

Board boss ripped for 'frivolous' zoo trip

By BRYN WEESE

A \$2,000 fact-finding trip to Ottawa, Quebec and the Adirondacks in New York state is "frivolous," according to a new member of the Toronto Zoo's board of directors.

Councillor Paul Ainslie made his comments about next week's five-day driving and motel-hotel tour yesterday after the trip was approved at a board meeting.

Board chairman Councillor Raymond Cho will accompany two zoo staffers to "research potential winter programming" to increase attendance, a staff report says.

"There's a recession out there. We're trying to be responsible," Ainslie said, noting there is no reason the information can't be collected over the phone or the Internet.

"I'm there as a city councillor looking after taxpayer dollars, and it's something I think could be done by telephone."

'FACT-FINDING'

Even if a trip to some of the zoo and non-zoo attractions on the van tour's itinerary is necessary, Ainslie said, he isn't sure political representation is needed.

"I know he (Cho) is the chair, but I'm not sure what level of expertise he would bring to the trip," Ainslie said. "It's a fact-finding mission, and I think it's something, in this economy, that should be done by telephone."

But Cho defended the trip, saying you gather far more information by visiting an attraction versus talking to "a stranger" over the phone.

"Hillary Clinton doesn't need to go to China, either. She could phone all those people to get the information," Cho said about the U.S. secretary of state's recent trip. "When you go and see, you get all kinds of ideas."

This year, the zoo is expecting to spend nearly \$100,000 on travel for staff and board members. Some of the conference and business travel planned include trips to Australia, Kenya, Panama, Puerto Rico, Florida, Arizona, Utah, California and Texas.

The 2009 travel budget is \$96,434, an increase of more than \$10,000 over 2008.