



## Special Meeting with Work Session November 6, 2024

**Call to Order:** The Board met in person in the park office at Richfield Heritage Preserve. The meeting was called to order at 4:02 p.m. by Anita Gantner, Board Chair.

### 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 about 12 other attendees

### Work Session

Ms. Gantner introduced the discussion of future plans for Richfield Heritage Preserve and offered three questions for the board's consideration: 1) What have we done so far? 2) Where are we going? 3) How do we get there? The second question includes expanding revenue sources, trail enhancements, trail markers, accessible trail development, and Buckeye Trail expansion.

Ways to accomplish future goals include the following:

- A 501(c)(3) that is affiliated with the park and can apply for grants and permits and accept donations
- Partnerships with and assistance from Cuyahoga Valley Career Center (CVCC), local businesses, volunteers, and corporate volunteer workdays
- The Grants & Fundraising Committee working with a possible grant writer.
- Exploring the possibility of an endowment fund for annual giving and legacy planning

Mr. McPeake reminded the board that trail enhancements were important in the community survey and asked about progress on that. Mr. Piepsny replied that time and resources limit the progress.

Ms. Gantner asked about fence repair and whether that should be a focus. Mr. Piepsny said that [Maintenance Supervisor] Chris has been doing minor fence repair but that the fence has not been effective for the purpose of keeping deer out. Neighboring residents expect the fence to be kept up to Village of Richfield standards. Mr. Wehner suggested that the fence should be let go due to maintenance costs.

Ms. Gantner asked if energy should be put into taking the fence away. Mr. Piepsny responded that repairs were not made to the front gate this summer, and it was left open. No vandalism was reported. Further discussion followed about fencing and the approach to repair or removal.

Ms. Price asked for a big-picture discussion, especially of the state grant recently awarded.

Mr. Selig reviewed the \$150,000 funding from the State of Ohio capital allocations, which includes funds for rerouting the Buckeye Trail from the entrance driveway to the south side of the drive in the woods. Mr. Piepsny has discussed this with Pat Hayes of the Buckeye Trail Association. Mr. Selig said that the pedestrian bridge across the upper lake dam gets the NatureWorks grant as well, but the new

funding covers any overage on this project. The State Capital funding will allow entrance improvements and a portion of the driveway resurfacing all the way to The Lodge. The park must put \$10,000 of additional park funds into the improvements. The front entrance sign and Lodge area asphalt are already complete, but the \$10,000 needs to be in the budget for 2025. The possible demolition of the poolhouse could come out of state funding. The main entrance trail will be the Buckeye Trail.

Ms. Gantner mentioned revenue enhancement. Amity House is coming online in 2025. The electrical inspection will be done on Thursday morning. Does it make sense to put money and energy into renovating North House? Mr. Piepsny said that there would be strong [public] interest in North House as a rental, just like there is in Amity House, especially for wedding guests and national park visitors.

Ms. Price reminded the board that Amity is still new, as far as understanding how much it will be used. She said that North House is ancillary to the park mission, but that the bridge by the mill is closed and needs to be addressed. Mr. Piepsny replied that the Buckeye Trail Association applied for funds to build a pedestrian bridge there, and the Ohio Operating Engineers could remove the existing bridge. He met with Molly Eastwood from Summit Ohio Horsemen's Council about a stream crossing for horses downstream from the pedestrian bridge. We will know by the end of the year if the Buckeye Trail funds are approved.

Mr. Wehner said that he wants to see the real revenue from Amity House, versus the associated expenses, but that North House would be a good investment. Mr. Selig agreed that work on North House would be a good idea if it is volunteer work and does not affect the budget. Mr. Piepsny added that it makes sense to keep the historic homes. The expense to build any of them now would be a couple of million dollars.

Ms. Price asked if a caretaker is a good idea in the future. Ms. Gantner said that there are only five premium days remaining for Lodge rentals during May through October, 2025.

Mr. Robeson said that the board should follow a format of making goals and setting priorities. They should create a list of all projects and then discuss and prioritize, e.g. the improved trails that are important to residents. A plan for a couple of years should be created, which would be good for the public to know. Mr. Piepsny agreed that a 3-5 year plan is a good idea. The capital fund is down to \$77,000, and the park needs to build savings.

Ms. Gantner stated that the trails are the most important priority. Most Lodge rentals are not by [Richfield] residents, and taxpayers use the trails. Mr. Lyons pointed out that everyone who comes to the park, including those who rent, experience the park. Focusing only on revenue can be to the detriment of the park experience.

Mr. Piepsny mentioned Chagrin Valley Cabin has a daytime occupancy permit. The administration is exploring an overnight occupancy permit there. The Richfield fire department did not expect to get an occupancy permit for Gemini Cabin due to access issues. Gemini is currently being used as a storage facility.

Ms. Price asked what the current needs are in the park, e.g. storage, maintenance garage, etc. Mr. Piepsny replied that work is being done on the maintenance garage to fix the roof. Equipment is currently being stored in the poolhouse as well. Coach House could also potentially be reverted to a garage as in the Neal family days. The upstairs of Coach House could be a maintenance office or a studio apartment. The park office could become a ranger home. Kirby House could be the park office,

nature center, and gift shop. However, 96% of survey respondents said the trails were the most important. Ms. Price said that, one way or another, funds will be needed to adapt a maintenance/storage facility. Mr. Piepsny responded that funds are in the budget for upgrades and repairs and to do small projects.

Ms. Gantner asked if the board is balancing the park's needs well, inquiring where work is most needed and whether the work is being done there. Visitors are amazed at the park and Amity when first visiting. She asked the board again if they are doing what they should be doing.

Mr. Wehner and Mr. Robeson said that a written plan needs to be outlined for park projects or specific categories. Mr. Lyons stated that one can over-program: the park is itself a wonderful, relatively undisturbed place. The board could explore trail planning in more detail. They need to be more specific about the condition of different areas and what they want them to be.

Mr. Selig said that most of the trails are fairly undefined and unmarked. Mr. Piepsny responded that the administration is already working on trail markers and distances.

Mr. Piepsny said that he will provide a detailed plan to the board. He wants to work on a 3-5 year plan to set priorities and expenditures. Mr. Selig agreed [with this timeline], saying that this also relates to the grant cycle.

Ms. Gantner returned the discussion to the "How do we get there?" question, asking if the board is ready for an endowment fund or other legacy source. Mr. Wehner replied that this requires funds and donors. Mr. McPeake commented that the board does not have the infrastructure to start such a project. Mr. Lyons agreed, saying that he is skeptical of its success [at this point] and that it requires a lot of effort. Mr. Selig said that ongoing repairs are more important than endowment. Mr. Lyons agreed that too many resources would be required to put toward this effort.

Mr. Lyons commented again on a five-year plan. The park has constantly shifting priorities, depending on opportunities that come up. Sometimes a funding opportunity can be connected to a plan on a shelf. Ms. Gantner mentioned the North House plan and work offered by HTZ Design+Build and CVCC, asking if the board wants to proceed. Mr. Piepsny clarified that HTZ is providing a design; CVCC students will do the work with HTZ acting as the contractor. Ms. Gantner asked him to present the plan to the board once it is created.

Mr. Lyons asked if HTZ plans to apply for building permits, but Mr. Piepsny said that they are just doing a design at this point. Ms. Price asked if this is just a design concept, not a structural review, wondering if this is the best use of HTZ. Mr. Lyons said that having a design won't hurt, but it must be realistic. Ms. Price asked if Coach House is a higher priority. Mr. Piepsny responded that Coach House would require a complete revamping to create what it could become.

Mr. Lyons mentioned that the board hasn't talked much about some of the other structures, such as Hilltop Cabin. Mr. Piepsny asked if the board feels the park needs all the latrines or shelters and if all the shelters should have the same look. Mr. Robeson replied that the board still wants a plan. Mr. Lyons said that a plan is needed for structures, independent of the champion program. He asked if the shelters should be in more accessible areas and where that should be. Mr. Lyons stated that the program areas and functional areas of the park must be balanced with what people like about the park. He said that the board should evaluate the structures and not wait for champion applications, looking at how the structures relate to the mission of the park.

Ms. Gantner said that she will talk to Mr. Piepsny about priorities and the plan, to be ready for the January board meeting. She suggested that they will come up with a 3-5 year plan and sequence of goals for board consideration. Mr. Lyons stated that they need to consider staffing and expenses and create an outline for the structures, but not too detailed. Mr. McPeake mentioned that they need to look at the equipment, too. Mr. Piepsny said that he should receive an equipment report from CVCC soon.

Ms. Price said that the board needs to keep funding in mind and acknowledge that this is an important part of the plan. An overall plan is needed to address this. Mr. Lyons reminded the board that simply acquiring the property was a major part of the plan and said that communication needs to be enhanced.

**Comments from the Floor:**

**Sandy Norris** (Humphrey Rd) asked board to keep in mind that “boots on the ground” know a lot of things.

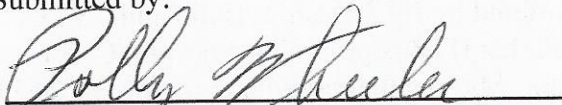
**Lynn Richardson** (Bedford) mentioned the champion program, reminding the board that the Friends of RHP submitted a champion application for Kirby House in April, and they want to have a conversation about that. She also wants to talk about the letter of intent (LOI) for the entire Kirby area. She said that there is lots of interest in repairing the mill bridge to allow emergency vehicles to get to the far side of the lower lake. The Friends of RHP want to help the RJRD board. They also want to restart the invasive species abatement program.

**Adjournment:**

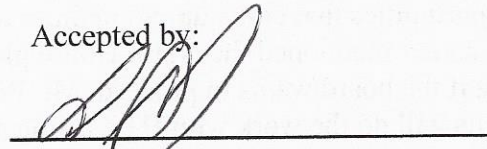
**MOTION by:** Mr. Lyons moved, seconded by Mr. Robeson, to adjourn the meeting.  
**MOTION PASSED:** Vote taken by voice, which was unanimously yea.

Meeting adjourned at 5:40 p.m.

Submitted by:

  
Polly Wheeler, Administrative Coordinator

Accepted by:

  
Anita Gantner, Board Chair