

**GEAUGA PARK DISTRICT  
BOARD OF PARK COMMISSIONERS  
SPECIAL /WORK SESSION MEETING MINUTES  
February 21, 2014**

The special work session meeting of the Geauga Park District Board was held on February 21, 2014 at the Donald W. Meyer Center, Chardon, Ohio. The meeting was called to order at 9:00 a.m. President Mary Ruth Shumway was in the Chair. Commissioner Louis Mucci was present.

President Mary Ruth Shumway called the meeting to order. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Mrs. Shumway announced that Judge Grendell, at the Board's request, has designated John Ralph as the Probate Court Liaison for the Geauga Park District Board and read the following Administrative Order into the record:

**IN THE COURT OF COMMON PLEAS  
PROBATE DIVISION  
GEAUGA COUNTY, OHIO**

<b>IN RE:</b>	)	<b>JUDGE TIMOTHY GRENDALL</b>
	)	
<b>DESIGNATION OF LIAISON FOR GEAUGA PARK DISTRICT BOARD</b>	)	<b>ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER 2014-15</b>

By action taken on February 11, 2014, the Geauga Park District Board requests that the Probate Court designate a liaison to attend all scheduled Geauga Park District Board meetings.

The Court finds this request well-taken and hereby appoints the Court's Constable, John A. Ralph, to serve as said liaison to the Geauga Park District Board until further order of this Court.

IT IS SO ORDERED.

\_\_\_\_\_  
JUDGE TIMOTHY J. GRENDALL

Mr. Ralph stated that he is looking forward to his interaction with the Park District.

**NEW BUSINESS**

Introductions

Mrs. Shumway thanked the Leadership Team for the professional manner in which they provided information to the Board. She added that the Board wants to gain an understanding of past operating procedures, each Department's role in the Park District and how the procedures and Departments affect the budget, which will help determine any changes in how business is conducted in the future.

Mr. Mucci thanked the Leadership Team for taking the time to prepare for this meeting. Mr. Mucci stressed the fact that the Park District Mission remains the same, and the only changes will be how the Park District operates to achieve the mission. Mr. Mucci elaborated on some of the goals of this work session: Dive deep into the operations and budget of the Park District; Review and assess current operations; and that he and Mrs. Shumway want to empower the Leadership Team to probe and provide new ideas and perspectives for Park District operations.

Mr. Mucci stated his concerns regarding the 2014 budget that projects the Park District will be operating in a deficit of \$1.9 million dollars. The goal of this meeting is to start the discussions necessary to adjust the Budget presented to the Board for approval at the March meeting.

#### Finance Department – Michele Pennell

Ms. Pennell reviewed the 2014-2015 Budget timeline stressing the importance of keeping on track in order to have a 2015 temporary budget in place for the July 20<sup>th</sup> County Budget Commission hearing, and to allow for planning of future projects.

Ms. Pennell provided an overview of the Finance Department's duties and responsibilities. She explained that Schedule B outlines current Park District real estate levies (three) amounting to 2.7 mils and stated that Geauga County allows budgeting on 98% of expected revenues from these levies. This revenue represents 62% of the 2014 budget which is less than previous years due to a levy being dropped from the books. Grants, donations and other unknowns make up the balance of revenue to the Park District. There were discussions regarding lost tax revenue due to a levy dropping off the Park District.

Ms. Pennell advised that the County Auditor is the Park District's fiscal agent. The Park District chose to use the County Auditor as a Fiscal Agent as it is more cost effective and provides a method of checks and balances in financial matters. The County Budget Commission, made up of the County Auditor, Treasurer and Prosecutor, must approve the Temporary Budget, the Final Budget and all changes.

Ms. Pennell reviewed the three parts of the budget - General, Land Improvement and Retirement Reserve Funds. Budget line items -revenues, appropriations – can be adjusted throughout the year but must be complete and approved by the Board and Budget Commission by year end, and the District cannot legally spend more than is approved for the total yearly Budget.

Mr. Pennell reviewed provided hand outs and reviewed the 2014-15 Budget Timeline.

Mrs. Shumway asked for any perspectives and suggestions from the Leadership Team regarding the Finance Department operations.

- Ms. Pennell stated that currently, the Park District uses two systems – the internal Fundware System and the County's New World Solutions software system. If the New World Solutions software system was totally up and running it would benefit the Park District because of its capabilities and could eliminate the need to use two accounting systems.
- Aaron Young (Planning) stated that it is critical to Planning to have budget numbers in place in order to plan for current and future projects as planning must take place a year in advance of projects. Mr. Mucci agreed with this, and stated this why all departments need to be more forward thinking in their planning but still to allow for flexibility in line items due the nature of some departments. Matt McCue (Planning) stated that one of the goals of the Strategic Plan is to work with all the departments to assist them in looking forward 5 to 10 years out. John Oros (Interim Deputy Director) added that one of the ideas in providing the Board with a three-year project plan is that it will help with budget-planning going forward.
- John Oros (Interim Deputy Director) stated that it would be helpful to department heads in budget planning if they were provided with the percentage of their current budget they could increase or be required to decrease.
- Ms. Pennell stated it would be beneficial for a Board member to attend the internal budget hearings

Planning Department – Aaron Young and Matt McCue:

Aaron Young stated that he would give the Board an overview of the Planning Department responsibilities and that Matt McCue would lead discussions regarding the Strategic Planning process.

Mr. Young reviewed the processes in Park planning. *Land Acquisition* was historically performed by the Executive and Deputy Director and added that it would benefit the Park District and the Planning Department if Planning was involved in this initial stage. *Park Master Planning* identifies the scope of the project and includes input from the Natural Resource department reports, administrative directives, public input meetings, design work, cost estimates and Board input/approval. Proposed future projects are inserted into the budget with an estimated 'placeholder' figure. There were discussions on the methods used to determine public input on Park projects. *Method of Construction* is determined by the cost and complexity of the project, and whether the project can be completed in-house or requires an outside contractor. The final cost of project determines whether the project needs to go out for bid or whether it can be done via an RFP (request for proposal). *Internal Budgeting* includes the final cost estimate, permits, consultant fees, advertising for bids and document printing. There were discussions on why the advertising portion of this budgeting is included in the Marketing budget vs. the Planning budget and when a design consultant would be used. *Project Design* is broken into two areas – projects that are bid and those that are performed in-house. Mr. Young reviewed the necessary steps and requirements for each type of project. *Permitting* is based on each individual project and is based on requirements for funding or on impacts to the environment. *Public Bidding Process* is required by the Ohio Revised Code (ORC) for projects over \$50,000.00. Mr. Young reviewed the necessary steps for the public bid process. *Contract Administration* follows the job from the time the bid is accepted through the completion. All project contracts include a 1-year warranty which, if activated, starts again when the repair is made. Mr. Young reviewed the final two steps – *Internal Wrap-up* and *Schedule*, or project timeline.

Mr. Mucci requested an update on the proposed 2014 projects. Mr. Young informed that the Maple Highlands projects are carried over from 2013 and are under contract. All other proposed projects will be put to bid after the Board approves the 2014 budget and proposed projects. The Maple Highlands North project extends the current trail to 5<sup>th</sup> Street in Chardon. The Maple Highlands South project, which is 75% complete, adds to Maple Highlands Trail starting at Headwaters Park with a 12 foot wide aggregate trail that can be utilized by the Amish community. Mrs. Jones inquired if horses were permitted on the trail. Mr. Mucci asked for Park policy on trail usage. Mr. Oros explained that most Park trails are multi-use trails and signage is posted indicating what is not allowed on a trail. Mr. Young stated that it is not recommended that horses be permitted on asphalt trails and that the Park maps indicate the recommended usage for all Park trails. There were discussions regarding shared trail usage etiquette, the value of multi-use trails and importance of keeping backwoods hiking trails for those taxpayers who appreciate seclusion.

Mr. Young stated that the Planning Department's goal is to plan for the needs of every age group, every ability, at every season so that all can experience the Park District.

There were discussions regarding the Nassau restoration project budget, where repairs to the current building are budgeted and possible design changes to the existing plans pending Board review of current project specifications. There were further discussions on how to effectively communicate any decisions that affected the Nassau restoration project to interested parties.

The Orchard Hills playground project was discussed with Mr. Young stating this project came out of public input meetings and administrative directives. There were additional discussions regarding the bidding process and ways to utilize more Geauga county vendors for Park projects.

The 2014 asphalt improvement project to the Besse Benner Metzenbaum Park was reviewed including the funding that is primarily provided by a Biennium Grant from the State of Ohio, the Park District re-paving schedule and any interaction/coordination with the County Engineers office on paving projects.

#### Perspectives & Suggestions from Leadership Team:

- John Kolar (Chief Naturalist) would like the Naturalist Department to have more input in the planning process as the parks and facilities are used by the Department for programs and events.
- Aaron Young raised the possibility of adding an entry level planner to the Planning Department to work on incoming projects to allow the Sr. Planners to focus on current projects.

#### Strategic Planning – Matt McCue

Mr. McCue advised that the Park District is currently working off the Strategic Plans completed in 2009 and based on past plans it was decided that the Park District take a more holistic approach to the Plan and instead of it being created department by department, the project would be assigned to one individual to oversee. In August 2013, Mr. McCue proposed a process to develop a 10 year plan that encompasses 2015 thru 2025 enabling the Park District to look forward in planning for capital improvements and for levies that expire in 2019 and 2025.

The Park District is currently in the assessment and analysis phase, with Mr. McCue meeting each Department and encouraging them to think long-term, looking at past planning, programming. Community input will commence later in the process. The main goal of the Strategic Plan is to reach 5 to 7 priorities that relate to the Park District's mission and philosophy and to outline long-term goals the Park District wants to accomplish. Re-evaluating the mission, vision and philosophy to test them against the priorities is critical. Opening up departmental communication and involving departments in projects/planning at an earlier stage are additional goals of the Strategic Plan.

There were discussions regarding past and proposed methods for obtaining public input. Methods discussed were insertion of surveys (with on-line survey option) in the Park Newsletter; sending surveys to all registered voters in the county; and phone surveys which include a specified time for the community to call in and answer questions. Other suggestions included keeping the survey direct and simple with an area for comments and pre-communicating to the public of the pending survey so that the community knows why the Park District is conducting it.

Mr. Mucci stated that a budget needs to be in place and approved by March 4<sup>th</sup>, and that after it is in place decisions on how to make adjustments to meet the budget would be made. Ms. Pennell stated that she felt that if the Leadership Team was empowered to propose the necessary changes that the budget reduction could be accomplished. The Board agreed that the budget, revised by the Park District Leadership Team, would be submitted to the Board by March 3<sup>rd</sup>, for approval at the March 4<sup>th</sup> Board meeting.

#### IT Department – Don Lombardy

Mr. Lombardy presented an overview of the Information Technology Department citing the Department's main objective is to "ensure staff has at their disposal, the correct technological tools and support to perform their daily tasks efficiently". This is accomplished by maintaining Agency compliancy, ensuring Agency data integrity, ensuring network connectivity, ensuring network security and providing the public with technology. Mr. Lombardy explained the computer replacement schedule.

Mr. Lombardy reviewed the criteria for establishing the IT budget which includes staff needs, computers (per replacement schedule), software and hardware needs and upgrades, major Park projects and departmental moves. There were discussions on cost estimates for relocating departments within the Park District. Mr. Lombardy stated he controls costs by the bid/approval process which includes approval of all bids by the County ADP Board (Automated Data Processing).

Mr. Lombardy explained the computer back-up system for the Park District advising that backup tapes are stored off-site of the Meyer Center and West Woods office areas.

Computers are replaced via the replacement schedule and type of computer an employee receives is based on needed software. Mr. Lombardy explained the quoting process used in securing replacement computers and the computer cost in the budget is an average cost of all computers being requested.

Perspectives & Suggestions from Leadership Team:

- Ms Orvis stated that the IT Department is much appreciated and that Mr. Lombardy has brought order and service to the Park District, which was not present before.

#### Marketing & Administrative Services – Paige Orvis

Ms. Orvis advised the Marketing and Administrative Services Department was created and placed under her jurisdiction in 2010. The original department included the Marketing Support Staff, Administrative Services Staff (secretarial support) and the IT Department. In 2012, IT became its own Department. In autumn of 2013 the Naturalist Services Director retired and John Kolar was promoted to Chief Naturalist. Ms. Orvis' role in the Naturalist Department is to mentor and provide compass for the Department regarding the strategic plan and advised that all three departments are service oriented.

Ms. Orvis provided the Board with an outline and explanations breaking down each of the division of the Department (Marketing, Admin Services and Naturalist Services) and the essential duties of each division. In addition Ms. Orvis provided the Board with a 'Marketing Stats at a Glance' worksheet to help answer Mrs. Shumway's question of 'how do you know your marketing is working' showing the increase in reservations, facility visitation, program attendance and volunteer participation. The worksheet also indicated how the public learned about Park District programs and our facilities. The Board received a synopsis of Park District website usage and a summary report of the 2013 Chip Henry summer camps and Camp Outcomes Report which included suggestions for improvements of the camping experience. Ms. Orvis advised that after review of the Outcomes report, the camp budget was revised to reflect one camp to include portions of both Adventure and Astronomy camp, and reduced staffing. There were discussions regarding the Friends of CASA donation to the camp and the expectation on the use of those funds by the camp. Ms. Orvis added that the Park District met with CASA to strategize to insure CASA recommended children are included in the 2014 camp experience.

#### Naturalist Services – John Kolar

Mr. Kolar presented a departmental overview to the Board stating that the Department takes the Park District Mission to heart and that the award winning staff works to provide a variety of educational experiences for diverse audiences. This is accomplished by encouraging the residents of Geauga County to experience what is special and unique about this county: the wildlife diversity, the flora, the ecosystem, the geology, and the astronomy / meteorology experiences available at Observatory Park.

Mr. Kolar spoke to the programming which is intended for all populations of the community and includes school, library, senior citizen and in-park programming. These educational programs, which reached 42,000 residents in 2013, utilize employee skills, props, costumed characters, ideas from pop culture and mass media to attract diverse audiences. Nature Scopes, the Park District's binocular program for 5<sup>th</sup> graders will service 980 Geauga County students in 2014. Mr. Kolar related that the Naturalists utilize recreation as a vehicle for nature exploration with the examples of canoeing, geocaching, horse trail rides and the "Caveman Crawl" 5K run. Special events such as Sap's A Risin' Sundays explore Geauga County heritage. Major exhibits are changed out every couple of years.

The Naturalist Department also assists with the Park District *Voices of Nature* publication, website videos and Ask a Nat inquiries, help in the training of volunteers and collaborate with numerous agencies and organizations.

Mr. Ralph inquired as to how the Naturalist department worked with the sportsmen of Geauga County, specifically in regard to deer management. Mr. Kolar advised that the Naturalist Department worked to help educate the public on the importance of balancing the Park District resources and why hunting is important to maintaining Park ecosystems.

#### Human Resources – Robin Pilarczyk

Ms. Pilarczyk advised she worked closely with the management team and had interviewed all but three of the Park employees in the room. Human Resources is responsible for employee communications, is a resource for staff information, houses personnel files and organization policies. Ms. Pilarczyk is the Park District liaison for benefits administered by the County such as Worker's comp and health care. She works with managers on employee recruitment, succession planning, onboarding of new employees, conducts background investigations and participates in employee relations conversations. In response to Mr. Mucci's question regarding employee contracts, Ms. Pilarczyk advised that all current employees are 'at will' employees. Mr. Mucci inquired as to the benefits provided to Park District employees and was advised as follows: health insurance is provided through the County via CEBCO which includes 25 other counties; dental insurance is through the county; and, the Park District vision reimbursement benefit is not a vision plan, but a benefit that reimburses employees up to \$200 for glasses/contacts. Ms. Pilarczyk advised that she works with employees for safety training and is part of the Disaster Recovery planning team. There are 65 Park District employees made up of 53 full time and 12 part-time.

#### Operations Department – Brett Bellas and John Oros

Mr. Bellas provided the Board with a handout outlining the duties of the maintenance and construction departments and stated that operations is where everything comes together. The construction department works on high skill level projects allowing the maintenance department to focus on the day-to-day Park upkeep and smaller projects. Mr. Bellas explained that the Operations Department is divided into three sections (North, South and West Ops) and that each section, or zone, is assigned a maintenance foreman. Each operations employee is assigned to a Park and is responsible for knowing what needs to be done in their area, giving the employee a sense of pride and ownership. In addition, operations personnel monitor shelter and lodge reservations to insure that the facilities are clean and ready for patrons' events and visits.

Mr. Bellas explained that the APO for the operations department is a list of projects that include plans and timelines. Mrs. Shumway inquired if additional employees would be needed for upkeep of the new bike trails. Mr. Bellas advised that seasonal employees would be used, instead of hiring additional full-time employees. Mr. Mucci asked for and received information on departmental equipment, along with the explanation that each zone is set up as its own company with all the basic equipment necessary to service the Park areas it is responsible for. Maintenance and construction departments share larger equipment which necessitates the renting of additional equipment during the busy summer months. Mr. Ralph inquired if the Park District had investigated the option of hiring a landscaping business to maintain some of the outlying Parks with Mr. Bellas advising it was looked into but was not cost effective at this time.

Mr. Bellas stated that operations is a support department that helps with Naturalist programming, special events, and insuring the facilities are reservation ready. The Department employees and the work they perform are always in the public eye. The department maintains a high standard of maintenance at all Parks because no matter how good a visit to the Parks is – if the facilities are not clean and well cared for – it leaves a bad impression. Mr. Bellas and the operations department will review their budget for possible reductions.

#### Ranger Department – Larry McKinnon

Mr. McKinnon shared the Ranger Department's overall mission..."to provide for the safety and protection of the visitors and employees of Geauga Park District through proactive, innovative, unbiased and professional practices while conserving and protecting its natural resources and facilities"... and advised that the Ranger Department has jurisdiction on all Park land and adjacent roadways (which includes the east and west bound

lanes directly in front of the park and ½ mile beyond Park District property). There were discussions on the mutual aid agreement between the Ranger Department and other law enforcement agencies/municipalities which touched on parameters, guidelines and restrictions by the O.R.C. that needed to be followed.

Mr. McKinnon provided highlights from the Ranger Department's 2014 Goals and Objectives which included the following: relocation to The West Woods Nature which will provide for a more central location and improve response times; their budget request to purchase three replacement vehicles and three ATV four wheel vehicles that will assist in trail patrol; the Department's involvement with the Natural Resource Management Department on the controlled hunting program; the Ranger bicycle and marine patrols; Ranger involvement, as a Terrorism Liaison Officer, with the Ohio Department of Homeland Security; and, the Ranger Department's strong relationship with other Federal, State, County and local law enforcement agencies.

Mr. Ralph stated that the Park District's Ranger Department has an awesome reputation and thanked and commended Chief Wilson for bringing the Department to a higher level.

There were additional discussions regarding the possibility of the Ranger Department investigating grant monies for needed equipment.

#### Natural Resource Management – Paul Pira

Mr. Pira provided a presentation to Board advising that the department was established in 1985 and currently employees a staff of four comprised of 2 full-time and 2 part-time employees. Mrs. Shumway asked if the Natural Resource Management (NRM) department was involved in land acquisition, with Mr. Pira advising yes. Mr. Pira explained that natural resource management is... 'the management and conservation of land, water, plants and animals while ensuring proper use and biological/ecological integrity'. The department conducts research, performs land stewardship, aligns partnerships, provides education, assists with land acquisition and permitting for projects. NRM conducts biological surveys on possible land acquisitions that determine baseline ecological data used to create land management plans for Park development and by the Naturalist department for programming. Mr. Young advised that these reports have also been used at public input meetings when discussing new Park projects.

NRM also conducts surveys on rare plant species to determine management plans, conducts surveys and creates management plans for invasive plant and animal species and works on restoration projects to promote and protect rare bird species. NRM heads up reforestation projects with many volunteer groups, conducts reports and creates plans for fish and wildlife management and heads up the Park District's deer management plan. Mr. Pira added that there were a record number of applications to participate in the deer management program this year and program is a good way to reach out to the sportsman user group.

The department also works with the public on citizen science projects, initiates small research grants, and provides educational support to local school groups. The Board inquired as to why the NRM department is only 1.5% of the Park District's budget, and was advised that most of their budget is in personnel.

#### Development Department – Emilie Gottsegen

Ms. Gottsegen provided the Board with handouts and advised that the Development Department is the face of fundraising for the Park District and that the Park District is fortunate to have the Foundation to assist us. Ms. Gottsegen stated it is the Development Department's role is to connect people to the mission who want to contribute and be a partner with the Park District. The Development Department works to make donors and potential donors feel like they are a part of the Park District by having events, brainstorming, and by sharing stories about Park District programs that donors can relate to. Ms. Gottsegen used the Nature Scopes program as an example stating that as information on program was shared, the more excited people became, increasing donation of money and time. There were discussions regarding the Nature Scope line item budget, with Ms.

Gottsegen confirming the monies are supported by donations. Ms. Gottsegen advised that the Park District exhibits are also funded by donations.

The Development department cultivates the Foundation Board and the Board cultivates donors. Ms. Gottsegen reviewed various types of donations and the importance of having different giving vehicles to reach all types of donors. There were discussions regarding Foundation endowments, where monies are held, and how they can be spent. Mrs. Shumway initiated discussions on what funds make up gifts, including information how the 'ask' for money made and who the monies are donated to. Mucci stated that the Development's APO showed a significant amount of time working with the Foundation on fundraising. There were discussions on the type of non-profit the Foundation is and the benefits the Park Districts receives from the time and efforts put forth on their behalf by the Development Department.

Ms. Gottsegen provided the Board with a chart outlining the donation process from cultivation through stewardship. Discussions were held regarding the proposed relocation of the Development Department to The West Woods Nature Center.

#### Closing Comments

Mr. Mucci thanked the group for the outstanding dialogue and shared a quote from one of his favorite Presidents – JFK – taken from his 'go to the moon speech':

*"We choose to go to the moon. We choose to go to the moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard, because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills, because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone, and one which we intend to win, and the others, too."*

Mr. Mucci stated that he appreciated the fact that the group asked to be empowered to do what is necessary to adjust the 2014 budget. He thanked everyone for spending the time and for being willing to do the things that are hard, because we have to do it.

Mrs. Shumway thanked all for the extreme professionalism during the day. She stated that as a team, and following the Park's mission, we can make good things happen in the Park District. She further stated that adjusting the budget is hard, but working as team, we can make it happen. Mrs. Shumway added that both she and Mr. Mucci have an open door policy and urged all to e-mail them if there were any problems or concerns.

Mr. Ralph stated he works for Judge Grendell and wanted all to know that the Judge loves the Park and wants the employees to have fun going forward. He explained that his position as Court Liaison is to assist with the transfer of information and is not a disruption, but a tool.

Mr. Mucci made a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Mr. Shumway seconded the motion and after voice vote, the motion was approved 2-0:

Mr. Mucci                      Yes

Mrs. Shumway              Yes

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned at 5:00 p.m.



**SUNSHINE LAW COMPLIANCE**

It is declared that notification of this meeting and any business conducted therein by the Geauga Park District Board of Commissioners was in compliance with Ohio's Sunshine Laws.

Respectfully submitted,

---

John Oros, Interim Deputy Director

---

Mary Ruth Shumway, President