

Minutes of the 943rd meeting of the Board of Park Commissioners of the Columbus and Franklin County Metropolitan Park District, held at 3:00pm on Tuesday, April 16, 2024 at the Nature Center, Battelle Darby Creek Metro Park, 1415 Darby Creek Drive, Galloway, OH 43119.

Present

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

Staff: Mr. Auricchio, Ms. Bergman, Ms. Hall, Mr. Hamilton, Ms. Huffman, Ms. Ingram, Mr. Kasnyik, Mr. Laughbaum, Mr. McGivern, Mr. Moloney, Ms. Niese, Mr. Peck, Mr. Pinson, Ms. Riley, Ms. Ruppensburg, Mr. Studenmund, Ms. Telfer

Legal Counsel: Mr. Franzmann

Guests: None.

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 March 19, 2024 Board Meeting

Mr. Alex made a motion to approve the minutes of the February 20, 2024 Board Meeting. Mr. Hadden seconded the motion and the minutes were approved.

Public Comment

None.

Disbursement Resolution No. 6152

Mr. Alex moved for the approval of the Disbursement Resolution for the March 2024 invoices. Mr. Hadden seconded the motion and the Board approved the resolution. Mr. McCue abstained. A copy of Resolution No. 6152 is attached to these minutes as part hereof.

Staff Reports

Administration

Mr. Moloney updated the Board on several projects. Between several agencies and municipalities, nearly 1,100 acres of land on the west side of Franklin County, near the Westland area and Battelle Darby Creek, are publicly held. Most of these lands are on the Hellbranch Run, an important tributary of Big Darby Creek. Steam + Wetlands Foundation, an environmental mitigation group, has restored wetlands on several parcels. Mr. Moloney stated that Metro Parks has been in discussions with Stream + Wetlands, Franklin Soil and Water Conservation District, the City of Columbus, Prairie Township and others about the potential of establishing these lands as a Metro Park. Acquiring these lands would provide Metro Parks with the opportunity to collaborate with several regional partners and to conserve important lands and waterways in a high-development region.

Mr. Moloney stated that staff has also been involved in talks with other stakeholders regarding development in the Hayden Run area, north of Hilliard, and in provisioning for green space in that area.

Operations

Mr. Peck first provided an update on the April 8, 2024 Solar Eclipse, which brought over 41,000 visitors into the Metro Parks to view the event. Five parks experienced totality and reached capacity prior to the eclipse. Thanks to an operational plan and the hard work of park staff, the event passed with only one minor incident at the end of the day. Traffic moved smoothly out of the parks and visitors were happy to have experienced the eclipse. Metro Parks distributed several thousand pairs of eclipse glasses and has begun an initiative with SWACO to collect gently-used glasses and recycle them for future eclipses.

Mr. Peck then introduced Mr. Geoff Hamilton, Park Manager for Battelle Darby Creek. Mr. Hamilton introduced his staff in attendance and updated the Board on several of Battelle Darby Creek's ongoing projects. Staff, with help from Resource Management, replaced the Nature Center's green roof. Fence upgrades are being made to the salamander/wildlife crossings that pass beneath Jack McDowell Drive. A new observation deck was installed in the Watts Wetland area and is popular with visitors. Plantings and preparations for the buffer zone between Metro Parks' property and the Invenergy solar farm are underway. The park has experienced some springtime flooding due to heavy rains and has been able to observe the function of the new H2Ohio-funded wetland.

Finally, six bison calves are expected later in the spring or early summer. Metro Parks partners with the Columbus Zoo/the Wilds to manage a small herd of bison at Battelle Darby Creek.

Mr. Peck also provided project updates for the wider park district. The office building at Quarry Trails has been granted an occupancy permit, allowing park staff to move into the building. Construction of the Invenergy solar farm is expected to begin in the third quarter of this year, and Metro Parks has reached out to Invenergy to remind them of their obligations under an agreement struck with Metro Parks to protect parkland. Progress on 2024 Capital Improvements is also being made, with several large projects put out to bid, awarded or already under construction.

Finally, Mr. Peck stated that work on the Blacklick Woods Canopy Walk is wrapping up, with much of the physical structure finished. Internal staff is preparing a walkway to the Canopy Walk from the parking lot. Staff anticipates an opening sometime in May of this year.

Mr. Alex asked Mr. Peck to elaborate on a complaint that had been filed with the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency regarding the Canopy Walk. Mr. Peck stated that OEPA had received an anonymous complaint that, during the course of work on the Canopy Walk, a wetland had been filled in. OEPA is obligated to investigate all such complaints. Mr. Peck stated that no wetlands had been filled in as part of the project;

much of the area is classified as "wet woods," which see some seasonal retention of water, but do not qualify as protected wetlands. Metro Parks responded to OEPA's inquiry with a letter, and once construction of the Canopy Walk is completed Metro Parks will restore the site with guidance from the Resource Management team.

Finance

Mr. McGivern's team is busy administering various Capital Improvements projects and in assisting Human Resources with preparations for seasonal hiring and onboarding. The Finance team also renewed Metro Parks' insurance coverage for a third year with Burnham & Flower. Insurance rates have increased over the past several years, but so to have Metro Parks' holdings, staff, equipment and amenities, all of which require insurance.

Human Resources

Seasonal hiring is well underway. Metro Parks hires between 100-110 seasonal staff annually, to support park operations during the busy spring and summer seasons, and Human Resources has been busy preparing for the 2024 season. In addition to seasonal staff, HR has also been working on the 2023 Columbus Schools Internship (CSI) program, which seeks to hire high school students from the Columbus City Schools system. Approximately 50-60 applications for CSI spots have been received.

Mr. Alex asked how many of those applicants would receive a spot in the 2024 program. Ms. Telfer stated that 20-25 spots are likely to be offered, based on available transportation.

Finally, Ms. Telfer thanked the Board for their feedback regarding new HR policies, which have now been implemented for staff.

Resolutions

- #6153 AUTHORIZING THE RENEWAL OF METRO PARKS INSURANCE COVERAGE TO BURNHAM & FLOWER INSURANCE GROUP
The Board authorized Metro Parks to enter into a third year of coverage with Burnham & Flower Insurance Group, for a premium of \$244,756.37.
- #6154 APPROVAL OF THE UNION COUNTY 9-1-1 SYSTEM PLAN
The Board, per Union County's request, approved of that County's 9-1-1 System Plan. Metro Parks operates Glacier Ridge Metro Park in Union County.
- #6155 AUTHORIZING ENTERING INTO A CONTRACT FOR ROADWAY, PARKING LOT AND TRAIL PAVING IMPROVEMENTS AT CHESTNUT RIDGE METRO PARK
The Board authorized Metro Parks to enter into a contract with Chemcote, Inc for paving improvements at Chestnut Ridge Metro Park following Chemcote's successful bid.

- #6156 AUTHORIZING ENTERING INTO A CONTRACT FOR MANUFACTURE AND PLACEMENT OF PRE-CAST RESTROOMS AT MULTIPLE METRO PARKS
The Board authorized Metro Parks to enter into a contract with Norwalk Concrete Industries for the manufacture and installation of pre-cast restrooms at Battelle Darby Creek (Shagbark Shelter) and Slate Run (Wetland Area.)
- #6157 AUTHORIZING ADDITIONAL EXPENDITURES ON THE BLACKLICK WOODS CANOPY WALK
The Board authorized Metro Parks to complete a change order with R.W. Setterlin, who is building the new Canopy Walk at Blacklick Woods Metro Park, to address an additional means of egress, elevator expenses and other end-of-project expenses.
- #6158 AUTHORIZING ANNEXATION OF PROPERTY AT BANK RUN METRO PARK
The Board authorized Metro Parks to allow the City of Obetz to annex Bank Run Metro Park into the City, which will allow Metro Parks to access City water and other benefits.

Other Business

None.

Adjournment

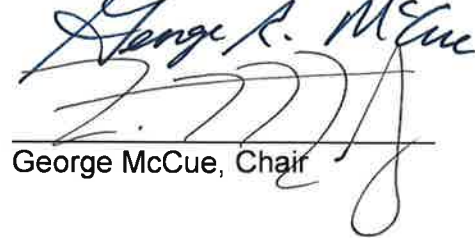
Mr. McCue asked if there was a motion to end the meeting. Mr. Alex made a motion, seconded by Mr. Hadden, and the Board voted to adjourn the meeting at 3:23 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Tim Moloney
Executive Director

Approved by the Board of Park
Commissioners:



George McCue, Chair