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## Headed for a Zoo cage match

Cal White is out, while power struggle brews between political overlords over future of park

By [SUE-ANN LEVY](#)

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This afternoon's meeting of the board could mark the start of a new chapter for the Toronto Zoo.

Or it could be "monkey" business as usual for the two-legged baboons who oversee the beleaguered wildlife park.

The meeting will be the last for Cal White, the smooth and colourful chief general manager of the Zoo for 23 years, who has variously been known for bringing award-winning exhibits like the Gorilla Rainforest to the park -- and for ruling over his staff and the board with an iron fist. He retires May 31.

White's tenure was marked by controversy in recent years after he took a six-month leave as CEO two winters ago, then launched an attempt, which later failed, to collect a \$400,000 exit package.

After returning to his post last July, he convinced the board to sever the Zoo's relationship with its fundraising arm, the Toronto Zoo Foundation -- a move designed to gain control over an ambitious 10-year, \$250-million fundraising effort.

That ended in a 50% drop in donations and a legal challenge from the foundation.

Just two weeks ago, an Ontario court approved the transfer of Zoo Foundation assets -- which vary between \$9 million and \$10 million depending on the investment market -- to the Toronto Community Foundation.

White did not return several phone calls from the Toronto Sun yesterday.

But former board member Michael Thompson, who resigned in disgust last fall, said while White has made a "good contribution" to the Zoo, all good things "must come to an end."

He stressed the Zoo board now has a "perfect opportunity" to move forward -- to really look at making the Zoo easier for the public to access, more entertaining and more relevant.

Elizabeth Huggins, vice-chairman of the Toronto Zoo Foundation, said it always felt the relationship with the Zoo was "salvageable." The board opted to see it another way, she said.

Nevertheless, Huggins said she's feeling confident that the Zoo will move forward with a "quality structured" search for a new leader who is "competent, visionary and participatory."

But whether that will happen is indeed the \$250-million question.

I got the feeling this week there may be a power struggle brewing between Giorgio Mammoliti and chairman Raymond Cho for control of the board and their own particular pet projects (Cho's being the Korean Garden and Mammoliti the pandas from China) -- with no one clearly calling the shots as to what happens next.

In fact, White's departure may end up creating a kind of leadership vacuum.

There doesn't appear to be any kind of succession plan in place, at least not yet.

Cho seemed to know little when I spoke with him earlier this week.

He told me "somebody has to replace" White but he "doesn't know who that will be.

"We'll find out there," he said, referring to today's meeting.

Asked how things are going with fundraising, he told me to speak with Mammoliti, the board's fundraising sub-committee chairman, who talked as if he was already chairman of the entire board.

He insisted he's not "at liberty" to say who the interim leader will be, but whoever it is should be given the task of putting a search process in place to select the "best-qualified" CEO.

"We should be looking all over the world," he said, noting he feels the interim leader should not be allowed to compete.

But the interim leader will be proceeding with a "very aggressive" fundraising plan -- his plan, not necessarily the \$250-million, 10-year plan proposed by White, he added.

ZOO IS 'REBORN'

"I see this as the Zoo being reborn," Mammoliti almost crowed.

Geesh.

New board member Paul Ainslie feels \$250 million "in this day and age" is an aggressive target and at this point is "not achievable."

Ainslie says the Zoo is supposed to raise just \$3.5 million to meet specific project obligations this year (like the 10-acre Tundra Trek) and doubts they can even do that.

Thompson agrees the odds of raising \$3 million are "slim to none."

He also fears things won't change much, even after White's departure.

"Although the ringmaster has stepped aside, the circus could still continue," he said.

SUE-ANN.LEVY@SUNMEDIA.CA