

Minutes of the 930th meeting of the Board of Park Commissioners of the Columbus and Franklin County Metropolitan Park District, held at 3:00pm on April 18, 2023 at Battelle Darby Creek Metro Park, 1415 Darby Creek Drive, Galloway, OH 43119.

Present

Commissioners: Mr. Alex, Mr. Hadden, Mr. McCue

Staff: Mr. Auricchio, Ms. Boniface, Mr. Bosworth, Ms. Hall, Mr. Hamilton, Ms. Ingram, Mr. Kaderly, Mr. Laughbaum, Mr. Kasnyik, Mr. McGivern, Mr. Moloney, Mr. Neumeier, Ms. Oberlin, Mr. Peck, Ms. Ruppensburg, Mr. Studenmund, Ms. Telfer

Legal Counsel: Mr. Franzmann

Guests: Mr. Fred Haertle

Mr. Alex 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 March 21, 2023 Board Meeting

Mr. McCue made a motion to approve the minutes of the March 21, 2023 Board Meeting. Mr. Hadden seconded the motion and the minutes were approved.

Public Comment: Mr. Fred Haertle, a local resident who frequently walks at Battelle Darby Creek Metro Park, introduced himself to and addressed the Board.

Mr. Haertle stated that he lives nearby and frequently walks in the Battelle Darby Creek Public Hunting Area; Mr. Haertle has been walking in the Public Hunting Area for several years. Beginning in 2010, when the Board of Park Commissioners voted to close the Public Hunting Area to non-hunters during hunting season, Mr. Haertle began to conflict with park staff and other park visitors.

Recently, Mr. Haertle's activities in the Public Hunting Area were deemed a nuisance and Mr. Haertle has been banned from the Public Hunting Area.

Mr. Haertle and Mr. Geoff Hamilton, Park Manager of Battelle Darby Creek, have met several times to reach a satisfactory compromise. Mr. Hamilton directed Mr. Haertle to walk in the Osprey Lake Area of the park, which Mr. Haertle found unsatisfactory due to noise from the road. He stated that he walked in the Public Hunting Area to enjoy nature and was unable to find the same experience walking elsewhere in the park.

Mr. Haertle thanked the Board for listening and left the meeting. Mr. Larry Peck, Metro Parks' Deputy Director, briefly left the meeting to exchange contact information with Mr. Haertle.

The Board had a few clarifying questions for Mr. Hamilton and his staff. Mr. McCue asked on what basis Mr. Haertle had been banned from the Public Hunting Area, and what policies or rules Mr. Haertle had been violating.

Mr. Hamilton stated that Metro Parks' Public Hunting Area is open only to hunters from September 1 to March 28 every year. Non-hunting activities are not permitted. These rules are posted online and are posted annually at all entrances to the Public Hunting Area. Mr. Haertle had been warned of these regulations several times prior to his ban. Mr. Alex thanked Mr. Hamilton for the information and moved on to other topics.

Disbursement Resolution #6076

Mr. McCue moved for the approval of the Disbursement Resolution for the March 2023 invoices. Mr. Hadden seconded the motion and the Board approved the resolution. A copy of Resolution No. 6076 is attached to these minutes as part hereof.

Staff Reports

Administration

Administrative staff continues to be involved with other local agencies, stakeholders and planning groups to secure funding for the acquisition of the Norfolk Southern rail line to expand the Heritage Rail Trail between Hilliard and downtown Columbus. No federal sponsors have yet been identified.

Mr. Alex asked if any potential acquisition would occur in a single purchase or in multiple. Mr. Moloney said that at this time, Norfolk Southern would prefer a single purchase. At this time the total cost for approximately seven miles of railway is \$20,000,000, though a formal appraisal is underway. The City of Hilliard and the City of Columbus have been identified as possible partners.

Metro Parks is also still working with other agencies and stakeholders in the northeastern part of Franklin County, including the City of New Albany, on greenspace plans as the Intel and Google projects move forward.

Operations

Mr. Peck introduced the Board to Mr. Geoff Hamilton, the Park Manager for Battelle Darby Creek, and Mr. Hamilton introduced his own staff. Battelle Darby Creek is one of the busiest Metro Parks in the district. It is the largest Metro Park and is also home to a

popular Nature Center and a herd of bison. Four of the bison are expecting calves this spring.

Battelle Darby Creek is anticipating several projects this year, including the installation of a new playground, a new observation deck, an H2Ohio wetland restoration project and several renovations to park facilities.

Mr. Peck reiterated that the parks are busy, with annual YTD attendance for 2023 up over 2022. Several weeks of nice weather have jumpstarted Metro Parks' summer season.

The concrete repair project for the damaged breezeway at Blacklick Woods Golf Course, which was authorized via an emergency resolution, has stalled. Metro Parks has cancelled the contract with the Righter Company and will be closely monitoring the walkway for safety. The security camera project is underway, with several high-traffic areas slated to receive cameras, with the aim of improving park security, and a new playground has been ordered for Highbanks Metro Park.

Mr. Peck was pleased to report that construction of the Canopy Walk at Blacklick Woods Metro Park will begin soon, now that an access road has been cut in for construction crews, and several partnerships at Great Southern Metro Park are in progress. Spring paving is underway at several parks and at Quarry Trails, the dog park is nearing completion, the Via Ferrata is finished and work continues on the office building and maintenance shop.

Finance

Mr. McGivern updated the Board on Finance's projects. Metro Parks has updated its insurance coverage for the next two years and once again selected Burnham & Flower Insurance Group for coverage. Despite widespread increases in insurance rates, Metro Parks was able to secure coverage at an increase of only 4.7%. Finance is also planning to update its investment policy to continue safeguarding its investments against market shocks and a volatile stock climate. Both the insurance renewal and the investment policy update will go before the Board as resolutions.

Human Resources

Ms. Telfer and her team have continued to focus on spring and summer recruitment. Six employees are currently enrolled in the Ohio Peace Officer's Training Academy and will graduate as full-time, commissioned Park Rangers.

Sixty-five high school students applied to the CSI internship program. Seasonal hiring is ongoing; many returning seasonals have started work and an orientation for new

seasonals is scheduled for May 15. Metro Parks also hosted its own job fair, aimed at recruiting full-time rangers, that was attended by over fifty people.

Elaine Hall, Mussels and Battelle Darby Creek

Ms. Elaine Hall, Assistant Park Manager at Battelle Darby Creek, introduced herself to the Board and provided a presentation on some of the natural resources that make the Big Darby Creek, a State and National Wild and Scenic River, a unique and important ecosystem in Central Ohio.

Big Darby Creek is home to more than forty species of freshwater mussels, including several species that are endangered at the federal and state level. Freshwater mussels are important indicators of water and stream habitat quality and are among some of the first warning signs that an ecosystem is experiencing stress. Freshwater mussels are filter feeders and need clean water to feed and survive; when water quality is impacted by agriculture, industry, development, runoff or other human activities, freshwater mussels are among the first species to die. The diversity of mussels indicates a healthy environment; declines in that diversity, including mussel die-offs, which have occurred on the Big Darby in recent years, are a sign that something is affecting the health of the ecosystem.

Like many areas in Central Ohio, land in the Big Darby Creek watershed has faced increasing development pressure. Several projects are planned in or near the watershed, including solar farms, housing developments, expansions to wastewater treatment plants and other projects. While it is important to continue to provide housing and services in Central Ohio, as the region continues to grow and attract economic development, freshwater mussels remind us that it is also important to take care of our natural resources. The Big Darby is one of the most biologically-diverse ecosystems anywhere in the Midwest and should continue to be protected.

Ms. Hall also provided information about the new Freshwater Mussels display at the Battelle Darby Creek Nature Center, which houses examples of many of the species of freshwater mussels that can be found in Big Darby Creek.

Resolutions

#6077 AUTHORIZING THE RENEWAL OF METRO PARKS INSURANCE COVERAGE TO BURNHAM & FLOWER INSURANCE GROUP
The Board authorized Metro Parks to renew their insurance coverage with Burnham & Flower Insurance Group.

#6078 UPDATING INVESTMENT POLICY
The Board authorized Metro Parks' Finance department to update its investment policy, allowing the Finance team to further insulate Metro Parks' investments against market shocks.

- #6079 AUTHORIZING ENTERING INTO A CONTRACT FOR PAVING IMPROVEMENTS AT MULTIPLE METRO PARKS
The Board authorized a contract with Brecks Paving in the amount of \$280,000 for paving repairs, improvements and other work at several Metro Parks.
- #6080 AUTHORIZING ENTERING INTO A CONTRACT FOR THE DEMOLITION AND REMOVAL OF STRUCTURES AND DEBRIS FROM PARK PROPERTY AT MULTIPLE LOCATIONS
The Board authorized a contract with Dilley's Excavating & Demolition, LLC to demolish and remove several houses, barns, sheds and other structures that had been declared surplus at Battelle Darby Creek and Walnut Woods Metro Parks.
- #6081 AUTHORIZING ENTERING INTO A CONTRACT FOR WATER SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS AT HONDA WETLAND AREA, GLACIER RIDGE METRO PARK
The Board authorized Metro Parks to enter into a contract with Precise Boring of Ohio, LLC for a new water system to replace a failed well water distribution system at the Honda Wetland Area of Glacier Ridge Metro Park.

Other Business

Mr. Moloney notified the Board that Mr. Moloney and Mr. Peck would be attending a meeting with the City of Columbus on Thursday, April 20 to discuss solutions to the Zimmer development project adjacent to Scioto Audubon.

Adjournment:


Mr. Alex asked if there was a motion to end the meeting. Mr. Hadden made a motion, seconded by Mr. McCue, and the Board voted to adjourn the meeting at 3:32 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Approved by the Board of Park
Commissioners:



Tim Moloney, Executive Director



Chair