

GEAUGA PARK DISTRICT  
MINUTES  
September 24, 2005

The special meeting of the Geauga Park District Board was held on September 24, 2005, at the The West Woods Nature Center, Newbury, Ohio. The meeting was called to order at 8:30 a.m. President Robert McCullough was in the chair. Board members Betty Cope and Mark Rzeszotarski were present.

Employees Present:  
Tom Curtin, Executive Director  
Keith McClintock, Deputy Director  
Barb Emch, Executive Secretary

Mr. McCullough moved to go into Executive Session at 8:30 a.m. for the purpose of discussing land acquisition and personnel matters.

Dr. Rzeszotarski seconded the motion and the roll being called upon its adoption, the vote resulted as follows:

Dr. Rzeszotarski	Yes
Miss Cope	Yes
Mr. McCullough	Yes

The Board returned from Executive Session at 10:05 a.m.

**LAND ACQUISITION**

**Greene Property**

**Russell Township**

Mr. McCullough made a motion to authorize the Executive Director to proceed with the Purchase and Sale Agreement for property in Russell Township owned by Elizabeth Greene consisting of 6.5 acres for the purchase price of Forty-Two Thousand Dollars (\$42,000.00).

Dr. Rzeszotarski seconded the motion and the roll being called upon its adoption, the vote resulted as follows:

Dr. Rzeszotarski	Yes
Miss Cope	Yes
Mr. McCullough	Yes

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S CONTRACT**

Miss Cope made a motion to extend the contract of the Executive Director effective October 1, 2005 at the annual salary of Eighty-One Thousand Dollars (\$81,000.00).

Dr. Rzeszotarski seconded the motion and the roll being called upon its adoption, the vote resulted as follows:

Dr. Rzeszotarski	Yes
Miss Cope	Yes
Mr. McCullough	Yes

The contract will be prepared and signed at the October 11, 2005 meeting of the Board of Park Commissioners.

**EXECUTIVE SESSION**

Mr. McCullough moved to go into Executive Session at 10:20 a.m. for the purpose of discussing personnel matters.

Dr. Rzeszotarski seconded the motion and the roll being called upon its adoption, the vote resulted as follows:

Dr. Rzeszotarski	Yes
Miss Cope	Yes
Mr. McCullough	Yes

The Board returned from Executive Session at 10:35 a.m.

**PUBLIC OPINION OF BUDGET  
FOR GEAUGA PARK DISTRICT**

Miss Cope began a discussion of the recent letter to the editor of the Geauga Maple Leaf in which the budget for the Park District was misinterpreted due the way some expenditures are capitalized which is different than most corporate or other non-profit agency budgets. Miss Cope stated that she feels that we should make a good and successful effort to explain our budget to the public. She had a conversation with Sherry Bosworth, Business Affairs Director, who provided an explanation of all of the Park District's revenue sources. Miss Cope further stated that the Park District must find a way to state our budget so that our constituencies can understand that our operating budget is just over Seven Million Dollars (\$7,214,402.00). Our budget is often quoted by residents at over Twelve Million Dollars (\$12,000,000.00) in letters to the editor and public forums; however this amount includes the approximate \$2.9 Million Dollars (\$2,951,000) that is transferred to the construction fund along with the carry over of cash from the previous year of \$2.8 Million Dollars (\$2,859,994.) and in essence is double counted. Miss Cope offered to discuss with Tracy Jemison, Geauga County Auditor, as to how and why our budget is always stated publicly to be over Twelve Million Dollars. She feels that we need the support of the County Auditor if we are to get a clear message to the public. Mr. Curtin offered to arrange a meeting with Mr. Jemison and the Board. Mr. Curtin stated that he could contact John Horton from The Plain Dealer to put together an article about the Park District's budget. It was agreed that Mr. Curtin should make the contact with John Horton. Miss Cope will not meet with Mr. Jemison at this time.

Dr. Rzeszotarski agreed that we need to put together a document that explains our budget which could then be published in our Treeline Telegraph, Annual Report, and other media. He also stated that residents may be upset because of the fact that the Park District is exempt from local zoning. He suggested that the Park District involve the appropriate zoning official for each Park project. Dr. Rzeszotarski also suggested that we do a political assessment of each project from every aspect – state, county, and township to determine the impact and the issues for those constituencies. Mr. Curtin stated that he included such processes in the handout and instructions to the staff regarding the master planning process at the last all-staff meeting.

**STRATEGIC PLAN**

Mr. Curtin opened the discussion by distributing the draft copy of the Strategic Plan. Dr. Rzeszotarski stated that the Strategic Plan should speak to the next three years, and when completed, should be distributed to the Geauga Park District Foundation and posted on our Park website. He stated we should look at our previously stated goals and ask ourselves if we have met each goal. For example, we have not yet achieved the goal of a park within easy driving distance of every resident in the county. Since our last strategic plan, we have added several thousand acres and as we look to acquiring property in the future, we need to ask if the property will provide a true value for our citizens. Dr. Rzeszotarski continued by saying that the Park District should put emphasis on acquiring lands that are adjacent to existing parks, have a high NQEI (Natural Quality Evaluation Index) score, fit our mission and the geographic areas we wish to serve. Mr. Curtin commented that partnerships with other agencies will be a very important part of the next Strategic Plan and the Park District's future. Dr. Rzeszotarski added that political

input needs to be part of the Strategic Plan. We need to think about how a property will fit in with the life of the county and involve the businesses in our community. Carrying through the concept of “adopt a highway” to an “adopt a trail” program would be one example.

Mr. Curtin shared the remarks made by Brian O’Neill, Superintendent of Golden Gate National Park, at a recent conference held at Quail Hollow. Golden Gate National Park has made significant progress in creating partnerships through an incremental approach involving offering team-building opportunities to the employees of businesses in their community. These team-building exercises lead to further involvement and partnerships in park projects. Mr. Curtin stated that he would obtain a copy of the tape of the speech to present to administrative staff and the Board. Miss Cope stated that it should also be presented to the Geauga Park District Foundation trustees who would likely react positively to this type of approach.

Dr. Rzeszotarski stated that he thought it would be useful to have a brainstorming session with the Board members and some of the park staff. Such a brainstorming session should be facilitated and clearly state the objectives and expectations while having no right or wrong answers. Mr. McClintock suggested using the eight factors or modules outlined in Brian O’Neill’s paper on business planning for the National Park Service as a basis for developing strategies for Geauga Park District. The eight factors are: Federal Appropriations, Other Public Funds, Revenue Generation, Cost Reimbursement/Cost Recovery, Public/Private Partnerships, Volunteers, Private Philanthropy, Management Efficiencies. Dr. Rzeszotarski stated that we also need to look at the demographics of Geauga County. We need to know who we are serving—aging population, children, Amish community, etc. Who will we be serving twenty-five years from now? Mr. Curtin stated that we are working to identify those target markets and that we also need to consider how we can develop our lands to benefit bio-diversity. Mr. McCullough stated that we also need to look at additional partnership opportunities with the City of Akron.

The Board took a break from 11:10 a.m. to 11:15 a.m.

Mr. Curtin distributed a document prepared by Sherry Bosworth, Business Affairs Director, which outlined the history of the Park District in terms of the number of employees, departments, equipment, parks and visitors from 1965 to the present. This document illustrates how the Park District has grown. Mr. Curtin commented that in the 1960’s the Park District began by offering small group nature programs and evolved to doing larger group programs in the mid 1980’s, which was followed by the growth of large public programs. The 1990’s saw the beginning of events such as Holly Days, the carving festival and the exhibit at the county fair. The building of The West Woods allowed for the staging of larger programs and exhibits. Over the past year, the Park District began the all-county mailing of the Park District newsletter and has worked to identify target market groups and brochures to address their specific needs and interests.

Dr. Rzeszotarski stated that we need to ask the question as to how we use what we have and where do we go from here. He commented that we should take the historical document and project out into the future as to what departments, equipment, staffing, revenue streams, etc. we will need to maintain and develop the Park District in the future. It is quite likely that revenue from traditional sources will decrease while capital costs will be increasing. The Strategic Plan will need to address how we will meet this challenge.

Dr. Rzeszotarski noted that the Park District has traditionally opposed a recreation mission; however it would be beneficial to our residents for us to continue to develop partnerships with the townships and municipalities who better serve that mission. We could offer grant writing support and assistance with planning. Mr. Curtin commented that we have provided assistance to Chester Township and Middlefield Township on projects in their communities. Mr. McClintock stated that the Park District has also assisted Claridon Township and Newbury Township on trail projects. Dr. Rzeszotarski stated that we need to publicize these initiatives to our constituents. Mr. McClintock mentioned that it may be beneficial to have the townships mention the Park District’s involvement in their own press releases.

The Board discussed the benefit of developing a business plan for the Park District. Mr. Curtin mentioned that we could work with business people in our county to help us create a business plan. We could also seek the help of business schools such as Baldwin Wallace or Cleveland State University. Mr. Curtin asked the Board about their opinion of the idea of sending several employees to Golden Gate National Park to shadow and learn from the staff members there who have developed and implemented their business plan. The Board expressed that they would be open to such an opportunity for selected staff members. Tom also suggested looking at the training opportunities provided by the National Park Service.

Dr. Rzeszotarski suggested an assignment for the next Board meeting. He asked the Executive Director and the Deputy Director to write a one-page Executive Summary of the next Strategic Plan. He noted that the rest of the Strategic Plan will be an outgrowth of the Executive Summary. Dr. Rzeszotarski added that it will be important to consider the audience for the document as it will be publicized in park publications and on our website.

The meeting adjourned at 11:55 a.m.

**SUNSHINE LAW COMPLIANCE**

The rules of the Park Board were complied with by sending notice pursuant to the rules adopted by the Board.

Respectfully submitted,

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Thomas G. Curtin, Executive Director

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Robert McCullough, President