
Minutes of the 944th meeting of the Board of Park Commissioners of the Columbus and Franklin County Metropolitan Park District, held at 3:01pm on Tuesday, May 21, 2024 at the Northern Shelter, Highbanks Metro Park, 9466 Columbus Pike, Lewis Center, OH 43035.

Present

Commissioners: Mr. Hadden, Mr. McCue

Staff: Mr. Bruch, Mr. Domiano, Ms. Ingram, Mr. Matt Kaderly, Mr. Dan Kaderly, Mr. Kasnyik, Mr. Laughbaum, Mr. McGivern, Mr. Moloney, Mr. Rosenbeck, Mr. Studenmund, Ms. Whillans

Legal Counsel: Mr. Franzmann

Guests: Ms. Jessica Bennet, Mr. Paul Miner

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 April 16, 2024 Board Meeting

Mr. Hadden made a motion to approve the minutes of the April 16, 2024 Board Meeting. Mr. McCue seconded the motion and the minutes were approved.

Public Comment

Ms. Jessica Bennett, local resident and disability advocate, addressed the Board. Ms. Bennett attended the February 2024 meeting to request that park staff consider an all-inclusive playground that could meet the needs of all Central Ohio residents and families, regardless of levels of ability.

Ms. Bennett stated that park staff had been very responsive and had met with Ms. Bennett and other community members several times to begin plans for an all-inclusive playground. Ms. Bennett has also collected over 2,000 signatures from community members expressing interest in such a playground, and is in the process of surveying residents to determine what needs are not being met by currently-available playgrounds.

Ms. Bennett thanked Mr. Peck and Mr. Laughbaum, who have been holding regular meetings to plan a playground, and asked the Board to consider breaking ground on an all-inclusive playground project some time before the end of 2024.

Mr. Moloney added that, while a playground of such size had not been included in the 2024 Capital Improvements budget, staff was interested in the project and was exploring opportunities to fund the design and possible partial installation of a playground in 2024.

Mr. Laughbaum added that staff had narrowed potential sites down to Blendon Woods Metro Park and is meeting with a designer in June.

Ms. Bennett thanked the Board and park staff for being open to feedback from the community and for their willingness to address community needs.

After Ms. Bennett, Mr. Paul Miner, a longtime trail user, photographer and volunteer at Highbanks Metro Park, introduced himself to the Board to bring a matter of concern to the Board's attention.

Within the last few years, Highbanks Metro Park has gradually replaced some of its clay trail surfaces with a gravel aggregate. The park selected this material for erosion control and maintenance reasons, but the aggregate is a departure from the previous trail surfaces.

Mr. Miner stated that he had concerns about the impact gravel aggregate has had on visitor experiences, including safety concerns (aggregate is looser and sharper than the previous surface), aesthetic concerns and recreational concerns. Mr. Miner stated that since the aggregate has been placed, he is no longer able to run on the trails he used to enjoy due to pain and concern for falling. Mr. Miner asked the Board if there had been any opportunity for the public to weigh in on the decision to replace the trail surfaces with aggregate.

Mr. Laughbaum, who is the Manager of Park Operations (MPO) for Highbanks Metro Park, stated that he was the manager who had signed off on the switch to aggregate and that he would be happy to meet at Highbanks with Mr. Miner to identify problem areas and to discuss safety concerns. Mr. Laughbaum provided his contact information. Mr. Miner thanked the Board for their time.

Disbursement Resolution No. 6159

Mr. Hadden moved for the approval of the Disbursement Resolution for the April 2024 invoices. Mr. McCue seconded the motion and the Board approved the resolution. A copy of Resolution No. 6159 is attached to these minutes as part hereof.

Staff Reports

Administration

Mr. Moloney updated the Board on several projects. Mr. Moloney and other park staff continue to attempt to work with the City of Columbus on a variety of projects and issues, but progress with the City remains slow.

One project of particular concern to Metro Parks is a large development that is underway at Hayden Run, on the northwestern side of the city; current plans estimate between 5,000-7,000 new rooftops added in that corridor, with no plans for any greenspace. Metro Parks manages two parks in that corridor and has concerns about the ability of those spaces to serve such an increase in residents without an increase in parkland, but despite reaching out to several different City departments, only one department has responded.

Mr. McCue asked if the proposed development had passed through the Board of Zoning Appeals (BZA). Mr. Moloney said that it had passed, by a margin of 6-0.

Metro Parks had provided comments on the zoning application expressing its concerns. Mr. McCue stated that, as the BZA is judicial, not legislative, that Metro Parks could request a hearing to express further concerns.

Operations

Mr. Laughbaum, filling in for Mr. Peck, introduced the Board to Mr. Matt Kaderly, Park Manager for Highbanks Metro Park. Highbanks is the busiest park in the district, with over 1.3 million visitors annually.

Mr. Kaderly introduced his staff and updated the Board on some projects ongoing at Highbanks. Staff completely rebuilt the dock at Dragonfly Day Camp just in time for camp season to start. Staff has completed several spring maintenance initiatives, including successional mowing, and opened all shelters to visitors. Staff is also in the middle of a project to replace all of the old roadway and parking lot lighting with LED lights and also completed a large invasive species removal project in the nature preserve south of the main park entrance. Finally, staff is preparing to get quotes for updates to the Nature Center's educational and interpretive displays.

Mr. Laughbaum was pleased to report that the Canopy Walk at Blacklick Woods has been a hit with visitors; the Canopy Walk opened last Friday, in the rain, with approximately 150 visitors, and then over the weekend saw more than 23,000 visitors across the park. Staff parked cars for the majority of the day Saturday and Sunday.

Memorial Day preparations are underway. Memorial Day weekend is one of the busiest across the whole park district. Aside from some rain Sunday, the coming Memorial Day weekend looks to have nice weather and should be well-attended.

At the Blacklick Woods Golf Course, the emergency breezeway repair project, authorized by the Board last year, is underway. Contractors have removed the damaged bridge structure and are pouring the footers for the new structure. The new walkway is expected to be open by the end of June.

Both Blendon Woods and Blacklick Woods are preparing to solicit quotes for updates to their Nature Centers. Both parks are looking for new interpretive displays, and Blendon Woods is seeking to enclose its three-season patio as well to create new classroom space. Work at Bank Run and Great Southern also continues apace, with several projects going on in both parks to prepare them for opening.

Finally, Mr. Laughbaum reported that eight full-time park rangers had finished training at the Ohio Peace Officer Training Academy (OPOTA), with final testing and graduation taking place later this month. Three more rangers have started at a new academy run by the City of Westerville.

Finance

Mr. McGivern provided updates from the Finance Department. Because staff was proactive and filed Metro Parks' financial statements early, the biennial audit process

has started early as well. Starting the process earlier in the year will allow the process to finish before the busy budgeting season in the fall.

Finance staff is also researching a new fleet fuel card program, which may help streamline the fuel purchasing process for park staff. IT has been busy updating Metro Parks' accounting software to maintain the district's financial security, and Finance has also been busy assisting Human Resources with onboarding Metro Parks' seasonal staff.

Human Resources

Mr. Domiano, filling in for Ms. Telfer, thanked Mr. McGivern and his staff for all of their assistance during seasonal hiring. Metro Parks has hired over 120 employees in the last few months, including 100+ seasonal positions (seasonal rangers, technicians, naturalists and interns), several interns with the CSI program and other part- and full-time staff to fill vacancies.

Human Resources, with the help of park staff, hosted a successful career fair aimed at recruiting naturalists and park technicians. Over fifty applications were received during this fair. HR is still working to fill some internal vacancies, but Metro Parks is well-staffed for the summer season.

Resolutions

- #6160** **AUTHORIZING THE PURCHASE OF REAL ESTATE OWNED BY ROBERT KELLER AT WALNUT WOODS METRO PARK**
The Board authorized Metro Parks to purchase approximately 1.6 acres of land from Robert Keller at Walnut Woods Metro Park. Mr. Keller will retain a life estate on the property. This parcel has access to Little Walnut Creek and will help form a connection between the Crawford-Miller property and the Tall Pines area of Walnut Woods Metro Park.
- #6161** **AUTHORIZING ENTERING INTO CHANGE ORDERS WITH AXIS CIVIL CONSTRUCTION LLC FOR IMPROVEMENTS AT BANK RUN METRO PARK**
The Board authorized Metro Parks to enter into change orders totaling \$85,538.23 with Axis Civil Construction, in order to pave additional trail, improve drainage and add aggregate to the site in preparation for its opening.
- #6162** **AUTHORIZING ENTERING INTO A CONTRACT FOR PROFESSIONAL DESIGN SERVICES FOR THE SHARON WOODS CONNECTOR TRAIL PROJECT**
The Board authorized Metro Parks to enter into a contract with Toole Design for the design of a trail connection project that will, when completed, connect a multi-use trail between Sancus Boulevard in the City of Columbus to Sharon Woods Metro Park. This project is part of the Olentangy to Alum Creek Trail connection project undertaken by Metro Parks, the City of Columbus, the City of Westerville, the City of Worthington and Central Ohio Greenways.

Other Business

None.

Adjournment

Mr. McCue 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 3:38 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Approved by the Board of Park
Commissioners:



Tim Moloney
Executive Director



George McCue, Chair