

Minutes of the 941st meeting of the Board of Park Commissioners of the Columbus and Franklin County Metropolitan Park District, held at 3:01pm on Tuesday, February 20, 2024 at the Nature Center, Blendon Woods Metro Park, 4265 East Dublin Granville Road, Columbus, OH 43230.

Present

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

Staff: Ms. Ballard, Mr. Berisford, Mr. Biegler, Mr. Bruch, Ms. Ingram, Mr. Kaderly, Mr. Kasnyik, Mr. Laughbaum, Mr. McGivern, Mr. Moloney, Mr. Peck, Mr. Studenmund, Ms. Telfer, Ms. West, Ms. Williamson

Legal Counsel: Mr. Franzmann

Guests: Ms. Jessica Bennett, Ms. Pam Tinsley, Mr. Kwesi Kambon, BLN Volunteers

Mr. McCue 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 January 23, 2024 Special Meeting

Mr. Alex made a motion to approve the minutes of the January 23, 2024 Special Board Meeting. Mr. Hadden seconded the motion and the minutes were approved.

Public Comment

Ms. Jessica Bennett, the founder of Jeremiah's Corner, a consulting firm focused on disability advocacy in Central Ohio, introduced herself and addressed the Board. Ms. Bennett and her colleague, Ms. Pam Tinsley, are both mothers of children with autism and have come to request that the Board and Metro Parks' administration staff consider the development of more inclusive playgrounds within the district.

Ms. Bennett asked the Board to consider creating more facilities specifically for older children and/or adults. Her son is currently seven, but will continue to grow and will someday outgrow Metro Parks' current facilities. Spaces for older children and for adults with disabilities allow families to continue using the parks throughout their lifetimes. Ms. Bennett recommended that staff study Magical Bridge Playground in California, which features dozens of amenities for visitors of all ages and abilities.

Mr. McCue thanked Ms. Bennett for approaching the Board, as did Mr. Alex. Mr. McCue said that he appreciated Ms. Bennett bringing the request for more inclusive spaces to the Board's attention and that the Board was willing to discuss the matter further. Mr. Moloney and Mr. Peck both provided Ms. Bennett with contact information to begin discussions with Metro Parks' administration.

Disbursement Resolution No. 6141

Mr. Alex moved for the approval of the Disbursement Resolution for the January 2024 invoices. Mr. Hadden seconded the motion and the Board approved the resolution. Mr. McCue abstained. A copy of Resolution No. 6141 is attached to these minutes as part hereof.

Staff Reports

Administration

Mr. Moloney updated the Board on several items. Mr. Moloney has spent time at the Statehouse this month working with members of the Legislature on the most recent round of State Capital Investment projects. The House recommended an eight-million-dollar project, led by the City of Hilliard, for funds to purchase old rail line, for funding. This project would ultimately allow for the extension of the Heritage Rail Trail between the City of Hilliard and Quarry Trails Metro Park. Metro Parks received \$1.5m in funding for this project during the last round of State Capital submittals.

Mr. Alex asked how much the overall project was estimated to cost. Mr. Moloney stated that estimates fell between \$19-27m in acquisition costs, and that the acquisition of the railway would be a multi-jurisdictional effort.

Mr. Moloney also spoke to the House regarding House Bill 344, which (as proposed) would eliminate replacement tax levies. Metro Parks has been following this bill closely, as Metro Parks is funded through a property tax levy. Mr. Moloney stated that Metro Parks' ability to rely on replacement levies – instead of renewal levies – allows Metro Parks to better capture growth in Central Ohio.

Related to growth in Central Ohio, Mr. Moloney also updated the Board on a policy put in place last year; Metro Parks continues to receive near-weekly requests from power, utility and development companies for easements. Staff expects the volume of these requests to only increase as development pressures mount in the region. Metro Parks is not opposed to growth in the area, but staff is wary of the volume of requests. A policy instituted last year, which provides utility companies and developers requesting easements with a procedure to follow and requirements to meet for consideration, has been helpful to staff in managing these requests. Metro Parks is also closely watching many neighborhood developments in high-growth corridors, as many of the densest have few plans for greenspace included with development.

Mr. Alex asked if Metro Parks had considered providing this input, specifically regarding greenspace requirements, to the City of Columbus as the City rewrites its codes. Mr. McCue stated that while such input is valuable, greenspace requirements in City codes can often be offset by a "cash in lieu of" clause, which many developers choose to save time or money.

Operations

Mr. Peck introduced Ms. Heather Williamson, the Park Manager for Blendon Woods and Rocky Fork. Ms. Williamson introduced the members of her staff in attendance and updated the Board on Blendon Woods' upcoming projects. Blendon Woods is planning to remodel its Nature Center, adding classroom space, updated educational displays and other features. Paving out in the park is planned, as are updates to the park's water line.

Mr. Peck added that Blendon Woods is the district's second-oldest park and serves over 600,000 visitors a year. Blendon Woods' staff also operates Rocky Fork Metro Park in New Albany and the recently-opened Hundred Acre Wood property.

The Operations team is working on several projects. A John Deere tractor for Slate Run Metro Park that was approved by the Board in December has been replaced by a Kubota tractor, saving approximately \$16,000. Staff met with the contractor for the Blacklick Woods Golf Course breezeway repair project and anticipates work to begin soon. Work on the 2024 Capital Improvements project list has begun and the Canopy Walk at Blacklick Woods Metro Park is nearing completion.

Finally, Mr. Peck stated that planning efforts to manage the anticipated surge in visitation for the April 2024 total solar eclipse are underway. Metro Parks has ordered several thousand solar eclipse glasses, which staff will distribute prior to the eclipse. Several parks are expected to be in the path of totality. Overall the state is expecting as many as 1.5 million out-of-state visitors for the eclipse.

Finance

Mr. McGivern updated the Board on the audit process, which was underway in January. Staff completed the initial audit compilation. Staff also filed 1099s with the IRS online for the first time. A new contract for fiber conduit at Battelle Darby Creek Metro Park will go before the Board later in the meeting.

Human Resources

Ms. Telfer passed out materials for the Board and provided updates on several Human Resources policy revisions that are underway. Some of these policies have not yet been formally adopted and will apply most immediately to non-bargaining unit employees (non-rangers), but HR plans to bring these policies to negotiations with the union Park Rangers are part of later in the year.

Policies that are being updated include:

- Further clarifications to the drug testing policy
- An increase in the tuition reimbursement available to employees who are also students, from the current \$2,000 per academic year to \$4,000 per academic year
- Updates to the current leave policy, which has been one policy but will now be split into policies to address each type of leave, including:
 - Military leave, specifically the health insurance portion of this policy, which will allow any employees on active military duty to remain covered by Metro Parks' health insurance as long as the employee continues to pay the monthly premium
 - Sick leave, including clarification on the current policy and an update that will recognize the transfer of accrued sick leave between public agencies, though the transfer of such leave is limited to 480 hours
 - Leave cash out policies

- Vacation leave, including an update to the rate at which leave can be accrued and procedural clarifications, and
- The implementation of a new four-week/160-hour parental leave policy.

Mr. McCue thanked Ms. Telfer for her work on these updates.

Resolutions

- #6142** HONORING ANN M. CULEK
The Board recognized Ann M. Culek, who has served as the Historical Farm Manager at Slate Run Living Historical Farm since 1988, for her thirty-six years of work and dedication to Metro Parks. Ms. Culek retires at the end of February.
- #6143** AUTHORIZING THE ACQUISITION OF CONDUIT, FIBER AND RELATED SERVICES AT BATTELLE DARBY CREEK METRO PARK FROM CHARTER COMMUNICATION HOLDINGS LLC UTILIZING THE STATE OF OHIO COOPERATIVE PURCHASING PROGRAM, CONTRACT NO. MSA0004-2, IN ACCORDANCE WITH OHIO REVISED CODE SECTION 125.04
The Board authorized Metro Parks to enter into a contract with Charter Communication Holdings LLC for conduit and fiber installation at Battelle Darby Creek. The addition of fiber and other connectivity projects are major focuses of the 2018 Levy campaign.
- #6144** AUTHORIZING THE PURCHASE AND INSTALLATION OF SECURITY CAMERAS AT MULTIPLE LOCATIONS
The Board authorized Metro Parks to enter into a contract with Security 101 for the purchase and installation of security cameras at multiple Metro Parks. A Blendon Woods volunteer asked where these cameras would be installed; Mr. Peck stated that several locations were under consideration based on a priority list from last year's contract.
- #6145** AUTHORIZING ENTERING INTO A CONTRACT WITH THE RIGHTER COMPANY FOR IMPROVEMENTS TO THE SCIOTO RIVER TRUSS BRIDGE AT QUARRY TRAILS METRO PARK
The Board authorized Metro Parks to enter into a contract with the Righter Company for repair work to an old railroad bridge at Quarry Trails Metro Park. These repairs will allow the park to convert the bridge into an amenity for visitors.
- #6146** AUTHORIZING THE PURCHASE OF A COMPACT TRACK LOADER
The Board authorized Metro Parks to purchase a compact track loader for the Roving Crew to assist with park operations.
- #6147** AUTHORIZING ENTERING INTO A CONTRACT WITH CUSTOM CUTTERS FOR SITE IMPROVEMENTS AT BANK RUN METRO PARK
The Board authorized park staff to enter into a contract with Custom Cutters in order to build a 100' slide at Bank Run Metro Park.

Other Business

None.

Adjournment

Mr. McCue asked if there was a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Alex made a motion, seconded by Mr. Hadden, and the Board voted to adjourn the meeting at 3:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Approved by the Board of Park
Commissioners:


Tim Moloney
Executive Director


George McCue, Chair