

**GEAUGA PARK DISTRICT BOARD
OF PARK COMMISSIONERS
BOARD MEETING MINUTES
May 15, 2023**

The regular meeting of the Geauga Park District Board was held May 15, 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 Ray Guarino and Les LaGatta were present.

Mr. Oros 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	
Paul Pira, Park Biologist	
Sandy Ward, Marketing Manager	
Holly Sauder, Events Coordinator & Naturalist	
Andy Avram, Volunteer Coordinator & Naturalist	
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. 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. Stein	Yes
Mr. LaGatta	Yes
Ms. Carnabuci	Yes
Mr. Guarino	Yes

APPROVE OR AMEND MEETING MINUTES

Mr. Oros asked for a motion to approve last month's meeting minutes. Mr. Guarino made a motion to approve the meeting minutes from April 17, 2023, Mr. LaGatta seconded the motion. After a roll-call voice vote, the motion was approved.

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

PRESENTATION OF FINANCIAL STATEMENT – APRIL FINANCE

Mr. Oros asked if there were any questions regarding April's statement. Ms. Sweeney stated the beginning balance for the General Fund was \$4,049,536 with an ending balance of \$3,975,575 as of April 30, 2023. The Capital Land Improvement Fund beginning balance was \$2,875,011 with ending balance of \$2,826,918. The Capital Reserve Fund ending balance was still \$89,190. The total balance ending April 30, 2023 is \$6,891,683. No questions were asked.

Mr. Oros reviewed the grant status initiative as of May 2023 with Veterans Legacy Woods granted full amount requested from the US Forestry Service (GLRI Funds) of \$159,360; The West Woods Entry Bridge grant from ODOT, requested amount was \$824,090 with an award of \$743,895; Brede Property Boardwalk & Access Parking Area request was granted in full from ODNR of \$16,409; Veterans Legacy Woods: Cold Water Stream Restoration request was granted in full from OEPA of \$1,107,662; Holbrook Hollows Park Expansion from the

State of Ohio FY2023-2024 Capital Budget, requested \$820,000 and was awarded \$367,500; Kittredge Acquisition funds were granted in full from the State of Ohio Clean Ohio of \$1,000,000.

PRESENTATION OF PAYMENT REPORT – APRIL FINANCE

Mr. Oros asked if there were any questions regarding April's paid bills. No questions were asked.

OLD BUSINESS

None

NEW BUSINESS

Resolution No. 6-2023 – 1,000 Tree Earth Day: Ms. Carnabuci read the resolution detailing the first tree planting at Veterans Legacy Woods.

WHEREAS, following sponsors who answered the call to support Geauga Park District's new 1,000 Trees Earth Day Initiative to reforest Veterans Legacy Woods this spring at the following levels: **at the Red Oak (\$3,000) level**, One Tree Planted, the Cleveland Museum of Natural History Trout Club, and Arms Trucking Co.; **at the Sugar Maple (\$1,500) level**, Western Reserve Land Conservancy, Davey Tree, and Troymill Wood Products; **at the Tulip Poplar (\$500) level**, Petersen & Petersen, ACE Billing Group, the Geauga County Maple Leaf, the Chardon VFW, Donate a Tree to the World, The Middlefield Banking Company, Independent Tree, and The Rotary Clubs of Geauga County; and **at the Dogwood (\$250) level**, VCA Burton Animal Hospital, the Middlefield VFW, and the Town & Country Garden Club of Cleveland; and in-kind sponsors included Sage's Apples with apples, Sunrise Springs Water with water, and The National Wild Turkey Federation with bare root saplings;

WHEREAS, the following organizations, companies and groups answered the call to plant trees and put up protective fencing as part of this effort at Veterans Legacy Woods: Cardinal Schools, Nestle USA, nVent, Chardon Middle School, Chagrin River Watershed Partners, Orvis Inc., Embrace Pet Insurance, ACE Billing Group Inc., Protect Geauga Parks, Siracki Realty Ltd., the Lesko family, VCA Burton Animal Hospital, WomenSafe, the Foundation for Geauga Parks, and Cub Scout Pack 3104 (Chesterland); as well as 38 members of the public, including some from our dedicated volunteers corps, who pre-registered and braved the weather to plant the last of these new trees during a rainy public program on Earth Day proper;

WHEREAS, from April 20 through 22, generous community support of Geauga Park District's new 1,000 Trees initiative culminated in 274 volunteers planting 310 3-to-6-foot Ohio native trees/shrubs and 40 bare root saplings — a fantastic contribution to this former golf course, where, within just a few years, new trees will begin providing excellent food and habitat to countless songbirds, insects and wildlife;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, the Geauga Park District Board of Commissioners extends its gratitude to all 1,000 Trees supporters for their contributions to preserve, conserve and protect the natural features of Geauga County and to provide outdoor recreational experiences to our residents of every age, every ability and at all times of the year.

Mr. Oros recognized Geauga Park District staff members Paul Pira, park biologist, as the project lead; Andy Avram the Volunteer Coordinator and park naturalist; Holly Sauder the Special Events Coordinator; Sandy Ward the marketing & communications manager; Jen Safick and Matt Kneitel the park land stewards who planted quite a few of those trees. Mr. Oros thanked them for their hard work, investment and initiative.

Mr. Paul Pira shared a presentation on the 1,000 tree planting days and the Earth Day Give-Away. Mr. Pira stated that the land stewards and naturalists that worked with the volunteer groups not only enjoyed their experience planting trees, were also excited to visit the parks again with their families and 'watch their trees grow.' Mr. Pira said the Natural Resource Management team started Earth Day outreach programs in 2015 at Swine Creek with caring for bluebird boxes, stream fish and ecology education. Today, Mr. Pira said the park is meeting with consulting companies to bid on the fairway rebuild of a stream. Mr. Pira stated that turning the golf course back to nature and restoring natural habitats with grants and public support is key to the park mission of conserve and protect. In the pictures presented, Mr. Pira showed old pictures (Orchard Hills in 2009 and 2019) and current pictures of Veterans Legacy Woods and other Geauga Park District Parks. Mr. Pira also showed pictures of the schools and public planting trees, putting up fencing and listening to the land stewards and naturalists educate on the proper way to plant trees. Mr. Pira said he was very proud of the park staff and said they should be proud of their work.

Mr. Pira showed pictures of the give-away on Earth Day April 2023 and encouraged people to plant native trees and plants. Mr. Pira also shared that working with Kent State University-Geauga which grew the trees and plants used in the give-away and tree planting were instrumental in growing native plants. Ms. Safick said they had given away ‘thousands’ of perennials to the public. Mr. Pira thanked everyone for their hard work and looks forward to next year.

Ms. Carnabuci shared that she had participated in the Earth Day program for 3 days and said young people took such an interest it was great to see, and she looks forward to the next planting in October. Ms. Carnabuci also thanked everyone who made this program happen.

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

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

Planning Update

Mr. McCue stated that in February he shared the strategic plan for 2025 they are working on. Mr. McCue said there would be open house meetings scheduled in the different zones within the Park District; June 20 at Veterans Legacy Woods, June 21 at Holbrook Hollows and June 22 at the Big Creek Meyer Center. Mr. McCue also shared that for the Veterans Legacy Woods stream restoration project they issued an RFP and short-listed 3 firms on May 8 – BioHabitats, RiverReach and Marks Construction partnering with Davey Resource Group which are all restoration design groups the park has worked with in the past. Mr. McCue said a proposal meeting was held at Veterans Legacy Woods with proposals due May 29 and then recommendations would be made for the contract award. Mr. McCue stated that Grounds and Facilities were focusing on day-to-day maintenance and spring cleanups.

Holbrook Hollows – Franklin Street Connection Contract Award

Mr. Oros shared that on March 22 five bids were received for the 2023 Holbrook Hollow – Franklin Street Connection Bid. Mr. Oros said that after reviewing the lowest bid of \$700,000 that was submitted by Great Lakes Crushing Ltd. on the information provided within the bid documents, they had fulfilled the requirements to be eligible to execute the project in accordance with the contract documents. Mr. Oros stated the submitted bid was within the budgeted amount of \$820,000.

Mr. Oros asked for a motion to accept and award Great Lakes Crushing Ltd. bid for the project. Mr. LaGatta made a motion to approve the resolution; Mr. Guarino seconded the motion. After a roll-call voice vote, the motion was approved.

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

2023 Swine Creek Asphalt Improvement Contract Award

Mr. Oros stated that on April 18, four bids were received for the 2023 Swine Creek Asphalt Improvement Re-Bid. After reviewing the low bid of \$188,537.80 that was submitted by Ohio Paving & Construction Co, Inc. on the information provided within the bid documents, Mr. Oros said they had fulfilled the requirements to be eligible to execute the project in accordance with the contract documents. Mr. Oros stated the submitted bid was within the budgeted amount of \$275,000.

Mr. Oros asked for a motion to accept and award Ohio Paving & Construction Co., Inc. bid for the project. Mr. Guarino made a motion to pass the resolution; Ms. Carnabuci seconded the motion. After a roll-call voice vote, the motion was approved.

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

Geauga County Budget Commission Correspondence

Mr. Oros read a letter from the Geauga County Budget Commission, dated May 1, 2023 (see below).



Geauga County Budget Commission

Christopher P. Hitchcock, Chairman
James R. Flaiz, Vice Chairman
Charles E. Walder, Secretary

May 1, 2023

Bridey Matheney, Esq. as counsel for
Geauga Park District
Board of Park Commissioners
9160 Robinson Road
Chardon, OH 44024

Re: Ohio Attorney General Opinion 2022-017

Dear Geauga Park District Commissioners:

The Geauga County Budget Commission ("Budget Commission") is reaching out to ensure that the Geauga Park District and its Board of Park Commissioners (collectively "GPD") is aware of Ohio Attorney General Opinion 2022-017, a copy of which is attached to this letter.

As you will recall, the issue regarding whether a 1545 parks district can establish a reserve fund was an issue of contention during GPD's 2022 budget hearing before the Budget Commission. As indicated in the opinion, the Ohio Attorney General agrees with the Geauga County Budget Commission's position that, as a "taxing unit", a 1545 parks district is without authority to establish a reserve fund. Please ensure that this opinion is taken into account leading into your 2024 budget season.

Additionally, the Ohio Attorney General has opined that a 1545 park district is only permitted to levy or replace taxes pursuant to R.C. 1545.21. Significantly, a 1545 park district is not authorized to renew tax levies. As GPD currently is collecting on two previously renewed levies, please ensure that GPD is prepared to address and justify the legality of the collection of these tax levies to the Budget Commission. Any advanced communication regarding your plans for remediation for past, current, and future collections would be welcomed by the Budget Commission.

Sincerely,

Christopher P. Hitchcock Chairman	James R. Flaiz Vice Chairman	Charles E. Walder Secretary
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Cc: Dawn Sweeney, GPD Treasurer
John Oros, GPD Executive Director
file

Courthouse Annex, 231 Main Street, Suite 1A, Chardon, OH 44024-1293

Direct Line: (440) 279-1600 FAX: Fiscal Office (440) 279-2184 * Real Estate/ Appraisal (440) 286-4359
Web site: <http://www.auditor.co.geauga.oh.us> Email: auditor@co.geauga.oh.us

Mr. Oros read the response sent to the Geauga County Budget Commission (letter below)

VIA ELECTRONIC AND REGULAR MAIL

Gauga County Budget Commission
c/o Charles E. Walder, Secretary
Courthouse Annex
231 Main Street, Suite 1A
Chardon, Ohio 44024
Email: cwalder@geauga.oh.gov

Re: Ohio Attorney General Opinion 2022-017

Dear Gauga County Budget Commission:

Thank you for your letter dated May 1, 2023 regarding Opinion 2022-17 from the Ohio Attorney General. Your letter will be taken into consideration as the Board of Park Commissioners of the Geauga Park District discusses its tax budget for 2024. In addition, Geauga Park District staff will reach out to the State of Ohio for information as to what action, if any, needs to be taken regarding its levies and will share the information it learns with the Geauga County Budget Commission.

Sincerely,
John Oros
Executive Director

cc: James R. Flaiz, as counsel for
Gauga County Budget Commission (email only)

Mr. Oros asked if there were any questions regarding the Budget Commission's letter, Attorney General's letter or the information in the packet. No questions were asked.

Mr. Oros stated that within this agenda we are acknowledging one of their concerns from Resolution No. 7-2023 the 2016 Capital Reserve Fund as stated in that letter, if need be the park would have to work with the State on issues of levy renewals. Mr. Oros stated he had an opportunity last week to look at the other 1545 park districts across the state of Ohio and how they handled ballot issues. Mr. Oros said that looking back at data as far back as 2010 to the most recent vote in May 2023, he looked at renewal, replacement and additional levy's, out of 151 total ballot issues, 65 were levy renewals by our sister 1545 organizations. Mr. Oros said the park would work with the State moving forward. Mr. Oros asked if there were any questions from the board members. No questions were asked.

Resolution No. 7-2023 – Rescind 2016 Capital Reserve Fund (#4901)

Mr. Oros stated while reading the resolution that the \$89,189.90 2016 Capital Reserve Fund would be returned to the General Fund.

Mr. Oros asked for a motion to Rescind the 2016 Capital Reserve Fund. Mr. Guarino made a motion to approve; Mr. Stein seconded the motion. After a roll-call voice vote, the motion was approved.

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

2024 Tax Budget – Draft

Mr. Oros presented a draft of the 2024 Tax Budget which will again be reviewed and voted on in June. Ms. Sweeney presented the draft starting on the summary sheet with actual numbers for 2021 and 2022. For 2023 and 2024 the numbers are estimates. In 2023 the estimated General Fund ending balance will be \$1,619,696.77 Starting in 2024 the General Fund Revenues will be approximately \$7,573,575.00 and the expenditures will be \$7,221,763.83 leaving us with \$1,971,507.94. Ms. Sweeney stated that In Land Improvement ending balance for 2023 would be \$1,491,571.00 however the park would also anticipate amounts awarded from grants which were included in the revenue with a transfer from Land Improvement to General Fund. Ms. Sweeney said that the Capital Reserve Fund, K-9 Fund and Retirement Fund would be closed by the end of this year. Mr. Oros asked the board to take the month to consider the budget and asked for approval in the June meeting. Mr. Oros also said that consistently the park’s general property tax revenue had hovered between \$6-\$7 million a year with an estimate in 2024 of \$6,662,575.00 Mr. Oros said to view our other expenditures and revenue sources, he wanted to give credit to the park staff for pursuing grant opportunities, specifically for The West Woods Bridge Project and the Veterans Legacy Woods Reforestation Project. Mr. Oros said he was proud of the park staff for thinking creatively to find sources of funding and going above and beyond. Mr. Oros asked the board if there were any questions. No questions were asked. Mr. Oros also reviewed Tax Budget Schedule B that references the real estate tax collection which uses the 98% tax collection column of \$6,662,575 also noted a 5-year capital improvement plan project which would be submitted to the tax budget commission. Mr. Oros stated there are monetary placeholders for projects slated for the next 5 years.

SURPLUS PROPERTY

Mr. Oros requested a motion to approve scrap and surplus property. The Park District would send (1) 2008 Kubota Zero Turn Mower, (2) Olympus Stylus cameras (defective) and a lot of Craftsman drills with batteries and charge caddy. Mr. Guarino made a motion to approve the remaining surplus. Ms. Carnabuci 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	Yes

COMMISSIONERS TIME

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

- Congratulations to Paul Pira, park biologist, and staff who learned the park was awarded a highly competitive Great Lakes Restoration Initiative grant in the amount of \$159,300 for Veterans Legacy Woods’ Cuyahoga River reforestation. This will amount to the purchase and planting of about 2,500 trees/shrubs over 13 acres, all contracted. In return, the NRM staff will prepare the sites, herbicide them, and follow up with invasive plant control, watering and long-term maintenance.

- Geauga Park District was also recently pleased to officially receive three grants from the Foundation For Geauga Parks for the 2023-24 Nature Scopes Binocular Program (\$22,346.38) and for summer camp supplies and staffing (\$9,920.00) totaling \$32,266.38.
- The Naturalist Department held a total of 129 programs serving 2,684 patrons.

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 Tuesday, June 20, 2023 at 8:30am.

ADJOURNMENT

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

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

The meeting was adjourned at 9:16 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