

## Monkey business hurts zoo

Controversy over control of fundraising scares away 50% of private donors

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The Toronto Zoo has been stung by as much as a 50% drop in private donors in recent months after the fight over control of its fundraising hit the headlines.

Elizabeth Huggins, vice-chairman of Toronto Zoo Foundation, the volunteer fundraising arm that has been given notice to disband effective March 11, told me yesterday while many donors "remain confident," some are "holding off" giving money "until everything is resolved" with respect to the zoo's fundraising controversy.

When I asked her the percentage still prepared to donate versus those who've refused to commit, she responded: "I would say it is quite balanced." She added that a mix of corporate and individual donors have chosen to withdraw.

Nevertheless, she refused to quantify the amount of money involved, saying it is "too early" to do so and all they want is for the zoo to "succeed."

Former board member Michael Thompson, who resigned in disgust last fall, said "absolutely" donations have been impacted by the recent (and ongoing) fight for control over the zoo's fundraising initiatives, especially given the current economic climate.

"I wish they (the zoo's management and the board) would see the zoo is in peril," he said yesterday.

This is but the latest chapter from the (two-legged) baboons who claim to run the city-owned wild animal park. The monkey business began with a decision last September by the zoo board to grant longtime CEO Cal White the power to sever the zoo's relationship with the foundation and to launch an ambitious in-house 10 year, \$250-million fundraising campaign.

Coun. Mike Del Grande resigned from the board shortly after, claiming it is nothing more than an "old boy's club."

Thompson makes no bones that unless management and the board changes its direction, "there's no way" they'll raise \$250 million.

"I don't think Mr. White has a reservoir of good ideas to really run the zoo," Del Grande said. "We need some new blood, new energy at the zoo."

The board has a chance to make change happen at their meeting this morning when Coun. Paul Ainslie, a new appointee, attempts to oust long-serving chairman Raymond Cho for its leadership.

Cho, considered by insiders to be compliant to White's wishes, couldn't be reached for comment.

But Ainslie said there should be turnover, especially at the chairman level. He feels turfing the foundation is "not the way to go" -- that it just needs to be restructured.

Nevertheless he recognizes it will be an uphill battle since Mayor David Miller told him flat out in December that Cho is his preferred choice for chairman (a move seen to ensure the councillor's loyalty to the mayor).

"Change is not wanted by some people ... people are happy with Raymond," he said.

Meanwhile, from the looks of it, the monkey business is far from over.

Huggins said the foundation has no problem with a plan to transfer its \$12 million in assets to the Toronto Community Foundation -- as is proposed in today's board meeting agenda -- but they still need to obtain assurances the money will go towards the purpose intended (education, conservation and the well-being of animals) and not to zoo operations.

If they don't get such assurances, they will be in court on Feb. 20 to seek "guidance" and "consent" for their recommendations, she said.

But in a lengthy interview, White insisted the money will "absolutely" go to the purpose intended.

"I don't see any need for the court thing but we'll see," he said yesterday.

He added they have a "great document" setting out how they plan to raise the \$250 million which he can't share yet but will when this controversy dies down.

#### STILL WORKING ON IT

Asked how much it will cost to hire a fundraising firm and to have a coordinated campaign team in-house, he said they haven't "worked that out" yet.

They've also yet to work out how much it will cost to have the Toronto Community Foundation invest and administer their assets, White noted.

"We will be negotiating that ... they're a really good organization," he said.

Asked what he thought of the criticism of his management and of the current board, White said "it doesn't make sense" to clean house because they have the "contacts."

"The fact the foundation is saying I'm a s---head, or Raymond, so be it," he said. "What we're doing is what we think is in the best long-term interest of the zoo."