



Hancock Park District

HANCOCK PARK DISTRICT BOARD OF PARK COMMISSIONERS Public Meeting Notice and Agenda

Date: Tuesday, July 11, 2017
Location: Richard S. "Doc" Phillips Discovery Center at Oakwoods Nature Preserve
Time: 3:30 p.m.

Roll Call

Approval of Minutes

1. Approval of Board Meeting Minutes dated June 13, 2017

Financial Status

1. Review of Financial Statement dated June 30, 2017 by Hancock Park District business manager, Vicky Stozich

Old Business

New Business

1. Request to approve the 2017-2018 Hunting with Permission Game Management Program at Litzenberg Memorial Woods from November 1, 2017 to January 31, 2018.
2. Request to approve the Waterfalls Area Parking Lot Plan.

Discussion

1. Hancock Park District Report:
 - Director – Gary Pruitt
 - Park Operations Manager – Bill Patch
 - Naturalist – Michelle Rumschlag
 - Marketing Manager – Anne Coburn-Griffis

Public Input Adjournment

Notice of Executive Session and Agenda

Roll Call

New Business

1. To consider the compensation of a public employee per Ohio Revised Code 121.22 (G) (1)

Park Tour

The Board of Park Commissioners will visit Mt. Cory's Community Park and Rawson's Community Park immediately following the Executive Session. The tour is expected to occur from approximately 4:45 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.

Next Meeting: Tuesday, August 8, 2017 at 3:30 p.m.

HANCOCK PARK DISTRICT BOARD OF PARK COMMISSIONERS
Staff Report / Agenda Supplement
July 11, 2017

Request to approve the 2017-2018 Hunting with Permission Game Management Program at Litzenberg Memorial Woods from November 1, 2017 to January 31, 2018: The Hancock Park District has been conducting its Hunting with Permission Game Management Program since 1993. For several years, the program has been conducted from September 1 to January 31 presumably to coincide with Ohio's hunting seasons.

Reducing the Hunting with Permission Game Management Program from five months to three months is in an effort to leave the 117-acre south unit of Litzenberg Memorial Woods open in September and October for other uses, such as horseback riding, hiking, nature photography, birdwatching, educational programs, park maintenance, and land management. The rationale for this request is as follows:

1. The Hancock Park District's Strategic and Comprehensive Plan includes an action plan for revisiting and improving trails throughout the Hancock Park System. Work is now underway with the trail system at Riverbend Recreation Area. Litzenberg Memorial Woods is next. Work includes trail realignment, wayfinding (i.e. new trail posts and signs), mapping (i.e. new trail map), and promotion (e.g. new park brochure).

To date, the trails in the south unit have not been treated as trails, but that should change with the trail project. The south unit is a quality hiking location and it should be available for hiking during late summer and early autumn. As it is now, outdoor recreation (other than hunting) is not permitted in the south unit of Litzenberg Memorial Woods during the entire autumn season.

Results of the Hancock Park District's most recent public survey in 2013 showed hiking as a popular activity within the Hancock Park System (e.g. 41.9% of respondents participate in hiking while visiting the Hancock Park System, and hiking received the second highest response rate when asked which activity do you or members of your household participate in most often). The 2017 public survey associated with Ohio's Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan showed hiking on a natural surface trail as the number one trail activity.

The Hancock Park District's Hike It! program was developed in 2015 in response to a public survey result that showed Day Hiking Series as the number one most important activity in terms of participation. The Hike It! program had over 100 participants in its first year. This demonstrates the interest in hiking. Guided hikes are offered throughout the year by Program Department staff. The south unit of Litzenberg Memorial Woods would allow for additional structured and unstructured hiking opportunities.

Additional hiking opportunities in the south unit of Litzenberg Memorial Woods follows other park improvements aimed at enhancing hiking opportunities. The Meadowlark Trail at Oakwoods Nature Preserve was developed a few years ago. It provides a grass trail around a portion of the leased agricultural area, thus providing a new hiking experience compared to other trails, which are predominately woodland trails. The Upland Trail at Aeraland Recreation Area was developed in 2017. It provides a grass trail around a portion of the 13-acre field, thus providing more of a backcountry trail experience through the meadow. It offers a nice contrast to the Highline Trail.

Staff Report / Agenda Supplement, continued – page 2

The interest in hiking and the diversity of parks and natural resources within the Hancock Park System justify the maximization of hiking opportunities during all four seasons of the year. Enhancing hiking opportunities in the south unit of Litzenberg Memorial Woods would build upon past efforts to improve hiking opportunities and experiences.

It's worth noting that the south unit of Litzenberg Memorial Woods contains one of two bridle trails in the Hancock Park System. There should be more opportunity to access the trail for horseback riding given its location and quality. The 2.5-mile loop trail is predominately grass with appropriate width to accommodate horses and hikers. Compare that to the bridle trail at Riverbend Recreation Area, which is a 1.94-mile loop along a variety of trail surfaces with varying widths. Horses cross roads and asphalt trails, negotiate narrow trail sections, and share trails with walkers, runners, bicyclists, hikers, campers, and disc golfers.

2. The Hancock Park District's Photography Contest format changed in 2017. Photographers can now participate in the contest all year around. Photographs are limited to the Hancock Park System, the Blanchard River, and the Blanchard River Greenway Trail.

Photography Contest objectives include A) Encourage participation in photography, B) Promote visitation within the Hancock Park System, C) Obtain quality photographs that are relevant, and D) Provide a Photography Course for Beginners throughout the year that focuses primarily on lighting, composition, a variety of subject matter, and socialization with other photographers. The course would combine just the right amount of classroom work followed by an ample amount of fieldwork in the Hancock Park System.

Photographers would be well-served by having access to the south unit of Litzenberg Memorial Woods in late summer and early autumn.

3. The Strategic and Comprehensive Plan encourages the Hancock Park District's Program Department to maximize the use of all parks for educational programs and to expand on outdoor recreation programs (e.g. Leisure Education Initiative/Outdoor Recreation Skills Instructional Courses). Given the north unit's proximity to the south unit, the south unit's direct link to the Worden Family-Indian Green Conservation Area and the Heritage Trail, the presence of a 2.5-mile loop trail along with smaller loops and short spur trails, access to the Blanchard River, and natural diversity and scenic views on site, conducting a variety of outdoor recreation activities and educational programs in the south unit of Litzenberg Memorial Woods for the general public and school groups would be one way to further an action plan related to programming.

There are many foreseeable programming opportunities, but since the south unit of Litzenberg Memorial Woods hasn't been available in the past during late summer and early autumn, there are many unforeseeable opportunities that will become known in time, thus increasing the value of the site even more.

Staff Report / Agenda Supplement, continued – page 3

4. The Strategic and Comprehensive Plan encourages a better balance between natural resource protection and visitation when it comes to six designated conservation areas. With a different management mindset and without any land acquisition cost, up to 150 acres of land can become available for passive outdoor recreation activities, such as hiking, birdwatching, and nature photography. Opening the south unit of Litzenberg Memorial Woods in September and October for similar outdoor recreation uses is no different. It requires the same mindset (i.e. maximize public land for visitation and use).

Times have changed since 1993, resulting in a need to adjust the Hunting with Permission Game Management Program timeline. By doing so, the impact on hunting would be minimal since the majority of hunting seasons begin after November 1. Other outdoor recreation enthusiasts would benefit by using a park during late summer and early autumn that they haven't been able to use before. Moreover, the value of the Hancock Park District being able to perform park maintenance and land management for two additional months should not be underestimated.

It's worth noting that the Conservation Reserve Program (wetlands, warm season grasses, and hardwood trees) per the Farm Land Management Agreement will end on August 24, 2017. A Natural Resource Management Plan will most likely follow in an effort to guide future maintenance and management decisions. Having more access to the property will aid the process and support capital improvements, whereas not having access will hinder any attempt to maximize productivity.

Before a decision was made to propose a change to the Hunting with Permission Game Management Program timeline, an assessment had to be made in terms of impact. What would the impact to hunting be if the program was reduced by two months? That was the leading question, which was answered (in part) by reviewing seasons and dates in Ohio's Hunting & Trapping Regulations publication. By reducing the program from five months to three months, the impact on hunting is as follows:

- Deer Youth Gun permits (i.e. youth hunt) are used in late November – no impact.
Note: 5 Deer Youth Gun Permits were available in 2016-2017.
- Deer Gun Permits are used in late November – no impact.
Note: 5 Deer Gun Permits were available in 2016-2017.
- Deer Muzzleloader Permits are used in January – no impact.
Note: 5 Deer Muzzleloader Permits were available in 2016-2017.
- Deer Archery Permits are used in late September to January 31. Hunting opportunities would be reduced by five weeks. However, twelve weeks would be available for hunting.
Note: 10 Deer Archery Permits were available in 2016-2017.
- Small Game Permits (Cottontail Rabbit, Ring-necked Pheasant, Chukar, Bowwhite Quail, Fox, Raccoon, Skunk, Opossum, and Weasel) are used in early November – no impact.
- Small Game Permits (Squirrel and Mourning Dove, and Ruffed Grouse) are used in September and October to January 31. Hunting opportunities would be reduced from two to eight weeks. However, twelve weeks would be available for hunting.
Note: 10 Small Game Permits were available in 2016-2017.
- Small Game Permits (youth) are used in October. This opportunity would be eliminated.
- Trapping Permits are used in November and December – no impact.
Note: 4 Trapping Permits were available in 2016-2017.

Staff Report / Agenda Supplement, continued – page 4

Even though the impact on hunting is minimal, it's worth noting that the south unit of Litzenberg Memorial Woods is not the only public hunting area in Hancock County. Hunting can occur at the Findlay Reservoir (permit required), Van Buren State Park, Hancock County Landfill Wetland Pond (by permission only), and at seven Hancock County Wildlife Production Areas with a total of 338.44 acres managed by the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (Allen Township – 57 acres, Eagle Township – 46.4 acres, Madison Township – 40.7 acres, Portage Township – 50.99 acres, Blanchard Township – 41 acres, Liberty Township – 54.7 acres, and Orange Township – 47.65 acres).

The Hancock County Wildlife Production Areas are generally characterized as dense woodland habitat in varying stages of early succession. Some sites are densely populated with trees while others are open with low-level vegetation. A few sites contain a water source. The 54.7-acre site in Liberty Township appears to be the only site with predominately mature hardwood trees. It is located close to the Blanchard River on Township Road 89. The 40.7-acre site in Madison Township is the only site that resembles the south unit of Litzenberg Memorial Woods with its mix of dense woodland habitat and grassland.

Hancock County Wildlife Production Areas are as rural and primitive as they can be in Hancock County. They are not maintained. They have no trails or designated parking areas. Therefore, hunters are expected to park on the side of the road. The only rules that apply are those outlined in Ohio's Hunting & Trapping Regulations.

Hancock County Pheasants Forever conducted its 19th Annual William "Bing" Beall Memorial Youth Hunt on Saturday, October 22, 2016 at the Broken Bird Gun Club on Township Road 186. Hancock County Pheasants Forever and the Hancock Park District each offer a youth hunt, one in October and one in November.

Program records appear to be scarce, but have probably improved over time. For example, the following information outlines participation in the Hunting with Permission Game Management Program since 2011:

In 2011-2012, there were 93 persons registered for the program with 69 permits issued.
 In 2012-2013, the program was not offered due to storm damage in the park.
 In 2013-2014, there were 76 persons registered for the program with 69 permits issued.
 In 2014-2015, there were 58 persons registered for the program with 59 permits issued.
 In 2015-2016, there were 47 persons registered for the program with 49 permits issued.
 In 2016-2017, there were 56 persons registered for the program with 39 permits issued (October 1 start).

Source: Hancock Park District Natural Resource Division

Other records indicate which and how many animals were taken and how often permit holders actually hunted and how many permits were issued each year (e.g. 4 deer were taken in 2014-2015 compared to 3 deer in 2015-2016, 26% of available days to hunt were used by hunters in 2015-2016, 46% of permits were not used in 2014-2015

compared to 18% in 2015-2016, and 28 hunters were issued from one to three permits in 2016-2017). The Hancock Park District will continue to monitor hunter participation (and the result of that participation) like it does with all other programs for the purpose of ongoing evaluation and reporting.

Agenda Supplement / Staff Report, continued – page 5

In preparation for the 2017-2018 Hunting with Permission Game Management Program, the following changes were made or at least contemplated:

Eliminate Daily Permits

In the past, a hunter who did not receive a permit during the lottery could get a daily permit at the office. There are two things wrong with that. First, if the number of permits drawn via the lottery are based on acreage or other criteria in consultation with the Department of Natural Resource Division of Wildlife, then the lottery should be the only avenue by which permits are issued.

In 2016, the following question was asked: *“How do you and Eric consider daily permits when choosing the number of lottery permits? Reply: “Daily permits have been so few and far between the past few years, we have left them at the same rate and not given them much consideration in the Lottery numbers. If the daily permits are used more often, then it would have a greater impact on lottery permits and reconsideration may have to be given in future drawings.”* An average of 22 daily permits were issued annually over the last six years.

Second, if hunters are expected to attend a lottery, then the maximum number of permits should be issued at that time and at one place – all according to the same rules. It’s more efficient. It’s more convenient.

Revise Rules and Guidelines

The previous Information Sheet has been rewritten with several changes made throughout.

It used to say, *“If you win a spot, you are required to use the permit a minimum of once during your selected category or ‘sit out’ the following year from the Lottery.”* Some hunters may have liked it, and it may have been effective at forcing some hunters to engage. However, in the future the record should simply reflect the degree to which permit holders actually hunted and what the results were rather than who didn’t use a permit and who has to “sit out” the following year. No duress.

Hancock Park District staff shouldn’t spend time tracking hunters who choose to not hunt after receiving a permit, and then spend time tracking hunters who are ineligible to hunt during the following year.

Revise Hunting Signs

The current and long-standing signs need improvement. They inform hikers that trails are closed, but allow hikers to use the Heritage Trail. The signs say nothing about horseback riding and the message is not serious enough in its effort to restrict access to all except hunters during the posted hunting season. Hancock Park District staff has reported in the past that park visitors have ignored the signs and accessed the trails during the posted hunting season.

The new sign proposal is aimed at greater clarity, a stronger warning, and a penalty for noncompliance supported by the Hancock Park District’s Park Regulations and the Ohio Revised Code. If nothing else, it puts the Hancock Park District in a stronger position from a risk management/liability standpoint should something go bad, since more appropriate signage related to a public hunting program would be on display.

Staff Report / Agenda Supplement, continued – page 6

Revise Hunting Area Boundaries Map

The map heading has already changed. It needed to be more descriptive. The actual map did not change, but it should change either as a standalone project or as part of the new park brochure once the new trail system has been realigned followed by the installation of new standard trail signs.

Managers serving on the Hancock Park District’s Management Team are involved with a wide range of Hancock Park District issues and topics. The Management Team met to discuss the idea of keeping the south unit of Litzenberg Memorial Woods open in September and October for a variety of outdoor recreation activities, thus

limiting the Hunting with Permission Game Management Program to three months. Opinions varied. Therefore, the group didn't arrive at a consensus.

There were two differing viewpoints in general:

First, eliminating the opportunity for hunters with a Deer Archery Permit to hunt for five weeks in September and October was a concern, even though twelve weeks remain available and there are other available hunting locations in Hancock County. It was believed that hunters with a Deer Archery Permit may participate more in late September and October with more sunlight at the end of a day, whereas less sunlight in the evening starting in early November may hinder participation. Moreover, the prospect of sharing the Wildlife Production Areas with hunters from outside of Hancock County may also deter participation, thus limiting the use of other public hunting areas in Hancock County.

Second, leaving the park open longer for a variety of other uses in an effort to (in part) serve more people and their outdoor recreation interests was preferred over continuing to close the park for five months. As it is, the park is closed for two months in September and October in an effort to provide exclusive use to 10 to 20 hunters who may or may not hunt. A better balance is desired: September and October (i.e. late summer and early autumn) for a variety of other activities and uses, and November, December, and January (i.e. three months) for hunting. This position constitutes the majority viewpoint (see Rules and Guidelines, Hunting Signs, Hunting Area Boundaries, and Wildlife Production Area Maps).

It's worth noting that the title to the south unit of Litzenberg Memorial Woods (112 acres) will transfer to the Hancock Park District in 2020 per the Last Will and Testament of Otto Mcc Litzenberg. At the time of transfer, the land will have remained in trust for 32 years. Also, there has been speculation about when and why the Hunting with Permission Game Management Program began in the first place.

Actually, the Hancock Park District requested it in writing dated November 7, 1991: *"We request that the Lodge consider two things for next year. First, we ask cooperation with the Park District to allow us and ODNR, Division of Wildlife to manage a 'Hunting With Permission Program' on the entire Litzenberg property south of SR224."* As a result, the Farm Land Management Agreement dated October 8, 1993, which will expire on August 24, 2017 included the following language: *"The agent shall, under its present lottery program, authorize hunting on the TRUSTEE's lands south of US 224 . . ."*

The portion of the program title "Game Management" in Hunting with Permission Game Management Program may be a misnomer, since the program may be as much or more about sport as it is about managing game.

Agenda Supplement / Staff Report, continued – page 7

Request to approve the Waterfalls Area Parking Lot Plan: The River Parks Action Plan in the Strategic and Comprehensive Plan regarding Waterfalls Area says (in part): Seal coat and stripe the parking area, create a one-way in/one-way out traffic pattern with approximately six designated parking spaces, add a Stop sign and Do Not Enter sign on channel posts at the west end of the parking area (i.e. exit), add a Enter Only sign on a channel post at the east end of the parking area (i.e. entrance), create one accessible parking space that is also van accessible with an adjacent unloading/loading zone at the west end of the parking area, and provide new concrete parking blocks.

The concern going into this project was whether or not there was enough space to allow for designated parking spaces and a traffic lane that complied with local traffic code. After all, maybe that was why the parking lot had never been striped. The engineering assessment determined that there is enough space.

Waterfalls Area, which is owned by the City of Findlay, but managed by the Hancock Park District has existed in its current state (i.e. no designated parking spaces) since 1976. No designated parking spaces means no compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). No designated parking spaces also means that parking occurs in a haphazard fashion with cars parked in literally all directions with entering and exiting at two locations – all within a small parking area.

Since the Hancock Park District is a strong advocate for providing accessible park locations as illustrated by an ADA Agency Self-Assessment completed in 2013, followed by a strong emphasis on ADA accessibility in the Strategic and Comprehensive Plan, followed by recent River Park improvements that led to accessible parking lots

and site amenities, it is necessary to provide the proper ADA accessible parking space, which requires striping and signage.

It's inappropriate for the Hancock Park District to condone a parking free-for-all at one of its high-profile River Parks located along the Blanchard River and Blanchard River Greenway Trail. A higher standard should be achieved.

With Board approval, seal coating and striping and other related improvements at Waterfalls Area will be included in the Hancock Park District's 2018 budget (see Waterfalls Area Parking Lot Plan).

HANCOCK PARK DISTRICT BOARD OF PARK COMMISSIONERS
Meeting Minutes for July 11, 2017

The July 11, 2017 meeting of the Hancock Park District Board of Park Commissioners was held at the Richard S. "Doc" Phillips Discovery Center at Oakwoods Nature Preserve.

Park Commissioners Present: Gary Hirschfeld, Scott Younger, Ed Ingold
HPD Staff Present: Gary Pruitt, Vicky Stozich, Michelle Rumschlag, Bill Patch, Anne Coburn-Griffis, Bob Sams
Guests Present: Jim Maurer

The meeting was called to order by Gary Hirschfeld at 3:30 p.m.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A motion was made by Scott Younger with a second by Ed Ingold to approve the June 13, 2017 meeting minutes. Motion carried by a unanimous vote.

FINANCIAL STATUS

Income and expense reports year to date June 30, 2017 were reviewed by HPD business manager, Vicky Stozich.

OLD BUSINESS

NEW BUSINESS

Request to approve the 2017-2018 Hunting with Permission Game Management Program at Litzenberg Memorial Woods from November 1, 2017 to January 31, 2018: A motion was made by Scott Younger with a second by Ed Ingold to approve the request as presented. Motion carried by a unanimous vote.

A suggestion was made by Park Commissioner, Ed Ingold to work toward the elimination of the Hunting with Permission Game Management Program, while retaining a youth hunt with a focus on safety and partnerships.

Request to approve the Waterfalls Area Parking Lot Plan: A motion was made by Scott Younger with a second by Gary Hirschfeld to approve the request as presented. Motion carried by a unanimous vote.

A suggestion was made by Park Commissioner, Gary Hirschfeld that the 9-foot wide parking spaces should be wider.

**Hancock Park District Board of Park Commissioners
Meeting Minutes – July 11, 2017 – Page 2 of 3**

DISCUSSION

Hancock Park District Report:

Gary Pruitt attended the Hancock Pathways meeting. The committee continued to review trail plans and generate and discuss ideas about promoting, prioritizing, funding, and raising awareness about trails. The concrete pad and walkway for the gazebo at Riverbend Recreation Area is finished. Fill and restoration work will follow to improve drainage/ponding issues due to the elevation of the concrete. Once the restoration work is finished, the gazebo will be purchased. Gazebo construction is expected to take one day.

Bob Sams was hired as Natural Resource Manager. Other positions remain open. Park entrance signs have been installed at River Landings and Liberty Landing. Other signs will be installed as time allows. Columbia Gas is inspecting its pipeline at three locations in Riverbend Recreation Area. Due to the threat of flooding, equipment has been removed from the floor of the boathouse.

Summer Camps are in progress. Participation looks good, especially for the one-day Adventure Camps in August.

The grant application for invasive plant removal in the Hancock Park System has been submitted. The Visitor Guide has been designed and sent to the printer. The website is so close. Concerts have been well-received. The first Sunday concert is on July 16.

PUBLIC INPUT

Park Commissioner, Ed Ingold was informed by a kayaker that while she liked the new boat launch facilities at Liberty Landing and Blanchard Landing, the design makes it difficult to get in and out of her kayak. When asked, she suggested an alternative design at White Star Park in Gibsonburg.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 4:04 p.m.

Executive Session Minutes

The meeting was called to order by Gary Hirschfeld at 4:06 p.m. A motion was made by Scott Younger with a second by Ed Ingold to enter into executive session to consider the compensation of a public employee per Ohio Revised Code 121.22 (G) (1). Motion carried by a unanimous vote.

The Board discussed the idea of raising base pay for all positions and increasing actual pay for all employees in response to new base pay beginning in 2018. No action was taken.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 4:22 p.m.

**Hancock Park District Board of Park Commissioners
Meeting Minutes – July 11, 2017 – Page 3 of 3**

Meeting Minutes approved:

Scott C. Younger, Vice Chairperson

Gary E. Pruitt, Director/Secretary

Date

Date