

Call to Order: The Board met in person in Council chambers at Richfield Village Hall, 4410 W Streetsboro Rd. The meeting was called to order at 6 p.m. by Anita Gantner, Board Chairperson.

Roll Call: Sandy Apidone, Anita Gantner, Jeff Deluca, Maureen McGinty, Mark Robeson, Michael Selig, and Dave Wehner

Also in Attendance: Park Director John Piepsny, Administrative Coordinator Polly Wheeler, Fiscal Officer Tim Clymer, Strategic Planning advisor Kelly Coffman, and approximately 25 attendees.

Work Session

Ms. Gantner offered opening remarks about the purpose of the meeting. She introduced Strategic Planning advisor Kelly Coffman and Fiscal Officer Tim Clymer.

Ms. Coffman reviewed the timeline and stated that she hopes the Strategic Plan will be adopted by the board at the November or December meeting. She reread the mission statement of the Richfield Joint Recreation District and listed what the presentation will cover. There will be four focus points: 1) Park amenities, 2) Sustainable operations, 3) Engaging the residents, 4) Resource stewardship and education.

Park map:

The latest version of the park map was presented, demonstrating a vision for what could be done, in addition to a matrix for possibilities and recommendations. Mr. Piepsny asked for an example of what is needed from the board on the priority categories. Ms. Coffman replied that this is more to look at what the board's priorities could be within this plan. Also, the plan and list do not have to be unchangeable; the board can review it each year and in committees.

Ms. Coffman presented the most recent iteration of the trails map with color and symbol coding. She advised naming the trails, and Mr. Piepsny suggested that a naming contest could be held within the community, with the board having final approval. A change was proposed to the bridle trail at the north end of the park to eliminate one stream crossing and help protect the upper lake. A discussion of terrain change in the area followed.

Financial review:

Ms. Coffman reminded the board that the operating levy is coming to a close soon. The current levy is for approximately \$186,000 annually. A more realistic approach is a \$300,000 operating levy. There is about \$700,000 [this figure should have been stated as \$500,000 due to dam expenses] remaining in the \$7,000,000 bond levy for capital improvements. Mr. Piepsny offered that full-time maintenance staff is needed at the park.

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Ms. McGinty reminded the board that match money is often required when applying for grants. Mr. Piepsny confirmed this and mentioned the main driveway that needs repaving. Ms. McGinty also mentioned that high quality amenities require funding.

Mr. Wehner mentioned the revenue from The Lodge but stated that it is an uneven source of funding. Mr. Piepsny said that the park has had a \$20,000-\$30,000 surplus at the end of each year. Mr. Piepsny also mentioned Bath Nature Preserve for comparison regarding staff, funding, and size of park.

Ms. Apidone asked about any increase in levy revenue as more homes are built in the communities. As fiscal officer, Mr. Clymer explained that the operating levy generates a fixed amount of money. Each residence will pay a little less as more homes are built and the tax burden is redistributed. The last collection year for the levy is the end of 2024, while the tax year is 2023.

Ms. Coffman mentioned other changing costs, e.g. road salt, fuel, utilities, repairs, inspections, EPA fees, etc. Mr. Wehner reminded the board that the numbers need to be kept in mind. Mr. Piepsny said there also could be unforeseen circumstances with associated costs.

Ms. Coffman asked how we can improve park experiences. What is the list of things that should be done?

Historic District:

Ms. Coffman stated that recognition of the historic district does not require every bit of every structure to be preserved. As an alternative, there would need to be interpretive recognition. The park would need to coordinate with the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) before doing any changes on contributing structures.

Mr. DeLuca asked if the SHPO offers state or federal grant money. Ms. Coffman replied that the SHPO has authority over a district when federal funding is involved, rather than giving out its own grants. Ms. Gantner asked for verification that not all structures need to remain in order to be compliant with the terms of the district designation.

Mr. Piepsny reminded the board of campaign managers or structure champions, but application does not guarantee approval, based on the park's mission. Ms. Coffman talked about the two-step process to determine the appropriateness of uses before submitting a complete proposal. She presented the application guidelines and stated that a successful application would lead to an MOU covering all relevant aspects of a proposal. Ms. Apidone asked if all buildings are open to this or just the top tier structures.

Ms. Coffman mentioned ADA laws that apply to all public facilities; they cannot be "grandfathered". Mr. Piepsny suggested Kirby House as an example. Any building open to the public has to be ADA compliant. Violations can be reported by anyone, which can lead to a lawsuit. Ms. McGinty said that all building permits go through Summit County. Ms. Coffman said that universal design benefits many people.

Mr. Wehner talked about liability and the fact that some buildings may need mitigation sooner than planned. Ms. McGinty asked who will determine a building's condition before agreeing to an MOU with a champion. Ms. Coffman stated that there is a release clause from the MOU if the inspection shows poorer condition than was known at the time of application.

Tiers:

Ms. Coffman gave an overview of the tiers that have been assigned to the structures in Richfield Heritage Preserve. Low tier structures are not accessible by vehicle or not easy to find. The majority are open shelters. There are RJRD board baseline commitments. Ms. Coffman also discussed the details of the additional tiers.

Board discussion:

The board discussed the expense of utilities and the reuse of materials, as well as other topics including the following:

Mr. Selig asked why the board could not allow ideas for the low tier structures, keeping safety in mind, suggesting that people may come up with things that the board may not have envisioned. Mr. Robeson agreed with Mr. Selig's observation, stating that he and his wife stop frequently in Robinson shelter to observe wildlife.

Ms. Apidone asked why the board should allow champions if there is no future use for a structure. Mr. Piepsny said that this is built into the MOU.

Ms. Gantner asked why the board should take down a structure that is stable. However, some people want to eliminate structures, while others want to keep them. Mr. Wehner mentioned liability again, as well as the possible cost of safety fences if structures become dangerous.

Mr. Robeson stated that the lowest tier buildings should be allowed to follow the "champion" process just like the rest of the structures. Doing that would mean allowing them to stay in place for at least 2023, during which time prospective champions could put forward their proposals just as with the other buildings. It is not costly to allow them to remain, nor is it unsafe or carry significant liability. Mr. Selig agreed, saying that they could remove those that are a safety risk, as Cricket's Corner was, but leave the others.

Mr. Piepsny said that the majority of the lower tier is in the Clean Ohio Grant area, and Clean Ohio will want to see improvements if we apply for future grants. Ms. McGinty stated that the board already made commitments in the original Clean Ohio application. Mr. Selig said he understood that, within the agreement, the board was able to maintain existing structures.

Ms. Apidone declared that no work has been done and that the board should not put off decisions any longer. Mr. DeLuca said that this was false and stated that multiple structures have been taken down during the past eight years. He also reminded the board that valuable wood and other items salvaged from the removed structures is saved for future use in the park.

Ms. Coffman described the process used in listing the structures on the various tiers.

Ms. Gantner stated that she wants to change the end of the plan to remove the reference to demolition and replace it with an intent to stop stabilization and use of funds on a structure at that point if no champion comes forward. Mr. Piepsny said that the park does not have the funds to tear down all the buildings and asked if the board would allow stabilization to continue. Ms. Gantner stated that this is not fair to donors, but she wants to give people more time to find champions. Mr. Selig agreed: he would like to allow champion opportunities beyond the deadlines.

Ms. Coffman thanked the board.

Comments from the floor:

Ms. Gantner spoke to attendees, stating that comments from the floor will be allowed but requesting that each speaker state his or her name and address and keep remarks to three minutes or less per speaker.

Ms. Karen Smik, of Faith Lane in Richfield, said that the ADA information may not be entirely correct in all respects. She asked for a copy of the mission statement of Richfield Heritage Preserve, saying that she has seen the statement for Richfield Joint Recreation District but that it would be different from the one for the park itself.

Mr. Hugh Groth, of Hawthorne Drive in Richfield, asked the board to publicize the availability of the champion opportunity, since champions will not be found unless people know about it. He stated that one year is a short time to allow for champions to come forward. Once a building is down, the board will not find a champion for it.

Mr. Paul Swan, of Humphrey Road in Richfield, reminded the board that they have said they have no money to spend on other things, so they should not spend money to tear buildings down. Wait until spring, bide your time, and determine which buildings actually need to come down.

Mr. Dustin Lee, of Seven Hills, stated that he is a filmmaker in the area. Richfield Heritage Preserve is a unique hidden gem in northeast Ohio. His crew filmed part of a recent series in the park, including Cook's Cabin and Cricket's Corner, and made a small donation afterward. In the film reviews online, he receives constant comments about the location used in filming, praising its beauty and asking where it is. Part of the Preserve's uniqueness is its structures. Just because there is not a use for them now does not mean there will be none in the future. If they are removed, the park will no longer be unique and will become just "hidden".

Ms. Cindy Moore, of Prestwyck Lane in Richfield, asked if the pavilions are only usable if they are rented. She also wondered if the champions will be just corporations with their names associated with the structures, similar to FirstEnergy Stadium, or if others will be considered. Ms. Gantner answered that the pavilions are usable by anyone if they are not reserved; if one is reserved ahead of time, then there is a fee. Corporations will not be the only champions considered; anyone can submit an application.

Ms. Judy Bowman, of Southern Road in Richfield, said that the pool is a high quality wetland and could be a wetland mitigation project eligible for grants. Mr. Piepsny replied that the pool is no longer holding water. Ms. Bowman asked if a potential champion could stabilize a structure for renovation in the future, since some will last for years. She also asked if the draft document of the presentation will be available to the public for review and comment.

Ms. Corey Ringle, of Shaker Heights, stated that the ADA requirements allow for some flexibility, especially of historic preservation structures, allow for accessibility to only a portion of the structure rather than the entire structure, with other ways of experiencing the remaining portions through video, displays, or other means. She is a registered architect.

Ms. Betty van der Meer, of Alger Road in Richfield, said that as a member of the Trash and Latrines Crew (TLC), she has seen a lot of trash in the cans by the shelters. This indicates more use of them for picnicking than the board realizes.

Mr. Rob Richardson, of Bedford, stated that having champions of shelters would not dilute the pool of potential champions for the buildings, since the cost of renovating a shelter is much lower than that of a building. He asked if the board would allow stabilization on any buildings to continue even if no champion comes forward. As treasurer of the Friends of Richfield Heritage Preserve, he said that the Friends have put a lot of money into stabilization of structures with the understanding that it is a risk, since these structures may not ultimately be saved, and they are likely to continue to do so.

Ms. Chris Naizer, of Medina, asked, when structures are removed, where the wood goes that is saved for repurposing in the future.

Ms. April Hawkins, of Cleveland, stated that the observation was made that 39 structures are a lot for any park. However, this is not like every other park. The mission statement mentions education as a goal. The classroom building, for example, would suit this goal because its purpose is to provide space for education.

Adjournment:

MOTION by: Mr. Wehner and seconded by Ms. Apidone to adjourn the meeting at 7:54 p.m.

MOTION PASSED: Vote taken by voice, which was unanimous

Submitted by:

Polly Wheeler, Administrative

Coordinator

Accepted by:

Anita Gantner, Board Chairperson

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