

Minutes of the May 1, 2017 meeting of the Development Committee, a Mill Creek MetroParks Board Advisory Committee (held at 4 p.m. at the MetroParks Farm)

In attendance: Murray Davis, Andy Detesco, Paul Hagman, Richard Scarsella, Janet Yaniglos; and from MetroParks staff: Aaron Young and Chris Litton. Absent: Terrance Esarco and Robert Toman.

Chairman Murray Davis welcomed Chris Litton, recently appointed Development Director for Mill Creek MetroParks, who will serve as staff to the Committee. Chris explained his familiarity with the area, having served as Yo-Warren Regional Chamber of Commerce Foundation President 6 years ago.

Minutes of the Feb. 4, 2017 meeting were approved (Scarsella moved/Detesco seconded). The resignation of Angelo Martino was accepted (Scarsella/Detesco); Terrance Esarco is his replacement.

The Chairman introduced three motions, asking for discussion:

First motion: “The Mill Creek MetroParks Development Advisory Committee approves the merger of The Mill Creek MetroParks Foundation and the Friends of Fellows Riverside Gardens to form the Volney Rogers Conservancy.” Discussion: Paul Hagman, President of Friends, commented that the motion may be premature because of the steps still underway. He summarized the sequence of events to date, explaining how the Friends (established 29 years ago) and the Foundation (operating for more than 30 years) began informal discussions several years ago about the benefits of joining together as one organization, and viewed the conservancy model, in place across many parks around the country, as the ideal model. The structure of a Conservancy resembles the Friends organization, being non-profit, private and independent, membership-based and volunteer-driven. Also, a Conservancy is a hybrid of a foundation, with a strong volunteer component.

Paul stated that in July 2016, Deb Yandala, Chief Executive Officer of the Conservancy for Cuyahoga Valley National Park, was invited by the Foundation and Friends to speak about the Conservancy model and its success in Cuyahoga Valley. Both organizations’ boards attended this special meeting, and Park Commissioners and management were invited as guests. Deb Yandala discussed her Conservancy’s formation, structure and success. She noted the large increase in membership, financial capacity and the strong public support that has emerged since the Conservancy’s formation.

Paul passed out to Advisory Committee members an overview of the Volney Rogers Conservancy, which was shared with Friends members at its April 27 Annual Meeting. He pointed out major points in the overview: the definition of a conservancy; the rationale for such a merger between the Friends and Foundation; the commitment to protecting the funds previously restricted by both organizations, and to “do no harm” to either with a consolidation (Friends has over \$3.1 million in assets); and the transparent process as discussions have progressed, with commissioners involved in numerous sessions to gain their feedback.

Paul stated that the Friends members voted to endorse the Conservancy model at the Annual Meeting, understanding that more work needed to be done to achieve a successful consolidation---primarily the drawing up of a Memo of Understanding between the three parties.

Andy Detesco, Foundation President, provided the history of the Foundation's evolution from a 3-party distribution board to a re-designed larger foundation several years ago, which has subsequently been interrupted in its mission and efforts by numerous events---change in park management with Dennis Miller's resignation, departure of a development director, multiple events in the park that drew negative public response, and work for passage of the park levy. The cumulative effect of these numerous challenges to the Park was to erode the membership and impetus of the expanded Foundation, leading to the examination of collaborating with the Friends. The ensuing discussions over the past two years have included the Foundation Board voting to designate funds for pursuing creation of a Conservancy.

In answer to questions by Richard Scarsella, Andy also explained the current foundation board membership and the financial standing of the foundation (with \$1.8 million in restricted assets and \$260,000 in undesignated funds).

Aaron Young's opinion of the conservancy model was asked; he stated that consolidated and unified fundraising would help Mill Creek MetroParks.

After this update and discussion, it was agreed that any vote by the Advisory Committee on the Volney Rogers Conservancy should be postponed until a Memo of Understanding is forged.

Second motion: "The Mill Creek MetroParks Advisory Committee approves adding the word *etc* to end of mission statement." The Chairman explained this would enable the committee to explore a variety of ways to improve and aid the park. Janet Yaniglos commented that since the mission of the Advisory Committee was developed and voted on by the Park Commissioners, it was not appropriate for the committee itself to expand its purpose. The Chairman determined that the motion would not be voted on.

Third motion: "The Mill Creek MetroParks Advisory Committee supports Representative Bocchieri and his stand against new State of Ohio Provisions that limit free speech." When asked for input on this issue, Aaron Young explained it was not proper for MetroParks staff to comment on proposed legislation or political issues. The Chair decided to remove this motion from a committee vote.

Good and Welfare: The Chairman introduced Brandon Grope as guest speaker. Brandon's expertise is in aeration of ponds, and he described the technique of using double-diffuser disks and adding beneficial bacteria as an alternative to dredging ponds such as the Lily Pond. He explained that this aeration system would halt oxygen depletion and fish kill and improve water quality, and could be installed at the Lily Pond for approximately \$12,500. Aaron Young requested that estimates and project concepts be provided to him and his staff responsible for pond and water quality maintenance. The committee thanked Brandon for his informative presentation.

Before the meeting was adjourned, it was decided that the next meeting would be held Friday, September 22, at 4pm, with the key agenda item being an overview of the Development Director's role and of the development process at the MetroParks.