

**WOOD COUNTY PARK DISTRICT
BOARD OF PARK COMMISSIONERS MINUTES WORK SESSION
FEBRUARY 19, 2021**

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Sandy Wiechman at 4:00 p.m. at the Hankison Great Room at the W.W. Knight Nature Preserve, 29530 White Road, Perrysburg, Ohio.

2. ROLL CALL

Tom Myers, present
Sandy Wiechman, present
Dennis Parish, present
Bill Cameron, present
Kim Rose, present

Staff present: Neil Munger

3. WORK SESSION

Ms. Wiechman introduced Mr. Ryan Wichman. Ms. Wiechman explained that Mr. Wichman is the father of a 4-year old son who is disabled and uses a walker to get around. Mr. Wichman explained that most playgrounds are difficult for his son to play in as it is difficult for him to navigate the surfacing in the playground. Mr. Wiechman stated that he and his wife researched playgrounds for kids with special needs and found one in Findlay. Mr. Wichman stated that as a result of the playground in Findlay being the closest fully inclusive playground facilities he and his wife helped to create an organization named Wood County Plays that has raised over \$800,000 for the construction of a fully inclusive playground in Perrysburg. Mr. Wichman added that the playground is set to begin construction this summer. Mr. Wiechman stated that he has visited many of the playgrounds located in the Wood County Park District facilities but noted that the mulch surfacing makes play difficult and frustrating for his son. Mr. Wichman added that the poured in place padded surfacing is the only surface that is fully accessible for all. Mr. Munger noted that the ground mulch surfacing used by the Park District is considered accessible by the Consumer Product Safety Commission standards which governs playground safety. Mr. Munger agreed that the poured in place surfacing is truly the most accessible surfacing available it is very expensive. Mr. Baney added that additionally the poured in place surfacing has limitations as to the fall height thus limiting the maximum height of the play structure. Mr. Baney added that not only is the wood mulch surfacing the less expensive alternative but it also is the safest from a fall perspective and the fall rating for surfacing. Mr. Wichman stated that he understands the costs and limitations and just hopes to open conversation to planning for future inclusion. Ms. Wiechman responded that we can certainly start looking at inclusion and begin planning for future improvements in the various parks.

Mr. Munger discussed the Park District's land acquisition planning and exactly how the Park District examines expansion. Mr. Munger stated that the Park District has

very specific guidelines we follow when considering acquisition of new parklands, noting that the Park District follows three basic principles. Mr. Munger stated that first, we look for land adjacent to existing parks. Mr. Munger noted that we need to be extremely careful not to expand and grow to a point where we are spread out too far in a very large county and unable to maintain what we have. In growing existing parks we are able to continue to preserve open space and provide access to various amenities without spreading staff out too thin throughout the county. Mr. Munger noted that most recently the addition to William Henry Harrison Park in Pemberville is an excellent example of this. In addition, Mr. Munger noted that the largest park facility in the district, the Bradner Preserve, was acquired in three separate purchases to grow it to what it is today. Mr. Munger noted the second principle is looking at land with unique characteristics. Property such as land along a river, such as Buttonwood, land with features such as the quarry at the Sawyer Quarry Nature Preserve are examples of land that needs to be preserved as open space before it is developed and lost forever. Mr. Munger stated that the third principle looked at is land of significant size. Mr. Munger noted that the original Bradner Preserve was 124 acres. Mr. Munger noted that parcels such as this with that much contiguous natural area is not frequently found in Wood County and must be preserved whenever possible. Mr. Munger noted that anytime the Park District is considering the potential addition of parklands, a team of staff with representatives from each of the departments visits the property and has a score sheet that they use to evaluate and score the property. Land must meet a minimum score before it is even brought to the board for consideration.

Mr. Munger stated that one of the big things that the Park District needs to keep in consideration with future planning is the Pratt Family Farm. Mr. Munger stated that about four years ago Doug and Mary Ellen Pratt announced that the Park District would be the eventual owners of their 168-acre farm in Perrysburg Township with the intentions of it being developed as a park. Mr. Parish noted that at the time of the donation, the Pratts talked to both the Park District as well as the City of Perrysburg regarding the land donation. Mr. Parish added that the City's plans were to develop it into an active recreation area with baseball fields, soccer fields and other active sports areas. Mr. Parish stated that the Park District discussed with the Pratt's the idea of leaving the area totally natural. The construction of a large pond would enable the Park District to utilize the spoils from the pond to sculpt the land and develop small hills and valleys. This was ultimately the desire of the Pratts, to develop the area as a natural space for generations to come. Mr. Parish stated that the time has come for the Park District to develop plans for the eventual park so the Pratts can give input as to what they would like to see happen. Mr. Munger stated that he agrees that this year is a good time to start the planning process for the park. Mr. Parish stated that if the rest of the board is agreeable to the idea, he would like for Mr. Munger to contact the Pratt's and see if it would be possible for the Board to hold a meeting at their farm to give the members of the board the opportunity to meet the Pratts and see their farm first-hand. All agreed and Mr. Munger stated he would contact the Pratts to see if they would be agreeable.

Mr. Munger noted that in regards to capital improvement planning, ideas for capital improvements is generated by the public. Mr. Munger stated that the Park District

has done strategic planning with public input sessions that generate a plan for a 5-10 year future in regards to planning. Mr. Munger distributed the latest strategic plan developed in 2013 and noted that we are at the end of the current plan with a need to develop a new plan in 2022. Mr. Munger shared the schedule of improvement for this year. Mr. Munger noted that this schedule includes the budget for each project, the staff member assigned to the project as well as the planned completion date for each project. Mr. Munger added that some of the projects are very tentative on the schedule due to costs. Mr. Munger stated that presently lumber costs are double normal costs due to a number of factors. With that said some of the projects such as the archery tower and the building expansion at the Reuthinger Preserve may be pushed back or even moved into 2022. Mr. Munger added that it does not make sense to pay a premium just to get the projects completed quickly when we can continue to plan for these improvements and save money simply by waiting for better prices.

Mr. Munger reported that in regards to the Park District operating levy, the levy is a one-mill, 10-year levy passed by the voters in 2018 that began collection in 2019 and will collect until 2029. Mr. Munger stated that back in 2017 when the Board discussed the levy and the future of the levy, they determined that with carryover that had been saved by prudent spending over the years, the Park District could function on a renewal of the existing one-mill levy. Mr. Parish questioned if it would be safe to say that at the present time the Park District is more focused on holding capital improvements to what we have as opposed to building a lot of new. Mr. Munger responded that the plan was for the first few years of the levy to finish up planned capital improvements then move into more of a maintenance phase, focusing more on maintaining what we have and spending less on new improvements. Mr. Parish questioned if there are any areas of land acquisition that are being targeted by the Park District at this time. Mr. Munger responded that the only real targets of acquisition are the North Coast Inland Trail coming into Millbury and the Holcomb Woods property located in eastern Wood County. Mr. Munger added that the Holcomb Woods property is problematic as it is owned by several different land owners and acquisition would be difficult but preservation of the largest woodland area left in Wood County would be extremely high on the Park District's priorities. Mr. Parish stated that in looking to the future in regards to the Pratt property development and other capital improvement and land acquisition the potential for a second levy strictly for capital improvements and land acquisition may need to be explored by the board. Mr. Parish added that a small .3 or .4 mill levy would generate approximately \$800,000-\$1-million in revenue that would give the ability for the Park District to fund these types of projects while the existing levy would function as the operating levy it was always intended to be. Mr. Munger stated that the upcoming strategic plan will assist the Park District in determining what will be needed for future capital improvements identified by public input. Mr. Munger added that information combined with the plan developed for the Pratt farm will help guide the need for an additional small levy.

Mr. Parish stated that he felt it very important that the board communicates amongst each other and discusses items without any surprises. Mr. Parish stated that he does not believe there has been a time that there was a close vote of the board as they have always been on the same page and understood the needs of the

organization. Mr. Parish stated that he hopes this continues with board members communicating thoughts and not creating surprises at board meetings with items brought up that the board does not have knowledge of. Mr. Parish added that he believes this instills public confidence in the board. Mr. Myers agreed stating that communication has been key for his positive experience on the board since day one and hopes that those lines of communication continue to be open between board members. Mr. Munger stated that one on one communications between board members is good but cautioned that decisions cannot be made behind closed doors in out of meeting discussions as Sunshine Laws prohibit these types of communication outside of a public meeting.

Mr. Parish stated that several years ago a compensation committee was formed consisting of the chair, vice chair and the director to meet and discuss compensation issues such as cost of living and other salary structure issues that may arise. This committee then comes to the board with recommendations to be voted on by the full board. Mr. Parish stated that he believes that the board should have areas of the Park District where board members dive in deeper. It could be as simple as a single board member or perhaps two or three that look at general areas such as police, programming, capital improvements, land management and possibly other areas. Creating a go to person where anyone can go to a member of the board to express any thoughts or issues. Mr. Myers agreed stating that as the organization grows more board involvement would give the members a better understanding of the day to day operations of the Park District and assist in the decision making of the board. Mr. Parish added that this isn't something that needs to be decided today, members can think about it and think about what committees would be beneficial for the board and the Park District to form.

Mr. Munger announced that February 2022 he will be retiring from the Park District. Mr. Munger added that as the board considers various committees to be formed he felt it important that they are aware of the need for a search committee for a new director so they can be proactive in the coming year. Mr. Munger stated that he has been in communication with the Ohio Park and Recreation Association (OPRA) and they offer the service of assisting agencies with the task of searching for a new director. Mr. Munger stated that the price for that service is dependent on the role of OPRA but it is much less expensive than bringing in any other companies to assist. Mr. Munger added that OPRA has a unique perspective in that they deal strictly with parks and park agencies and can offer great experience in dealing with park professionals that would be a great asset to the search. Mr. Munger stated that he would be as involved or uninvolved in the search process as the board wishes.

4. **ADJOURNMENT**

Ms. Rose moved adjournment. Mr. Myers seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 5:17 p.m.


Sandra Wjechman, Chair


Neil Munger, Director

Wood County Park District, 18729 Mercer Road, Bowling Green, OH 43402