



## **Regular Meeting with Work Session December 19, 2022**

**Call to Order:** The Board met in person in The Lodge at Richfield Heritage Preserve. The meeting was called to order at 6:32 p.m. by Anita Gantner, Board Chairperson.

### **Pledge of Allegiance**

### **Roll Call**

Present: Sandy Apidone, Jeff DeLuca, Anita Gantner, Maureen McGinty, Mark Robeson, Mike Selig, Dave Wehner

**Also in Attendance:** Park Director John Piepsny, Township Trustee Don Laubacher, Village Council representatives Sue Ann Philippbar, Bobbie Beshara, Pat Norris, and Ralph Waszak, Administrative Coordinator Polly Wheeler, Volunteer Coordinator Susan Czaplicki, Lodge Event Consultant Shari Green, and approximately 15-20 other attendees.

## **Work Session**

### **Brochure/newsletter:**

Mr. Piepsny thanked Ms. Kathy Donchess for the work she has done in the past on the RHP newsletter. He stated that he would like to set a new tone representing the vision for the park. The newsletter is supposed to relay park news. There have been some complaints that there is too much information in the newsletter and that it is not read in its entirety. The new newsletter will be smaller, will be published monthly, and will touch on the highlights of happenings in RHP.

The brochure will be a new publication advertising park events. It will be mailed biannually to all of 44286 zip code. One version will list events for April 1 – Aug. 31, and the other will have Sept. 1 – March 31 events. Mr. Piepsny has asked the park partners for information on their events and programs. The first edition will be compiled during January-March for publication approximately April 1, 2023.

The board suggested that zip code 44141 be included since there are a number of township residents with that zip code.

### **Lodge website:**

Mr. Piepsny announced that the Lodge website was launched in early December. Shari Green and volunteer Amy Huey did a beautiful job on it. The RHP site will be redesigned to look similar, and Ms. Huey will help with this site as well.

### **RecDesk software:**

Mr. Piepsny stated that three software companies were interviewed: CivicRec, RecTrac, and RecDesk. RecDesk was the least expensive and is the number-one selling reservation software in the state of Ohio. Their charges are \$5,800 annually with no initial setup fee. It is user-friendly and includes unlimited customer service. RecDesk is also the system used by the Village of Richfield Parks & Rec department, so Mr. Piepsny has experience with it and would not have to learn two systems.

Mr. Wehner asked about ongoing charges. Mr. Robeson asked if the software aids in tracking of reservations. Ms. Gantner said that Ms. Wheeler does the tracking of reservations and payments manually now, and this software would make the process more manageable, taking that piece off Ms. Wheeler's responsibilities.

Mr. Piepsny mentioned that the park surveys done earlier in the year listed the need for additional programs, which is one of his strengths. The software will be needed for specific events and programs. Mr. Wehner asked about the desired timeline to acquire the software. Mr. Piepsny stated that he wants to send a copy of the RecDesk pamphlet to the board for their review so that a decision can be made in January.

### **Budget:**

Mr. Piepsny presented his proposed budget for initial discussion. It included a new paid position for the Volunteer Coordinator and also the need for program and daycamp staff required for running the anticipated programs.

For revenue, Mr. Piepsny mentioned that there is some equipment owned by the park that is unneeded and could be sold. One example is the brush hog tractor attachment that was purchased new but never used. Ms. McGinty asked how the fields are mowed now. Mr. DeLuca responded that the Ventrac mower is used and that the brush hog is a side-mower attachment that is more difficult to use.

Mr. Wehner pointed out that in the Capital Improvement fund, no figures were placed in the dam expenses for 2022. Mr. Piepsny stated that the latest version does have the figures and that what was distributed may have been an earlier version.

Mr. Piepsny reported that the golf carts need to be replaced due to the ongoing expensive repairs they are requiring. In addition, repaving is needed in front of The Lodge. Mr. DeLuca got a quote of about \$25,000 for this project before Covid; now it is likely to cost \$30,000 or more.

Mr. Wehner reiterated that the expenses need to list the 2022 dam costs. He also pointed out that in the salary line OPERS is listed at 10% but is now 14%, and insurance will increase when programming begins. Mr. Piepsny responded that most of the contractors who provide programming now are required to carry insurance.

### **Strategic Plan:**

Ms. Gantner noted that the appendices were received the day of the meeting and the day before, allowing little time to review. Mr. Selig suggested that the board hold off on adopting the plan to allow review of the new material. Ms. McGinty stated that the board has been working on the plan for quite some time and needs to move forward.

Mr. DeLuca said that it is a very good plan overall and that the board worked all year on it. He reiterated that some of the material was received recently but all of that can be worked in and tweaked as things go along. The board has been working hard to bring the two sides to the middle and work with every resident. Overall, the idea is here and should be adopted. The board also needs to allow prospective champions the time to go through the champion process.

Mr. Robeson stated that he agrees with Mr. DeLuca about the framework of the plan. There are some core parts missing, such as the document to set up an MOU with a champion.

Mr. Wehner agreed that the framework is sound.

Ms. Gantner agreed that the group has been working hard on this plan and has forged a good compromise. She read some of the new documentation, but there is too much new material to make a decision tonight. Mr. Hanna, the board's legal counsel, advised that the board should not vote on the plan tonight and must have more time to review and make changes. Ms. Gantner said that she wants this process to be finished, but it can't be yet. However, the board can vote on whether to vote on the plan or not.

**Comments from the floor:**

Paul Swan (resident) read a letter that he sent to the board, a copy of which is attached to these minutes.

Rick Hudak (resident) advised that the board should look into the rules governing an organizational meeting to see what business is allowed to take place.

Clare Paquellet (resident) stated that she read the 8-page strategic plan outline. She stated said that an 800-page document is not a strategic plan but rather an operational plan. She believes that it is not in the board's best interest to defer a decision.

Pat Norris (resident) said that it is more important to make the right decision than a fast decision, and that the board should listen to their legal counsel.

Judy Bowman (resident) said that the public had only three days to read the letter regarding the champion process. She also believes that the board needs to have a mission statement for Richfield Heritage Preserve that is separate from the statement for Richfield Joint Recreation District.

Corey Ringle (Friends group) stated that it will take two to three weeks to digest the information in the plan.

Kitty Butler (resident) asked that the board make sure everyone in the community knows that the champion process is available.

Bobbie Beshara (resident) stated that it is time to vote; this plan is a working document.

Chris Naizer (Friends group) echoed legal counsel's opinion that the board should take more time to look at the plan and said that this represents sound judgement. She would like to see a study proving that Cook's Cabin is causing a problem in its current location.

## Regular Meeting

**Approval of Minutes**

Minutes of November 28 regular meeting were considered. Vote was taken by voice to approve the minutes, which was unanimous.

**Standing Committee Reports****Governance Committee:**

No meeting or report

**Park Operations Committee:**

Mr. DeLuca reported the following:

- 1) He met with dam safety personnel. They are looking at the dam projects and reviewing with Gannett Fleming.
- 2) Holes in the perimeter fence are being repaired for security and deer prevention.

**Grants and Fundraising:**

Mr. Selig reported that the committee met on Friday, December 16. They discussed the Friends' donation acceptance policy and possible grants and fundraising for 2023.

**Marketing/Communications:** No meeting. However, Mr. Robeson reported that they had a discussion with volunteers and talked about social media content. Nicole Farley pulled data from the platforms and found that there are 3,150 followers on Facebook and fewer than 600 on Instagram.

Nicole is posting 17-28 posts per month. There are 14,000 to 40,000 page views on those, which is 1,400 to 2,000 per post on average.

The group also discussed the upcoming brochure and newsletter. There are currently 411 email addresses on the newsletter list.

**Administration Report:**

Park Director John Piepsny thanked Ms. McGinty for her time on the board and wished everyone Happy Holidays.

**Treasurer Report:**

Mr. Wehner reported the following numbers for December:

About \$514,000 in the bank, with \$7,000 in outstanding checks and \$160,000 restricted for the bond fund. This leaves \$347,000 in the operating/capital/Lodge cash funds.

About \$6,500 in cash receipts: \$1,200 from the cell tower, \$5,000 from The Lodge, \$300 from programs.

About \$35,000 in expenses.

Total funds:

\$25,000 positive in Operating plus Lodge fund

\$675,000 deficit in Capital fund due primarily to dam expenses

**Old Business:**

**MOTION by:** Mr. Wehner and seconded by Ms. McGinty to approve Resolution 27-2022 to adopt the Strategic Plan.

**FURTHER DISCUSSION:** None

**MOTION FAILED:** Vote taken by roll call: Mr. DeLuca (Nay), Ms. Gantner (Nay), Ms. McGinty (Yea), Mr. Robeson (Nay), Mr. Selig (Nay), Mr. Wehner (Yea), Ms. Apidone (Yea).

Mr. Wehner stated that he would like this passed by December 31 to allow Ms. McGinty to vote on it.

**New Business:**

Ms. Czaplicki has been in the volunteer position of Volunteer Coordinator. The board would like to offer her a paid position for this work. The terms were set forth in an offer letter from Mr. Piepsny.

**MOTION by:** Mr. DeLuca and seconded by Mr. Robeson to offer Ms. Czaplicki the paid Volunteer Coordinator position.

**FURTHER DISCUSSION:** None

**MOTION PASSED:** Vote taken by voice Yea, which was unanimous.

Resolution 28-2022 approving a budget for 2023 was introduced but it was stated that the board is not yet ready to pass the budget.

**Announcements:**

Ms. Gantner announced that the Snowbird Festival will take place on January 22 from 1pm-4pm as a combined Richfield Village/Township/RJRD event. Ms. Czaplicki gave the details on the event.

Mr. Michael Lyons was appointed to the vacant board position on December 15.

Ms. Gantner thanked Ms. McGinty for her service on the board. Ms. Gantner said that when she started on the board, Ms. McGinty gave her a lot of information and background. She said that Ms. McGinty has been tireless in her efforts to preserve the park as a natural area.

The organizational meeting will be held on January 5, 2023. The next regular board meeting will be on January 23.

**Questions / Comments from the Floor:**

Rick Hudak (resident) said that the board should check into the correct procedure to vote on Resolution 28-2022.

Corey Ringle (Friends group) asked if a meeting notice will be sent for the organizational meeting. She also asked if it will be possible to see the Strategic Plan.

Judy Bowman (resident) asked if a copy could be made to put in the Richfield library. Ms. Gantner responded that this would be too costly due to the size of the Plan.

Bobbie Beshara (resident) asked if the 800-page document is more operational than the 8-page document that was sent out. Ms. Gantner replied that there is much more detail and that the champion process is part of it.

Chris Naizer (Friends group) asked what type of social media process will be used to promote the champion program.

Karen Smik (resident) asked where the funds are coming from for the additional staff and why the Volunteer Coordinator position is necessary.

Kitty Butler (resident) asked if the pages of the Strategic Plan could be scanned and posted on the website.

Following Ms. Gantner's reminder that the board does not want to answer questions during the actual board meeting, Chris Naizer (Friends group) stated that there is no transparency if questions are asked after the meeting and are not asked of the entire board.

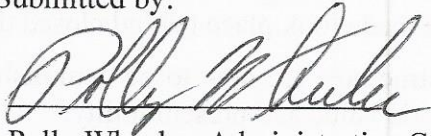
**Adjournment:**

**MOTION by:** Ms. McGinty, seconded by Ms. Apidone, to adjourn the meeting.

**MOTION PASSED:** Vote taken by voice, which was unanimous.

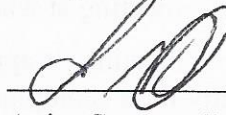
Meeting adjourned at 7:40 p.m.

Submitted by:



Polly Wheeler, Administrative Coordinator

Accepted by:



Anita Gantner, Board Chairperson

December 16, 2022

To the members of the RJRD Board:

The Richfield Historical Society appreciates that much work has been done this year to develop a strategic plan for Richfield Heritage Preserve. We have some concerns, however, about the process used to develop the plan as well as about the proposed plan itself. We are especially concerned because the operating levy for Richfield Heritage Preserve is due for renewal soon. If voters' wishes are not respected, the levy's chances of passing are not good.

**In the RJRD's spring 2022 survey, 55% of Richfield citizens said that it's important to them that the historic houses remain** (if non-tax dollars were available for restoration and maintenance – which, in fact, they ARE available through grants and partner groups.) Yet, the strategic planning process seemed to focus more on how many structures could be demolished rather than developing a vision of how the unique features of the park can best be preserved and utilized.

In that same survey, 75.6% of Richfield respondents listed “quality trails” as their top priority. The former camp shelters along the trails are a major benefit to hikers, support programming, and give visitors the historic perspective of the former camp---all for minimal cost. The following statement appears on the “About RJRD” page on your own website: “Identifying potential properties that would offer outdoor opportunities to foster educational, historical and recreational activities to protect the value and investments in our community.” Preserving and maintaining the shelters, which were integral to the Girl Scout's use of the property, is certainly historical and can decidedly add to the recreational enjoyment of the park. Yet RJRD has already demolished some shelters and is proposing the demolition of more. It costs taxpayer dollars to tear down and remove a shelter to a landfill.

The presentation made at the September 13 stakeholder meeting showed that the remaining historic structures had been evaluated and grouped into 3 categories: a top tier to be preserved, a middle tier with probable value, and a low tier with little value. The middle and low tier structures were eligible for a champion to adopt. There is no record showing how RJRD chose which buildings would go into what tier. This makes it appear that the meeting at which these decisions were made took place behind closed doors.

At the RJRD's December 5 meeting, it appeared that “low tier” structures are now to be demolished---without even the opportunity for a champion---in spite of their historic value and present utility.

The Richfield Historical Society has a deep interest in preserving and promoting our shared heritage. Therefore, we respectfully ask the following:

- Publicly share the RJRD's criteria for evaluating the historic structures and allow public input into the rankings OR
- Allow low tier structures to be eligible for “champions” to adopt
- Delay voting on the strategic plan until it is publicized for a final round of public comment.
- Place a moratorium on structure demolition until a mission and/or vision for RHP is defined, and potential champions have had a chance to submit usage and funding plans.
- Provide a mechanism by which the public's concerns and questions can be recorded and addressed.

Sincerely,

Paul Swan, President  
Richfield Historical Society