “had to continue to improve some management skills, including communication.” Despite negative reviews from her immediate staff and subordinates, Singh received high marks from the curators and associate curators, who indicated their full and unambiguous support of her.

## The Curators and Zookeepers

Curators make recommendations such as what animals to acquire, whether animals should be bred, and whether animals should be lent to other zoos for either breeding or display purposes. Curators are also responsible for the designing and planning of animal exhibits, including coming up with ideas for new exhibits that might be of interest to the public. Though curators are responsible for the overall well-being of the animals, they are certainly aware of the marketing and public relations functions of animal exhibits.

The general curator at a zoo oversees the entire animal collection and animal management and is responsible for strategic collection planning. Zoos also have animal curators who manage a specific section of the animal collection. City Zoo had four area curators: curator of Fishes, curator of Reptiles, curator of Birds, and curator of Mammals. Some areas also had associate curators, such as the assistant curator of Large Mammals and the assistant curator of Small Mammals.

Senior zookeepers and zookeepers (also called *keepers*) report to the curators and work with individual animals, feeding them, handling them, keeping their cages clean, and looking after their welfare on a day-to-day basis. Keepers often work with the same animals for a number of years, so they can grow quite attached to their animals. Keepers can feel that they understand more about the welfare of their animals than the curators.

At City Zoo there was significant tension between the curators and the keepers. The keepers complained that curators did not listen to their concerns, and curators complained that the keepers often went around them to share concerns about animals with Dr. Bernardino. The curators felt that the keepers should raise all concerns with them, rather than with the veterinarian.

### Randi Walker

Randi Walker was curator of Mammals at the zoo. The Mammals department’s 22 full-time employees (including 14 zookeepers) took care of the zoo’s apes, great cats, bears, elephants, and all hoofed animals. This was the largest animal department at the zoo, and was twice the size of the next largest department, the Birds department. All of the deaths investigated by the Ministry of Natural Resources had happened in Walker’s unit.

The assistant curator of Large Mammals and the assistant curator of Small Mammals worked under Walker. The assistant curators were two of the most liked curators at the zoo. They had excellent animal-care backgrounds, were very aware of the zoo’s communication problems, and knew how to work effectively with the other employees. They were also respected by the zookeepers and other curators.

Although curators do not usually have veterinary training, Walker had completed her veterinary studies. However, she was not licensed to practise veterinary medicine in the province. Her background may have led to her difficult relationship with Bernardino. Sometimes she tried to second guess him, and other times she attempted to overrule his decisions.

Walker was particularly uncomfortable with the relationship that Bernardino had with the Mammals zookeepers. She felt that his close relationship to them undermined her. "There are communication problems with mammal keepers and [Mammals curator Randi Walker]," one keeper said. "Some people can talk; other people, if they open their mouth, she jumps on them. That's the underlying thing why people talk to Dr. Tim."

Gorilla keeper Dale Petiniot noted that while she had no problem discussing issues with Walker, sometimes keepers needed to discuss issues with a neutral third party. "It's not always that we're justified, but sometimes you need to talk about things, and you don't have a next step, other than the vet," Ms. Petiniot said.

When zoo officials, responding to the Ministry of Natural Resources' surprise investigation, tried to investigate the death of George the giraffe, they quickly discovered that most employees in the Mammals department would simply not talk about the event, saying that they feared retribution by Walker. Even though zoo officials offered immunity from any disciplinary action in exchange for clarification about what had happened, no one came forth to take responsibility for putting the two animals together. "Nobody claimed responsibility," Andy Yang, curator of Reptiles and head of the internal investigation, said.

The report of the internal investigation concluded, "The apparent failure of the mammal keeper staff to inform, discuss, and plan this introduction with the veterinary staff prior to any action was unacceptable and compromised the welfare of the giraffe." Yang's committee made a pointed observation regarding the Mammals department: "There are significant communication problems in the Mammals department that need attention. These communications problems have negatively affected animal welfare."

Xavier Tolson, a human resource consultant hired by the zoo at the end of 2004 to analyze workplace problems in the Mammals department, reached many of the same conclusions. "I do not believe I have ever seen a department as dysfunctional as the Mammals department" at City Zoo. He noted that there was a lot of conflict between the head curator and the zookeepers. Tolson suggested that the keepers had a tendency to try to bully Walker into seeing their point of view about animal concerns.

Though most of her subordinates were quite critical of Walker's performance, managers at the most senior levels in the zoo were strongly supportive of her. She was always

deferential to their views, and they felt she was right not to cave in to employee concerns.

## The Biological Program Committee

In most zoos, the general curator oversees the work of the curators, zookeepers, and veterinarians and attempts to resolve any issue that might come up amongst the three groups. However, City Zoo had no general curator. When the zoo hired Robert Stellenbosch as COO in 2002, he was unable to serve as general curator, a role his predecessor had filled, because he had no previous animal experience.

Shortly after Stellenbosch was hired, William Lau, the executive director, announced that the newly created Biological Program Committee (BPC) would perform the duties normally handled by the general curator. The committee consisted of the curators of Mammals, Birds, Reptiles, and Fishes, an animal behaviour specialist, and members of the zoo's veterinary staff. Only the four curators and the animal behaviour specialist had voting rights on the committee, however. The curators took turns chairing the monthly committee, rotating the position every few months. No one else was allowed to chair the committee.

Not everyone was happy with the new management committee meetings. Bernardino, who had had a very good relationship with the former general curator, felt that his authority was diminished because of the BPC structure. Bernardino also objected that he was not able to rotate into the role of committee chair. He complained that the curators did not pay enough attention to animal-care issues. He also complained that the curators treated members of the veterinary staff who were on the committee like second-class citizens. After trying to get along with the new management structure for about six months, Bernardino took his concerns about the BPC to the executive director. Lau dismissed the veterinarian's concerns, suggesting that communication amongst committee members was good, except for some "troublemakers," which Bernardino took to be a reference to himself.

Beth Else, curator of Conservation and Research at the zoo, noticed a change in Bernardino's demeanor after the creation of the BPC. "It seemed in the past that Tim relied on gentle persuasion to bring people over to his way of thinking. In recent years, particularly in the past year, Tim has been more of a disruptive influence at the zoo," Else said. "I don't want to give the impression that I think Tim is malicious, because I don't," Else said. "Tim, in his own mind, thinks he is doing what is right."

Other employees must have agreed with Else that Bernardino was trying to do the right things at the zoo. On February 23, 2005, the zoo staff voted on nominees for "Outstanding Employee" of the year. Bernardino received the most votes.

## Shockwaves at the Zoo Head Veterinarian Fired

On February 28, 2005, City Zoo dismissed Bernardino from his \$102 000-a-year position as head veterinarian. The executive director said that the dismissal had nothing to do with the 2004 Ministry of Natural Resources inspection, or with issues about animal care. "There is no question in my mind that he raised the level of animal care here at the zoo," Lau explained. "And while I do have a problem with the way Bernardino dealt with the Ministry of Natural Resources in the past, the termination was a result of our concerns over Dr. Bernardino's administrative and management skills that we had worked with him to address over the last several years."

Bernardino's dismissal created shockwaves both inside and outside of the zoo. The local newspaper contacted several well-known veterinarians throughout the country to find out what they could do about Bernardino. All of the contacted veterinarians spoke with great regard for the dismissed veterinarian. Reporters also uncovered previous performance reviews of Bernardino, which indicated that Bernardino had performed exceptionally in his work with the animals. Reporters concluded from their investigation that "The firing of Dr. Bernardino in late February was the culmination of a year-long struggle between him and zoo administrators beginning, it appears, with the veterinarian's frank comments last year during a routine animal-care inspection by the Ministry of Natural Resources. Those comments led to an admonition by the Ministry of Natural Resources that the zoo failed to heed warnings about its animal-care practices."

The intense press coverage prompted the city to start its own investigation of zoo administration. City Council felt an obligation to protect taxpayers' money, and recognized that public confidence in the zoo was at an all-time low because of all the negative publicity. Council appointed a 14-member Citizens' Task Force in mid-March. The mandate of the task force was to review zoo finances and operations, including animal care, and to issue a report within 100 days.

As the task force was getting underway, more scandal struck the zoo. The local newspaper reported that Executive Director William Lau had traded in the Jeep he had been given at zoo expense for a luxury Volvo, also paid for by the zoo. Similarly, COO Robert Stellenbosch had traded in his Dodge. The two Volvos were costing taxpayers \$700 per month.

Members of the public were outraged by this news, coming just two weeks after Bernardino's firing. One long-standing zoo member emailed the local newspaper that he was disgusted with zoo administrators: "The firing of the whistleblowing vet is enough to make one wonder if the chimpanzees could not do a better job of running the place. If anything would make me stop supporting the zoo, it is the

attitude of the zoo director and [chief operating officer]. To rent Volvos for themselves, to be so wasteful with the dollars of the taxpayers is tantamount to being part of the low-down reptile exhibit."

## A Settlement and Resignations at the Top

After his dismissal, Bernardino approached the board of directors, requesting that they meet with him and give him back his job. The board was feeling under siege because of all the negative publicity. Bernardino's dismissal seemed to mobilize community sentiment toward the veterinarian, and against the zoo's senior management.

In an effort to quiet speculation by community members about zoo leadership, the board of directors made a settlement with Dr. Bernardino on May 1, 2005. The agreement reinstated him to his position of director of Animal Health and Nutrition of the zoo effective immediately, although he would serve in this role only as a "consultant," on an "as-needed basis." The agreement stated that Bernardino was not allowed to be on zoo grounds while performing his job, and could not enter the zoo as a private citizen for six months. The agreement prohibited him from discussing "his opinions as to the welfare of the animals at the Zoo, the circumstances of his termination or reinstatement of employment, his opinions regarding personnel at the Zoo, or any other matters pertaining to the Zoo" with anyone unless subpoenaed.

Bernardino's consulting position was to last for 18 months. He would be paid \$105 000, plus health and retirement benefits during that time. Under the settlement, he would also receive \$42 815 in back pay, benefits, and attorney's fees. The board agreed to remove all negative evaluations that were added to his file in 2004. Bernardino agreed that he would not file claims of wrongful discharge or breach of contract against the zoo.

Two weeks after the settlement with Bernardino, the zoo board announced that Executive Director William Lau would retire immediately, after 25 years at the zoo. The board also announced that COO Robert Stellenbosch would resign once a new management team was in place.

## The Findings of the Citizens' Task Force

The Citizens' Task Force presented its findings to City Council at a public meeting held on July 8, 2005. The task force divided its presentation into three parts: a discussion of the employee survey they had commissioned; a presentation of what they had learned about the politics of zookeeping; and a discussion of other observations about how the zoo operated.

## Employee Survey

The Citizen's Task Force asked Maynard & Associates, a Toronto-based employee relations consulting firm, to determine employee morale. Exhibit 3 summarizes the results of the survey, including separate results for the Mammals department. Maynard & Associates have collected baseline data as a result of their many employee surveys, and that data is also included.

On many dimensions, City Zoo employees were more critical than the average employee in Maynard's surveys.

Zoo employees complained about the lack of effective leadership, poor communication, and the scarcity of teamwork. Only half of the employees said there was open and honest communication at the zoo, and many employees noted that this lack of communication led to rumours and myths that spread throughout the zoo.

Employees said that they did not feel that they could talk freely to their supervisors about job-related problems, and they gave low marks to supervisors for resolving employee problems. Employees also gave low marks to

**EXHIBIT 3** Employee Attitude Survey of City Zoo, and Some Comparisons

Category	Question	Percentage of Employees Who Agree or Strongly Agree With Statement			
		City Zoo	Mammals Department	Other Zoos	Other Organizations
Pay	My compensation is satisfactory and fair compared with that of other employees who work here.	80	81	82	75
	My compensation is satisfactory and fair compared with what I would earn at similar companies.	81	81	82	74
Recognition	My supervisor recognizes and provides positive feedback for work well done.	63	57	68	72
Supervision	My supervisor treats me fairly.	43	43	63	63
	My supervisor helps me perform my work effectively.	41	39	70	70
Communication	I feel comfortable expressing my ideas to my supervisor and other leaders in the company.	41	35	71	73
	Leaders communicate pertinent information to employees.	51	48	55	74
Empowerment	I am free to make decisions that affect my work without consulting with my supervisor.	55	45	67	69
	My ideas are used when managers make decisions that affect the company.	49	41	65	70
Job Satisfaction	Overall, the company is a good place to work.	68	60	70	77
Management	The managers here are honest, fair, and ethical.	45	39	76	79
Participation	Managers seek employee input into the way work is done here.	53	45	68	77
Teamwork	Employees work together as a team here.	59	53	79	79
	Teamwork is encouraged here.	55	50	75	75
Training	I receive adequate job-related training to do my job.	85	83	81	76
	There are plenty of opportunities here to learn additional skills.	85	78	81	74
Work Demands	The workload is fair and reasonable.	75	74	73	79



supervisors for letting employees know what was expected of them. Supervisors were also criticized for not considering differing opinions, and a number of employees noted that they feared punishment if they expressed contrary opinions. Employees also expressed the expectation many employees placed on each other that “if you are not with us; you are against us,” which created a lot of divisiveness across the zoo.

Despite the low morale uncovered by the survey, results indicated that employees loved working at the zoo, were fairly paid, and felt that they had been trained appropriately to do their jobs. However, they wanted to see an end to the political, communication, and leadership problems that dominated day-to-day work at the zoo.

### The Politics of Zookeeping

Three members of the Citizens’ Task Force were asked to discuss the events that had occurred at City Zoo with respected members of the zoo community throughout North America. Dr. Christopher Bondar, the associate veterinarian at the Central Canada zoo, suggested that it was not surprising that there were tensions between zoo management and the veterinarians. “The zoo business in general, because people’s emotions tend to run high about animals and their welfare and because it is a small community, tends to have a lot of politics,” said Dr. Bondar, who added that he has not encountered such problems at his own zoo. It can be hard to understand all of the politics at zoos because “so many businesses are about paperwork or industry or goods that don’t spawn the type of passion people have for living animals.”

Members of the task force spoke with Dr. Philip Robinson, a former director of veterinary services at the San Diego Zoo, and author of the book, *Life at the Zoo: Behind the Scenes with the Animal Doctors*, and asked him about the relationship between curators and veterinarians. “The perception that [veterinarians] should stick to sick animals and leave the other issues to the other people on staff—traditionally, this is sort of a turf battle that has more to do with management style than anything that benefits the animals,” he told them.

Other experts supported Dr. Robinson’s position. They told the task force that it is crucial for veterinarians to interact with keepers to understand the needs of individual animals. “If the curator says to the keeper, ‘You only tell me what’s happening,’ then the veterinarian is sort of between a rock and a hard place to know when the animal is on the road to a problem, or already is there and has the problem,” said Randolph Stuart, the executive director of the Canadian Association of Zoo Veterinarians. “That’s why most vets will keep a good rapport with keepers.”

Experts in the area of zoo administration suggested that many zoo administrators don’t appreciate the passion that

veterinarians bring to their work. Veterinarians are chiefly concerned with animal welfare, while the zoo administration is also concerned with fundraising, providing an experience for zoo visitors, running successful gift shops and snack bars, and making sure parking lots are adequately designed for visitor load.

Dr. Mark Cornwall, the director of animal health and attending veterinarian at the Maple Leaf Zoo stressed the need for good communication among all zoo employees. The Maple Leaf Zoo was sued by an employee under whistle-blower protection legislation. The employee was demoted and harassed after she complained to government officials about unsafe conditions at the zoo. “Everybody kind of learned something from that,” said Dr. Cornwall. “Animal welfare comes first,” he said. “Zoo veterinarians are really the ones who are in charge of that. Veterinarians tend to champion those causes because that is what they are expected to do. You have different perspectives and opinions on those things, but the key is to sit down with all the folks.” He added, “Zoos are complicated organisms and organizations. Open communication can improve the situation, however.”

### Other Issues Raised by the Task Force

During its presentation, the Citizens’ Task Force identified a number of other issues of concern, and they briefly reviewed these for council.

**Organizational Culture** The task force found that lack of trust was a big issue among staff. They also found a “culture of fear” and noted that even though retaliation was often subtle, it was definitely there. In particular, keepers were afraid to admit actions or mistakes, even when immunity was offered. The task force expressed concern that many of the zookeepers were too focused on their own specific job duties and did not “see or support the ‘big picture’ of the zoo as both a wildlife conservation facility and a business.”

### Relationship Between Curators, Veterinarians, and Zookeepers

Some curators were found to be good at managing animals but weak at managing people. The keepers complained that curators did not always respond in a timely manner to their proposals and suggestions for improving animal care. Veterinarians had some of the same complaints as the keepers—that curators did not always see the need to consult with veterinarians on animal management issues. The task force also noted that some keepers and curators held grudges that they might not be able to put behind them.

Curators complained that veterinarians undermined them through direct contact with the keepers. However, the task force noted that there was no defined communication

path for keepers to raise concern with the veterinary staff. Moreover, experts throughout the zoo veterinary world stressed the importance of open communication between keepers and veterinarians so that vets can fulfill their obligations under the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act.

The task force concluded that there was a lack of communication among keepers, veterinarians, and curators that led to questionable care standards for the animals. Because departments of the zoo did not work closely together, there was not a good system of checks and balances to maintain appropriate care.

**The Biological Program Committee** The Citizens' Task Force was particularly critical of the BPC, suggesting that many of the zoo's problems resulted from the creation of the BPC. The BPC created a mutual admiration society for the curators, and allowed the curators to overlook the concerns of keepers and the veterinarian staff. The board also found that there was no real accountability for decisions because of the committee structure.

**Organizational Structure** The task force raised a number of questions about the current structure of the zoo, noting that communication issues, lack of teamwork, and lack of coordination were all factors that resulted in animal deaths, and were likely related to the current structure. During their investigation, they had asked Lau whether all individuals directly involved with animal care had reported to him. He claimed they did, until a member of the task force, pointing to the organizational chart (see Exhibit 4), noted that the veterinarians and veterinarian technicians reported to the COO.

"It was largely the size of the group, and the number of people reporting to different people. We were trying to divide the zoo up so that neither Bob nor I [had too many]," Lau explained. "Money being what it is, we didn't want another high management position."

**Employee Conduct** The task force found that there was a "lack of consistency, uniformity, accountability, and decisiveness in the enforcement of standards of conduct across departments" and that the Employee Relations department was not good at enforcing standards of conduct. A number of employees complained that those who worked hard were often expected to compensate for employees who underperformed.

Employees are disciplined through a "five step" process. An employee can be terminated if he or she receives five written infractions within a 12-month period. The task force found this process so burdensome that employees were almost never terminated. In fact, Jennifer Fisher, employee relations director, told the task force that "no animal keepers or other non-managerial employees had been fired in the past 20 years."

## A New Executive Director Takes Over

Emma Breslin began her position as the new executive director last week, eight months after the resignation of the previous executive director.

Breslin's previous position was as executive director for the past 10 years at Maritimes Zoo, a smaller zoo with 51 employees, a general curator, and two contract veterinarians. Breslin had been hired by Maritimes Zoo to reunite a divided staff. She is known as a consensus leader, and at Maritimes Zoo she increased communication, improved supervisory skills, and taught employees to value each other's contributions to the successful operation of the zoo. Breslin was also successful in raising awareness among the community about why financial support from the public was so important to the zoo.

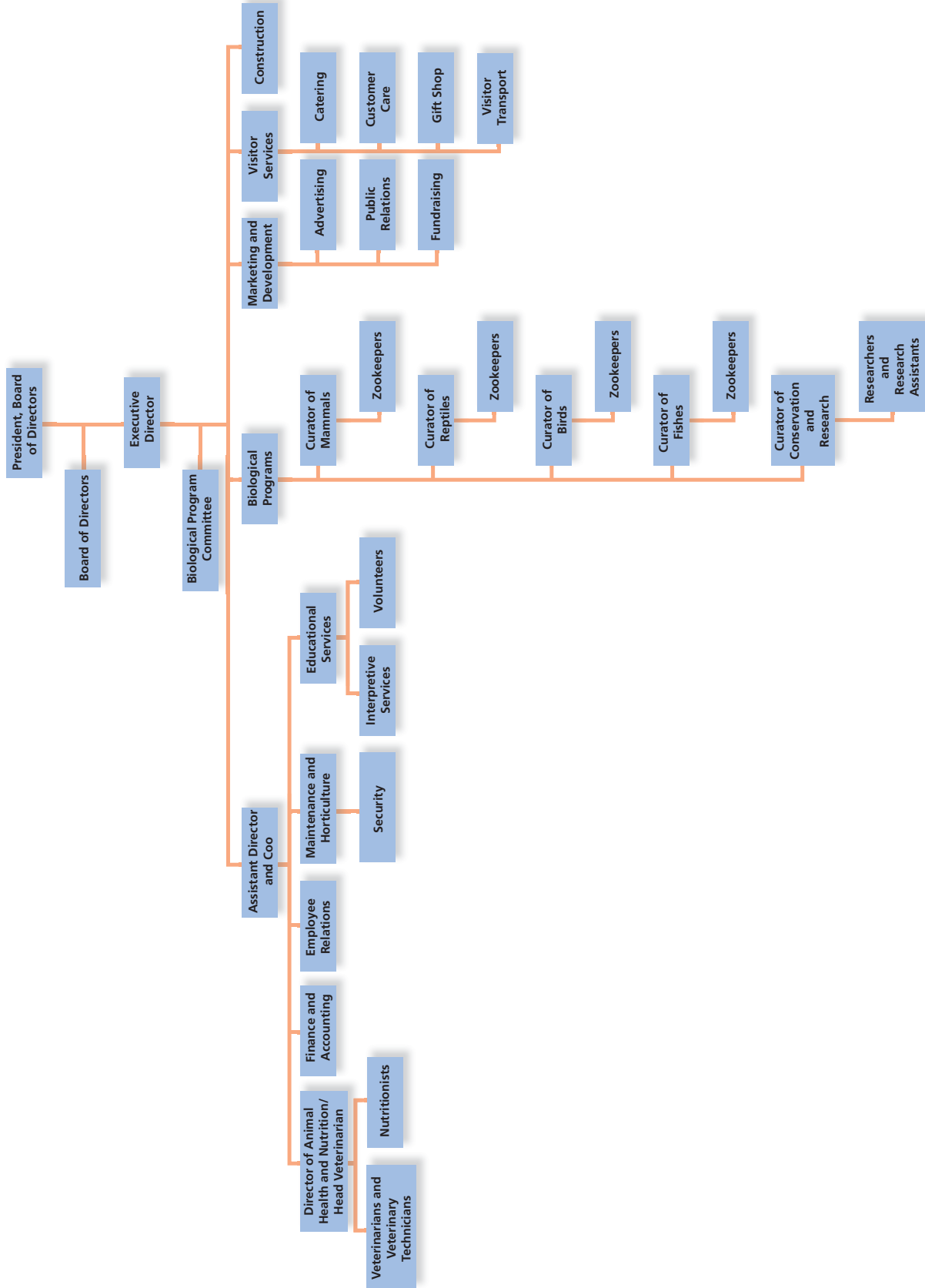
Breslin faces a large public relations problem as she begins her new job. She knows that much of the zoo's revenue is dependent upon public support. The next tax levy vote is three months from now. The zoo also raises significant revenue through the "Friends of the Zoo" program, an annual subscription program where people donate money to the zoo. She needs to restore community trust. At the same time, she needs to grow zoo attendance levels, which have fallen in the past six months, and develop a strategic plan for the zoo.

Breslin also faces a very divided and demoralized staff. She has reviewed what was written in the press and familiarized herself with the Citizens' Task Force review. She knows she needs to bring some peace and stability to employee relations. Her most difficult task will be to unite the staff. She needs to build staff morale and gain their trust. She wonders how she will accomplish these goals over the next year. The outline of what she intends to do over the next six months to get things back on track is to be presented to the board in two weeks.

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**EXHIBIT 4** Organizational Chart of City Zoo, January 2005



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