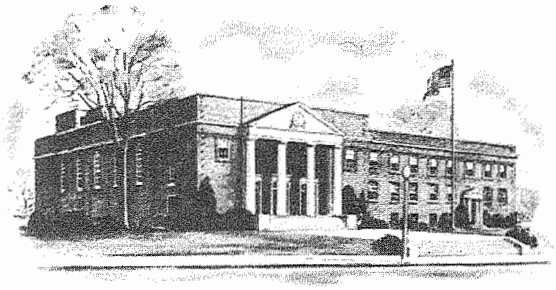

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June 1, 2015

Secretary Jay Ash
Executive Office of Administration and Finance
One Ashburton Place
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Secretary Ash,

As the Stoneham Board of Selectmen, we write you today to respectfully request that the Administration approve the immediate release of at least $3 million of pre-authorized bond funding dedicated to construction and maintenance of the facilities at the Stone Zoo. Based on two prior bond approvals, there are currently $24.5 million in bond authorizations for deferred maintenance and capital improvements dedicated to the Zoos.

This development is of immediate concern to Stoneham. Stone Zoo is located inside of Stoneham' boarder and our community would suffer direct and grave consequences if the zoo were to lose accreditation. The unintended consequence would have a negative impact on the economic climate of our community. We have spent the last several years trying to recover from the last economic downturn. The zoo attracts thousands of visitors to the Stoneham location and those visitors are important to our local small businesses who, in turn, count on consumer revenue to survive. Further, we have been immersed in a Downtown Revitalization Plan of which we are beginning to see the fruits of our investment. To risk the zoo, which is an important element of the revitalization plan, would have a devastating impact that would take years to recover and inevitably shutter some local small businesses.

In addition to the economic consequences, a loss of accreditation or closure would also have direct cultural consequences on Stoneham. We are defined by our shared location and our culture has been build upon the zoo for 115 years. The zoo is an important asset to our community, they work with our community in close proximity, and we are grateful to the free educational programs they offer, especially in light of the fact that our community has traditionally not received our fair share of Chapter 70 allocation. We consider the zoo part of our very fabric and our close working relationship and all the benefits that come with our partnership would be lost. To lose this precious resource would be a blow of epic proportions.

As explained more fully below, the release and expenditures of these monies are urgently needed now because Stone Zoo is currently in the midst of an accreditation process administered by the National Association of Zoos and Aquariums. To achieve re-accreditation, the Stone Zoo must immediately address deferred maintenance and urgent construction needs, and it requires the release of funds to accomplish these tasks.

The Stone Zoo has already postponed the accreditation process once because of this funding problem. The downward spiral effect of failing to receive accreditation could be fatal. Failure to achieve re-accreditation will result in, among other things, the recall of many animals currently on loan to the Stone Zoo, the loss of publicity, financial assistance and other benefits extended by the National Association of Zoos and Aquariums, and heightened requirements if/when Stone Zoo re-applies for future accreditation. Simply put, the after-effects and costs of failing to secure re-accreditation will be prohibitively expensive not only to the Stone Zoo, but also to the Franklin Park Zoo and the Commonwealth in general.

In 2008, Zoo New England, which manages both the Stone Zoo and Franklin Park Zoo, submitted the *Strategic Master Plan: Building Exceptional Zoos for the People of Massachusetts and Beyond* ("the Plan"), to the Legislature. Based in part on the Plan, the Legislature authorized a $30 million general obligation bond (7007-6300) for renovations to be completed at both zoos.

The Plan refined Zoo New England's mission and developed a long-term strategy to increase visitation, increase revenues, eliminate some of the deferred maintenance and operating costs and move Zoo New England along the road to self-sufficiency by encouraging private investments. Despite the bond authorization, the Zoos did not receive any funding until FY10. Between FY10 – FY15, $11.5 million of the bond authorization has been allocated towards operating expenses, and an additional $2 million of the bond has been allocated for deferred maintenance/capital. There remains $16.5 million from the 2008 bond authorization. Last fiscal year, the Legislature passed an environmental bond (2840-7024) with an $8 million authorization of funding specifically for Zoo New England's construction and maintenance of buildings at the Zoos.

Zoo New England has made great strides towards its goal of self-sufficiency. The Zoos themselves serve as great attractions for tourists, educators and families throughout the Commonwealth and beyond while constantly taking steps to increase their attendance, educational offerings, and private sources of funding.

We ask you to authorize the immediate release of $3 million of bond funding to Zoo New England, to be spent on deferred maintenance and construction at the Zoos. With the Administration's assistance, we will help the Stone Zoo avoid a near-certain catastrophe that will occur if it does not achieve re-accreditation.

Respectfully,

Thomas Boussy

Chairman
Stoneham Board of Selectmen