

Dane County Exec. Parisi: 2018 budget invests in new Henry Vilas Zoo facility

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As part of his 2018 proposed Capital Budget, Dane County Executive Joe Parisi announced today that Dane County will renovate the bathrooms at the Henry Vilas Zoo. The \$2.2 million dollar project will replace the building to include more stalls and urinals, provide a family and breastfeeding area, and feature more handicapped stalls. The plan also includes LED lighting and other green features.

“The Henry Vilas Zoo has become a destination for families across Wisconsin,” said County Executive Joe Parisi. “With the dramatic increase in our attendance, our Zoo must accommodate all those who visit.”

The bathroom stalls for both women and men have become less than adequate to serve the approximately 800,000 visitors who visit the Henry Vilas Zoo each year. The Zoo’s current lower restroom building is over 30 years old and the roof is starting to fall in. The County Executive is allocating \$1.3 in his 2018 Capital Budget to address these structural issues and provide better restroom amenities to the Zoo’s visitors. Previous budget investments will cover the total \$2.2 million cost of the project.

Dane County has made many investments in the Henry Vilas Zoo, including the recent Arctic Passage exhibit that has led to the highest attended years in the Zoo’s 106-year history. The completion of the ground-breaking Arctic Passage exhibit transformed 1.7 acres of land and outdated exhibits into state-of-the-art habitats

that allow for visitors to connect directly to the animal residents that call Arctic Passage home. The Arctic Passage exhibit has been transformative for the community and the Zoo, which has served over 800,000 visitors a year since the exhibit's opening. In September, Arctic Passage was awarded Top Honors by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA), which is the highest honor an exhibit can receive.

Just last year, the Zoo opened up the Wisconsin Heritage exhibit featuring badgers Kaminsky, Dekker and Bucky, highlighting the Zoo's connection with the University of Wisconsin. The exhibit also emphasizes the history of mining and the conservation success story of sand hill cranes in the state. The Wisconsin Heritage exhibit is the only place in the region that guests can take a picture with a life-sized "Bucky Badger" mascot.

The Henry Vilas Zoo is open every day from 9:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Be sure to stop by for a visit and check out the Zoo's restaurant, the Glacier Grille, to enjoy the unique experience of looking onto the polar bear yard while dining.