

H&LA

HOTEL & LEISURE ADVISORS

REQUEST FOR DEVELOPER INTEREST AND QUALIFICATIONS

PROPOSED HOTEL AT THE
COLUMBUS ZOO
POWELL, OHIO



INTRODUCTION

The Columbus Zoo in Powell, Ohio (Delaware County) is seeking a qualified developer to finance, construct, and potentially operate a signature lodging experience as part of its long-term expansion initiative. The proposed hotel will be located adjacent to the entrances of the Columbus Zoo and Zoombezi Bay Waterpark, with a future aquarium planned nearby.

This RFQ invites experienced developers to submit initial qualifications and interest for a destination hotel concept aligned with the Zoo's long-range vision and positioned as a cornerstone of an enhanced guest experience.

Strategic Vision: 2040 Framework

In 2023, the Zoo introduced its **2040 Framework**, a comprehensive master plan guiding growth and investment across its four parks: The Columbus Zoo, Zoombezi Bay Waterpark, and Safari Golf Club (all located at the Powell Campus), as well as The Wilds, one of the world's largest conservation centers, located in Cumberland, Ohio.

The framework is designed to:

- Elevate the visitor and animal experience
- Reinforce leadership in wildlife conservation
- Increase attendance and length of stay
- Activate land more efficiently and sustainably
- Create a more cohesive and immersive arrival experience

A key component of this vision is the introduction of on-site lodging.

The full 2040 Framework, along with a timeline for projects, will be shared with qualified bidders (upon execution of a Non-Disclosure Agreement).

PROPOSED FACILITY SUMMARY

The Zoo seeks a development partner to deliver a themed, upper-upscale hotel that:

- Enhances the Zoo's brand and mission
- Serves both overnight guests and local visitors
- Integrates visually and experientially with mixed-use development
- The hotel is envisioned as a destination experience, not simply an accommodation—blending hospitality, conservation, and immersive design.



Respondents may refine the program; however, proposals should consider the following baseline framework:

Guestrooms (minimum of 130 Keys)

- Mix of:
 - King rooms
 - Family-oriented rooms with bunk beds and themed elements
 - Double-queen rooms
 - Suites with separate living areas
- Select rooms featuring:
 - Animal-themed design
 - Family-focused layouts
 - Balconies overlooking the Zoo and Zoombezi Bay

Food & Beverage

- Full-service restaurant (breakfast and dinner; lunch optional)
 - Designed as a destination dining venue for both hotel guests, zoo patrons, and locals
- Coffee/pastry café or grab-and-go outlet

Amenities

- Indoor pool with waterslide and whirlpool
- Fitness center
- 24-hour market/retail outlet
- Themed lobby with integrated conservation and educational programming

Meeting & Event Space (~7,750 SF)

- Ballroom (divisible, ~5,000 SF)
- Breakout meeting rooms (~1,000 SF total)
- Pre-function space (~1,250 SF)
- Executive boardroom (~500 SF)
- Modern technology and flexible configurations

Guest Experience Integration

- Dedicated pedestrian connectivity to Zoo entrance
- Potential for early attraction access for hotel guests
- Bundled ticketing/packages with Zoo and affiliated attractions

These recommendations are from the feasibility study that H&LA prepared for the hotel development in 2024. The developer will propose plans for the site that may vary from the H&LA recommendations. The H&LA feasibility study will be available for review by qualified bidders.

Other Development Considerations

Estimated development cost:

- \$250,000–\$350,000 per key
- Total: approximately \$32M–\$45M (excluding land)

Parking strategy must:

- Accommodate hotel guests and Zoo visitors
- Provide controlled access for overnight guests
- Utilize the existing parking lot

The Zoo is open to:

- Ground lease the site
- Alternative ownership/operating models

Sustainability and Environmental Stewardship

The Zoo would like proposals to incorporate environmentally responsible design, construction, and operational practices. Respondents are encouraged to outline strategies for energy and water efficiency, sustainable materials, waste reduction, and long-term operational sustainability, as well as understand any experience with recognized green building or hospitality standards. The intention is to deliver a hotel that aligns with the Zoo's commitment to environmental stewardship while enhancing guest experience and operational performance.

OVERVIEW OF THE COLUMBUS ZOO

The **Columbus Zoo** is one of the premier zoological institutions in the United States, welcoming nearly 1.8 million visitors annually while caring for over 7,000 animals representing approximately 600 species.

Established in 1927, the Zoo has evolved from a modest collection of donated animals into a nationally recognized destination known for immersive habitats and conservation leadership.

Today, the Zoo is organized into a series of themed regions designed to enhance the guest experience, including:

- Heart of Africa
- Asia Quest
- Shores & Aquarium
- Australia & the Islands
- Polar Frontier
- Adventure Cove
- Congo
- North America Trek

These environments are supported by a wide range of **food and beverage venues, retail outlets, event spaces, and guest amenities**, creating a full-day destination experience.

Pricing strategies are designed to maximize accessibility and repeat visitation, with a broad mix of discounts, memberships, and bundled experiences. Local support is further reinforced through a voter-approved levy in Franklin County, underscoring the Zoo's importance as a regional asset.

Integrated Campus & Demand Drivers

The Zoo is part of a larger, multi-attraction campus that includes:

- Zoombezi Bay is a 26-acre water park featuring 19 attractions, including Conservation Tower, which opened in 2025. A combination of three slides, Conservation Tower offers two of the first waterslides of their kind in the world and a third that is the first of its kind in the Midwest. In 2025, Zoombezi Bay welcomed nearly 370,000 visitors.
- Safari Golf Club is nestled on more than 200 acres where several areas are being thoughtfully conserved and are actually "green". Safari is one of the few golf courses in Ohio and worldwide earning the distinction as a Certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary.

Collectively, these assets generate significant regional visitation and position the site as a multi-day destination, although currently there are no on-site lodging accommodations.



2040 Vision Framework

Following the successful reaccreditation by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums in 2023, the Zoo launched its 2040 Framework, a comprehensive master plan guiding long-term growth and reinvestment across each of the four parks.

The framework is centered on three core objectives

- Enhancing animal care and conservation leadership
- Elevating the guest experience through immersive, year-round offerings
- Increasing visitation, length of stay, and per-capita spending

Central to the 2040 Framework is the integration of innovative animal care practices. New and updated habitats will offer animals more choices and provide guests with enhanced engagement opportunities. By showcasing conservation efforts through these new experiences year-round, the Zoo will build on its status as an impactful regional attraction and tourism generator and begin to move toward becoming a national, nature-focused destination.

Key features of the 2040 Framework at the Powell Campus include the establishment of a dedicated Conservation Center, a 100,000-square-foot stand-alone aquarium, new and expanded habitats for many regions, new arrival and parking experiences, and the introduction of new dining and transportation options for guests. Zoombezi Bay will add more rides and attractions to extend the operating season, while Safari Golf Club will leverage innovative technology to enhance guest experiences year-round.



LOCAL HOTEL MARKET PERFORMANCE

The proposed hotel will compete with other hotels on the north side of Columbus, Ohio. The following table profiles the performance of the competitive select- and full-service hotels in the Dublin and Polaris market areas.

Competitors' Operating Performance											
Proposed Hotel at Columbus Zoo & Aquarium											
Year	Annual Supply	% Change	Demand	% Change	Occupancy	% Change	ADR	% Change	RevPAR	% Change	
2018	570,650		402,691		70.6%		\$128.64		\$90.82		
2019	570,650	0.0%	409,305	1.6%	71.7%	1.6%	\$131.94	2.6%	\$94.60	4.2%	
2020	546,121	-4.3%	169,218	-58.7%	31.0%	-56.8%	\$111.93	-15.2%	\$34.70	-63.3%	
2021	622,272	13.9%	281,097	66.1%	45.2%	45.8%	\$124.83	11.5%	\$56.42	62.6%	
2022	626,991	0.8%	351,606	25.1%	56.1%	24.1%	\$145.65	16.7%	\$81.71	44.8%	
2023	626,991	0.0%	371,425	5.6%	59.2%	5.5%	\$152.18	4.5%	\$90.09	10.3%	
2024	626,991	0.0%	387,052	4.2%	61.7%	4.2%	\$155.94	2.5%	\$96.21	6.8%	
2025	626,991	0.0%	403,977	4.4%	64.4%	4.4%	\$160.30	2.8%	\$103.23	7.3%	
Average	602,207	1.5%	347,046	6.9%	57.5%	4.1%	\$138.93	3.6%	\$80.97	10.4%	
Year to Date through February											
2025	101,349		53,064		52.4%		\$146.97		\$77.01		
2026	101,349	0.0%	52,216	-1.6%	51.5%	-1.7%	\$146.25	-0.5%	\$75.32	-2.2%	

Note: Data includes an anonymized 'Composite Property' to protect the confidentiality of data participants. Supply and demand are inflated by approximately 5%. Occupancy, ADR, and RevPAR approximates the actual results of the competitive set.

Source: CoStar

INCENTIVES FOR DEVELOPMENT

No incentives are currently in place for the proposed hotel development, nor have they been requested from local jurisdictions. However, the possibility of future incentives may be considered for a qualified developer.

SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS

As the first step in the selection process, we are requesting qualifications from potential development partners. To be considered in this initial stage, the following information is required. Qualified candidates may be invited at a later stage to submit a full development proposal.

1. Cover Letter

- Introduction to the developer
- Summary of interest in the project
- Contact information

2. Developer Qualifications & Experience

- Company profile and history
- Organizational structure
- Key team members and their roles
- Relevant experience in hotel development
- Portfolio of completed hotel projects

3. References

- Contact information for past project partners or clients
- Case studies of previous developments

SUBMISSION DUE DATE

Qualifications are due by 5:00 PM on May 22, 2026, and should be submitted electronically via email to Heidi Banak at hbanak@hladvisors.com.

A copy of the feasibility study will be made available to qualified developers for review as part of the submission process. Developers interested in accessing the study or seeking clarification regarding the RFP should contact Heidi Banak via email at the address above or by phone at 216-403-6653.

After evaluation, a short list of respondents will be invited to submit a formal proposal and may be invited to participate in interviews with the project team and ownership. Following the review and interview process, the Columbus Zoo and Aquarium will proceed with the selection of a development partner and enter into negotiations at its discretion.