

**GEAUGA PARK DISTRICT BOARD  
OF PARK COMMISSIONERS  
BOARD MEETING MINUTES  
JANUARY 16, 2024**

The regular meeting of the Geauga Park District Board was held January 16, 2024, at the Meyer Center, Big Creek Park. The meeting was called to order at 8:31 a.m. Commissioners Howard Bates, Ray Guarino and Les LaGatta were present. Jolene Carnabuci and Frank Stein were absent.

Mr. Oros called the meeting to order. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

<b>Park District Employees</b>	<b>GUESTS</b>
John Oros, Executive Director	Todd Hicks
Matthew McCue, Deputy Director	
Chief Dennis Sloan, Ranger	
Sandy Ward, Communications Specialist	
Lucas Beamer, Interim IT Manager	
Jessica Alpers, Administrative Assistant	
Paul Pira, Park Biologist	
Matt Kneitel, Land Steward	
Christine Ward, Human Resources	
Dan McConnaughy, Park Planner	
Dawn Sweeney, Fiscal Officer	

**APPROVAL OF AGENDA/ADDENDUM ITEMS**

Mr. Oros asked for a motion to approve the agenda. Mr. Bates made a motion to approve the agenda; Mr. Guarino seconded the motion. After a roll-call voice vote, the motion was approved.

Mr. Bates	Yes
Mr. LaGatta	Yes
Mr. Guarino	Yes
Ms. Carnabuci	Absent
Mr. Stein	Absent

**ELECTION OF BOARD OF OFFICERS**

Mr. Bates nominated Mr. Guarino for President. After a roll-call voice vote, the nomination was approved for Mr. Guarino to act as President.

Mr. LaGatta	Yes
Mr. Bates	Yes
Mr. Guarino	Yes
Ms. Carnabuci	Absent
Mr. Stein	Absent

Mr. Guarino nominated Mr. Bates for Vice President. After a roll-call voice vote, the nomination was approved for Mr. Bates to act as Vice President.

Mr. LaGatta	Yes
Mr. Bates	Yes
Mr. Guarino	Yes
Ms. Carnabuci	Absent
Mr. Stein	Absent

**APPROVE OR AMEND MEETING MINUTES**

Mr. Oros asked for a motion to approve last month's meeting minutes. Mr. Bates made a motion to approve the meeting minutes from December 20, 2023, Mr. Guarino seconded the motion. After a roll-call voice vote, the motion was approved.

Mr. Bates	Yes
Mr. Guarino	Yes
Mr. LaGatta	Yes
Ms. Carnabuci	Absent
Mr. Stein	Absent

**PRESENTATION OF FINANCIAL STATEMENT – DECEMBER FINANCE**

Ms. Sweeney stated that for the month of December the General Fund had a beginning balance was \$4,292,396 with an ending balance of \$3,725,729. The Land Improvement Fund had a beginning balance of \$2,035,190 with an ending balance of \$1,858,239 Ms. Sweeney shared that all funds combined had an ending balance of \$5,583,968. Mr. Oros asked if there were any questions about the financial statement. No questions were asked.

**PRESENTATION OF PAYMENT REPORT – DECEMBER FINANCE**

Mr. Oros asked if there were any questions about the payments made in December. No questions were asked.

**OLD BUSINESS**

Mr. Oros asked if there was any old business to discuss at this time. No old business was brought forward.

**NEW BUSINESS**

**Planning Update**

Mr. McCue shared the 2024 Capital Improvement Project Summary. Mr. McCue stated the Veterans Legacy Woods Coldwater Stream project had already entered into contract in 2023 but the majority of the work will be done in 2024 so the information had been carried over from last year. Mr. McCue said the rest of the projects (The Rookery and Orchard Hills – asphalt improvement; The West Woods, Orchard Hills, Swine Creek – trail, shelter improvement; Big Creek – camping improvements; Claridon Woodlands – upper dam and site improvements) will be done in 2024. Mr. Guarino asked if the projects listed as ‘TBD’ on the information sheet are out to bid or not. Mr. McCue stated that once those projects have gone out to bid, and a contract has been awarded, the contractor information would be included where TBD is noted.

Mr. Oros asked if there were any additional questions at this time about contracts for 2024. No questions were asked.

**Surplus Property**

Mr. Oros presented a number of surplus property items stating that new tables and chairs were purchased for The West Woods as the current tables and chairs had been in use for 20+ years, so these items were being sent to auction. Mr. Oros said the items going to auction were being sold as lots: (14) 6ft metal folding tables with wood veneer tops; (12) 8ft metal folding tables with wood veneer tops; (2) 4ft metal folding tables with wood veneer tops; (166) chairs with metal legs and blue cushioned seats; (24) chairs with metal legs and brown cushioned seats.

Mr. Oros asked for a motion to approve items sent to auction. Mr. Bates made a motion to approve, Mr. Guarino seconded the motion. After a roll-call voice vote, the motion was approved.

Mr. LaGatta	Yes
Mr. Bates	Yes
Mr. Guarino	Yes
Mr. Stein	Absent
Ms. Carnabuci	Absent

**COMMISSIONERS TIME**

**2025 Strategic Plan Survey Results**

Mr. Dan McConaughy shared the results of the survey as follows: The purpose of the 2025 Strategic Plan is to establish and guide the direction of Geauga Park District’s decisions, making and identifying priorities and initiatives that reflect the Park District’s Mission. Geauga Park District welcomed residents to attend one of three open house-style informational meetings held this past summer at Big Creek Park, Holbrook Hollows and

Veterans Legacy Woods. These informational meetings preceded the Strategic Plan Survey that was available to the public between July 24 and August 6th of 2023. Questions on the survey covered various topics of public opinion related to park values, usage, investment and needs and how they relate to the Geauga Park District mission.

Mr. McConnaughy stated that they had received over 1,200 surveys with participation from all township/village/cities in Geauga County with Chardon, Bainbridge and Chester contributing the most results. Mr. McConnaughy shared that the 24 questions on the survey with the first 4 relating to values (example: how you see the overall parks and their worth) with the bulk of the answers being positive. Mr. McConnaughy said the next few survey questions were about 'connections' or how patrons use the parks (example: hiking, trails, close to nature, programs) with the remaining questions about parks, amenities and facilities with what the patrons think the future priorities should be for the parks.

Mr. McConnaughy shared the phases of the plan as started in 2023 and moving into 2025 with Summer Phase 3 - The Park district's priorities, goals and timeline for implementation and how the Park moves into development and future use.

Mr. McCue asked, what were some of the other popular responses to the questions from the survey, once you get past the walking, hiking, and trail responses?

Mr. McConnaughy said the next highest percentage of the patron responses focused on nature & nature programs.

Mr. Oros asked for the PowerPoint presentation to be emailed to the park board and if any member of the public would like to see it, please email him with a request.

#### **Natural Resource Management Presentation – Volunteers n Natural Resources Management**

Mr. Matt Kneitel explained why volunteers are an important component to Natural Resource Management and to the Park District with regards to various park projects. Mr. Kneitel stated that with over 10,500 acres of park land, it is difficult for the NRM team to monitor and maintain these natural resources alone. Mr. Kneitel said the relationships between volunteer organizations and corporations have helped with the invasive plant program and tree plantings which allows the NRM team to prioritize where they go for these specific projects and also what efforts they can do with multiple groups on the ground. Mr. Kneitel stated that with a large group of volunteers, especially for the invasive plant removal, having a group work an area greatly reduces the use of herbicides.

Mr. Kneitel shared that some of the volunteers come for a natural resources management background so they already have some skills, while others may have never done this type of work before so it's an opportunity for us to engage them in something new. Mr. Kneitel said that regardless of experience level, working with the NRM team instills a feeling of 'ownership' with the parks. As an example of volunteer group assistance, Mr. Kneitel said that within the next month or so, garlic mustard and dames rocket which are easily pullable with a large group making a sweep in about 2 hours whereas the NRM team could take 2 days. Mr. Kneitel also mentioned that we have non-native invasive woody species in our forests so instead of full spray of herbicides, volunteers can also go through with loppers and pruners, and use a small amount of herbicide on the stumps. Mr. Kneitel also said that in the winter, some invasive plants keep their seed heads so we can have volunteers deadhead the plants before they can reproduce.

Mr. Kneitel said tree planting, especially starting with Earth Day 2023, volunteers had planted over 700 trees. Mr. Kneitel stated that with corporate groups, schools and the public volunteers, they have made a huge impact on tree planting within the parks. Mr. Kneitel shared that he now has a core group of volunteers going through the planted trees at Veterans Legacy Woods and other reforested areas, to track the survival rate of these trees, which is at about 85% survival rate. Mr. Kneitel said that this core group of volunteers is also surveying hemlock trees for early detection of Elongate Hemlock Scale and Hemlock Woolly Adelgid monitoring mostly in the winter. Mr. Kneitel is thankful for the volunteers who work with the Natural Resources Management team and the hard work and enthusiasm they have for the parks.

Mr. Oros shared the following staff and department updates from the month of December 2023:

- In the year 2023, the Visitor Services Representatives (Nicole, Grace, Ruth, Jessica & Kathleen) facilitated 3,655 lodge or shelter reservations (attended by approximately 129,000 patrons) plus 1,337 camping reservations, all enabling Geauga residents and others to enjoy our county's awesome natural areas.
- Total visitors to The West Woods Nature Center in 2023 was 21,850.
- On Thursday, December 21, the Naturalist Department put on a great show at our annual Winter Solstice Celebration at The West Woods - which had the second-largest attendance in the past 20 years, drawing 750 people in just two hours!
- And finally, naturalists hosted 72 programs in the month of December with a total attendance of 2,139 patrons.

**Director John Oros Review**

The attending Board of Commissioners discussed and presented Mr. Oros's employee evaluation. After a stellar review, Mr. Oros thanked the commissioners. Mr. Oros also thanked the park staff.

**EXECUTIVE SESSION**

Mr. Oros asked if there were any items to be brought to Executive Session. No items were brought forward.

**ANNOUNCEMENT OF NEXT BOARD MEETING:** Mr. Oros announced the next meeting is Tuesday, February 20, 2024, at 8:30am.

**ADJOURNMENT**

Mr. Oros asked for a motion to adjourn. Mr. Bates made a motion to adjourn the meeting, Ms. Guarino seconded the motion and after a roll-call voice vote, the motion was approved.

Mr. Bates	Yes
Mr. Guarino	Yes
Mr. LaGatta	Yes
Mr. Stein	Absent
Ms. Carnabuci	Absent

The meeting was adjourned at 9:08 a.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,

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John Oros, Executive Director

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Ray Guarino, President