

To our park supporters,

I'd like to take this opportunity to share some personal thoughts on the difficult decisions that were made this past Friday that had an especially significant impact to several long-time staff members who served the community with the utmost professionalism. You are all supporters of us in various ways and it is important to me to share that the decisions made were based on a variety of long standing issues that were prevalent long before I ever imagined having the privilege of serving as your executive director.

One of the first things that I spent considerable time reviewing after I was fortunate enough to join Mill Creek MetroParks was the 2013 Strategic Master Plan. This strategic master plan had been completed over a year before my arrival and was the apparent result of a long, detailed, collaborative process whose product was intended to be the roadmap for the future of the organization. One notable statement within the plan reads;

“The culture inside the organization needs to focus on ‘first, what is right for MetroParks’ versus ‘what is right for the individuals and the departments they represent.’ The organizational culture must be more adaptable and willing to change to maximize efficiency and leverage resources. It will take a collective effort of everyone inside the organization and strong leadership.”

In my first 13 months as executive director for an organization that has seen multiple people in my position come and go, I have found no truer statement. The changes that were made on Friday and which will continue in various ways, aim to address the statement within the 2013 Strategic Master Plan. I would like to further explain the outlook and the approach that was taken on Friday.

Of those positions that were affected on Friday, six were full time positions and two were part time positions. Five of those individuals were offered another position that they were specifically qualified for and was available. They were also offered the opportunity at what we considered a generous severance package. These five staff members were given some time to consider these options and none have yet informed us of their choice. The other three staff members were offered what we considered to be generous severance packages due to the fact that there were set to be no positions at their skill level. Anyone that has ever been part of or affected by an internal reorganization understands that these are never easy processes nor are they an enjoyable component of organizational change. The options presented to our colleagues, reflect our acknowledgement of this difficult situation.

The MetroParks police presence on Friday at the meetings with affected staff members was not intended to be the perception that it ultimately portrayed. Police were asked to ensure that no uninvolved staff member or visitor inadvertently interrupt the meetings due to the delicate nature of the topic and out of respect for those involved. They were also asked to assist the affected staff members in any manner that those staff members needed, up to and including being a buffer to any inquiries or untimely questioning. I understand the unintended negative connotation that the involvement of MetroParks Police has had on

the perceptions of the day's events and apologize to those affected staff members if the very support that I sought on their behalf contributed to the uncomfortable nature and stress of the situation.

These changes, which involved personnel of fine character, were not personally motivated in any way, shape or form. They were the result of a difficult but necessary step towards fiscal sustainability. During the recent levy campaign I shared that in order for Mill Creek MetroParks to be a sustainable and viable organization over the long term that administration would have to become more organized, efficient and proactive. The passage of the levy was not a financial windfall that would permit the internal operations of the MetroParks to remain status quo. The levy allowed us to maintain current funds and also added new funds that meet just half of the vital capital improvement needs. There was always the other half to achieve in order to meet all expectations. This less costly levy option was selected because it offered a balance between providing adequate, long term sustainability potential while minimizing the financial impact to the residents. That potential is what we are hoping to capture as we move forward with keeping our promise.

As an over forty year lifelong member of the Mahoning Valley, an elected Township Trustee and an active park user, I am honored to be in this position of public service and am eager to bring some long term stability, vision and leadership to a position that has seen a decade of turnover. True leaders continue to learn and adapt through the opportunities of being involved in difficult situations and Friday was one such opportunity for me.

We have many more challenges ahead of us and it is my hope that we can continue to work with all of our supporters to ensure that we create a viable MetroParks for the next 125 years just as Volney Rogers did for all of us 125 years before.

Sincerely,

Aaron Young
Executive Director