



LEGACY ANNUAL REPORT FY24

Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund / January 2025

Como Park Zoo and Conservatory is pleased to submit our annual report on programs and projects supported by the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund (ACHF), which was created by the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment. This report is required by Minnesota Statutes 129D. 17 and section 3.303, Subd. 10 and details outcomes for FY 2024: July 1, 2023 to June 30, 2024.

We are grateful for your support of our programs.

Como Park Zoo and Conservatory continues to serve as a treasured resource for all Minnesotans, inspiring curiosity and connection to the wonders of the natural world. Over a century after its founding, Como remains the State's most visited cultural destination, offering free admission, a family-friendly atmosphere, and accessible, non-formal education programs for all.

Support from the Legacy Amendment's Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund has enabled Como to provide inclusive, enriching programs and enhancements that celebrate the arts, culture, and history, ensuring meaningful experiences for communities across Minnesota.

This document covers the Fiscal Year 2024 reporting period of July 1, 2023 to June 30, 2024 of all Legacy grant funds and activities that took place during this time period.

FY 24 Total Funding Amount: \$1,500,000

Administrative Costs: 3% to MN Department of Administration Grant Management \$45,000, 2% to Como Administrative Costs \$29,100

Duration of Projects: July 1, 2023 - June 30, 2024

Staff FTE: 4.6 FTE

Oversight of these projects is the responsibility of Como Park Zoo and Conservatory, a division of the Saint Paul Parks and Recreation Department and key senior staff. Questions about these projects may be directed to:

Michelle Furrer

City of Saint Paul – Parks & Recreation
michelle.furrer@ci.stpaul.mn.us

Como Park Zoo and Conservatory

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LEGACY AMENDMENT ARTS
AND CULTURAL HERITAGE GRANT

Como Park Zoo and Conservatory
FY 2023 Report Minnesota Legislative Reference
Library

July 1, 2023-June 30, 2024 / January 2025

Como Park Zoo and Conservatory is owned
and operated by the City of Saint Paul's
Department of Parks and Recreation.

Leadership:

Michelle Furrer
Campus Manager & Director,
Como Park Zoo and Conservatory

Andy Rodriguez
Director, Saint Paul Parks and Recreation

Mayor Melvin Carter

City of Saint Paul City Council:

Mitra Jalali, City Council President

Anika Bowie
Rebecca Noecker
Saura Jost
HwaJeong Kim
Nelsie Yang
Cheniqua Johnson

Reporting: As a recipient of funds from the ACHF, Como Park Zoo and Conservatory must abide by certain reporting requirements as stated in Minnesota Statutes § 3.303, Subd. 10, § 129D.17 Subd. 2 (d), and § 129D.19 Subd. 5. 4 According to Minnesota Statute 129D.17, Subdivision 2(d): A state agency or other recipient of a direct appropriation from the arts and cultural heritage fund must compile and submit all information for funded projects or programs, including the proposed measurable outcomes and all other items required under section 3.303, subdivision 10, to the Legislative Coordinating Commission as soon as practicable or by January 15 of the applicable fiscal year, whichever comes first. The Legislative Coordinating Commission must post submitted information on the Web site required under section 3.303, subdivision 10, as soon as it becomes available.

MUSIC IN NATURE

Celebrating Minnesota's vibrant multicultural community through the rich rhythms and melodies of live music. Como Park Zoo & Conservatory connects visitors with local artists through diverse music programs. Groovin' in the Garden brings an eight-week summer concert series to the Conservatory's front lawn, while the Music Under Glass series offers an enchanting eight-week winter concert experience inside the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory. Summer Music Mondays showcase strolling musicians throughout the zoo grounds, creating a lively atmosphere. These free events, featuring Minnesota artists, take place outside standard public hours, introducing the arts to new audiences in a welcoming and accessible way.



Outcomes &
Outputs FY24

- 16 concerts
- 73 artists
- 8,655 attendees

Proposed Outcome
Achievement

- ✓ Achieved all
(Achieved 100
of proposed outcomes)
- Achieved most
(Achieved greater than 50%
of proposed outcomes)
- Achieved some
(Achieved less than 50% of
proposed outcomes)
- Achieved none
(Achieved 0% of proposed
outcomes)
- Outcomes data not
yet available



PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMS

Como is dedicated to offering accessible programs for everyone through the Legacy funded Public Engagement initiatives—focused on connections, access, reach, engagement, and storytelling. These programs emphasize equity, inclusion, and virtual learning, providing participants with opportunities to explore, create, and connect in a welcoming environment. Feedback highlights increased interest, appreciation, and engagement with the natural world, while fostering meaningful connections and expanding participation with new audiences.



SENSORY FRIENDLY MORNINGS
Como Park Zoo and Conservatory is an energetic environment full of sensory stimuli. We know this environment can be overwhelming for some visitors. Because of this, Como has early access mornings designed for individuals on the autism spectrum and their families. A Social Narrative, created in collaboration with the Autism Society of Minnesota (AuSM), explains what to expect step-by-step as they explore the Campus. The Visual Schedule Board tool helps visitors plan their route around the zoo. A Sensory Friendly Map is also available and highlights areas of stronger smells and quiet spaces.



LITTLE EXPLORERS
Little Explorers provides opportunities for families of young children to create memories while developing an appreciation for the natural world. This program provides age-appropriate, hands-on educational activities, along with two interactive story times. Little Explorers is offered Thursdays from 10am-12pm, year-round.



ASL INTERPRETED PROGRAMMING
An ASL (American Sign Language) interpreter joins select Como programming every Thursday. These programs include a Little Explorers story time, a keeper talk located at rotating habitats around the zoo, and a Blaze Sparky Show seal & sea lion training demonstration. These ASL interpreted programs allow our deaf/hard of hearing visitors a chance to fully engage.

Outcomes & Outputs FY24

- 370 Program Offerings
- 133,922 Participants
- 44 Digital Episodes – 6,277 new digital followers
- 2,144,398 social media engagements

Program Outputs

- **Little Explorers**
 - 51 total programs
 - 4,585 total participants
- **ASL Interpreted Programming**
 - 153 programs interpreted
 - 38,840 total participants
- **S.A.F.E. Tables**
 - 56 total programs
 - 10,182 total participants
- **Senior Strolls**
 - 23 AM & Sunset
 - 716 total participants
- **Sensory Friendly**
 - 24 total programs
 - 1,282 total participants
- **Como C.A.R.E.S. Table Programs**
 - 25 total table programs
 - 4,639 total participants
- **Social Media Videos**
 - 44 total social media videos
 - 2,144,398 total views
 - 6,277 followers gained
- **Como in the Community**
 - 18 total programs
 - 73,668 total participants
- **Apprentice Program**
 - 20 total programs
 - 10 total participants

Proposed Outcome Achievement

- ☒ **Achieved all**
(Achieved 100 of proposed outcomes)
- ☐ **Achieved most**
(Achieved greater than 50% of proposed outcomes)
- ☐ **Achieved some**
(Achieved less than 50% of proposed outcomes)
- ☐ **Achieved none**
(Achieved 0% of proposed outcomes)
- ☐ **Outcomes data not yet available**



SENIOR STROLLS
Senior Strolls is a program for Como’s “55 and better” visitors. This program offers an opportunity for a leisurely stroll through the lush greenery and warm confines of the conservatory outside the regular busy hours. Seniors Strolls takes place twice a month on Tuesdays with both a morning and evening option.



S.A.F.E. STATIONS
S.A.F.E. stands for “Saving Animals From Extinction.” It is an initiative through the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA), who we are accredited by. AZA S.A.F.E. focuses the collective expertise within AZA-accredited zoos and aquariums and leverages their massive audiences to save species. Our current S.A.F.E. program includes an educator stationed at various exhibits around the zoo bi-weekly to give visitors more information on our S.A.F.E. animals. Como is currently home to eleven species on the AZA S.A.F.E. List; African Lion, African Penguin, Wood Turtle, Blanding’s Turtle, Chinchilla, Giraffe, Gorilla, North American Bison, Orangutan, Radiated Tortoise and Snow Leopard.



SOCIAL MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS Como Park Zoo and Conservatory is on Instagram Reels! Reels are a great way to show the amazingness of Como’s plants and animals to those Minnesotans who may not be able to physically visit the zoo and conservatory. Viewers can enjoy learning fun facts, getting insider information, and seeing what kind of free programming is being offered at Como! Reels have something for everyone, from a Sunken Garden show change time lapse, to introducing new members of our Como Zoo family like Ivy, the Reticulated Giraffe, or even just having a laugh at the Tiger Van.



COMO IN THE COMMUNITY EVENTS Through Como in the Community, our purpose is to make members of the community aware of what is at Como and how Como can best serve them. This program can be utilized at community events, open houses, fairs, festivals, etc. and share upcoming events and resources that Como has to offer. We will also promote Como with activities or props. Currently, we provide a table of biofacts (bones, furs, feathers, etc), a trivia wheel with animal and plant trivia, and prizes.



APPRENTICE PROGRAM
The Apprentice Program partners with Saint Paul’s RightTrack initiative, offering two years of paid training in zookeeping and horticulture to prepare young people for professional careers. RightTrack supports nearly 1,000 youth annually at a barrier to employment, providing training and development to build a diverse workforce.



COMO C.A.R.E.S. STATIONS & VIDEOS
Como C.A.R.E.S. (Conservation, Action, Research, Empathy, Stories) stations and videos help visitors strengthen their connection to Como through insider information about the zoo and conservatory such as animal names, personalities, highlighting special programs, and even trivia! Along with these weekly stations, Como C.A.R.E.S. reaches a virtual audience through social media videos (Instagram Reels) that look at Como’s plants and animals through a humorous lens.

SPECIAL EXHIBITS

GLASS IN FLIGHT

The Glass In Flight exhibit, created by renowned artist Alex Heveri, brought a stunning collection of intricate glass sculptures to Como Park Zoo and Conservatory. This breathtaking display celebrated the beauty and grace of flight through meticulously crafted pieces depicting butterflies, dragonflies, and other winged creatures. Vibrant colors and intricate details made the artwork both captivating and memorable.

Set against the backdrop of Como's lush gardens, the exhibit blended art and nature seamlessly, offering visitors a unique and inspiring experience. The placement of the large-scale sculptures created an immersive environment, encouraging guests to reflect on the delicate elegance of the natural world.

Glass In Flight underscored the importance of fostering a deeper connection to nature and showcased the transformative power of art to inspire awe and appreciation for the world around us.



MISSION SAFARI MAZE

Mission Safari Maze invited guests to explore a vast biodiversity in Mission Safari, a bilingual, multi-layered adventure maze, and discover how even the most insignificant seeming wildlife (ahem...mosquito) plays an important role in human survival. Mission Safari.

Guests embarked on a journey by completing question-and-answer challenges that let you choose your own path through the winding maze.

Along the way they could transform into different animals and experience life on the wild side. They saw how a long jump measures up to that of a Red Kangaroo; Swing through the canopy beside an Orangutan; Soar on the breeze like a Bald Eagle; Hang with a Two-Toed Sloth; And try not to get squeezed by a Python or caught in the Black Widow's web!

They could also continue the survey of Earth's biodiversity on a Secret Safari. Here you will enter the hidden maze-within-a-maze and connect with a dozen different animals on missions to learn about their unique adaptations and survival stories.



EXHIBIT GALLERY

MONARCHS AND MILKWEED: A STORY OF SURVIVAL

This exhibit took visitors on a journey into the world of butterflies and plants, highlighting the complex relationship between monarchs and milkweed. It explored how their survival has been shaped by one another over time, guiding visitors through the seasons of a calendar year to reveal how the insect and plant grow and interact, culminating in a remarkable migration spanning a continent.

WHAT IS COMPASSION

The What Is Compassion exhibit, created in partnership with local artist Harper Steinbach and the Compassion Museum, invited visitors at Como Park Zoo and Conservatory to reflect on the meaning of compassion. This interactive art installation provided a unique and immersive experience, encouraging guests to pause, explore their emotions, and share personal reflections in a welcoming space.

The exhibit aligned with the Compassion Museum's mission to inspire curiosity and change, strengthen skills of empathy and love, and foster connection while healing divides. By offering visitors an opportunity to engage deeply with the concept of compassion, the exhibit created a meaningful experience that encouraged thoughtful dialogue and personal growth. Hosting What Is Compassion at Como emphasized the importance of kindness, understanding, and community, enriching the visitor experience and promoting a shared sense of humanity.

As a result of the internal exhibit “History and Celebration” by Como Friends, a fifth special exhibit was presented without utilizing the Legacy fund budget and is not included in the output calculations.



Outcomes & Outputs FY24

- 4 special exhibits
- 462,033 participants
- Increased off-peak attendance by 8.3%
- Update 1 focus area
- Visitor Engagement 941,650

Proposed Outcome Achievement

- ✓ **Achieved all**
(Achieved 100 of proposed outcomes)
- **Achieved most**
(Achieved greater than 50% of proposed outcomes)
- **Achieved some**
(Achieved less than 50% of proposed outcomes)
- **Achieved none**
(Achieved 0% of proposed outcomes)
- **Outcomes data not yet available**

HABITAT RENEWAL

The Marine Mammal Building was the focus of the Habitat Renewal in FY24 with new tanks and public experiences for both the guest and animal to better make the connection to inspire the public to value the presence of living things. Work has been completed and an evaluation will be conducted once animals populate the exhibit.



Proposed Outcome Achievement

- ☐ Achieved all
(Achieved 100 of proposed outcomes)
- ☐ Achieved most
(Achieved greater than 50% of proposed outcomes)
- ☐ Achieved some
(Achieved less than 50% of proposed outcomes)
- ☐ Achieved none
(Achieved 0% of proposed outcomes)

✓ **Outcomes data not yet available**



GARDEN PRESERVATION

The art of gardening will be on full display for the preservation of the Lily Reflection Pool featuring the historical Victorian Water Platters, which first appeared in Como Park in the late 1880s. The Marjorie McNeely Conservatory has been a historical cultural landmark since 1915 and preserving the great staircase back to the artist's original design. Work has been completed and the planting will happen in 2025, at which time there will be an evaluation.



Proposed Outcome Achievement

- ☐ Achieved all
(Achieved 100 of proposed outcomes)
- ☐ Achieved most
(Achieved greater than 50% of proposed outcomes)
- ☐ Achieved some
(Achieved less than 50% of proposed outcomes)
- ☐ Achieved none
(Achieved 0% of proposed outcomes)

✓ **Outcomes data not yet available**

