

Minutes of the 937th meeting of the Board of Park Commissioners of the Columbus and Franklin County Metropolitan Park District, held at 3:00 pm on November 21, 2023, at the Banquet Room, Blacklick Woods Metro Park, 7309 East Livingston Avenue, Reynoldsburg, OH 43068.

Present

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

Staff: Ms. Boniface, Mr. Bruch, Ms. Christian, Mr. Davidson, Mr. Eutsey, Ms. Ingram, Mr. Kasnyik, Mr. Laughbaum, Mr. Peck, Mr. Samulski, Mr. Sorgini, Ms. Stiles, Mr. Studenmund, Mr. Whitt, Mr. Williamson

Legal Counsel: Mr. Franzmann

Guests: Mr. Bob and Ms. Ann Litt

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 October 17, 2023 Board Meeting

Mr. McCue made a motion to approve the minutes of the October 17, 2023 Board Meeting. Mr. Hadden seconded the motion and the minutes were approved.

Public Comment: None.

Disbursement Resolution #6120

Mr. Hadden moved for the approval of the Disbursement Resolution for the October 2023 invoices. Mr. Alex seconded the motion and the Board approved the resolution. Mr. McCue abstained. A copy of Resolution No. 6120 is attached to these minutes as part hereof.

Staff Reports

Administration

Mr. Moloney updated the Board on several projects. Administration staff has been working with the Westland Area Commission, Franklin County Soil & Water Conservation District, Prairie Township and other agencies on the west side about potential parkland or a park extension near Battelle Darby Creek and Prairie Oaks Metro Parks. Between several stakeholders, over 700 acres of land in that area are in some kind of conservation use. The west side of Franklin County is one of several Central Ohio growth corridors and Metro Parks is interested in conservation opportunities. Relating to conservation opportunities, the Cumberland Trail Golf Course has approached Metro Parks about a potential conservation easement on their property.

Mr. Moloney also brought an issue regarding property at Clear Creek Metro Park to the Board's attention. In 2005 Metro Parks purchased a conservation easement from the Camp Fire Girls organization for property adjacent to Clear Creek Metro Park. Camp Fire Girls and later Camp Wyandot have operated the property as a campground and educational space, while Metro Parks has held the conservation easement.

In late October, Clear Creek park staff were notified of significant noise and activity indicative of logging in the conservation easement. Staff investigated and found that numerous trees had been removed from the property. Metro Parks issued a Cease and Desist order to more thoroughly investigate and found that 211 trees, 190 of them mature hardwoods, had been

removed from the property. When questioned, staff removing the trees stated that they had only removed trees that were "hazardous," which is an activity permitted under the easement.

Commercial logging is not permitted under the terms of the easement. Metro Parks has maintained the Cease and Desist order while consulting with legal staff at Squire Patton Boggs. Potential legal ramifications for removing so many trees are being considered. Further complicating the issue is that the easement was purchased in part using Clean Ohio Greenspace Conservation Funds, which prohibit commercial logging. Metro Parks has requested 10+ items from Camp Wyandot in an attempt to ascertain several features, including who ordered the work, how trees were designated for removal and what has happened to trees removed.

Mr. Alex stated that Metro Parks' primary mission is conservation, and that the Board would closely follow this issue. Mr. McCue asked if Metro Parks knew who had hired the tree removal company and if a third party (between Camp Wyandot and the contractors) was involved. Mr. Moloney stated that those questions were among the 10+ items asked by Metro Parks' legal representation.

Mr. Moloney added that the issue was further complicated by the fact that the easement was executed between Camp Fire Girls and Metro Parks, and that Camp Fire Girls has since passed control over the camp to Camp Wyandot, Inc, which now operates the property.

Operations

Mr. Peck introduced the Board to Danny Sorgini, the Blacklick Woods Golf Course Manager, who introduced the rest of his staff. The Golf Course has had a busy year, with revenues coming in above projections. The course is in good shape and staff has emphasized new programming this year. Much of the course green has been planted with a new drought-tolerant species of grass that will help reduce water use at the course.

Mr. Moloney thanked Mr. Sorgini and the rest of the Golf Course staff for their hard work this year and in the last few years to reinvent the Golf Course.

Mr. Peck then updated the Board on several projects. A project to repair damage to the breezeway bridge at the Blacklick Woods Golf Course is currently out to bid. The Canopy Walk is progressing and the Fire Tower at Scioto Grove Metro Park is now open to the public. Work at Bank Run Metro Park also continues.

At Quarry Trails Metro Park, a project to refurbish an old railroad truss bridge over the Scioto River was unsuccessfully bid. Staff is reviewing that project and will put it back out to bid in 2024. A sport climbing route next to the Via Ferrata is being prepared. A wetland restoration project at Battelle Darby Creek has been completed. This project was funded partially by an H2Ohio grant.

Mr. Alex asked if the wetland project was a traditional wetland or some other kind of structure. Mr. Kasnyik, Resource Manager, stated that the project removed a levee between the wetland and the river and restructured water flow, which restored the wetland's function and also improved the floodplain's ability to retain and treat water.

The annual deer management program is underway at several Metro Parks. Two lottery hunts (one at Slate Run and one at Clear Creek) were held or will be held during Deer Gun Week.

Staff is also bringing a resolution to the Board later in this meeting related to Invenergy, the company behind the Pleasant Prairie Solar Project adjacent to parkland at Battelle Darby Creek. This resolution will confirm protections for Metro Parks' property, including the fee simple acquisition of a buffer zone between the solar fields and the park. Mr. Alex thanked staff for all of their work on this project, which has been ongoing for several years.

Finally, Mr. Peck and Mr. Moloney both acknowledged that park staff, particularly the ranger staff, has been managing a high number of mental health-related issues in the parks. Several members of the public have visited the parks in the past few months and experienced a mental health challenge, including several attempted or successful suicides. Rangers are preparing for specialized training early in 2024 to help address these incidents and to better prepare for any future challenges.

Finance

The Finance Team is preparing the 2024 Budget, of which a draft copy has been given to the Board. The annual budget meeting is scheduled for Monday, December 4, 2023 at Sharon Woods Metro Park.

Finance staff is also working on year-end procedures, on processing a popular vacation conversion program (which allows staff to convert up to forty hours of unused vacation time into a one-time payment) and other projects. Metro Parks has received national recognition for its management of investments and returns.

Human Resources

HR processed several promotions this quarter and has finished hiring for vacant manager and assistant manager positions. The vacation conversion program mentioned by Finance is popular and was brought back for a third year this year.

HR is also preparing to issue updates to Metro Parks' Drug & Alcohol Policy in order to clarify Metro Parks' response to and expectations regarding the passage of Issue 2.

Resolutions

#6121 AUTHORIZING THE PURCHASE OF DIGITAL MARKETING SERVICES FROM THE MARKETING BARN, LLC

The Board authorized Metro Parks to enter into a contract with The Marketing Barn, LLC for digital marketing and advertising services.

#6122 AUTHORIZING ACCEPTANCE OF DONATIONS OF REAL ESTATE ASSOCIATED WITH THE PLEASANT PRAIRIE SOLAR PROJECT IN FRANKLIN COUNTY

The Board authorized Metro Parks to accept a donation of approximately ninety-six acres of land in Prairie Township to form a buffer between Metro Parks' property and the Pleasant Prairie Solar Project.

Public Comment

None.

Executive Session

Mr. Hadden moved to enter into executive session at 8:25 a.m. for the purpose of establishing the salaries of the Directors. Mr. McGregor seconded the motion and the roll being called upon its adoption, the vote resulted as follows:

Mr. Alex	Yes
Mr. Hadden	Yes
Mr. McCue	Yes

The Board returned from executive session at 9:00 a.m.

Resolution

The Board considered the following resolutions:

#6126 RELATIVE TO THE ADOPTION OF THE 2024 BUDGET AND APPROPRIATION OF FUNDS FOR 2024

The Board approved Resolution #6217 to adopt the 2024 Budget and appropriate funds for 2024.

#6127 ESTABLISHING SALARIES OF DIRECTORS

The Board set the annualized salaries for the Directors, effective January 1, 2024.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 9:10 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Approved by the Board of Park
Commissioners:



Tim Moloney
Executive Director



Aryeh Alex, Chair