

BOARD OF PARK COMMISSIONERS
October 12, 2021

CALL TO ORDER

A special meeting of the Cincinnati Board of Park Commissioners was held on this day at Cincinnati Park Board Administration Building. Commissioners present: President Jim Goetz, Vice President Linda Lee Thomas, Commissioner Brad Lindner, Commissioner Molly North and Commissioner Susan Castellini. President Goetz called the meeting to order at 11:00 A.M.

Introduction

President Goetz noted the purpose of the meeting was to have an open discussion about strategic planning. Director Kish explained the meeting resulted from the Commissioner's recommendation to focus on strategic planning, specifically a 3-year strategic plan. Cincinnati Parks Leadership Team and Park Board Commissioners introduced themselves and their backgrounds.

Desired Outcomes

President Goetz requested that all present state their desired outcome for the Strategic Planning Facilitated Discussion Meeting. Crystal Courtney, Division Manager of Natural Resources, stated that she would like to see an alignment of the mission, vision, and objects after a period of change in parks staff and to have all staff speaking from the same script. Commissioner Lindner agreed with Ms. Courtney on aligning park staff and stated he would like for Parks to accomplish its goals. President Goetz stated that he would like to see established plans, in writing, for short term and long-term goals, along project priorities. Vice President Thomas stated that she would like to have a set vision for Cincinnati Parks, a mission and strategy to achieve said vision, and a timeline in place to achieve said vision. Commissioner North stated that Cincinnati Parks needs to spend more time planning, parks needs to establish clear objectives about what the department is focusing on, and realistic expectations for what the Park Board wants to accomplish.

David Rippe, Strategic Planning Facilitator, stated that his goal for the meeting was to lay the groundwork for future dialogue, discuss what the Park Board's core values, competencies, and mission are for Cincinnati Parks and establishing a 1-year and 3-year framework to accomplish the mission. The role of the Park Board was discussed, specifically that it will be determined over time. Commissioner Castellini stated that she is not impressed with previous efforts to execute a strategic plan and that rather than having multiple strategic planning meetings the Park Board should focus on operations and efficiency in procurement and spending. She also stated that she is aware of the Board's purpose and unless that purpose is changing, there is no need to discuss it.

Director Kish stated that she is interested in establishing a 3-year plan with an internal dialogue between staff and the Board, focused on direct budget recommendations and operation recommendations, different from the 10-year master plan. Rocky Merz stated that he would like to take this opportunity to embrace the new organizational structure and take time to catch up to the changes that have been made over the past years and insure that information exchange is

upheld among parks staff. Commissioner North stated that with 200 plus employees in the Park system Cincinnati Parks needs 3 main focal points with a plan to implement, as well as accountability for maintaining the main focal points. Craig Sherman stated that setting expectations and finding the internal and external gaps between divisions in Parks is important. He noted outside entities tend to drive decisions that are made, and Parks needs to be more proactive rather than reactive with decisions.

Core Values

There was discussion regarding current Core Values of Cincinnati Parks and where they are listed for the public. It was expressed the Core Values have been established as Clean, Safe, Reliable, Green, Beautiful, and Enriching but are not widely known among staff and the public. Mr. Rippe suggested an exercise to determine Parks' Core Values. Discussion followed regarding Board participation in the exercise, and it was concluded that Parks leadership should engage in this and present to the Board at an upcoming meeting.

Commissioner North provided suggestions for Core Values, including inclusiveness/equity, conservation/stewardship, health/wellness, diversity, economic equality, accessibility, community vibrancy, family friendliness, innovation, and excellence. Director Kish stated that one of the priority Core Values for Parks staff and her leadership team is staff empowerment and staff accountability. Director Kish requested suggestions for Core Values from the Board. President Goetz discussed inward vs. outward facing Core Values and how the outward, public Core Values will be different from the inward. He also discussed the priority of Parks achieving its goals. Director Kish discussed the need for clear direction, from the Board, in setting 1-year and 3-year goals to produce annual budgets and annual goals. Commissioner Castellini added that the Infrastructure Study that was conducted should be used as part of the road map for setting and achieving goals in the 1-year and 3-year plans. Director Kish commented that the Board and Park staff need a collective shared language on the priorities of both parties. She also mentioned that she would like to embark on a new 10-year master plan, including priorities that the Cincinnati community desires from Parks, as well as a 3-year plan of Board priorities for staff.

Master Plan Discussion

President Goetz stated that the 2007 Master Plan has not been completed, he asked when planning ends and executing the Master Plan begins. Director Kish agreed that the 2007 Master Plan needs updates. Director Kish reiterated that a set Master Plan with deadlines and community input is important to the future of Cincinnati Parks. President Goetz agreed that the Master Plan needs to be updated and include new community input. Commissioner Castellini stated that the 2007 Master Plan should be reviewed and edited by Park staff and changed where needed rather than scrapping the original and starting from scratch. Commissioner North asked whether the current Master Plan reflected the current Board's vision. President Thomas stated that the Master Plan is important and needs to be worked on, but first Core Values need to be established. Mr. Rippe agreed that the Master Plan needs to be discussed, but at a future meeting. He also stated certain exercises, such as actualizing Core Values, would be more beneficial for Park staff to come up with then bring to the Board at a later date and that today's discussion should focus on building a 3-year plan for Cincinnati Parks from the end goal to present.

Director Kish recapped what values she believes the Board deems important, including trails, preservation and restoration of current assets, sustainability of the urban canopy, conservation of natural resources, volunteerism, operational efficiency, partnerships, and equity of land. Commissioner Castellini stated Parks need to be more proactive than reactive to incidents that occur in parks and that this needs to be addressed and worked on. Commissioner North expressed staff should use the Infrastructure Study should be used as a guide for current status and where Parks wants to be in the future. Vice President Thomas added Parks needs to have standards and consistency across every park that reflects which qualities Parks deems important. Commissioner North reiterated Parks needs to have a standard baseline classification and priorities for every park and adhere to that for every park. Director Kish responded that Parks have started to build land management committees to develop these standards. Ms. Courtney added that in the last two years Parks have been working standards and best practices for all park districts so the system is working together in a holistic approach.

3-year Plan Discussion

President Goetz stated he would like Parks to spend equitably across all neighborhoods. For neighborhoods and parks that do not get as much attention, Parks should work with community groups for private donations. President Goetz expressed desire to to enhance Parks' profile in Cincinnati with more public events, to understand Park' payroll expenditures, to focus on partnerships and collaborations to achieve goals of equity, and to see what the public needs today instead of being beholden to a 20-year-old Master Plan.

Commissioner Castellini stated that her goal would be to utilize existing funds, referencing the PNC account. She suggested hiring a procurement specialist for parks. There was general agreement to the benefits of this idea in helping to avoid the pitfalls of procurement and to have an expertise on the process. There was discussion about hiring a procurement position.

Commissioner North stated her goals for Parks are to set a minimum standard for all parks. She acknowledged that all parks will not be equal, but Parks should have a baseline standard and focus on how to achieve this standard. She expressed parks should have safe, reliable, updated playground equipment. Ms. North emphasized need to focus on the trails system updates and availability of online maps. She mentioned updates were needed on the Parks website. Director Kish informed the Board that trails, and the website are currently being updated.

Vice President Thomas expressed 3-year goals should be to define and categorize each park by features and have a plan for each park to address infrastructure. She expressed the website should include a feature search for parks. She mentioned there should be short-term and long-term plans and goals for each park.

Commissioner Linder stated his goal for the next 3 years is to keep removing invasive species. Director Kish agreed and conservation and land management were discussed. There was discussion regarding staff being trained and educated on what is needed, expected, and having all staff work together.

Mr. Sherman expressed the need to embrace new technology for efficiency and project management. He also referenced additional revenue opportunities. There was discussion regarding current revenue generation and future opportunities. Commissioner Castellini suggested utilizing City lobbyists to help raise money for conservation and park needs. President Goetz suggested having staff seek grants from the Federal government.

Vice President Thomas asked how Parks gauges the utilization of individual parks. Director Kish stated her intent and desire to have entrance or trail counters to have actual numbers of Park visitors. There was discussion regarding ability to track website visitors and the goal of having the website updated by late January. There was discussion about utilizing park visitor data to understand underutilized parks and needed improvements. The volunteer program was discussed as an example of using technology to track volunteer hours to see what the public is interested in volunteering for and what volunteer work needs to be recruited for. Vice President Thomas expressed the idea of having communities "Adopt a Park." Director Kish agreed with this sentiment and stated that Parks needs to reach out to groups and decide if the Board wants to hear the ideas and opinions of the neighborhoods where parks are being changed. President Goetz expressed he would like to see CPACs for all major parks and for Parks to acknowledge volunteerism and participation of CPACs to help improve neighborhood parks. Ms. Kish and Mr. Merz explained they are developing and growing CPACs and regular meetings. Vice President Thomas reiterated that a community council could still be helpful in creating CPACs for other parks and the public needs to be made aware of what is happening in their parks.

Recap

There was discussion regarding plans to create a written summary of the present meeting including next steps for staff and a timeline for next steps. Next steps were established, including establishing Board expectations for the Master Plan. It was explained that Commissioners will receive prework and outcomes will be established before the next meeting. Director Kish expressed desire to present the final document in January. It was announced the next strategy meeting will be held in November and staff will work on reviewing the Master Plan, defining internal core values, making recommendations to establish external values, define priorities and tasks that need to be completed in the next 3 years, and setting expectations and ownership of all projects and budgets to be presented to the Board.

ATTEST:


PRESIDENT


DIRECTOR