

**GEAUGA PARK DISTRICT BOARD
OF PARK COMMISSIONERS
BOARD MEETING MINUTES
March 20, 2023**

The regular meeting of the Geauga Park District Board was held March 20, 2023, at the Meyer Center, Big Creek Park. The meeting was called to order at 8:30 a.m. Commissioners Howard Bates, Jolene Carnabuci, Frank Stein and Les LaGatta were present. Mr. Ray Guarino was absent.

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

Park District Employees	GUESTS
John Oros, Executive Director	Mr. Todd Hicks
Matthew McCue, Deputy Director	
Dawn Sweeney, Fiscal Manager	
Christine Ward, HR Manager	
Mike Rose, Sergeant Ranger	
Paul Pira, Park Biologist	
Sandy Ward, Marketing Manager	
Lucas Beamer, IT	
Jessica Alpers, Administrative Assistant	

APPROVAL OF AGENDA/ADDENDUM ITEMS

Mr. Bates made a motion to approve the agenda, Ms. Carnabuci seconded the motion. After a roll-call voice vote, the motion was approved.

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

APPROVE OR AMEND MEETING MINUTES

Mr. LaGatta made a motion to approve the meeting minutes from February, Mr. Stein seconded the motion. After a roll-call voice vote, the motion was approved.

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

PRESENTATION OF FINANCIAL STATEMENT – FINANCE

Mr. Oros asked if there were any questions regarding February’s statement. Ms. Sweeney stated the beginning balance of the General Fund as of February 28, 2023 was \$3,361,065 with the year-to-date ending fund balance of \$3,636,111 In the Capital Land Improvement Fund the beginning balance was \$2,006,157 with the ending balance \$2,888,656 No Board Member questions were asked. Mr. Oros shared that the grant funding opportunities status report was included as the last page of financial statement. Mr. Oros stated the Brede Property boardwalk and access parking areas had been awarded funds in the amount of \$16,409 by ODNR. Veteran’s Legacy Woods - Cold Water Stream Restoration was granted by the OEPA in the amount of \$1,107,662 and on the Holbrook Hollows Park Expansion, which was out to bid currently, had been awarded \$367,500 from the State of Ohio FY2023-2024 Capital Budget. In 2024 the Geauga Park District will receive from ODOT for The West Woods Entry Bridge project \$743,895 Mr. Oros stated the Park District was hopeful the U.S. Forest Service would award \$159,360 to be applied to the reforestation of Veterans Legacy Woods but grant status had not been determined at this time. Mr. Oros thanked the Park District staff for their hard work in being awarded these revenue sources.

PRESENTATION OF PAYMENT REPORT – FINANCE

Mr. Oros asked if there were any questions regarding February’s paid bills. No questions were asked.

OLD BUSINESS

None

NEW BUSINESS

Secretary to the Park Board: Mr. Oros requested Ms. Jessica Alpers be appointed the new Secretary to the Park Board to record minutes of the meeting.

Mr. Bates made a motion to approve the appointment of a new secretary, Ms. Carnabuci seconded the motion. After a roll-call voice vote, the motion was approved.

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

Resolution No. 3-2023 – Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) - Ohio Park District Roadwork Fund FY 2024-2025:

Mr. Oros asked for Resolution No. 3-2023 to be approved. This Resolution is a requirement by the Ohio Department of Transportation for the allocation of the Ohio Park Districts Roadway Fund FY 2024-2025 biennium. The Geauga Park District has participated in this funding program over the past fifteen years.

Improvement projects have consisted of stone and asphalt materials and labor used to resurface roads and parking lots throughout the Park District. Mr. Oros stated the Park District is asking for this to be passed so the required paperwork can be submitted prior to the June 1, 2023 deadline.

Mr. Bates asked if the contactors doing the work are appointed by the state. Mr. McCue clarified it is ODOT-let which prequalifies the contractors so those are the contractors the Park District uses. Mr. McCue stated the Park District had used this process in the past for Eldon Russel Park, Bessie Benner Metzenbaum Park and The West Woods projects.

Mr. LaGatta made a motion to pass the resolution, Mr. Bates seconded the motion. After a roll-call voice vote, the motion was approved.

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

NATURALIST PRESENTION

Mr. Paul Pira shared ‘Potential Land Acquisition and How It Is Evaluated.’ Mr. Pira stated the Park District owned approximately 10,000 acres of land which is about 4% of the county at this time. Mr. Pira shared that Geauga is known for its forests and stands out in the state as either 3rd or 4th in natural lakes. Geauga is also known for its abundant wetlands, vernal pools, rock outcroppings and meadows. Mr. Pira explained he typically conducts a ‘one day’ evaluation, though quick, looking at the different features of a property. Mr. Pira also stated he uses GIS (Geographic Information System) for a more in depth look at a potential property. Mr. Pira explained that he evaluates everything from communities on the land, interesting or rare plants and animals, tree growth, habitats, water and wetlands as well as other natural features. Mr. Pira stated he uses several different types of maps to evaluate the property including LIDAR (Light Detection and Ranging) which is a technology used to create high-resolution models of ground elevation with a vertical accuracy, bouncing off trees and buildings which gives a better picture of tree growth and forest density. Mr. Pira shared that he then evaluates the ‘interior forest’ which is about 500 ft. into a forest to check habitats. Mr. Pira said he also looks at the connectivity to other protected lands, for example, the Longo property which was appealing to the Park District because it’s connected to a very large block of property the Ohio Division of Wildlife has (Hamden Orchards) which is already protected. Mr. Pira stated he would then submit a report for the Park Board, Executive Director and Deputy Director on his ‘thought’

regarding the property and his recommendation. Mr. Pira shared how he utilized NQEI (Natural Quality Evaluation Index) to score a property, using 20 different metrics (example: size of property, unique qualities, species rich diversity, protected connectivity, location within the county). Scoring is from 0-5 points with a total of 100 but when added up, an evaluated property should be in excess of 64 for it to be a viable consideration for Park District acquisition. Mr. Pira stated he would then investigate the property more thoroughly before moving forward with additional reports. Mr. Pira said there may be other considerations when compiling his reports, but these are the basic points.

Ms. Carnabuci asked if Mr. Pira's average scores were based on what he has scored in Geauga County, Mr. Pira said yes. Ms. Carnabuci asked how the scores compare to other counties. Mr. Pira stated he utilizes other data from other sources but has customized the scoring system to better reflect Geauga County's natural resources. Mr. Pira shared that in the past, other park districts in the area had meetings a few times a year to compare information but have not done so for quite a while. Mr. Pira said he is not sure if other park districts utilize the same scoring process as he does for evaluating properties, but this method is what he has used for the past 20 years or so.

Mr. Stein asked if when Mr. Pira makes his surveys and views older forests, does the parks ever have a potential for forest fires. Mr. Pira stated there is always a potential for forest fires, he is a fire manager for the park and fire is not necessarily a bad thing. Mr. Pira stated that when nature accumulate in the understory for 20, 30, 40 or 50 years can be an issue for possible fire but this doesn't happen in Geauga County very much anymore. Mr. Pira shared that in southern Ohio they utilize fire for land regeneration but in Geauga it is mostly used for park meadows.

Mr. Oros stated that the system Mr. Pira uses for property evaluation is a good process. Mr. Oros stated that this system of evaluation had been used for the Gallo property which was added to The West Woods and Brubaker property which was added to The Rookery and recently acquired by the Park District.

COMMISSIONERS TIME

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

- Naturalist Department finished the Nature Scope program with 819 Fifth Graders participating in January and February.
- Observatory Park hosted 16 programs with a total of 387 patrons attending
- The Naturalists hosted 118 programs serving 2,792 patrons

Mr. LaGatta asked if the Park District was participating in the upcoming eclipse since people come from all over Ohio specifically to this region. Mr. Oros shared that Mr. Chris Mentrek, our 'AstroNat,' is working with a state task force with ODNR, planning for this event.

Mr. Bates stated there were concerns about board members who have business with the Park District. Mr. Bates said his company has bid on projects this year and in previous years, with this years' bid being the lowest by 6% and which was a savings of \$3,000 under the other bid. Mr. Bates stated it is a competitive business and he finds it frustrating when there are complaints, and it is felt his company shouldn't be able to bid as he is a board member. Mr. Bates also stated there were rumors that the asphalt bid process was cancelled due to funding issues within the Park District. Mr. Bates stated there are no funding issues, there were design issues. Mr. McCue shared that the design was being reevaluated to lower costs with the original cost at \$250,000 while the new design is closer to \$200,000. Mr. McCue said the project will go out to bid again with the new parameters. Mr. Bates asked if the county engineer was consulted. Mr. McCue said he had spoken to the county engineer and the municipal engineer who had made red-line markups to the project. Mr. Bates shared that the parking lot at Swine Creek is more than 19 years old and needs to be dealt with and the cost quotes between here and Columbus would be the same. Mr. McCue said the state bid which is set but the park can go with a lower amount if it is submitted.

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, April 17, 2023 at 8:30am.

ADJOURNMENT

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

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

John Oros, Executive Director

Howard Bates, President