



Seattle – October 30, 2007 Contact: Irene Wall, President, 206 784-8731 or 206 883-9438  
**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Zoo Garage Declared Illegal:**  
**Seattle Hearing Examiner Reverses City Decision Allowing Controversial Zoo Garage**

The Seattle Hearing Examiner today reversed the City decision approving the controversial 700-car parking garage proposed for Woodland Park Zoo, ruling that the Zoo garage violated the City's Land Use Code. In a decisive victory for appellants Phinney Ridge Community Council, Save Our Zoo, Seattle Community Council Federation, and numerous individual appellants, the Hearing Examiner agreed that the Zoo garage was not a "customary building" in a park and therefore not allowed under the Land Use Code.

The Zoo is located in Woodland Park, and the property is in a single family zone. The Land Use Code allows "parks and open space, including customary buildings and activities" in a single family zone. Appellants argued that the Zoo garage was not a "customary building" because no Seattle park has a visitor parking garage, and only one of the 19 zoos on the Zoo Society's list of "comparable zoos" had a parking garage. "The [City's] failure to address the issue of whether the proposed parking garage is *customary*, i.e., a 'common feature,' or 'commonly observed,' in parks was clear error," according to the Hearing Examiner. Therefore, the Examiner ruled, it was "clearly erroneous" for the City to determine that the proposed garage was allowed, and the Examiner reversed the City's Decision.

"The Zoo garage was one of the biggest threats facing Seattle's parks," said Jeannie Hale, president of appellant Seattle Community Council Federation. "If the Zoo garage had been allowed, every park in Seattle would have been vulnerable to mall-sized parking structures and other buildings that were never intended to be placed in City parks. We are thrilled that the Hearing Examiner made the crucial decision to prohibit it."

"This decision should forever close the door on this offensive project and open the door for a more rational approach to managing peak season parking demand at the Zoo," said Irene Wall, president of Phinney Ridge Community Council and a former Zoo Society Board member. "The Land Use Code clearly did not allow this garage and we are relieved that the Hearing Examiner confirmed our position. It's a great victory for all of Seattle's parks."

The proposed Zoo garage would have been located on Phinney Avenue, paving over one acre of parkland with one of the largest parking garages in the City -- a 250,000 sq foot, four-level parking structure, holding more cars than the new parking garages at Northgate and Southcenter Malls, destroying over 30 mature trees, and blocking the sunset views from the North Meadow, the site of the popular summer Zoo Tunes concerts. "It was an outrageous and

inappropriate project that should never have been proposed, said Michele Bucy, president of appellant Save Our Zoo. “We certainly hope the Zoo Society does not appeal this decision and instead focuses on more appropriate approaches to its parking issues.”

The City agreed in 2004 to help finance the garage because City officials believed the garage was necessary to support current and future Zoo attendance, and that it would reduce the impact of Zoo visitor parking in the neighborhood. But neither the City nor the Zoo Society followed the proper procedures to determine whether the Land Use Code allowed the Zoo garage, even though they did obtain the requisite approvals for other new buildings proposed for the Zoo. “It was a troublesome oversight especially since citizens had raised red flags about the West Garage project from the beginning,” Wall explained.

In May 2007, a majority of City Council members developed buyers’ remorse about the controversial project after overwhelming evidence undermined the justification for this \$30 million project and the substantial taxpayer subsidy it required. In a letter to the Zoo Society, the Council confirmed that the Zoo garage was “inconsistent with both the City’s and the [Zoo’s] general goals of environmental stewardship and sustainability” and urged the Zoo Society to pursue a different approach to its parking issues. The Zoo Society refused.

“The Zoo Society has been remarkably tone-deaf,” Bucy noted. “This garage was far too big and would seldom, if ever, fill up,” she said. The Zoo already has enough parking to accommodate its visitors for approximately 90% of its operating hours. It closes the North entrance for over half the year, and the 200 parking spaces in that parking lot sit empty. The Zoo’s own data reveals that substantial numbers of Zoo visitors prefer to park free on the streets instead of paying for onsite parking. “We have proposed several other ideas to the Zoo Society, but they have been unwilling to listen,” Wall said. “We hope that they will be more open-minded in the future because they clearly can thrive without this garage.”

The Zoo Society has insisted that the garage was necessary to accommodate increased attendance, but attendance growth has fallen far short of the Zoo Society’s predictions. Attendance is lower now than in 2000 when the garage projections were first revealed. Zoo attendance also dropped precipitously this summer after the Zoo instituted an unprecedented 50 percent increase in admissions fees without obtaining prior Council approval as required in the management agreement.

The City has already reimbursed the Zoo Society over \$1 million in design and related costs, with additional bills expected. “We hope the City Council will halt all future spending on this illegal project,” Wall said. The Council is in the midst of budget hearings, including appropriations for the Zoo garage. The Council had approved a bond of \$18.3 million for the Zoo garage in the spring of 2007, which will require annual payments of almost \$1.4 million for the next 20 years. “We hope that money can be redirected,” Wall noted.

Council member Richard Conlin had already been convinced that “proceeding with the garage does not make sense for either the City or [the Zoo].” And Council member Peter Steinbrueck had observed that, “[t]he garage is too big, it’s too expensive, it’s anti-environmental, and it’s for an organization that should be setting a higher example on conservation and the environment.” More information about the Zoo garage is available at [www.phinneyecovillage.net/saveourzoo](http://www.phinneyecovillage.net/saveourzoo).