

BOARD OF PARK COMMISSIONERS
March 18, 2021

CALL TO ORDER

A meeting of the Cincinnati Board of Park Commissioners was held on this day remotely by video conference. Commissioners present: President Brad Lindner, Vice President Jim Goetz, Commissioner Susan Castellini, Commissioner Linda Lee Thomas, and Commissioner Molly North. President Lindner called the meeting to order at 9:02 A.M. Attendance was confirmed by roll call.

Acknowledgement of Public Comments

President Lindner announced there were no public comments submitted for this meeting.

Approval of Meeting Minutes: February 18, 2021; February 22, 2021 (Special); March 4, 2021 (Special)

Commissioner Castellini motioned to approve the meeting minutes from February 18th, February 22nd, and March 4th. Commissioner Thomas seconded. The motion passed by unanimous roll call vote.

Update from Cincinnati Police Department

Captain Dennis Swingley provided an update on recent police activity in French Park and Mt. Airy Forest. Captain Swingley explained on March 3rd, gunshots were reported in French Park and an individual reported witnessing someone carrying a rifle in the park. An extensive search was conducted and officers stopped patrons from entering the park. He explained it was determined to be a misperception; the individual was carrying a large stick and the noise was from nearby construction. He explained CPD has been patrolling the park daily in the weeks since the incident to ensure safety. Captain Swingley presented an update for Mt. Airy Forest, reporting Year-to-Date (YTD) calls for service as 104, mostly for small theft.

Commissioner Thomas asked how the YTD calls have increased from the previous year. Captain Swingley explained calls to the parks in general are increasing now that the weather is improving and COVID-19 vaccinations are increasing.

Commissioner Castellini asked for an update on Twin Lakes in Eden Park. Jenny Mobley provided an overview of communications with CPD Assistant Chief Lisa Davis to address noise complaints in the area. Ms. Mobley explained CPD plans to patrol the area in vehicles and possible need for police detail has been discussed. She indicated new speed bumps and increased seasonal staff will hopefully improve speeding and noise levels. There was discussion regarding CPD's awareness of complaints and noise in the area and Parks' preparedness for the Spring season.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

President Lindner announced the plan to move into Executive Session. He explained the public livestream would be discontinued for the session and would continue when the public meeting reconvenes for the purposes of continuing the regular meeting agenda.

President Lindner motioned to enter into Executive Session pursuant to ORC Section 121.22(G) to consider the employment and discipline of a public employee. Commissioner Castellini seconded. The motion passed by unanimous roll call vote.

The Board entered Executive Session at 9:15 A.M.

The Board entered back into public meeting at 9:55 A.M.

Vice President Goetz motioned to place Y. Laketa Cole on unpaid leave status and authorize Director Kish to initiate disciplinary action related to Ms. Cole. Commissioner Castellini seconded. The motion passed by unanimous roll call vote.

OLD BUSINESS

FY 2022 City Funds Recommended Budget

Director Kish thanked the Board for the budget feedback provided at the previous meeting. She pointed out major modifications made to the budget since the first reading. She explained the budget is reflective of City Funds only and is directly in line with the targets provided by the City. Ms. Kish presented the budget of \$20,919,946 and explained \$9,582,000 is from the General Fund 050. She explained the 8% reduction exercise has been modified to reflect a reduction in Position Vacancy Allowances.

Commissioner North acknowledged the All Positions Summary report provided and noted modifications could help formulate more of an understanding staffing opportunities. President Lindner agreed the summary was helpful and acknowledged there are opportunities for refinement.

Vice President Goetz commented on the elimination of 28 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) positions since FY19, and that there are only 3 PVAs to “cushion” the budget this fiscal year. This point and implications for future budget reductions was discussed.

Vice President Goetz motioned to accept the budget recommendation as presented. Commissioner North seconded. The motion passed by unanimous roll call vote.

NEW BUSINESS

Parks Foundation Grant: Smale Riverfront Park Design

Director Kish presented an opportunity to complete the design of Smale Riverfront Park. She noted the Cincinnati Parks Foundation has been raising funds since 2019 for the completion of the park. She presented the staff recommendation to approve application and acceptance of a Foundation grant for up to \$500k to procure design services to produce construction documents.

Commissioner Castellini asked if the request was specifically for Lot 23 and if it included Lot 28. Director Kish answered the completion of Smale Riverfront Park includes Lot 28 and the funding could potentially include design services for it.

Vice President Goetz commented on the great opportunity being offered by the Foundation to cover up front design costs for Lot 23 and Lot 28 if funds remain available and the Park Board is still supportive of completing Smale Riverfront Park.

Commissioner Thomas expressed her support and appreciation for the funding opportunity. She reiterated her understanding the grant would be for design work for Lot 23 and Lot 28, assuming there will be sufficient funds for both and further funding may be needed for Lot 28. President Lindner commented Director Kish should get more clarification, Lot 23 design work would be priority and remaining funds could be used toward Lot 28.

Vice President Goetz motioned for the Park Board to show its appreciation to the Cincinnati Parks Foundation for their continued work in fundraising for the completion of Smale, and that the Park Board request funding for up to \$500k for design work to prepare for the completion of the park when funds are available. Commissioner Castellini seconded. The motion passed by unanimous roll call vote.

Contracts over \$50k: Stump Grinding Contract

Crystal Courtney explained the three-year stump grinding contract needs to be renewed so tree stumps can be ground after removal to allow for new plantings. She presented the staff recommendation to approve the presented contract and expense of annual forestry funds from Fund 792 to cover the cost of right-of-way stump grinding, city-wide.

Commissioner Thomas asked if the 924 trees removed per year was high and if trees are replanted. Ms. Courtney answered the annual total is based on a 5-year average and trees are replanted.

Commissioner Castellini motioned to approve the staff recommendation. Commissioner Thomas seconded. The motion passed by unanimous roll call vote.

Burnet Woods Invasives Management Update

Crystal Courtney presented updates on the invasive species management project with Mad Scientist in Burnet Woods. She thanked new Conservation Technician, Drew Goebel for oversight of this contract and initiative. Ms. Courtney presented an overview of the program and insight into the invasives management plan over next four years. She described priority areas, invasive species removal work to date, timeline of work, and the budget.

Commissioner Castellini asked about mudslide concerns in hilly areas that have been cleared of invasives. Ms. Courtney explained since the areas are not very steep, slippage is not a concern and the area will be reseeded when the weather is warmer to prevent future movement. She expressed the importance of ongoing maintenance of these sites, continued replanting, and reseeded. Replanting and ongoing management of the newly cleared areas was discussed as well as treatment

of lesser celandine. Volunteer assistance from Preserve Burnet Woods (PBW) was discussed as well as future goals of training volunteers in land management.

Commissioner North asked how parks are prioritized for invasive species management and what the overall vision is for invasives management. Ms. Courtney explained prioritization is based on existing partnerships with volunteers because Parks does not have the staff to target invasives management system-wide. She explained land management plans have been created for areas with strong existing volunteer groups as a model for the rest of the Parks system.

Vice President Goetz commented on the transformation of Burnet Woods and commended PBW and staff on the creation of this partnership model.

The role of the Parks Foundation in invasives management was discussed. Ms. Courtney described the commitment of the Foundation to conservation, including a \$25k grant for invasive species management in Mt. Airy through a partnership with Groundwork Ohio River Valley. She also explained a partnership with the Foundation and PBW, will provide 250 volunteers to be trained, certified, and insured for pesticide invasive species management application.

President Lindner commended Ms. Courtney and staff on the thorough plan and management of invasive species removal. Commissioner Castellini also commended Ms. Courtney.

Volunteer recognition was discussed. Commissioner Thomas suggested recognizing volunteers at a future meeting for this work. President Lindner suggested continuing the bi-monthly volunteer recognition at Park Board meetings.

Urban Tree Canopy Analysis Update

Matt DiBona presented an update on the urban tree canopy analysis used for analytics in Urban Forestry and throughout the Parks system as well as an overview of tree inventory. He described the current status of the UTC analysis, explaining imagery is being reviewed but quantitative analysis is not yet available. Further, the deliverable from Applied Geographics should be available in the fall. Mr. DiBona explained the contract includes the entire county and is being maximized by funding from MSD.

Mr. DiBona showed comparisons between free online data and the accuracy and detail of the UTC data. He provided an overview of LiDAR technology. He presented the iTree analysis for Parks' tree inventory, which generates the benefits for trees within any setting.

Commissioner North commented on the impact of development to tree canopy and asked if the data can be used to determine the cost of development on the tree canopy so Parks can position itself for resources. Mr. DiBona described the ways Parks is analyzing tree canopy trends related to development and zoning. There was further discussion regarding measuring and recuperating value of trees impacted by development as well as considerations for species selection for replanting.

Commissioner Thomas expressed excitement for the public availability of the data and iTree dashboard. She asked if there was an incentive for developers to replace tree canopy. Mr. DiBona

answered there are deterrents. Ms. Courtney explained MSD is working on an impervious surface fee which could include tree canopy as mitigation for impervious surfaces. There was discussion regarding opportunities to include tree regulations in zoning codes and educating developers and City Council on the benefits of tree canopy, as well as the ability to update data moving forward.

Vice President Goetz commended staff on this work and asked for future updates so the Park Board can advocate on behalf of Parks staff. Commissioner North commented on the opportunity to also prohibit the planting of invasives such as bamboo in the city. President Lindner expressed support and the positive impact on quality of life this work accomplishes. Mr. DiBona commented on the ability for Parks to complete this in-house. There was further discussion regarding the need to protect and identify mature trees because they cannot be replanted at maximum value.

Director Kish commented positively on the Park Board's investment in this software and the passion and talent of the Natural Resources team.

Mt. Airy Forest Plan Community Engagement

Steve Schuckman presented an overview of the community engagement process staff have participated in with the Mt. Airy community. He explained Mt. Airy wanted to incorporate ideas and improvement recommendations for Mt. Airy Forest in their new neighborhood plan preparation, and a survey was developed and established a working group to represent park and community interests and stakeholders. He described representation on the community group, content and outcomes of two community engagement sessions, and survey results.

Director Kish expressed excitement for Parks' participation in this plan with the community and City Planning Department to explore how parks can be improved and commented on the Planning Department's future plans to create plans for other neighborhoods. Mr. Schuckman emphasized Parks is working with Planning to be at the table for development of the 10 neighborhood plans.

Commissioner Thomas commented on the mutual benefit of Parks and the community to engage in this process to focus community needs and utilize them to improve the parks through these neighborhood plans in partnership with the neighborhoods and Planning.

The Mt. Airy Forest survey was discussed. Mr. Schuckman commented 99% of respondents expressed interest in volunteering at Mt. Airy Forest. Commissioner Thomas commented the demographics of respondents was not representative of the park users and future plans should focus more on gathering diverse feedback. Mr. Schuckman agreed and suggested methods for achieving this. Vice President Goetz echoed the need to consider the source of the data and not focus solely on the survey feedback when determining recommendations for the park.

Commissioner North commented Parks should not wait for a new master plan to address long sought-after improvements, including trails. She suggested trails may be an opportunity for federal stimulus funding. Mr. Schuckman agreed trail improvements could happen sooner and emphasized the asset Mt. Airy to walkers and hikers.

Director Kish introduced Daniel Traicoff, Director of Mt. Airy Community Urban Redevelopment Enterprise (CURE). Mr. Traicoff provided background on the neighborhood plan in development, emphasizing many Mt. Airy residents do not regularly visit Mt. Airy Forest despite the prevalence of its footprint. He commented on safety perception of the park, neighborhood property value, and Parks staff's assistance in the planning process. He acknowledged the need to improve accuracy of survey demographics and commented on desired improvements including electricity and improving connection to Hawaii Terrace apartments. He thanked the Park Board and staff for their involvement.

The involvement of the Mt. Airy Forest Advisory Council was discussed. Vice President Goetz commented on the great resource community groups involved in this discussion provide. President Lindner thanked Mr. Traicoff.

Approval & Advice Requirements Discussion

Director Kish recommended tabling this discussion item, as it is not time sensitive. President Lindner tabled the item until the next regular Park Board meeting.

STAFF COMMENTS

Kelly Piller, Communications and Visual Designer, presented staff updates on Explore Nature! summer camps, flood response, and April events. Ms. Piller announced Explore Nature! summer camp registration went live on February 27th and nearly sold out within the first 48 hours. She expressed gratitude to the Parks Foundation for the Stevenson Sisters Scholarship, which provided free registration for 40 campers. She commented 55 spots remain for the camps for kids 3.5-14 years old which take place June 14th to August 6th at \$75-125 per camper. Director Kish explained this year's camps are designed to be COVID safe again and discussions are occurring for enhancing camps next year. Ms. Piller emphasized safety requirements are being met and overall, registrants did not show hesitancy regarding safety of camps. Commissioner Thomas asked if reduced capacity of summer camps would continue this year and Ms. Piller confirmed.

Regarding the recent flooding of the Ohio River, Ms. Piller expressed appreciation for the Riverfront and East District teams for their extensive preparation of the area and thorough cleaning response after the waters receded.

Ms. Piller announced April is the official start of the season and the majority of park restrooms start opening April 1st through 15th. She explained staff are planning volunteer events and tree plantings in conjunction with Earth Day on April 22nd Arbor Day on April 30th, including a partnered volunteer event with the Parks Foundation and LifeCenter to plant 40 trees in Mt. Echo to honor Parks' 40th year as a Tree City USA community. Ms. Piller described plans to honor volunteers for volunteer appreciation month in April and acknowledged the Park Board's interest in reestablishing volunteer recognition at Board meetings. She explained volunteer events can be found at Cincinnatiiparks.com.

COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

There was discussion regarding the possibility for Parks to benefit from federal stimulus funding received by the City through the American Rescue Plan Act. Director Kish asked for direction on communicating with the Mayor's Office to speak to the value of an investment in Parks as the City is deliberating on best utilization of funds. She asked for Board feedback on engaging with the Mayor's office regarding available funding projects to be considered, and demonstrating support for projects that have an impact on park property.

President Lindner was supportive of contributing ideas for utilization of stimulus funding and informing the Mayor's Office of potential projects. He suggested prioritizing capital needs and new transformational projects.

Commissioner Castellini asked if the City knows the amount it will be receiving. Commissioner North answered, \$291 million. Ms. North referenced the possibility a portion must be committed in the first 12 months after receipt. The implications for project timelines as a result of these guidelines were discussed. Director Kish expressed the guidance is still unclear but Parks has been asked to provide ideas for projects that are not necessarily shovel ready, implying there could be an extended timeline, but presuming expense of funds in a timely manner. She cited the Infrastructure Study which could be used as a tool to determine potential projects for investment.

Commissioner North provided feedback to Director Kish on a one-page draft document highlighting ideas for a \$30 million investment in Parks. She suggested proposing priorities within the \$20 million suggested for capital needs, as well as clarifying the difference between funding priorities and additional ideas, and stating projects rather than problems. Director Kish noted this feedback. The "Spark the Parks" vision was discussed.

Vice President Goetz commented on the best approach for communicating funding priorities to the Mayor's Office. He recommended collaboration through meeting instead of just a formal letter.

Commissioner Thomas provided feedback on the one-page draft document, suggesting simplification and presenting the priorities within broader areas of focus, such as "rehabilitation" and "enhancement."

Director Kish discussed methods of initiating the conversation with the Mayor's office. President Lindner suggested sending a letter stating general areas of focus and stating Parks' ability to utilize the Infrastructure Study to identify specific funding opportunities, and express interest in a collaborative meeting as a next step.

Commissioner Castellini asked if a portion of the federal funding would be committed to the City's deficit. Commissioner North explained her understanding is about a \$20 million portion would. She expressed investing stimulus dollars in parks would be valuable to the community, but funding will still be competitive.

Vice President Goetz emphasized the need to move quickly and submit a full proposal for stimulating the parks as opposed to a "piecemeal" approach. Director Kish suggested sending an

email correspondence to the Mayor's Office with high level priorities, with reference to the Infrastructure Study, and a request to meet. President Lindner and Commissioner Thomas expressed the strength of having data to support the requests. Ms. Thomas reiterated the need to communicate the value of investing in Parks and to collaborate in a meeting with the Mayor's Office, not just in writing. The community benefits of Parks receiving federal stimulus funding were discussed.

Vice President Goetz commented MEMI is interested in constructing a permanent stage on Lot 23 and requested drawings for those plans. Steve Schuckman confirmed he could provide those to the Board. Mr. Goetz explained a property in Mt. Adams adjacent to Tom Jones Commons is for sale and a group of citizens is interested in purchasing the space and donating to Parks. He explained staff have been in communication with the citizen group.

Mr. Goetz asked about the reopening plan for Krohn. Jenny Mobley explained Krohn will reopen with reservations for an extended Butterfly Show, May 8th through Labor Day. She explained staff are considering extended hours to maximize daily attendance while reducing capacity. Mr. Goetz asked the purpose of delaying the opening until May 8th and Ms. Mobley explained further preparation is needed for the Butterfly show installation and a Spring show is not currently installed in the exhibit space.

Commissioner Castellini commented on the positive and informative meeting. Director Kish expressed plans to continue to include informative staff presentations on the agenda.

Commissioner North suggested discussing the status of projects at an upcoming meeting, as well as having an overview of upcoming projects for consideration.

ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Castellini motioned to adjourn. The meeting adjourned at 12:40 P.M.

ATTEST:



PRESIDENT



DIRECTOR