



Regular Meeting February 24, 2025

Call to Order: The Board met in person in Council chambers at Richfield Village Hall. The meeting was called to order at 6:34 p.m. by Anita Gantner, Board Chair.

Pledge of Allegiance

Roll Call

Present: Anita Gantner, Mike Lyons, Steve McPeake, Holly Price, Mark Robeson, Mike Selig, Dave Wehner

Also in Attendance: Park Director John Piepsny, Administrative Coordinator Polly Wheeler, and more than 60 other attendees, as well as about 20 attendees by Zoom

Regular Meeting

Minutes

Minutes of January 27 meeting were approved as submitted.

Standing Committee Reports

Governance Committee: At the committee meeting on February 18, the committee discussed the Contract & Bid Policy. A draft has been prepared for the board. The committee also discussed and reviewed agreements with affiliated entities. The next meeting is planned for April 3 at 6pm [later changed to March 19 at 6pm].

Grants & Fundraising Committee: The committee has not met since the January board meeting. A public trails meeting was held on February 23, and another is scheduled for March 10 from 5-6pm to discuss a proposed accessible trail.

Administration Report

Mr. Piepsny said that his report stands as submitted. He also mentioned that printed copies of the 2025 program guide are available in the office.

Ms. Price reminded the board and director that North House is not authorized as a project yet and that any plans must still be concepts. She also asked for more information about the direction given to volunteers regarding the gas, water and electric lines throughout the park.

Mr. Piepsny agreed that North House has not been authorized as a project. The administration has not authorized volunteers to work on water and gas lines throughout the park. One of the Friends is interested in tracking a lot of the water lines and getting water throughout the park. Mr. Piepsny said that gas meters were installed at North House, Coach House and Chagrin in order to get gas to Chagrin, since the cabin is a rentable facility now. Eventually, Coach House and North House will go online if possible. The line going to Coach House needs to be replaced by a licensed contractor when that time comes, which could be years.

Treasurer's Report

On January 31, the balance in the bank was \$533,000. There were \$9,000 in outstanding checks and adjustments. That leaves \$524,000 cash available on January 31, broken down to \$184,000 in the bond fund and \$340,000 in all other funds.

Cash inflows were \$8,000: donations were \$1,000, Lodge rental gathered \$5,000, and \$2,000 came from programs, cell tower rent, and miscellaneous other sources. Of the budgeted income for 2025, this represents 1% of the operating fund, 2% of the Lodge fund, and 0% of the bond fund. This is not much different than past Januaries.

Cash outflows were \$42,000. Payroll related expenses were \$7,000, professional expenses for the audit and legal services were \$2,000, technical support was \$5,000, repairs and maintenance were \$1,000, utilities came to \$5,000, software expenses were \$6,000, commissions were \$5,000, and the Village of Richfield contact was \$11,000.

Of budgeted expenses, 9% of the operating fund was spent, 11% of the Lodge fund, and 0% of the bond fund.

New Business

Mr. Selig explained Resolution 03-2025 and the grant process.

MOTION: Mr. Wehner moved to adopt Resolution 03-2025: A Resolution Authorizing the Submission of a Recreational Trails Program Grant Application; Mr. McPeake seconded.

No further discussion.

MOTION PASSED: Vote was taken by roll call: Ms. Gantner (yea); Mr. Lyons (yea); Mr. McPeake (yea); Ms. Price (yea); Mr. Robeson (yea); Mr. Selig (yea); Mr. Wehner (yea).

Ms. Gantner introduced Resolution 04-2025

MOTION: Mr. Lyons moved to amend Exhibit A of Resolution 04-2025: A Resolution to Modify the Contract Authority & Bid Policy, as noted above; Mr. Wehner seconded.

Mr. Lyons explained that Exhibit A needed a change in Section b, last sentence, to read, "The Park Director shall attempt to obtain at least two (2) written quotations."

MOTION PASSED: Vote was taken by roll call: Mr. Lyons (yea); Mr. McPeake (yea); Ms. Price (yea); Mr. Robeson (yea); Mr. Selig (yea); Mr. Wehner (yea); Ms. Gantner (yea).

MOTION: Mr. Lyons moved to adopt Resolution 04-2025: A Resolution to Modify the Contract Authority & Bid Policy, as amended; Mr. Wehner seconded, as amended.

No further discussion.

MOTION PASSED: Vote was taken by roll call: Mr. McPeake (yea); Ms. Price (yea); Mr. Robeson (yea); Mr. Selig (yea); Mr. Wehner (yea); Ms. Gantner (yea); Mr. Lyons (yea).

Mr. Piepsny reviewed the October quote for lake management from AQUA DOC, stating that the company said they would hold the price in that quote.

MOTION: Mr. McPeake moved to accept the quote from AQUA DOC and enter into the contract; Ms. Price seconded.

No further discussion.

MOTION PASSED: Vote was taken by voice vote; unanimously yea.

Old Business

Ms. Gantner announced that the Friends of RHP would give a report and participate in a question and answer period to provide information to the board.

Lynn Richardson began the report as Friends historian. She distributed and reviewed a document outlining projects on which the Friends have worked. Ms. Richardson described all the photos in the report and reviewed the financials for the current date in February.

Ms. Price asked that Ms. Richardson share the percent of the mill project that has been completed, as it relates to the submitted drawings. Ms. Richardson estimated that it is 60-75% for the structure, not including landscaping or the donor recognition piece, and said that the Friends would like to extend the project to include landscaping to reduce the mud issues. Ms. Price asked for the cost estimate for the remaining work. Ms. Richardson replied that the same carpentry group that did the mill balcony will replace the water box for \$27,500 and would like to do some of the painting while the scaffolding is in place. The cost for the suspension bridge replacement is not entirely known, since it may require more work than the original estimate. Gannett Fleming estimated \$56,000 for the bridge engineering. Ms. Richardson estimated that it will require \$125,000 to \$175,000 to finish the entire project.

Ms. Price asked how the mill will be used when it is complete. Ms. Richardson responded that it will be experienced from the outside, since the mill cannot be made universally accessible. It would be desirable to have educational materials available.

Ms. Gantner asked how much has been spent on the mill so far. Ms. Richardson said that \$266,414.64 has been spent so far.

Ms. Price thanked the Friends for the statement of funds they provided, but she would expect to see another bucket of restricted funds for the park as a whole. Ms. Richardson said that there is no separate fund for the Garfield Hall project; all of the funds for this have gone into the Friends' general fund. A separate park fund could be an option but would need further discussion.

Mr. Wehner said that the funds raised so far are an admirable number. He said that the donations need to be tracked in detail in order to grow. Corey Ringle, the Friends president, said that the group does have lines in their bookkeeping to track earmarked donations. Ms. Richardson reminded the board that the Friends were asked to handle fundraising for the park when the park was begun, and they developed a case statement for the major structures in the park, which was approved in 2018. Work was subsequently begun on Gund Hall, now The Lodge, but the board at that time did not want the Friends involved in that project. Ms. Richardson

said that the level of involvement by the Friends that has been granted permission by the board is part of why the Friends are project oriented.

Ms. Price said that she would like to hear more about the work done in the kitchen in Kirby House. Ms. Ringle reported that the water damage in Kirby House was assessed. The laminate in the kitchen was peeling, causing a hazard. The cabinets, which were non-original, had to be removed to get to the rolled laminate underneath. She also reviewed additional structural support work that was done on the advice of a structural engineer.

Ms. Ringle added that the Friends are eager to continue to collaborate with the board. Park visitors have been enthused about the repairs and improvements to structures. She added that two-way communication is needed, and sometimes it feels like communication doesn't come back from the board. The Friends want to pursue a project-oriented relationship.

Ms. Gantner asked for additional questions from the board, but none were forthcoming at this point.

Ms. Gantner said that the board will continue to discuss the relationship between board and the Friends. She described the board, its work for the park, and its approach to governing the park, with the goal of making the park the best it can be.

Reviewing the general format of an MOU, Ms. Gantner described the purpose of this type of document, including permissions, financials, and other areas.

Ms. Gantner said that there has been cooperation, and also a lack of it, during the original 10-year agreement. The board is in a very different place than it was 10 years ago. In addition, there is now a park director and several part-time staff. At this point, fundraising is one of the biggest needs. The Friends are not willing to fundraise for general park needs. Therefore, another 501(c)(3) is needed for this purpose and for general support. The board did not feel the need for an overarching agreement with the Friends for projects. Ms. Gantner asked for further comments from the board.

Mr. McPeake said that he is always an advocate of trying for grants. Because the operating money from the levy alone is not sufficient to operate the park, the board is always playing catchup, trying to gather more funds from other sources. The financial holes need to be plugged to make the park work better.

Mr. Selig thanked everyone in the room for their passion and dedication to the park. He said they won't always be on the same page, and communication does need to be improved, but that shouldn't stand in the way of being able to move forward as an organization. The park is maturing, so structure is needed to fill the gaps in communication.

Mr. Robeson said that there is tremendous support for the property. It is important to have an agreement that would formalize the relationship with the supporters, to engage and not ignore them.

Ms. Price stated that an agreement should be developed for work on the mill, for example. She remarked that problems arise when meanings are interpreted differently. She is upset about the demolition done in Kirby House that the board did not expect, so she wants to see very well-defined projects going forward, which will help to build trust.

Mr. Wehner concurred with most of the other trustees' comments, saying that the Friends' contributions have been tremendous but that the park's needs have changed. He stated that a very simplified MOU with the Friends is needed that really focuses on projects.

Mr. Robeson added that a formalized communication channel is needed as part of the agreement. This will help prevent different interpretations of a given situation.

Ms. Gantner said that the effort comes from a good place, but communication is a challenge and is the most important area to improve.

Mr. Lyons said that the Governance Committee looked at a variety of agreements from different organizations. The committee did not know about the plans for Kirby House before that meeting. The board needs to provide guidance about rules for work being done in the park. A well-defined set of guidelines is needed, along with the need to provide guidance and feedback to the director. He concluded that just as much can be accomplished with project agreements as with an MOU, since the MOU has not really been referred to for guidance in the relationship. A lot more work has yet to be done, and the Governance Committee will revisit this issue.

Ms. Gantner stated that the Friends will continue to work on the mill, and the funds they have raised for the mill are not being moved elsewhere. The board needs to come up with a new agreement for this, since the old one has expired, as has the MOU. Projects can continue, and the issue of an MOU will be considered.

Mr. Lyons said that there is some contention, but a step back from being accusatory needs to be taken. The board cannot discuss topics outside public meetings, which is a disadvantage when working through issues. He asked the Friends to consider that.

Ms. Gantner emphasized the importance of working within the park's management structure, saying that the current approach will need to change so that work goes through the volunteer coordinator and the park director.

Ms. Price reiterated that the board needs to make sure there are clear guidelines for any work and that an agreement is needed for the mill so work there can continue. She asked what the board's plan is to make this happen.

Mr. Lyons responded that further discussion about a mill agreement is necessary. More feedback from the Friends on their work plan for finishing what has already been approved would be helpful for this. The Governance Committee will assume responsibility for this, continuing with their meeting in early April.

Announcements

Mr. Piepsny announced that he is accepting sponsorship applications for the Goat Derby on May 3, as well as craft fair applications. He added that Youth Art Contest entries are also being accepted, with a deadline of March 21.

Ms. Gantner announced a presentation being held on March 5 by the National Park Service, covering the coexisting with beavers in an environment. Mr. Piepsny said that he talked to a beaver specialist regarding the beaver population in the park and ways of managing their activities.

Comments from the floor

Ms. Gantner opened the floor to questions, saying that the board will do their best to answer, instead of allowing only comments. She referred to a printed sheet of answers to last meeting's questions, which was passed out to the audience. She asked the audience to be respectful and to stick to a 3-minute time limit.

Kelly Clark (Broadview Rd) introduced herself as an original board member. She read prepared remarks regarding the Friends and their approach to working with the board, saying that this and other issues have been problems for 10 years. Ms. Clark defended her right as a former board member to make statements, saying that she has proof of incidents leading to a toxic environment.

Following Ms. Clark's lengthy comments, Ms. Gantner extended the time limit to 5 minutes.

Marty Kruszynski (Berkley Rd) suggested changing the Friends' name to Heritage Conservancy. He said that three members of the Friends should be appointed to communicate with the board. A different approach is needed to move forward.

Corey Ringle (Hawthorne Dr) complimented the productive comments made at this meeting. She said that the bulk of the Friends' projects come in at a fraction of the professional price of completing the projects. As a Richfield resident, she appreciates the volunteer efforts of the group and feels that ways to utilize their efforts and enthusiasm need to be found.

Paul Swan (Humphrey Rd) introduced himself as a lifelong Richfield resident and president of the Richfield Historical Society. He commented that the burden of proof is now on the board to come up with what they need that will work together with what the Friends are willing to offer. He also appreciated the board's willingness to answer questions at this meeting.

Gary LaGuardia (N Royalton) offered answers to board questions from earlier in the meeting, including financial questions brought up by Mr. Wehner. He said that separate buckets do not need to be maintained for every project, just for specific long-term project agreements. He also responded with additional comments regarding the work in Kirby House. Mr. LaGuardia said that more work needs to be done, but due to volunteers' regular job schedules, many work hours need to be in the evenings, so more time will need to be made available for volunteers to work.

Mr. Selig asked if the structural engineer's recommendation was conveyed to the director before the work was done in Kirby House. Mr. LaGuardia responded that it was not really conveyed because the project was a smaller repair. Mr. Selig reiterated that, while it was a smaller repair, it should still have been communicated to the park director. Mr. LaGuardia said that Mr. Lyons visited the site while work was under way and that he didn't seem to see anything out of line in what was done.

Bill Ridgeway (Broadview Hts) introduced himself as a construction professional who has been a volunteer for the board and for the Friends. He said that much of the work that is done on the park building is unforeseen, so having a direct contact is needed for when problems are discovered. He said that the Friends are working to provide the village and the township a great product in the end and commented that folks have a lot of different skills and enjoy sharing them with the park.

Meg Slifcak (Humphrey Rd) introduced herself as a former board member. When she was on the board, there was no possibility of staff, and the board was relying on the village for accounting and administrative support. The park needed money, so to raise funds it had to look like a real organization. The park partnered with

Cuyahoga Valley Career Center to remodel the park office and save the taxpayers money. Now the park is in the “norm & perform” stage of its life, so the conflict needs to end. MOU was essential in the beginning, but now project agreements will be important because they are clear. It’s time to move on and evolve into the “norm” stage. Ms. Slifcak thanked the volunteers and the board for everything they are doing.

Beth Sanderson (Middleburg Hts) is a member of the Friends’ advisory committee. She said that the Friends have events, meetings, hikes, and other programs they would like to provide, but these are not in the program guide. The group cannot fundraise or grow membership if they can’t have their meetings and events. She thanked Mr. Lyons for his comments and asked the board to have a discussion about these things. Ms. Gantner agreed that this is needed.

Ed Luther (Brush Rd) is a lifelong Richfield resident, currently raising his family in Richfield. He stated that Richfield Heritage Preserve is a gem in the middle of the community. He praised the Friends for their work and thanked both sides for their stated willingness to work together to build on their successes. He said actions speak louder than words, and he hopes to see continued progress and cooperation.

Corey Ringle (Hawthorne Dr) read a Friends report from May 2024 regarding work done in Kirby House, saying that the group is trying very hard to communicate with the board. If the current approach isn’t working, she asked the board to let them know what would.

Lynn Richardson (Bedford) thanked the board for allowing Friends to continue working on the mill. She asked permission to call the carpenter and Gannett Fleming the next day and said that they need a discussion regarding keys for access to buildings during site visits. Mr. Lyons said that this needs to be worked out, but that permission is not needed to get information from professionals. Ms. Price reminded Ms. Richardson that there is currently no agreement, so keys cannot be handed out at this time. Ms. Gantner said that a site visit can be worked out through the park director.

Annette Pederson (Forestbrooke Ct S) is a relatively new resident to Richfield but is a former Girl Scout counselor. She suggested that representatives from a new 501(c)(3) be invited to sit at the meeting and report on fundraising.

Karen Smik (Faith Lane) said that the Friends of RHP name was adopted to align with the new park name. The name was not stolen. The Friends contributed over \$20,000 to the park office renovation. There were good reasons for not helping with the liquor license or Amity House raffle, but she declined to bring those up. Ms. Smik asked why none of the Friends’ events, hikes, or meetings were approved or advertised in the program guide. Also, the Friends are not listed on the RHP website as an affiliate group, and she wanted to know why.

Ms. Gantner replied that all of these requests were made as the MOU was about to expire. The board does need to address what will be supported going forward. She said the board will get back to the Friends on these items.

Judy Zivick (Euclid) read prepared remarks supporting the Friends of RHP. She reminded everyone that the residents would not have the opportunity to experience the park if it were not for the Friends’ efforts, working with the Western Reserve Land Conservancy and getting the issue on the ballot. The Friends have their foundation in service, learned in the Girl Scouts. The board needs to take the value of their work and their initial advocacy seriously.

Sandy Namath (Westlake) said that she is impressed with the Friends' work and also with the RJRD board. She said that the park's fundraising base is not just within Richfield and money needs to be raised from outside the community. She agreed with an earlier comment that the Friends need an immediate contact person when work is happening.

Christine Naizer (Granger Township) said that the Friends is a broad group of people interested in supporting the park. She said that the Friends helped energize the community to vote for the creation of the park. Ms. Naizer stated that she had hoped to offer programming in scouting, but the scout structures have been razed. She listed some structures that have been removed and reviewed her email from 2022 regarding the potential for using Gemini, referencing the Brooklyn Exchange Cabin in the Cleveland Metroparks.

Candice Mencke (Dakota Rd) said that she thinks the board is doing a great job and also appreciates the work of the Friends. When she helped get the original park issue on the ballot, no mention was made of a camp; the property would be a park. She commended the board for their plan to have more oversight.

Gary LaGuardia (N Royalton) read a motivational quote.

Ms. Gantner thanked everyone for coming to the meeting.

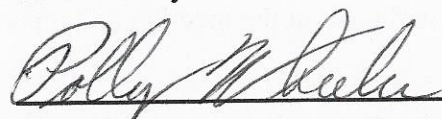
Adjournment

MOTION by: Mr. Lyons moved, seconded by Mr. Wehner, to adjourn the meeting.

MOTION PASSED: Vote taken by voice, which was unanimously yea.

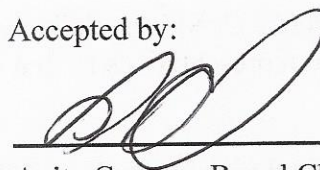
Meeting was adjourned at 8:49pm.

Submitted by:



Polly Wheeler, Administrative Coordinator

Accepted by:



Anita Gantner, Board Chair