

Minutes of the 900<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Board of Park Commissioners of the Columbus and Franklin County Metropolitan Park District, held on December 15, 2020 at Innis House, Inniswood Metro Gardens, 940 S Hempstead Rd, Westerville, Ohio 43081.

**Present**

Commissioners: Mr. Hadden, Mr. McGregor, Mr. McCue

Staff: Mr. Moloney, Mr. McGivern, Mr. Peck, Ms. Telfer, Mr. Studenmund, Ms. Hanley, Mr. Knowles, Ms. Ingram, Mr. Simon

Legal Counsel: Mr. Franzmann

Guests: Ms. McGregor

Mr. Hadden asked if all of the notice requirements of Section 121.22 of the Ohio Revised Code and the rules of the Board regarding open meetings had been met. Mr. Moloney confirmed that all of those requirements and rules had been met.

**Minutes of the November 17, 2020 Board Meeting**

Mr. Hadden made a motion to approve the minutes of the November 17, 2020 Board meeting. Mr. McCue seconded the motion and the Board approved the motion.

**Public Comment:** None

**Disbursement Resolution #5873**

Mr. Hadden moved for the approval of the Disbursement Resolution for the November 2020 invoices. Mr. McCue seconded the motion and the Board approved the resolution. A copy of Resolution No. 5859 is attached to these minutes as part hereof.

**Staff Reports**

**Administration**

Mr. Moloney stated that he had spoken with incoming Franklin County Probate Judge Jeff Mackey, who will be replacing Judge Montgomery in January. Incoming Judge Mackey liked Judge Montgomery's court and expects a stable transition. Mr. Moloney invited Judge Mackey to attend the January Board meeting.

Mr. Moloney provided updates on the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) I-71/I-70 project and its impacts on Scioto Audubon Metro Park. The Operations department currently expects significant impacts to park operation, as ODOT will access a construction site through Scioto Audubon starting in 2021. Operations does not currently know what those impacts will be and is exploring several options with Scioto

Audubon staff and ODOT. A decision about how to manage these impacts is pending more information from ODOT.

Mr. Moloney also updated the Board on the Zimmer development, also adjacent to Scioto Audubon. He stated that information about the development, which will take place on the former CSX property behind the Bishoff warehouse, has not been forthcoming from the developer. Zimmer currently plans to build several buildings on the site, including a 30-story tower. This development will also have significant impacts on Scioto Audubon, but at this time development has not begun. Other agencies in the area are also awaiting information from Zimmer regarding development plans.

Mr. Moloney discussed the solar project in talks for development adjacent to Battelle Darby Creek Metro Park. He stated that several agencies are involved in the project. Metro Parks' Resource Management staff, led by Kevin Kasnyik, is working on solutions to minimize impact to Metro Parks' properties and protected spaces, including high-quality wetlands in the area. The solar project is still in its early stages and nothing has been formally decided.

### **Operations**

Mr. Peck introduced staff in attendance, including Bryan Knowles, Public Gardens Manager at Inniswood.

Mr. Knowles caught the Board up on several of Inniswood's 2020 projects, including overhauling and replacing the aged irrigation system and the 2020 Winter Lights program. The entire irrigation system was replaced with over 8.3 miles of PVC pipe and the new system became active in July, giving Inniswood staff more control over the irrigation system, supporting staff function and opening new opportunities to expand the gardens. The project was funded through the Columbus Foundation.

The 2020 Winter Lights program is also underway in tandem with the 2020/21 Winter Hikes program. Light displays went in at the beginning of December and will be on between 5:00pm-8:00pm through December 31. The Winter Lights program has seen over 10,370 visitors since it began December 1.

Mr. Peck expanded on the 2020 Winter Lights program; five other parks (Highbanks, Chestnut Ridge, Blacklick Woods, Homestead and Scioto Grove) have installed lights displays for the Winter Hikes. Visitors are responding positively to the program.

The 2020/21 Winter Hikes program has been heavily modified to support Metro Parks' COVID-19 response. Instead of large, single-day events, the Winter Hikes program has been converted to a self-guided program that will run from December 2020 through

February 2021. Visitors can hike the parks at their own pace and practice social distancing.

Mr. Peck noted that parks continue to be exceptionally busy. Metro Parks has seen over 1,200,000 million additional visitors from the 2019 numbers. Staff continues to support the high visitation, offering parking services, guidance through the park and increased cleaning and sanitation.

Mr. Peck also provided further updates on Metro Parks' COVID-19 response. The district continues to operate in Incident Command Management and has returned to "pod" scheduling, with employees assigned to one of two pods and working only on those pod days. Reservations have been canceled through January. Ten staff members have tested positive for COVID-19 overall. HR continues to manage exposure reports on a case-by-case basis.

A construction project is underway at Battelle Darby Creek Metro Park; a salamander crossing is being installed underneath Jack McDowell Way near the Nature Center. This crossing is designed to reduce salamander mortality as they cross from wetland to wetland in the park. If the crossing is successful, the staff plans to pitch the concept to local committees with the intention of partnering on a second crossing underneath the larger, busier Darby Creek Drive.

## **Finance**

Mr. McGivern reported that the 2021 Budget has been finalized. His staff is working with other units in the district to finalize payroll, expenditures and reporting so that the Finance Department can close out the 2020 fiscal year.

Mr. McGivern provided more information on the funding Inniswood staff received from the Columbus Foundation to replace the irrigation system; the funding comes in part from a small fund left by the Innis sisters in 1972, which has grown substantially over the last several decades. There are funds remaining in the account to support other projects at Inniswood.

Mr. Peck, Mr. Moloney and Mr. Studenmund added that several additional streams of revenue had been found to support the District; Metro Parks recently completed its annual auction of old equipment through GovDeals, bringing in \$59,000; State Capital Improvement funds reimbursed \$1.5 million in expenses at Quarry Trails; and the State of Ohio awarded Metro Parks \$500,000 for a trail connection project at Sharon Woods

Metro Park that will extend existing greenway trails from the back half of Sharon Woods to I-70, with the ultimate goal of connecting to the Olentangy Greenway Trail.

### **Human Resources**

Ms. Telfer informed the Board that arbitration for an employee discipline matter earlier in the year concluded on December 8. The results of this arbitration will be made available to HR after a 30-day waiting period.

Ms. Telfer also told the Board about a modified Breakfast With Santa program for the children of Metro Parks employees. Instead of the annual breakfast event, HR and other staff put together gift bags with crafts, cookies, ornaments, small gifts and handwritten letters from Santa. Feedback from this program has so far been very positive.

### **Other Business**

The Operations Department is evaluating the need for a mask requirement at designated sledding hills as winter approached. Three sledding hills at Highbanks, Battelle Darby Creek and Sharon Woods historically see high visitation on days where snow is present. With most children being schooled remotely and overall visitation up, staff anticipates that visitation at these locations will be higher than ever and that social distancing will be impossible.

Staff is considering requiring masks at these three sledding hills. If adopted, signage will be prominently posted and staff will be on site while the sledding hills are open.

The Board discussed the idea and supported staff's recommendation, as the rule would be temporary per the COVID-19 pandemic and would not require an alteration to extant Metro Parks rules.

### **Resolutions**

#### **#5874 AUTHORIZING TAX ADVANCES FOR 2021**

The Board approved the authorization of tax advances for 2021; Mr. Moloney will be able to submit paperwork to the Franklin County Treasurer to access up to 90% of Metro Parks' tax funding early, prior to normal disbursement in March.

#### **#5875 AUTHORIZING THE PURCHASE OF DIGITAL MARKETING SERVICES FROM THE MARKETING BARN, LLC**

The Board approved the authorization of purchasing digital marketing services from The Marketing Barn, LLC in the amount of \$189,800. This agreement allows Metro Parks more flexibility in advertising services, including targeted ads across multiple platforms which will reach a greater proportion of Franklin County residents than previous marketing contracts allowed.

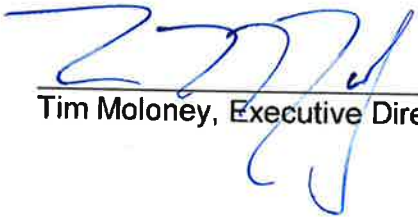
#5875 AUTHORIZING THE PURCHASE OF REAL ESTATE LOCATED IN BLENDON TOWNSHIP  
The Board approved the authorization of a purchase of four acres of wooded land in Blendon Township, adjacent to Metro Parks' property, in the amount of \$168,000.

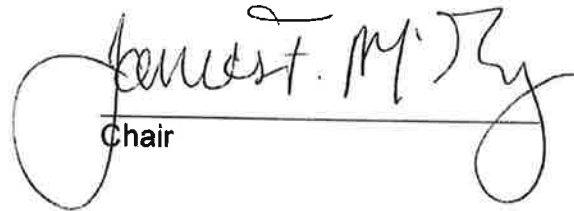
Other Comments:  
None

Adjournment:  
The meeting adjourned at 3:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Approved by the Board of Park  
Commissioners:

  
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Tim Moloney, Executive Director

  
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Chair