

## Mission

Warren County Park District enhances our community's well-being by preserving quality natural spaces where all are invited to discover and experience the great outdoors

## Vision

Warren County Park District aspires to be a leader in natural resource conservation, outdoor recreation, and nature education by building partnerships and working toward a connected network of green space and trails that enhance our community's quality of life.

## Goal Topics





# Strategic Plan Final Draft Goals and Objectives

December 19, 2024

## Conservation

Become a recognized leader in the conservation and stewardship of Warren County's natural and scenic resources

### Objectives & Recommendations

- Identify priority areas for conservation and/or restoration and acquire land from willing sellers
  - Prioritize acquisition, preservation, and restoration of regionally significant natural areas, with an emphasis on scenic features and environmentally sensitive areas, including rivers and streams, wetlands, and habitats for threatened or endangered species
  - Develop a land acquisition policy that reflects the Park District's strategic goals and role as a County-wide regional park, green space, and trail provider
  - Prioritize land acquisition in developing areas and in geographic areas not currently being served by the Park District
  - Consult regional green space plans such as those published by the Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana Regional Council of Governments and Green Umbrella to inform green space protection priorities
  - Identify opportunities to preserve the County's rural character, including working with partners on regenerative agriculture demonstration projects where appropriate
  - Take advantage of grant programs such as the Clean Ohio Fund to advance the Park District's preservation and restoration objectives
- Enhance the ecological and wildlife habitat value of Park District lands while maintaining an appropriate balance of recreational opportunities
  - Maintain at least 75 percent of Park District lands in an undeveloped state on average across the Park District, and meet or exceed that standard in new parks
  - Develop and implement natural resource management plans for each Park District property in conjunction with park master planning efforts
  - Manage invasive plants, focusing on highly visible areas, ecologically sensitive areas, and areas where safety can be improved through invasive species removal
  - In areas not being used for active recreation, convert turfgrass lawn areas to natural habitats through native meadow/prairie establishment and/or reforestation
  - Hire, train, and equip a team of natural resource professionals and seek training opportunities for existing staff to develop the Park District's natural resource skill set
- Once a skilled team of natural resource professionals is established, proceed to train, equip, and engage volunteers to support natural resource management activities.
- Preserve and restore headwater streams and wetlands to improve the region's water quality
  - Seek grant funding, such as the H2Ohio program, and/or partnerships with in-lieu fee stream and wetland mitigation programs, the Soil and Water Conservation District, and other interested organizations
- Regularly convene and facilitate representatives of park providers, land trusts, and related organizations serving Warren County to coordinate regional conservation, preservation and restoration efforts



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## Recreation

Provide a variety of opportunities for relaxation and recreation in the great outdoors

### Objectives & Recommendations

- Provide a variety of outdoor recreation experiences across the park system, while retaining and refining the unique identity, character, and purpose of each park within that system
  - Evaluate existing programs and services in accordance with the Park District Mission and Vision, relevant industry trends, market research, and community needs
  - Develop master plans for future recreational amenities in each park that appropriately balance recreation access with natural resource protection
  - Take a regional approach to providing recreation opportunities by coordinating and combining the efforts of multiple park providers, with each partner focusing on their own unique strengths, avoiding duplication and filling gaps in services
- Improve access to outdoor recreation experiences for all users by providing improved comfort facilities, signage, wayfinding, parking, and trail access
  - Prioritize low-cost, high-impact improvements such as signage and wayfinding
  - Seek grants and donations to partially defray costs for larger capital investments
- Enhance access to outdoor recreation experiences for guests of all ages and ability levels
  - Prepare and implement an Americans with Disabilities Act self-assessment and transition plan, balancing the need for accessibility with opportunities for physically challenging activities so that all ability levels are served
  - Design all new facilities and amenities with accessibility in mind, and dedicate a portion of each year's capital maintenance/replacement spending to accessibility improvements
  - Balance the need for accessibility with the need to provide challenging outdoor adventure experiences, so that all ability levels are served
- Maintain and enhance public safety in the Park District so that residents and visitors can comfortably access outdoor recreation opportunities
  - Conduct a review of park rules and regulations with the goal of creating a set of clear, consistent, and enforceable park rules
  - Improve public safety patrol and enforcement through enhanced partnerships with law enforcement agencies and/or a dedicated park ranger force
  - Implement Crime Prevention through Environmental Design principles in the parks
  - Leverage invasive species removal efforts to improve safety and visibility in the parks
  - Program and activate targeted park areas to drive out undesirable activity
  - Improve wayfinding to assist emergency response efforts
  - Seek opportunities to consolidate and improve the visibility of park regulatory signage



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## Education

Increase understanding and appreciation of the county's parks and natural resources

### Objectives & Recommendations

- Expand nature education opportunities and spread those offerings to parks not currently being served
  - Prioritize the program types most desired by residents as expressed in survey results, emphasizing opportunities that are the most achievable based on current and anticipated resources/staffing levels
  - Rotate nature education opportunities to different sites around the Park District
  - Utilize volunteer effort, including Ohio Certified Volunteer Naturalists, as well as partnerships with like-minded organizations and businesses to act as a force multiplier for program delivery
- Work toward year-round programming by partnering with libraries and other organizations to increase nature education opportunities at indoor locations during the winter months
- Expand education opportunities to residents in areas where the Park District lacks a physical location
  - Develop and expand partnerships with other park providers serving Warren County to provide nature-based programming in their parks
- Develop outdoor adventure programs to introduce people to nature-based recreation activities
  - Emphasize programs that equip people with the knowledge they need to safely and confidently pursue outdoor activities
  - Consider partnerships with local organizations (such as activity-based clubs) and businesses (such as outdoor recreation equipment providers)
- Raise awareness of program offerings in Warren County by cross-marketing opportunities provided by community partners that are aligned with the Park District's mission.
- Explore nature education opportunities outside of the traditional scheduled program framework, which could include interpretive signage along trails or the use of digital apps
- Regularly convene and facilitate representatives of park providers and related organizations serving Warren County to coordinate and fill gaps in nature education programming efforts



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## Connectivity

Develop a connected network of green space and non-motorized trails, including land-based trails, water trails, and habitat corridors

### Objectives & Recommendations

- Provide access to public green space, land-based trails, water trails, or WCPD program offerings within a ten-minute drive of every Warren County resident
  - Inventory existing trail and green space assets, identify opportunities to make connections, and prioritize those opportunities
  - Consider a range of trail types (including paved, natural surface, and water trails) and experiences suitable for a diverse range of ability levels
  - Prioritize trails that connect communities, parks, schools, and other similar assets
  - Use the Park District's countywide reach to facilitate regional trail connections between jurisdictions
  - Trail planning should emphasize the importance of the Little Miami and Great Miami River corridors as the spine of the regional trail network, and seek to create connections between them
  - Emphasize the connection between recreation and active transportation, making use of transportation funding sources where appropriate to develop trail connections
- Connect to larger regional networks, facilitating tourism through multi-day trail excursion experiences
- Increase utilization of existing trails through improved mapping, signage, wayfinding, and marketing
- Collaborate with partners to quantify and publicize the economic impact of trails
- Collaborate with partners to market the County's trail offerings to local and regional audiences
- Collaborate with state, local, and nonprofit partners and neighboring jurisdictions on a regional approach to trail planning, funding, maintenance, and management





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## Community

Bring people and organizations together to build community and achieve common goals

### Objectives & Recommendations

- Leverage the county-wide reach of the Park District to facilitate collaboration and partnership between jurisdictions and organizations, fostering a regional approach to parks, trails, and programming
- Market the parks as welcoming spaces where people can gather, interact, and build community by providing a shared environment for activities, social events, and casual encounters
- Design programs, partnerships, and events that engage new audiences and park user groups while promoting inclusion and combating social isolation
- Build partnerships with organizations that deliver programming on natural resources, public health, and arts and culture. Collaborate to cross-market those programs that align with the Park District's mission.
- Emphasize the parks as spaces that enhance physical and mental health for people of all ages, and promote mission-aligned activities that support improved health outcomes
  - Market the parks as a location for fitness and wellness-based group meetings and activities and develop partnerships with those groups
- Pursue increased volunteerism as a community-building activity that can deliver multiple benefits for parks, trails, and green space
- Increase awareness and relevancy of the Park District and the value it brings to the community
  - Develop and implement a branding and marketing strategy, including a consistent graphic style for signage, printed materials, and digital communications
    - Marketing/branding strategy should reflect the values expressed by the community through surveys and outreach
  - Clearly demonstrate and communicate the Park District's offerings and benefits to County residents and visitors
  - Build the perception of parks as an essential community service, similar to transportation, public safety, utilities
  - Conduct ongoing market research to refine goals, improve services, and evaluate outcomes



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## Operations

Build an exceptional organization to ensure positive park experiences for all guests

### Objectives & Recommendations

- Deliver a consistently high standard of park maintenance and appearance
  - Develop and implement maintenance standards across all parks to clearly define maintenance expectations
  - Identify staffing and equipment needs to keep pace with park improvements and expansion
- Ensure that park facilities remain functional and relevant in a changing world
  - Conduct facility evaluations of each site to determine needs and opportunities
  - Quantify and document deferred maintenance needs, life cycle costs, and liabilities due to aging infrastructure
  - Consider changing or removing park features or properties that do not align with the mission and goals of the Park District or where the value provided to park users is not sufficient to justify the effort required to maintain those features
- Drive efficiency and sustainability
  - Reduce maintenance effort and emissions from equipment
    - Implement no-mow zones and other practices that support conservation goals while reducing maintenance effort
  - Reduce time, cost, and emissions related to loading, unloading, and transporting equipment and personnel
  - Examine team member reporting and equipment storage locations to achieve a more even distribution across the Park District
    - Consider alternative service delivery methods such as contracting with private businesses for some maintenance functions
    - Seek and take advantage of opportunities to drive energy efficiency
  - Promote “Leave No Trace” principles in the parks and encourage patrons to take their trash home with them, in conjunction with pilot projects to remove trash receptacles in targeted park areas.
  - Leverage volunteer efforts as a force multiplier for park maintenance and improvement
- Make Warren County Park District a great place to work
  - Ensure that team members are equipped with the tools and resources they need to do their work effectively and efficiently



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## Operations

**Build an exceptional organization to ensure positive park experiences for all guests**

- Identify staffing and equipment needs to keep pace with park improvements and expansion
- Ensure that policies and procedures are clear and well understood. Conduct a policy and procedure review using CAPRA as a model
- Conduct ongoing monitoring of compensation trends to ensure that salaries are competitive for comparable positions in the area
- Promote a positive, friendly, and supportive workplace culture
  - Implement a formalized system of employee recognition to express appreciation for outstanding work
  - Find opportunities for joint projects that pull in staff from different teams to increase team cohesion across the organization and break down silos
  - Explore opportunities to improve employee benefits in a cost-conscious manner
- Expand career development opportunities for team members
  - Connect team members with training, education, and networking opportunities
  - Identify career paths and growth opportunities within the Park District and steer key team members toward those opportunities
  - Incorporate professional development goals into performance reviews
- Foster a culture of safety in the workplace
  - Develop formalized training procedures for safe operation and routine maintenance of equipment
  - Convene a safety committee and meet on a regular basis to advance safety initiatives
- Develop a diverse and sustainable funding strategy that demonstrates fiscal responsibility
  - Partner with communities, organizations and businesses to support local initiatives, benefit the regional economy, and generate revenue
  - Increase supplemental funding through grants and donations, including through collaboration with non-profits, government partners, and community foundations
  - Expand opportunities for corporate engagement, partnerships, and sponsorships
  - Grow non-tax revenue by charging appropriate fees for specialized activities and enhanced services
  - Recognizing the role of parks as an essential community service, seek enhanced taxpayer funding as part of a diverse funding mix, to ensure a high level of service to the community