

**GEAUGA PARK DISTRICT BOARD
OF PARK COMMISSIONERS
BOARD MEETING MINUTES
AUGUST 21, 2023**

The regular meeting of the Geauga Park District Board was held August 21, 2023, at the Meyer Center, Big Creek Park. The meeting was called to order at 8:31 a.m. Commissioners Howard Bates, Frank Stein Ray Guarino and Jolene Carnabuci were present. Les LaGatta was absent.

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

Park District Employees	GUESTS
John Oros, Executive Director	Todd Hicks
Matthew McCue, Deputy Director	
Dawn Sweeney, Fiscal Manager	
Christine Ward, HR Manager	
Chief Dennis Sloan, Ranger	
Paul Pira, Park Biologist	
Sandy Ward, Marketing Manager	
Lucas Beamer, Interim IT Manager	
Jessica Alpers, Administrative Assistant	

APPROVAL OF AGENDA/ADDENDUM ITEMS

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

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

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 July 17, 2023, Mr. Guarino seconded the motion. After a roll-call voice vote, the motion was approved.

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

PRESENTATION OF FINANCIAL STATEMENT – JULY FINANCE

Ms. Sweeney stated that for the month of July the General Fund had a beginning balance of \$3,061,464 with an ending balance of \$5,647,696. The Land Improvement Fund had a beginning balance of \$2,758,379 with an ending balance of \$2,728,213. Ms. Sweeney shared that all funds combined had a beginning balance of \$5,819,843 with an ending balance of \$8,375,909. Mr. Oros asked if the ending combined balance number included the real estate tax collection and Ms. Sweeney said yes. Mr. Oros asked if there were any questions about the financial statement. No questions were asked.

PRESENTATION OF PAYMENT REPORT – JULY FINANCE

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

OLD BUSINESS

Planning Update

Mr. McCue shared updates regarding current ongoing capital projects. Mr. McCue stated that everything is under construction now with a Cold Water Stream Restoration meeting scheduled at Veterans Legacy Woods in the near future. Mr. McCue stated the repaving at Swine Creek Reservation had almost been completed. Mr. McCue also shared that the public survey for the 2025 Plan had been completed with over 1,200 surveys completed online. Mr. Oros asked if there were any questions. No questions were asked.

NEW BUSINESS

Ohio Revised Code 1545.21 – Levy Renewal

Mr. Oros shared that a letter had been sent to the Geauga County Budget Commission on August 1, 2023 in response to the Geauga County Budget Commission letter dated May 1, 2023 – see below.

August 1, 2023

Gauga County Budget Commission
Christopher P. Hitchcock, Chairman
James R. Flaiz, Vice Chairman
Charles E. Walder, Secretary
Courthouse Annex, 231 Main Street, Suite 1A
Chardon, OH 44024-1293

Re: Geauga County Budget Commission Correspondence May 1, 2023

Dear Members of the Budget Commission,

I am reaching out, on behalf of the Geauga Park District (“GPD”), in further response to your letter dated May 1, 2023.

In your letter, you referenced Opinion No. 2022-017 issued by the Ohio Attorney General (“Opinion”) and asked that GPD consider the Opinion in preparation of its tax budget for year 2024, particularly where the Ohio Attorney General opined that a 1545 park district is a “taxing unit” and without authority to establish a reserve fund. After considering the Opinion, the GPD board of park commissioners, by resolution, rescinded its only reserve fund – the 2016 Capital Reserve Fund – and, on June 5, 2023, you took formal action to amend GPD’s 2022 Official Certificate of Estimate Resources reflecting the rescission of the reserve fund and the transfer of those monies back to their source, the general fund.

Also in your letter, you asked that the GPD be prepared to address and justify the legality of the collection of its two existing renewal levies to you in light of the Opinion – which admittedly is merely guidance and not binding – opining that a 1545 park district is not authorized to renew tax levies. Since your letter, the Ohio General Assembly, working with our peer organization, Ohio Parks and Recreation Association, and others revised Section 1545.21 of the Ohio Revised Code to expressly authorize 1545 park districts to renew existing tax levies. This was part of the state budget bill, HB 33, and was signed into law on July 4, 2023 by Governor DeWine. A copy of Section 1545.21 of the Ohio Revised Code, showing the changes as underlined, is enclosed for your reference.

In addition, legal counsel Bridey Matheney reached out to the Ohio Department of Taxation, specifically Shelley Wilson, Tax Program Executive, Tax Equalization Division, to confirm what if anything, GPD would need to do with respect to any of its existing renewal levies passed by the voters prior to the change in Section 1545.21 of the Ohio Revised Code. Ms. Wilson was extremely knowledgeable about the question of renewal levies, the new law, and our continued collection of our existing renewal levies, as she worked closely with the Ohio General

Assembly in revising the language of Section 1545.21 of the Ohio Revised Code and the rest of HB 33. Ms. Wilson confirmed that the words “any existing levy” in the newly revised Section 1545.21 applies to existing renewal levies and that the Ohio Department of Taxation has neither any intention of invalidating any current, existing levy, including an existing renewal levy, nor requiring or suggesting that a 1545 park district go back and redistribute or refund the collection of any current existing renewal levy. Based on Ms. Wilson’s confirmation, there is nothing GPD needs to remediate with respect to the collection of its two existing renewal levies.

In closing, I hope this letter, and the action taken by the GPD board of park commissioners, addresses the items in question from your correspondence May 1, 2023, and continues to ensure a positive working relationship with you. I also hope this letter addresses any outstanding issues that remain unresolved prior to our upcoming tax budget hearing on August 22nd. If not, I would appreciate knowing about any outstanding issues in advance of our meeting so that they can be reviewed and corrected if needed. Thank you for your consideration.

Finally, I want to recognize the positive working relationship between Deputy Auditor Kristen Sinatra, Tammy Most, and GPD’s Fiscal Officer Dawn Sweeney. On behalf of GPD, I appreciate Kristen and Tammy working collaboratively in order to ensure positive outcomes for both of us. Thank you!

We look forward to seeing you on the 22nd.

Sincerely,

John Oros, Executive Director

Enclosure

CC w/ encl.: Howard Bates, President
Ray Guarino, Vice-President
Jolene Carnabuci, Commissioner
Les LaGatta, Commissioner
Frank Stein, Commissioner
Todd Hicks, Legal Counsel
Bridey Matheney, Legal Counsel
Dawn Sweeney, Fiscal Officer
Matt McCue, Deputy Director

Mr. Oros also provided the pages with 1454.21. in Am.Sub. H.B. No 33, starting at pg. 649 135th G.A. with the letter to the Park Board. Mr. Oros stated that renewal levys were addressed by the State Legislature and we are grateful to the Ohio Parks & Receptions Association in working with the General Assembly in addressing this issue. Mr. Oros asked if there were any questions. No questions were asked.

Bass Lake Stream Restoration Project – Agreement between Geauga Park District and Chardon Lakes Golf Course

Mr. McCue detailed plans for the North Bass Lake Stream Restoration Project between Geauga Park District and Chardon Lakes Golf Course. Mr. McCue explained that from the culvert on Woodiebrook Road which goes through the golf course then flows down to Bass Lake at the north end, the current stream formation has been an ongoing issue with the Natural Resource Management team who have had to remove debris, beaver dams and other blockages to make sure the water continues to flow. Mr. McCue said he had met with Park Biologist Paul Pira a year prior and confirmed this was a priority project similar to the restoration project at Beaver Creek and began the search for funding. Mr. McCue stated the work would occur on multiple, separate properties along the stream, approximately 9,000 linear feet total is on park property. Mr. McCue also shared that multiple streams merge into the main Bass Lake stream with 2.25 square miles of area draining to this culvert. Mr. McCue said this project would restore the main stream through the golf course to park property and create vernal pools and reconnect to its flood plain area. Mr. McCue also said that during heavy rains, the stream would be able to rise

and flood the plain which would function as a natural system filtering out silt and sediment instead of building up at the North Bass Lake area. Mr. McCue stated that this project would also come with a conservation easement after restoration work is done as it runs through the golf course. Mr. McCue said we are only at the funding stage of the project and in discussions with the golf course owners. Mr. McCue shared that if we were successful with funding, the park district would work out a long-term agreement with the golf course as part of the conservation project. Mr. McCue said we would be receiving funding from Clean Ohio H2Ohio funding with a current estimate of \$3.3 million dollars. Mr. McCue stated with is by far the largest restoration project so far for the park district.

Mr. Pira shared that Governor DeWine started the H2Ohio program to address Lake Erie and the harmful algae blooms but also nutrients enrichment in water specifically phosphorus and nitrogen. Mr. Pira said we are also experiencing these same issues in Bass Lake. Mr. Pira stated he had met with ODNR about this program, met with members of ODNR at Bass Lake who said the H2Ohio program would be perfect opportunity for funding. Mr. Pira said the state has \$12 million for Lake Erie and \$16 million for other clean water projects for rivers and streams. Mr. Pira shared that most of Chardon drains to two culverts during big rain events, one area being Bass Lake which means there will always be flooding at Woodiebrook Road. Mr. Pira said this project would address the flooding but also the harmful nutrients in the water and help create a more natural habitat. Mr. McCue stated that in a 100-year storm event the peak flow at this area is about 800 cubic feet of flow per second – at a 10 year storm event it is 400 cubic feet of water flow per second. Mr. Oros stated the park had partnered with the Chagrin Watershed Partners for funding who have been a tremendous help and the park is fortunate Governor DeWine has started this program.

Mr. Oros asked for a motion to move forward with the agreement with Chardon Golf Course for the Bass Lake Stream Restoration Project. Mr. Bates made a motion to approve, Mr. Guarino seconded the motion. After a roll-call voice vote, the motion was approved.

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

Resolution 12-2023 - H2Ohio Funding

Mr. Oros read Resolution 12-2023 (below)

WHEREAS, the State of Ohio, through the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, administers financial assistance for water quality improvement projects through the H2Ohio Wetland Grant Program.

WHEREAS, Geauga Park District desires H2Ohio funding.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, by the Geauga Park District Board of Commissioners as follows:

1. That Geauga Park District approves filing an application for H2Ohio funding.
2. That John Oros, Executive Director, is hereby authorized and directed to execute and file an application with the Ohio Department of Natural Resources and to provide all information and documentation required to become eligible for possible funding.
3. That Geauga Park District does agree to obligate the funds required to satisfactorily complete the proposed project and become eligible for reimbursement under the terms and conditions of the Ohio River Basin H2Ohio Wetland Grant Program.

Mr. Oros asked for a motion to approve the application for H2Ohio Funding. Mr. Bates made a motion to approve, Mr. Guarino seconded the motion. After a roll-call voice vote, the motion was approved.

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

Resolution 13-2023 – Revised Budget Resolution

Mr. Oros read the resolution ‘Please find the resolution for adoption of the revised 2023 Appropriations. The following format conforms with the “legal level of budgetary control” according to Ohio Revised Code 5705.38(C) that requires “appropriation measures shall be classified so as to set forth separately the amounts appropriated for each office, department, and division, and within each, the amount appropriated for personal services.” Therefore, this budget format conforms with state statute in that the appropriations resolution is presented as follows: By Fund, By Department, Personal Services (Salaries & Benefits), All other non-personal services expenditures. This revised appropriation resolution reflects an appropriation amendment in the Land Improvement Fund 4301 for Land Acquisition.’

Mr. Oros stated that in this case the appropriations follows the increase of \$750,000 related to the Clean Ohio Conservation program dedicated to the purchase of the Kitteridge property as discussed a number of months ago in Hambden Township. Mr. Oros stated the 182-acre purchase if finally coming to fruition with the assistance of the Western Reserve Land Conservancy for a total land acquisition of \$1 million dollars. Mr. Oros said the money should be in escrow in the month of September. Mr. Oros asked if there were any questions, no questions were asked.

Mr. Oros asked for a motion to approve the Revised Budget Resolution. Mr. Guarino made a motion to approve, Ms. Carnabuci seconded the motion. After a roll-call voice vote, the motion was approved.

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

Surplus Property

Mr. Oros asked for a motion to the surplus of empty metal 2,3 and 4 drawer file cabinets at the Big Creek Meyer Center. Mr. Bates made a motion to approve the surplus, Mr. Guarino seconded the motion. After a roll-call voice vote, the motion was approved.

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

COMMISSIONERS TIME

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

- Out of the Marketing Department: As shared last month, Geauga Park District has been running dual digital advertising campaigns throughout the summer. As teens begin returning to school, the campaign targeting ages 12-17 and their families finished up on Saturday (10-weeks managed by Company 119). Two 15-second videos about Big Creek Park’s mountain biking opportunity were produced to complete the campaign.
- 1,551,167 ‘impression’ meaning the number of times it was viewed; 1,348 ‘clicks’; 308 ‘engagements’; 183,854 ‘video completes’ with 91.28% video completion rate
- Naturalists held a total of 100 programs in July, serving 2,478 patrons.
- Astronomy programs at Observatory Park attracted 756 patrons.
- Boat-borrowing at Headwaters Park served 851. High ropes at Claridon Woodlands served 239.
- July 30 was the Ansel’s Cave Historic Signature hike at The West Woods, where 22 patrons discovered 120 new signatures, bringing our total number of documented signatures to 260.
- Chief Sloan introduced new Ranger Evan Smythe who had just graduated from the Police Academy.

Mr. Guarino asked how the ‘viewing’ of the videos for the campaign were done. Ms. Sandy Ward stated the ads come up organically as people search the internet but also while streaming TV. Ms. Ward also stated the ‘static’ ads that were created by Ms. Vicky Liptak were also viewable to the public, not a video. Mr. Oros said we have seen an uptick of use at the mountain bike due to the ads. Ms. Ward shared that the videos are also on our YouTube channel.

Mr. Bates shared when referring to a ‘100-year storm’ it the inches of rain in a timespan within a year. Burton has had two 100-year storms in the past few weeks.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Mr. Oros stated there were no items to be brought forward to executive session.

ANNOUNCEMENT OF NEXT BOARD MEETING: Mr. Oros announced the next meeting is Monday, September 18, 2023, at 8:30am.

ADJOURNMENT

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

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

The meeting was adjourned at 9:04 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,

John Oros, Executive Director

Howard Bates, President