1 Honorable Judge Jean Rietschel Hearing Date: July 25, 2014 2 Time: 1:30 p.m. 3 4 5 6 7 IN THE SUPERIOR COURT OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON 8 IN AND FOR THE COUNTY OF KING 9 10 ALYNE FORTGANG, Case No.: 14-2-07283-0 SEA 11 Plaintiff, PLAINTIFF'S MOTION FOR SUMMARY JUDGMENT 12 v. 13 WOODLAND PARK ZOO a/k/a WOODLAND PARK ZOOLOGICAL 14 SOCIETY, 15 Defendant. 16 I. **RELIEF REQUESTED** 17 18 COMES NOW Plaintiff Alyne Fortgang and, pursuant to CR 56, respectfully requests the 19 Court conclude as a matter of law that Defendant Woodland Park Zoo a/k/a/ Woodland Park 20 Zoological Society ("Zoo") is subject to the Washington State Public Records Act, RCW 42.56 21 et seq. ("PRA"). 22 II. STATEMENT OF FACTS 23 A. Plaintiff's PRA Request and the Zoo's Response 24 Plaintiff Alyne Fortgang is a single woman and a resident of the City of Seattle, in King 25 County, in the state of Washington. Fortgang Decl. ¶ 1. Ms. Fortgang pays taxes and fees to the 26 City of Seattle, which is used in part to fund the Zoo. Id. ¶ 2. On November 6, 2013, Plaintiff

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submitted a public records request to the Zoo that asked eight specific questions. Ex. A to Fortgang Decl. Among other things, the public records request sought information on use of taxpayer dollars by the Zoo for the elephants, as well as information and background documents used by the Zoo for its Report. *Id*.

On November 13, 2013, the Zoo contacted Plaintiff in writing acknowledging receipt of the public records request and promising a response by December 20, 2013. Ex. B to Fortgang Decl. On December 20, 2013, the Zoo responded to Plaintiff's public records request by stating that the Zoo is "a private company" but was "responding to your questions despite any legal obligation to do so." Ex. C to Fortgang Decl. The Zoo's response addressed each of the specific requests; however, the Zoo only provided responses to two. *Id.* The Zoo indicated that, as to the other requested public records, "The zoo considers this information not subject to a public records request." *Id.*

B. The Zoo's Operating Agreement with the City

The City of Seattle, acting through its Department of Parks and Recreation, entered into the Woodland Park Zoo Operations and Management Agreement (the "Operating Agreement") with the Zoo on December 17, 2001. Ex. A to Smith Decl. The term of the Operating Agreement is twenty years. *Id.* at p. 7.

Under the Operating Agreement, the Woodland Park Zoological Society manages and operates the Zoo, and assumed all of the City of Seattle's ("City") obligations with respect to the animals exhibited, housed, or otherwise kept at the Zoo. The Operating Agreement provides that the City must provide the Zoo with annual operations payments, routine maintenance payments, and other financing. The City retains ownership and control over the property and facilities of the Zoo. *Id.* at p. 3. Ownership of Zoo animals rests with the Zoo, but reverts to the City upon expiration or termination of the Operating Agreement. *Id.* at p. 17. The Operating Agreement may be terminated if the Zoo fails to care for the Zoo animals in accordance with federal, state, and local laws and regulations. *Id.* at p. 26-27.

The Operating Agreement requires the Zoo to provide a formal annual report and to present an annual plan and monthly reports to the superintendent of the City's Department of Parks and Recreation, to provide quarterly supplementary reports to the City's Board of Park Commissioners, and to provide annual reports to the City's Parks and Green Spaces Levy Oversight Committee. *Id.* at p. 22. The Zoo has to provide the public with an opportunity to review and comment on the Annual Report and further agrees to respond to such comments in a supplementary report to the City. *Id.* at p. 23. In addition, the superintendent of the City's Department of Parks may, upon request, inspect the Zoo records regarding the veterinary management and treatment of Zoo animals in order to ensure that Zoo animals are receiving proper care and treatment. *Id.* at p. 22. Under the Operating Agreement, these Zoo veterinary records are also to be made available to a member of the public upon request. *Id.*

C. The City's and Taxpayer's Substantial Funding of the Zoo

Since the Operating Agreement was put in place, the Zoo has relied substantially on the City and King County's support for its operations. The following chart demonstrates the substantial subsidies that taxpayers provide to the Zoo on an annual basis:

Year Ending (December 31)	Total Contributed Support	City Contribution	County Contribution (Pro Parks Levy)	Percentage of Government Subsidy
2002	\$21,186,782	\$5,700,000	\$3,204,816	42.0%
2003	\$21,630,140	\$6,554,050	\$2,622,000	42.4%
2004	\$22,537,105	\$6,656,930	\$2,685,000	41.5%
2005	\$24,955,943	\$6,732,061	\$2,751,000	38.0%
2006	\$25,252,936	\$6,816,698	\$2,819,000	38.2%
2007	\$27,927,541	\$6,988,644	\$2,888,000	35.4%
2008	\$28,028,670	\$7,315,896	\$4,304,409	41.5%
2009	\$30,581,123	\$6,359,045	\$3,616,928	32.6%
2010	\$29,668,062	\$6,359,045	\$3,663,478	33.8%
2011	\$33,949,517	\$6,327,561	\$3,794,413	29.8%
2012	\$33,938,403	\$6,478,611	\$3,983,460	30.8%
TOTAL	\$299,656,222	\$72,288,541	\$36,332,504	

Ex. B to Smith Decl. In total, since the Operating Agreement was executed, *over \$100 Million* of City and County government money – from taxpayers – has been spent on the Zoo.

III. STATEMENT OF THE ISSUES

- 1. Whether the Court should grant Plaintiff's motion for summary judgment and hold the Zoo accountable to taxpayers as the functional equivalent of a public entity under the PRA?
- 2. Whether Plaintiff is a prevailing party under the PRA for an award of all costs and reasonable attorneys' fees incurred in connection with this action, and for the award of a statutory penalty for each day Defendant was in violation of the PRA pursuant to RCW 42.56.550(4).

IV. EVIDENCE RELIED UPON

This Motion relies on the Declaration of Alyne Fortgang ("Fortgang Decl.") and the Declaration of Rob Roy Smith ("Smith Decl.") and the Exhibits attached thereto, as well as the [Proposed] Order submitted with this Motion on behalf of Plaintiff.

V. <u>LEGAL AUTHORITY AND ARGUMENT</u>

A. Summary Judgment Standard

Summary judgment is appropriate where there are no genuine issues of material fact and the moving party is entitled to judgment as a matter of law. CR 56. Summary judgment is designed to do away with unnecessary trials when there is no genuine issue of material fact. *LaPlante v. State*, 85 Wash.2d 154, 158, 531 P.2d 299 (1975). "A material fact is one upon which the outcome of the litigation depends." *Jacobsen v. State*, 89 Wash.2d 104, 108, 569 P.2d 1152 (1977).

The burden is on the moving party to demonstrate there is no genuine issue of material fact and, as a matter of law, summary judgment is proper. *Jacobsen*, 89 Wash.2d at 108. If the moving party satisfies its burden, then the non-moving party must present evidence demonstrating material facts are in dispute. *Atherton Condo Ass'n v. Blume Dev. Co.*, 115 Wash.2d 506, 516, 799 P.2d 250 (1990). The non-moving party must "set forth specific facts

showing there is a genuine issue for trial." *LaPlante*, 85 Wash.2d at 158. A non-moving party may not oppose a motion of summary judgment by nakedly asserting there are unresolved factual questions. *Bates v. Grace United Meth. Church*, 12 Wash. App. 111, 115, 529 P.2d 466 (1974).

As explained below, as a matter of law the Court should find that the Zoo is the functional equivalent of a state or local agency and is subject to the PRA.

B. Washington's Public Records Act

The "PRA is a strongly worded mandate for broad disclosure of public records." *Neighborhood Alliance of Spokane County v. Spokane County*, 172 Wash.2d 702, 714, 261 P.3d 119 (2011). In light of this purpose, the PRA is liberally construed in favor of disclosure and its exemptions are narrowly construed. RCW 42.56.030. The PRA "requires all state and local agencies to disclose any public record upon request, unless the record falls within certain very specific exemptions." *Progressive Animal Welfare Soc. v. Univ. of Wash.*, 125 Wash.2d 243, 250, 884 P.2d 592 (1994). RCW 42.17.020(1) defines agency to include all state agencies and all local agencies. Some non-government agencies (such as an association of counties) which nonetheless performs governmental or quasi-governmental functions can be considered an "agency" if they meet a four-part test. *See* 2002 Att'y Gen. Op. No. 2.

Under the PRA, agencies must respond within five business days of receipt of a public records request. RCW 42.56.520; *West v. Thurston County*, 168 Wash. App. 162, 182, 275 P.3d 1200 (2012). An agency may withhold all or part of a record if it falls within an exemption under the PRA "or other statute which exempts or prohibits disclosure of specific information or records." RCW 42.56.070(1). Review of the Zoo's decision is *de novo*. RCW 42.156.550(3).

C. The Zoo Is Subject to the PRA

"The Washington Public Records Act is one of the strongest open government laws in the nation and reflects the desire of Washington citizens to know what their government is doing. A

¹ In *PAWS*, the Supreme Court interpreted and applied former chapter 42.17 RCW, the public disclosure act (PDA). Effective July 1, 2006, the PDA was renamed the PRA and was recodified as chapter 425 of the RCW. LAWS OF 2005, ch. 274, §§ 102-03.

transparent and accessible government is essential to a successful free society, and fosters trust and confidence in government." http://www.atg.wa.gov/OpenGovernment.aspx. It is time for the Zoo to come clean to the people of Seattle and become subject to the PRA.

The leading case that must guide this Court's consideration of whether the Zoo is the type of public entity that is subject to the PRA is *Telford v. Thurston County Bd. of Comm'rs*, 95 Wash.App. 149, 974 P.2d 886, *review denied*, 138 Wash.2d 1015, 989 P.2d 1143 (1999) ("*Telford*"). In *Telford*, the Court of Appeals was asked to determine if two organizations—the "Washington State Association of Counties" and the "Washington State Association of County Officials"—were public entities. *Id.* at 152-56, 974 P.2d 886. The court in *Telford* adopted a four-factor "functional equivalent" balancing test to determine if an entity is to be regarded as a public agency for purposes of the PRA: (1) whether the entity performs a governmental function; (2) the level of government funding; (3) the extent of government involvement or regulation; and (4) whether the entity was created by the government. *Id.* at 162, 974 P.2d 886. Under *Telford*, each of these criteria need not be equally satisfied, but rather the criteria on balance should suggest that the entity in question is the functional equivalent of a state or local agency. *Id.* On balance, there is no genuine issue of material fact and judgment as a matter of law should issue that the Zoo is the functional equivalent of a state or local agency and is, therefore, subject to the PRA.

1. The Zoo Performs a Government Function

The first *Telford* factor, performance of a government function, is satisfied here. The Operating Agreement was expressly established in order to further the *City's mission* in "education, conservation of wildlife, recreation, providing benefits to the citizens of Seattle, and developing the Zoo as an important civic asset, cultural resource and attraction." Ex. A at p. 3 to Smith Decl. The City continues to own the underlying property managed by the Zoo. *Id.* at p. 9-10. Although the Operating Agreement does give temporary ownership rights of the animals to the Zoo, it also imposes on the Zoo "all obligations the City may have with respect to animals

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exhibited" and provides the City with a reversionary interest in the animals. *Id.* at p. 17. The Zoo is stepping into the City's shoes and performing a government function.

The Zoo's contractual relationship with the City under the Operating Agreement is analogous to the facts in Clarke v. TCAC & Control Shelter, 144 Wash.App. 185, 181 P.3d 881 (2008). In that case, the Court of Appeals held that the Tri-Cities Animal Care & Control Shelter ("TCAC"), a privately-run corporation that contracted with the Animal Control Authority of Richland, Pasco and Kennewick to provide animal control services for the Tri-Cities area, was the functional equivalent of a public agency for purposes of the PRA. Like here, under the government function factor, the court noted although the functions were assigned to the private sector, the delegation occurred via a contractual relationship between the cities and the animal control agency. *Id* at 194. The court concluded that "the nature of the delegation merely allows TCAC to step into the shoes of the local government. In short, while the local government can delegate the performance authority for this public function to a private entity, it cannot delegate away its statutory responsibility to perform within [PRA] legal requirements." Id. The court went on, "were we to conclude that TCAC is not a functional equivalent of a public agency, we would be setting a precedent that would allow governmental agencies to contravene the intent of [] Public Records Act by contracting with private entities to perform core government functions." Id. The same holds true here.

For these reasons, this factor balances in favor of finding that the Zoo is the functional equivalent of a public agency.

2. The Zoo Receives Substantial Government Funding

The second *Telford* factor tips strongly in favor of application of the PRA to the Zoo. The Operating Agreement requires continuous, substantial funding by the City and King County taxpayers. The numbers tell the story. Accordingly to the Zoo's website, presumably for 2014, "Public funding sources provide 30% of the zoo's support, including revenue from both the City of Seattle and King County." http://zoo.org/page.aspx?pid=2372#Establishment. The Zoo's

operating budgets for each year since the Operating Agreement was executed demonstrate that the City and the County contribute approximately one-third of the funding needed to operate the Zoo. Ex. B Smith Decl; *see* Table *supra*. In fact, since 2002, the City has contributed a staggering \$72,288,541 to the Zoo; another \$36,332,504 has been contributed to the Zoo from King County through the Pro Parks Levy. *Id*.

The substantial and ongoing tax payer contribution to the Zoo –\$108,621,045.00 since 2002 – is critical to the Zoo's operation. The Zoo could not operate absent City and County contributions and levies. In fact, the Agreement spells out Zoo's option to terminate the Operating Agreement unless the City continually renews a Zoo levy or, absent voter approval, provides "replacement funding." Ex. A to Smith Decl. at p. 27. Moreover, under the Operating Agreement, the Zoo operates on City-owned land within a public park which is open to the public, and the City to holds title to all buildings and the land. *Id.* at p. 16. In sum, both annual, dependable publicly-funded support, and the land itself, are indispensable to the Zoo's very existence.

Again, these facts are similar to the facts in *Clarke*. There, a majority of TCAC's operating budget came from public money and the "TCAC occupies space in a building rent-free, subsidized by the local government with which it contracts, and it is forbidden by the terms of that contract from engaging in any business on that premises other than its animal control services." *Clarke*, 144 Wash.App. at 195. For the same reasons, this factor heavily weighs in favor of application of the PRA to the Zoo.

3. The City is Extensively Involved in the Zoo

The third *Telford* factor also tips strongly in favor of application of the PRA to the Zoo, as the Operating Agreement makes clear the robust oversight of the Zoo by the City.

As a general matter under the Operating Agreement, the Zoo's financial records must be open and available for review by the City. Ex. A to Smith Decl. at p. 23. The Operating Agreement requires the Zoo to provide annual reports to the Superintendent of Seattle Parks,

including a "complete financial accounting." *Id.* at p. 21. It also requires the Zoo to submit an annual plan to the Superintendent, including a one-year capital improvement plan, a description of all major programmatic changes, and any change to fees. *Id.* The Operating Agreement also specifically requires a host of supplementary reports be issued to City entities. The Zoo must submit quarterly reports to the Parks Board, reports to Oversight Committee regarding expenditure of levy funds, monthly finance reports to the Parks Superintendent, a summary of revenue from various sources and accounting of costs, and an annual independent audit signed and delivered to the Superintendent. *Id.* at p. 22.

The Operating Agreement requires the public's participation on Zoo's Board of Directors via appointment of public members, one each by the Mayor, the Superintendent, and the Council committee that generally oversees parks functions. *Id.* at p. 24. Similarly, the Operating Agreement requires WPZ to involve the public in all major capital projects and specifically calls for a neighborhood liaison with Phinney Ridge, Wallingford, Fremont and Greenlake neighborhoods. *Id.* at p. 23. The Zoo's board meetings are subject to notice and public participation. *Id.*

In addition, there are government restrictions on how the City facilities can be used by the Zoo. The premises are to be used solely for the operation of a public zoological gardens and related and incidental purposes and programs. *Id.* at p. 9. Additionally, improved transit, bicycle and pedestrian access was required to be built into all parking area improvements. *Id.* at p. 14 The City continues to own the underlying property managed by the Zoo as well as improvements made to the property. *Id.* at p. 9. Under the Operating Agreement, the City is also able to perform an audit of "the use and application of all revenues, grants and fees, all City funds, except for private fundraising activities and private donor information, received by WPZS during the current and preceding year, including Zoo operations and management." *Id.* at p. 23. This provision of the Operating Agreement provides the City with extensive oversight in compliance with RCW 35.64.010, which governs public contracts for management and operation and

requires oversight "to ensure public accountability of the entity and its performance in a manner consistent with the contract." *Id.* at p. 18.

In sum, there is a substantial degree of City control of the Zoo. This factor too heavily weighs in favor of finding that Zoo is the functional equivalent of a public agency.

4. The Zoo Was Originally a City Entity; Now, the Zoo Could Not Exist Without the City

What is now the Zoo as Seattleites know it was largely run by the Seattle Parks

Department for much of its existence; it was only in 1965 that the Seattle Zoological Society
(later Woodland Park Zoological Society) was formed. http://zoo.org/page.aspx?pid=2170; see also http://zoo.org/page.aspx?pid=2170; see also http://zoo.org/page.aspx?pid=2372#Establishment. In 2002, through the Operating Agreement, the City transferred certain responsibilities to Woodland Park Zoological Society.

Most importantly, the Operating Agreement makes clear that Zoo could not perform its functions without its symbiotic relationship with the City. See generally, Ex. A to Smith Decl. At best, the fourth Telford factor is neutral.

5. On Balance, the Zoo is Subject to the PRA

On Plaintiff's summary judgment motion, the Court is required balance the above four-factors, construing the PRA liberally in favor of the fullest possible public records access. On balance, the Court should conclude as a matter of law that the Zoo is the functional equivalent of a public agency.

If public agencies are able to create and finance a new agency with public money, but then call it an exempt association, they would effectively be able to delegate significant government power to an entity that is insulated from public accountability. Here, the City has created and funded a separate organization in order to manage and operate property owned by the City without being subject to such accountability. While the Zoo undeniably performs some non-public functions and has some non-public characteristics, the fact that it performs a governmental function dependent upon its relationship with the City, receives substantial funding from taxpayers to perform that function (over \$100 Million since 2002), and is subject to regular

City government oversight, all tip the scale in favor of finding that Zoo is the functional equivalent of a public agency.

This conclusion is bolstered by the fact that the Zoo has partially complied with the PRA. The Zoo complied with the PRA requirement of acknowledging receipt of the Plaintiff's public records request within five days. RCW 42.56.520; Ex. B to Fortgang Decl. The Zoo cannot have it both ways, as it cannot claim it is not subject to the PRA at all based on its practice of partial compliance with PRA requests. Compliance with the five-day rule is a critical admission of the PRA's application to the Zoo.

D. Because the Zoo is Subject to the PRA, Statutory Attorney's Fees and a Penalty Must Be Awarded

The PRA requires the trial court to award attorney fees and costs to a party who "prevails against an agency in any action in the courts seeking the right to inspect or copy any public record or the right to receive a response to a public record request within a reasonable amount of time." RCW 42.56.550(4). The award of reasonable attorneys' fees and the award of the statutory penalty are mandatory, although the amount is within the court's discretion. *E.g.*, *Progressive Animal Welfare Soc'y*, 114 Wash.2d at 683-84, 790 P.2d 604. A PRA claimant "prevails" against an agency if the agency wrongfully withheld the documents or that some other violation of the PRA occurred. *Germeau v. Mason County*, 166 Wash. App. 789, 811, 271P.3d 932, *review denied*, 174 Wash.2d 1010 (2012); *Citizens for Fair Share v. Department of Corrections*, 117 Wash. App. 411, 431, 72 P.3d 206 (2003).

Here, if the Court finds that the Zoo is subject to the PRA, there is no credible dispute that Plaintiff should be found to be a "prevailing party" under the PRA. As such, as a matter of law, Plaintiff should be awarded her attorneys' fees and costs, in an amount to be determined through post-judgment briefing.

"In addition, it shall be within the discretion of the court to award . . . an amount not less than five dollars and not to exceed one hundred dollars for each day that he or she was denied the right to inspect or copy [a wrongfully withheld] public record. "RCW 42.56.550(4). A "PRA

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penalty determination involves a two-step inquiry: (1) determining the appropriate daily penalty amount; and (2) calculating the number of days the public agency denied the party access to the records." West, 168 Wash. App. at 188. The principal factor to be considered in setting the amount of the statutory daily penalty is whether the agency acted in bad faith, but bad faith is not required. Yacobellis v. City of Bellingham, 64 Wash. App. 295, 303, 825 P.2d 324 (1992). The requester need not show actual loss. The penalty is for each day the record was withheld and need not be per record, although a court has discretion to group records into categories and impose penalties per category. Yousoufian v. Office of Ron Sims, 152 Wash.2d 421, 436, 98 P.3d 463 (2004). The penalty runs for the time between the request and the disclosure.

The Court should exercise its discretion under RCW 42.56.550(4) to assess the full statutory penalty (\$100/ day) against the Zoo for its failure to comply with the PRA. The number of days for which the penalty should apply is from November 13, 2013 (the date of the request) through, at least, the date of any Order compelling disclosure.

VI. **CONCLUSION**

For the foregoing reasons, Plaintiff respectfully requests that the Court grant this motion and declare that the Zoo is the functional equivalent of a state or local agency and is subject to the PRA; enjoin the Zoo to comply with Plaintiff's PRA request; and award Plaintiff her attorneys fees costs and make an assessment of penalties under RCW 42.56.550(4).

DATED this 23rd day of June, 2014.

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