

27 June 2011
Mayor and Honorable Members of Council
2600 Fresno Street
Fresno, CA 93721

RE: Chaffee Zoo Expansion EIR

Dear Mayor Swearingin and Members of the Fresno City Council,

I read the news articles posted by Marc Benjamin for the Fresno Bee and Gene Haagenson for Channel 30 and was surprised by some of the erroneous information provided to you during the public hearing. Since the purpose of the hearing was to take testimony related to the re-circulated draft Environmental Impact Report, I believe it is important that the information you base your decision on is accurate. Therefore I wish to correct two statements made by the consultant. Based on my research and interviews with Bruce Roeding and George Roeding III I am aware that some of the testimony given is incorrect.

I was fortunate to have the opportunity to interview the great grandsons of the original park founder as part of my research, while preparing the park's nomination for the Historic American Landscapes Survey (HALS)¹. Roeding Park has been designated as California's 59th site for the HALS program and will shortly be submitted to the Library of Congress by the National Park Service.

During your hearing the consultant remarked that George Roeding resigned from the Parks Commission in 1923 and that "his resignation clearly marks the beginning of the end of the family's official involvement in the park." This statement, although technically accurate in terms of George C. Roeding's "official" capacity, gave the false impression to decision-makers, the public and the press that the Roeding family had no involvement with Fresno since that time and diminished the generous subsequent "unofficial" contributions made by the Roeding family to the park and to the City of Fresno for several more decades.

More importantly, the record needs to acknowledge that the Roeding family continued to operate their business in Fresno and to be actively involved with the park for many decades longer than suggested by the consultant and as reported in the published news articles. In fact, the family continued to own and operate the California Nursery Company at Belmont and Thorne (formerly Fancher Creek Nurseries founded in Fresno by George C. Roeding) essentially next door to Roeding Park until 1968, under the direction of George C. Roeding Jr. In the early 1960s the

¹ HALS, which is modeled on the Historic American Building Survey (HABS), was created in 2000 by the National Park Service to recognize the value of our nation's cultural landscapes.

Zoo Society was planning a new entry to the zoo and asked George Roeding Jr. to donate the palm trees, which he did – those trees are still there today.

His sons, George and Bruce Roeding who attended your hearing last week, retain strong memories of their experience delivering those palms for the zoo. The City's consultant did not conduct an interview of these descendants – a curious oversight by a highly regarded historic consultant that normally would conduct such interviews for a project of this importance.

In fact the Roeding family's involvement and interest in Roeding Park has continued during the entire lives of George III and Bruce Roeding. The family business at Belmont and Thorne required them to make regular visits to Fresno and those trips often included visits to the park. The brothers have a photograph showing both Bruce and George (aged 18 months) drinking from the same drinking fountain in Roeding Park circa 1931. A front page article in *The Fresno Bee* on June 30, 1964 describes a "perpetual donation" of rose bushes from George Roeding, Jr. to the new Downtown Fresno (Fulton) Mall and reports how these were to be transplanted in Roeding Park. As recently as 2004, the Roeding family descendants, including Bruce and George III attended the 101st anniversary celebration of the first donation of the park land at the invitation of the City of Fresno.

Another factual correction that should be in the record is the inaccurate statement that the Roeding family "gave over 40 acres for the zoo in 1908". The research I conducted – mostly at the Fresno Library History Room, and at the Fresno County Hall of Records, documents that the zoo was not originally planned to be part of the park but rather was conceived after unsolicited donations of animals were made to the park. According to newspaper articles from this period, the cages for the bears, birds and other animals on display were not "permanent" until after George Roeding's death in 1928. Prior to the 1930s, it is unlikely that the Roeding Park menagerie would have been considered a zoo by standards applied at the time.

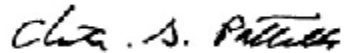
Four generations of Roedings have made tremendous contributions to the City of Fresno. Roeding Park and several nearby streets – Thorne Avenue, Olive Avenue, Weber Avenue and Vagedes – recognize their generous contributions. Regrettably, Roeding Boulevard was renamed Fruit Avenue, although Roeding Elementary School still exists. The Roedings have given their land, they guided the planning and construction of the park, they gave their time - George Roeding served for years as the City's first park commissioner - and they have continued to give to the City of Fresno by making donations of trees to the park over many years. The record should reflect these facts.

In 2004, the Roeding family sent a letter to Mayor Alan Autry after discovering that a previous zoo expansion had consumed the area around the Lisenby Bandstand and incorporated it for the exclusive use of the zoo's bird show. Their letter protested this taking of park land – land their great grandfather gave to the people of Fresno to be used as a public park. None of the members of either the Roeding or Lisenby families were notified of the zoo's taking of public park land or the bandstand. Today, they are objecting to the current zoo expansion plan, which if implemented, will profoundly transform the entirety of this historic park.

I sincerely hope you will consider the full impacts of your decision regarding the expansion of the Chaffee Zoo as it is currently proposed, and direct the planners to change their master plan and protect the park for future generations of Fresno families.

I will attend the public hearing on Thursday June 30 and be available to answer questions. If you wish to speak to me prior to the meeting I am available by email at: Pattillo@PGAdesign.com or by phone at: (510) 550-8855.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chris S. Pattillo". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Chris Pattillo, Historical Landscape Architect, PGAdesign
Founding Member of the Northern California Chapter of HALS