



## Medina County Park District



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# Strategic Plan 2017-2026

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# Medina County Park District Strategic Plan 2017-2026

## A Celebration 50 Years in the Making

On April 19, 1965, Medina County citizens successfully petitioned Probate Court Judge W.W. Garver for the creation of Medina County Park District under Chapter 1545 of the Ohio Revised Code. The park district's boundaries include all of Medina County – except Hinckley Township, which is part of the Cleveland Metroparks system.

Half a century later, this far-reaching vision to preserve open space, protect important natural resources, and provide recreational opportunities has made Medina County a greener, richer place to live.

In 1972, the park district opened its first park -- Green Leaf Park in Sharon Township -- on 30 acres of donated land that included a reclaimed gravel pit. With support from the Letha House Foundation, a second park -- named in honor of the Medina County philanthropist -- opened in Chatham Township in 1976.

The park district met its early operating expenses through a combination of funding from the Medina County Commissioners, the State of Ohio Local Government Fund, and grants. The non-profit Friends of Medina County Parks and its precursor organizations held fundraisers, poured volunteer labor into projects, and helped manage day-to-day operations before professional staff could be hired.

While these resources provided for the initial operation of the parks, little funding was available for the acquisition of land or the construction of facilities. Several attempts to gain voter approval of a county-wide property tax to fund the park system were unsuccessful.

In 1978, the park district board of commissioners contracted with Leisure Concepts and Designs for the development of a comprehensive plan. Titled "Ready for the Year 2000: An Open Space Imperative," it called for the creation of a network of parks throughout Medina County with an emphasis on preserving open space in the rapidly developing community. The plan included passive parks (primarily offering nature trails and picnicking opportunities) and nature preserves (protecting wildlife habitats and critical watersheds). The strategy also called for the creation of an active park – Buckeye Woods, opened in 1989 – offering youth sports fields for baseball and soccer.

In 1989, Medina County voters approved a 0.5-mill, 10-year levy for the operation and improvement of the park system. Citizens have continued their support of Medina County Park District by approving a replacement levy in 1998, as well as a replacement and 0.25-mill increase in 2006.

Generous gifts from private landowners have enabled the park district to grow and thrive. Benefactors have included Ruth Oenslager, Stan and Esther Allard, Ted and Willette Chandler, Theda Schleman, Richard and Beverly Mugrage, and others.

Since its humble beginnings, Medina County Park District encompasses more than 6,300 acres today – including 17 open parks and preserves, as well as 12 additional sites set aside for future development.



Greenleaf Park opened in 1972.



Stan and Esther Allard

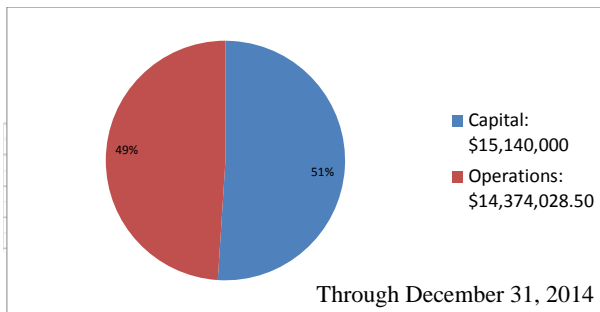


Ruth Oenslager

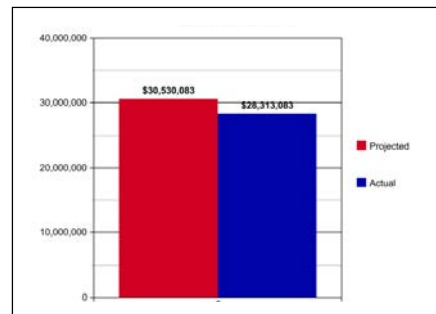
# The Park District Today: 2007-2016

In 2006, when the board of park commissioners directed the staff to create an operational plan for the park district for the current ten-year levy period, no one could have foreseen the impact of the Great Recession that took hold of America's economy beginning in 2008. It led to a significant decline in Medina County property values, which resulted in a \$1 million loss in projected income from the park district's current ¾-mill levy through 2014. Cuts by the State of Ohio to the Local Government Fund during the same period led to the loss of another \$1 million in park district income through 2014.

## **Current Levy Funding Distribution: Capital vs. Operations**



## **Projected vs. Actual Income**



Already fiscally conservative, the park district responded to this \$2 million net loss of funds by reducing expenses. Planned staff additions to serve the needs of the growing park system were scaled back. Development of some future sites -- including Black River Park and Black River Nature Preserve -- were placed on hold. Yet, the current levy period has seen a remarkable number of new facilities opened to park visitors -- thanks, in part, to grants received by Medina County Park District. Many major objectives of the existing strategic plan were realized. In other instances, the timely availability of grant funding moved new projects to the top of the list.

During the current cycle, Medina County Park District successfully competed for more than \$3.5 million from the Clean Ohio Fund to assist in land acquisition. By combining these state grant dollars with local resources, the park district will achieve the goal of preserving at least 1,900 acres as set forth in the 2007-2016 strategic plan.

## **Major accomplishments during the current levy period include:**

Opening of Carolyn Ludwig Mugrage Park – A gift from landowners Richard and Beverly Mugrage, Medina County's newest park opened in 2013. It offers an expansive dog park, as well as an inclusive playground designed for children of all abilities and funded by community donations -- including a major gift from Friends of Medina County Parks. Located in a rapidly developing area on the State Route 18 corridor in Granger Township, C.L. Mugrage Park also features a multi-purpose trail, fishing pond, sledding hill and picnic shelter.

Susan Hambley Nature Center – Nestled in the woods adjacent to the 13.2-acre Brunswick Lake is Susan Hambley Nature Center. Opened in 2008, the center was made possible with a grant from the State of Ohio and is named in memory of the late Brunswick Councilwoman Susan Hambley. Medina County Park District assumed operational responsibilities for the nature center in 2010, with plans to assume additional management of Brunswick Lake Park, pending the outcome of the park district's levy request on the November 2015 ballot.



**Susan Hambley Nature Center**

Redevelopment of Letha House Park – One of the earliest parks in the system, Letha House Park received a new entry road, parking lot, gravel walking path, picnic areas, restrooms and an enclosed shelter. Opportunities to experience the park were increased by the addition of the the 0.85-mile Wood Thrush Nature Trail and an expansion of the bridge trail. A former farm field was converted to a complex of shallow wetlands and upland prairie buffers, creating a 33-acre mitigation wetland on the east side of the park.

Opening of Lake Medina Trail – Completed in 2015 with an \$835,000 grant from the Ohio Department of Transportation, this new 1.63-mile trail is an asphalt path that follows the West Branch of the Rocky River and connects to the city of Medina’s paved trail along Reagan Parkway. The ten-foot-wide trail continues along the bottom of the reservoir’s dam, crosses the river channel twice with bridges and boardwalks, and provides safe crossing of State Route 3 and Reagan Parkway, utilizing crosswalks and a pedestrian signalization system.



**Lake Medina Trail**

Opening of Brunswick Lake Trail – Medina County Park District and the city of Brunswick joined forces to complete the 1-mile asphalt Brunswick Lake Trail in 2014. Accessible to all persons, the multi-use trail circles the 79-acre Brunswick City Park and 13.2-acre lake, crossing wetlands over a pair of wooden bridges. It gives neighborhoods south of the lake access to shopping areas, the library and city recreation center via walking or bicycle.

Opening of Chippewa Rail Trail – A former CSX Railroad line, this 2.75-mile, paved asphalt trail travels from the outskirts of the city of Medina to the village of Chippewa Lake. The ten-foot-wide trail, opened in 2008 and funded through a grant from the Ohio Department of Transportation, is ideal for walking, running, cycling, in-line skating and cross country skiing.



**Public access boat ramp at Chippewa Lake**

Opening of Chippewa Lake Boat Launch Ramp – Watercraft owners can access the 340-acre Chippewa Lake for fishing and recreational boating via this new public access ramp located off Westfield Landing Road. It features parking for vehicles with trailers, a restroom and lighted parking lot. Development was supported by a grant from the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Division of Watercraft.

Opening of The Lodge at Allardale -- A generous gift of almost \$1 million from the Allard Family Fund and Linda Allard Gallen made possible the construction of this 4,800 square-foot lodge on the east side of Allardale Park. It has proven to be one of the park district’s most popular reservable facilities for meetings and events.

Opening of Medina Marsh -- Home to an active blue heron rookery, this 126-acre, high-quality wetland complex in the floodplain of the West Branch of the Rocky River is part of a large corridor of protected land along the river. Opened in 2015, the new Medina Marsh Conservation Center doubles as a visitor center and the Medina field office of the Western Reserve Land Conservancy.

Opening of Killbuck Lakes – A reclaimed gravel mining site featuring deep-water lakes as well as small areas of intact forest and wetlands, the first phase of Killbuck Lakes is expected to open to the public in the fall of 2015, including fishing access, a hiking trail, and restrooms.



**The Lodge at Allardale**



**Killbuck Lakes Park**



**Bald eagle and blue heron nests at Medina Marsh**



Natural Resources Manager Jim Spetz helps families plant trees at Earth Day.

When new parklands and facilities are opened to the public, there is a need to increase staff to keep pace with the park district’s high standards for maintenance and programming. The current strategic plan projected a need to add 17 positions during the 2007-2016 period: nine full time, two part time and six seasonal. However, in keeping with the park district’s careful fiscal management, only half that number or 8.5 full-time equivalent positions were added:

### Staff Additions 2007-2016

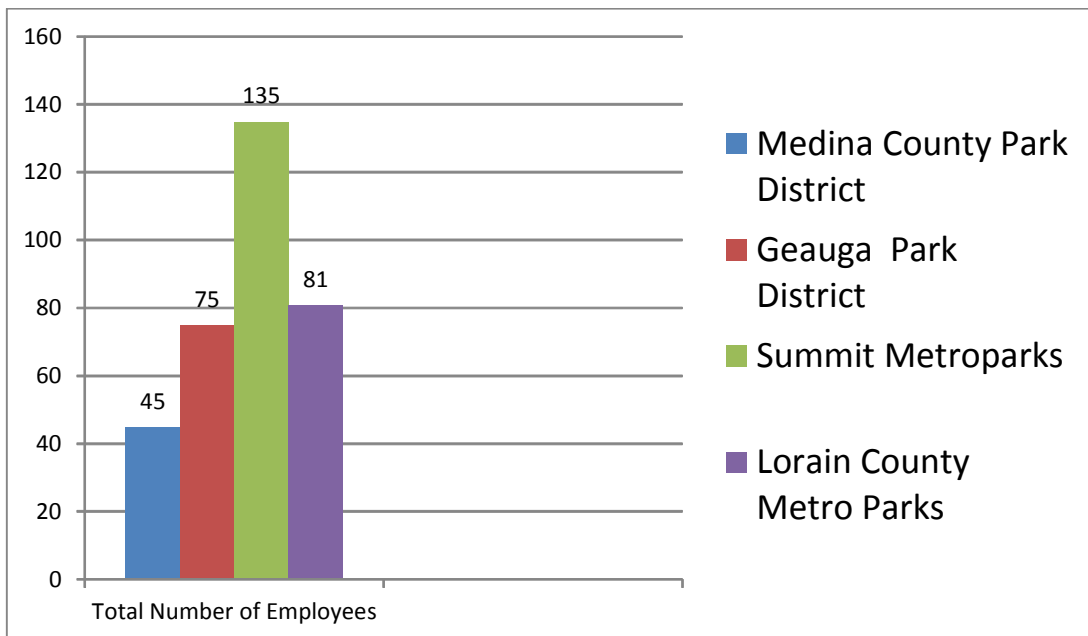
As of June 1, 2015, the current staffing level of Medina County Park District stands at 45 employees: 31 full time, 4 part time and 10 seasonal. The park district operates with the lowest staff levels in the area. The following positions were added as of June 30, 2015.



Naturalists plan unique programs for all ages throughout the year.

Department	Position	Status
Administration	Deputy Director	Full time
Administration	Communications Coordinator	Part time
Planning	Horticulturist	Part time
Planning	Planner	Full time
Natural Resource	Natural Resource Technician	Full time
Operations	Maintenance Worker	Part time to full time
Operations	Maintenance Worker	Part time to full time
Ranger	Ranger	Full time
Interpretive Services	Naturalist	Full time
Interpretive Services	Naturalist	Seasonal

### Staffing Level Comparison with Area Park Districts



## **Planning for the Future: 2017-2026**

In 2006, Medina County voters approved a ten-year, ¾-mill property tax levy that funds 90 percent of the park district's budget for operating expenses and capital improvements. Approximately 7 percent of the park district's budget comes from the State of Ohio's Local Government Fund. The remaining 3 percent is earned income derived from facility rental fees.

The current ¾-mill levy expires December 31, 2015. Clearly, without the financial support of Medina County residents, the park district could not sustain its current levels of programming, site maintenance, open-space preservation and natural-resources management. The potential loss of 90 percent of its funding would devastate the park district's ability to function, placing in jeopardy 50 years of investment on the part of Medina County residents in establishing and building a park system that is a source of pride, enjoyment and increased quality of life for many thousands of citizens each year.

As the end of the current ten-year levy period approached, the board of commissioners directed park district staff to create a new ten-year strategic plan outlining how Medina County Park District will fulfill its mission of *Enhancing the Quality of All Life . . . Naturally* over the coming decade, as well as determining the costs associated with meeting those goals.

Park district staff identified strategic goals in five key areas: Opportunity, Connection, Restoration, Stewardship and Preservation.

### **Opportunity: *New Parks and Preserves***

Medina County Park District recognizes the need to expand its offerings to meet the diverse needs of a growing Medina County into the next half century with new parks, nature preserves and wildlife sanctuaries.

Some of these properties will become fully developed parks offering both new and familiar amenities. Others may undergo habitat restoration projects that promote biodiversity and protect natural resources at a broader landscape level. Still others may see virtually no development with only passive management allowing the plants, animals and geological features that make the land special to thrive for the benefit of these important ecosystems themselves and to create education and enrichment opportunities for visitors. Site planning and development is a long-term process that requires years of work to reach fruition.

Medina County Park District seeks to continue development of new parks and preserves. Experience has shown this aspect of planning requires a high degree of flexibility due to a number of outside factors including the availability of funds and unexpected donations of land that enter into the park district's development timeline.

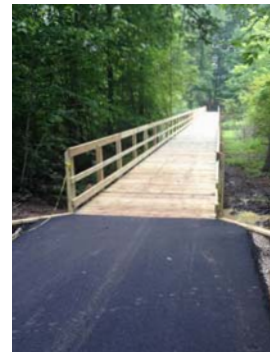
Understanding these variables, here is a selection of Medina County Park District sites with the potential to be opened to the public in the next ten-year period:

**Brunswick Lake Park:** Pending funding, the park district plans to enter into an agreement with Brunswick to assume management of the city's 79-acre park and 13.2-acre lake. Home of the Susan Hambley Nature Center in the heart of Medina County's largest city, this site includes wetlands as well as mature maple, oak, ash and beech trees.

**Chippewa Lake Park:** Increase public access by supplementing the existing boat ramp and shelter with trails, fishing areas, picnic areas and possible boat rental.

**Killbuck Lakes:** A portion of the former site of Baker Sand and Gravel, Killbuck Lakes consists largely of reclaimed lands with smaller areas of intact forest and wetland. Within this 408-acre property are three deep bodies of water and one shallow body of water left behind during mining operations, providing more than 68 acres of open-water habitat for waterfowl and future opportunities for fishing. This area protects one of the largest underground aquifers in this part of the State of Ohio. The aquifer provides water supplies for the residents of both Medina and Wayne counties. A limited portion of Killbuck Lakes is scheduled to be opened to the public in the fall of 2015.

**West Branch Preserve:** Located along the West Branch of the Rocky River, much of this 107-acre site is restored prairie full of native grasses and brilliantly colored wildflowers that acts as a buffer for the watershed of a headwater stream restored in 2009. The stream previously had been ditched and straightened along the edge of a farm field. The project restored natural wetlands and recreated the stream's original meandering path to improve water quality and habitat. Upland portions of the property contain forests with many mature trees and steep ravines.



**Brunswick Lake Path**

**Black River Park:** Adjacent to Medina County Park District's reservable Hidden Hollow Camp, this 105-acre property lies between the railroad tracks and U.S. Route 224. The eastern portion of the property, formerly in agricultural production, was restored into a tall-grass prairie. It serves as a buffer for the restoration of the West Fork of the East Branch of the Black River completed in 2002. Native wildflowers, including Virginia bluebell, blanket much of the floodplain. A mature stand of evergreens is located on the west side of the river.

**Northwest Park:** Located in the northwest corner of Medina County in Litchfield Township, this 148-acre park will include a restored wetland, hiking trails, pond, and other improvements. Located in the headwaters area of the Black River Watershed, the wetland restoration will help improve water quality in the Black River.



**Virginia bluebells in bloom at the future Black River Park.**

## **Connections: Trails and Corridor Lands**



**The popular multipurpose Chippewa Inlet Trail**

Medina County Park District has a proud history of partnering with other government entities in ways that benefit the parks, the municipalities and, especially, the public. The development of trails provides an inviting and meaningful way to do that. A county-wide master plan for trails was created by Brunswick, Medina, Wadsworth, Lodi, Seville and the park district in 2001.

In cooperation with Medina County cities, villages and townships, trail development will be a major focus in the upcoming planning period, including the following potential projects:

- Brunswick Lake to Laurel Road to Plum Creek Park
- Lake Medina to the city of Medina's Jaycee Park
- Village of Chippewa Lake to the village of Seville
- City of Wadsworth to the city of Barberton (with an eventual Summit Metro Parks link to the Towpath Trail system)

## **Restoration: Protecting Natural Resources**



**Plowing the soil during the restoration of a wetland**

Beginning in the mid-to-late 1800s, significant numbers of Medina County's wetlands were drained and cleared of native vegetation to open the land to agricultural use. Once-meandering streams were straightened, and their channels deepened, causing the water to move faster and accelerate erosion.

In many cases, the land remained wet and difficult to farm during various seasons of the year. Unintended consequences included the loss of natural filtration and absorption qualities of the wetlands, leading to flooding and pollution problems downstream. Natural ecosystems were drastically altered, and wildlife habitat was severely degraded.

The park district has focused on acquiring and protecting high-priority natural resources that include streams, wetlands and surrounding floodplain areas. In many cases, these flood-prone areas are poorly suited to residential development or agriculture, but their value as open space can be significant. With proper management, the restoration of these open spaces

can greatly enhance their value to wildlife and ecosystem function. By acquiring key watershed areas and restoring them to their natural states, Medina County Park District has improved water quality and effectively lowered flood insurance rates by greatly reducing the risk of flood damage during times of heavy rain and spring snow melt.





A naturalist leads a program at Wolf Creek Environmental Center.



StoryWalk at Mugrage Park



Rangers help keep visitors safe at Chippewa Lake.



Mowers are part of the capital equipment purchases.

## Stewardship: *Caring for Parks and Visitors*

Medina County residents continually express pride in the cleanliness and well-maintained appearance of their parks – and the park district staff shares that pride. Each day, members of the operations team perform necessary tasks including cleaning restrooms, emptying trash, mowing grass, plowing snow, repairing buildings, maintaining roadways and parking lots, and more. The interpretive services staff of trained naturalists guide visitors in their discovery and appreciation of nature. Rangers patrol parks and preserves, provide assistance, answer questions and keep visitors safe.

The increase in parkland and facilities necessitates the addition of staff and equipment to keep pace with the high standards of maintenance, programming and public service the park district seeks to provide park visitors.

Much in the same way that the timing of future park openings is dependent on several variables, programming is largely dependent on the new parks that come into the system and the unique natural features each has to offer visitors.

With the potential of the park district opening or expanding parks containing significant bodies of water -- such as Brunswick Lake, Killbuck Lakes and Chippewa Lake -- there will be opportunities for increased watersports-based programming, including canoeing, kayaking and fishing.

The 2015 opening of the StoryWalk at Carolyn Ludwig Mugrage Park is an example of a successful collaboration between Medina County District Library and Medina County Park District. The interpretive services department will continue to put an emphasis on expanding programming partnerships with community organizations whose mission aligns with that of the park district, such as Ohio State University Extension, Medina County Soil and Water Conservation District, Sea Scouts, Medina County Art League, Run for the Trails, Medina Creative Housing, and more.

With the proposed opening of additional parks and preserves during the next ten-year cycle, the park district forecasts the need for an additional seven full-time employees, two part-time employees, and two seasonal workers in the following areas:

### Projected Staffing Needs 2017-2026

Year	Position	Year	Position
2017	Site Manager	2021	Naturalist Intern
2018	Planning Intern	2022	Site Manager
2019	Mechanic	2022	Seasonal Worker
2019	Seasonal Mechanic	2022	Maintenance Worker
2020	Maintenance Worker	2025	Part-time Naturalist
2021	Part-time Naturalist		

**Total cost over the ten-year plan: \$2,826,986.85**

### Capital Equipment Needs 2017-2026

During the planning period, it is projected that \$800,000 will be spent on capital equipment. These needs include tractors, mowers, vehicles, trailers, and computers.

## Overall Projected Operating Costs 2017-2026

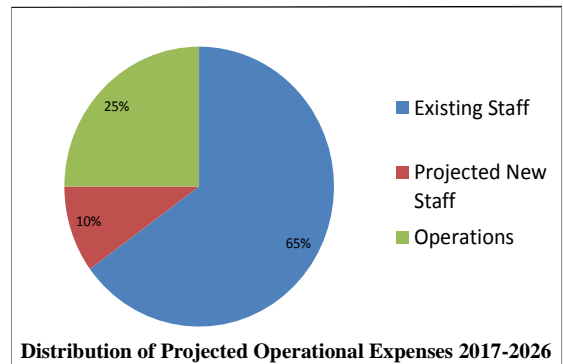
\*Assumes five percent annual growth of costs associated with operations

Note: These costs include supplies, gasoline, utilities, printing, etc.

Staffing \$23,062,802

Operations \$7,082,773\*

**Total cost over the ten-year plan: \$30,145,576**



## Preservation: Open Space for Tomorrow



**Bald eagles have made their homes in our parks over the past six years.**

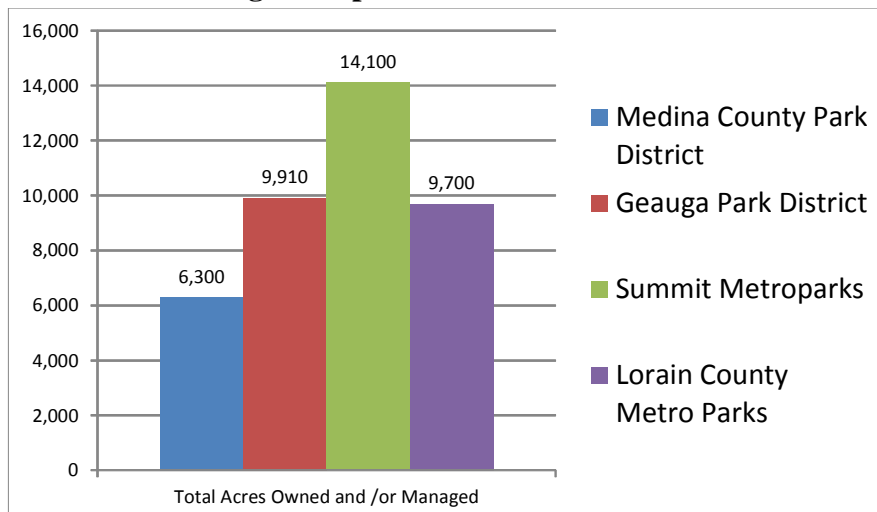
course of years and even decades. The parks and preserves we see today were brought into being through half a century of investment and long-range planning. It speaks to the urgency of pursuing opportunities as they arise today -- as expressed in the Friends of Medina County Parks community survey -- so there will be open spaces and natural areas to be enjoyed by residents 5, 10 or even 50 years into the future.

An April 2015 public opinion survey conducted by Friends of Medina County Parks indicated a desire to see the park district grow as land acquisition opportunities become available to protect open space and wildlife habitat. The park district currently protects just two (2) percent of the total land acreage in Medina County (excluding Hinckley Township, which is served by Cleveland Metroparks).

In some cases, sites have been acquired at considerable savings to Medina County residents thanks to the generosity of preservation-minded land donors, through partnerships with organizations like Western Reserve Land Conservancy, and by the park district's successful pursuit of state and federal grant dollars. Therefore, it is essential to provide capital resources not only to pursue opportunities as they emerge, but to attract the investment of outside resources in the form of partnerships and grant funding to match local contributions.

The occasion of Medina County Park District's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2015 is a reminder that preserving land is a future-minded endeavor, one that takes place incrementally over the

## Total Acreage Comparison with Area Park Districts



# Funding

Since passage of the original county-wide park district levy in 1989, voters have approved a replacement levy in 1998 and a replacement with a ¼-mill increase in 2006. The park district is grateful for these votes of confidence in its mission to provide the recreational opportunities and natural resource protection that contribute to the high quality of life Medina County residents enjoy.

Ongoing public investment is essential to the continuation of the park district’s operation. It provides the stability necessary for the park district to pursue land acquisition, development of parks and preserves, and long-term restoration projects. Local support is key to attracting grant dollars to Medina County – giving residents a greater return on their investment in the park district.

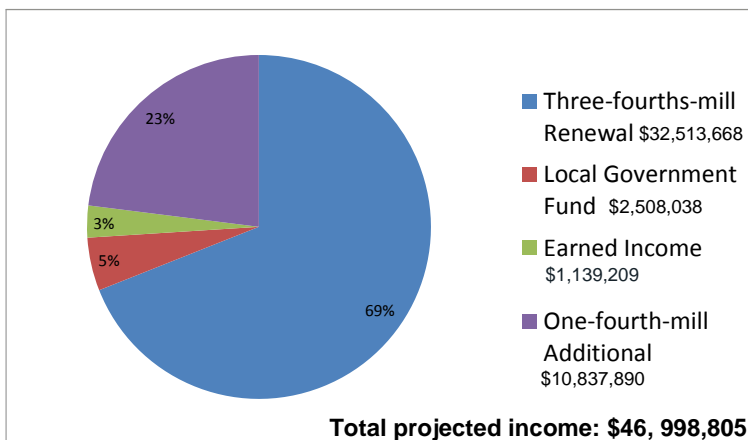
To meet the goals of continued good stewardship of resources outlined in this plan and to support the community’s desire to see open space preservation continue, the staff recommends the park district place a renewal of the current ¾-mill levy plus a ¼-mill increase on the November 2015 ballot.

This overall 1-mill, 10-year levy contains an important benefit for taxpayers. As a renewal, the ¾-mill portion of the levy will remain subject to the State of Ohio’s property tax rollback. Property owners will continue to receive a 12.5 percent tax reduction on the ¾-mill renewal.

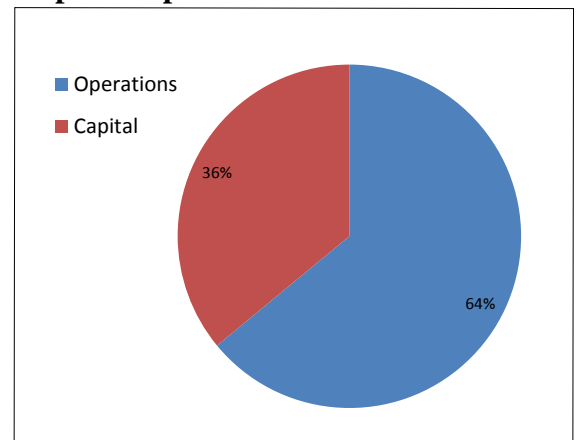
The additional ¼-mill portion -- which would cost \$8.75 per \$100,000 in valuation -- helps mitigate the loss of income in the past levy period due to lower real-estate values and reductions in the State of Ohio Local Government Fund. It allows for projected growth in operating costs over the next ten-year period and provides necessary funding for capital projects.

## Projected Income vs. Expenses 2017-2026

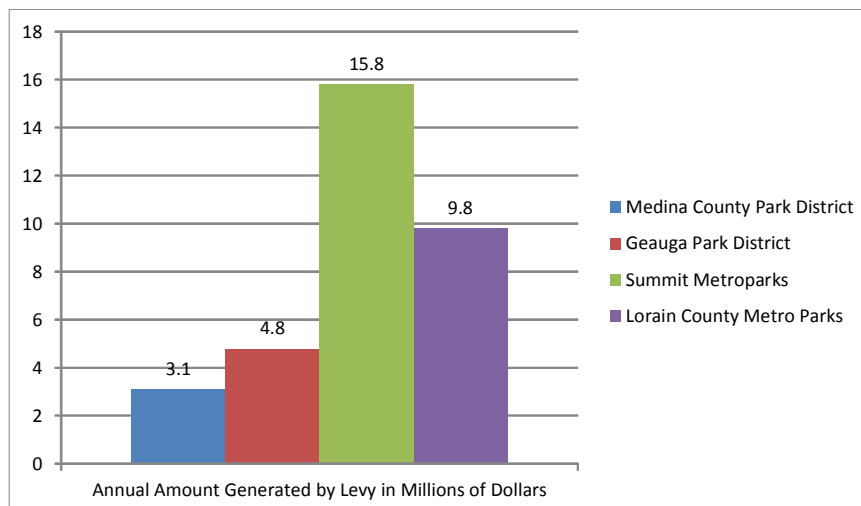
### Sources of Projected Income 2017-2026



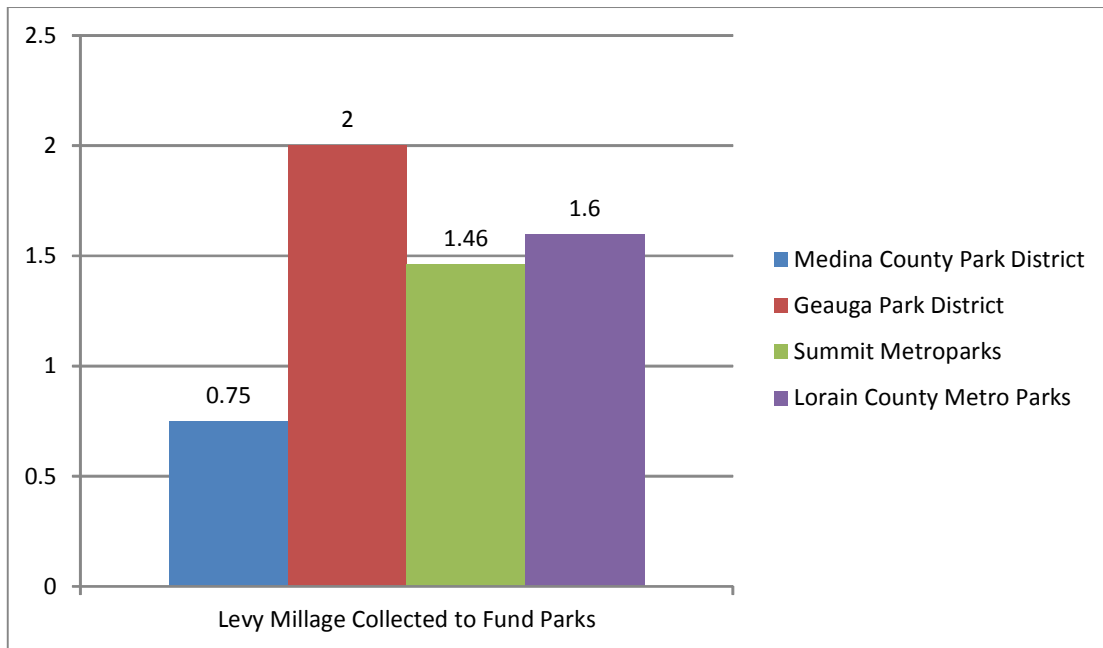
### Projected Operational Expenses vs. Capital Expenses 2017-2026



## Current Levy Income Comparison with Area Park Districts



### Current Levy Millage Comparison with Area Park Districts



## A Timeline: Development of Carolyn Ludwig Mugrage Park

Opening a new park requires years of planning and construction. Such was the case with Medina County Park District's newest park – Carolyn Ludwig Mugrage Park in Granger Township. Parks almost always are works in progress, with development continuing in phases, even after the site is open to the public.

**2005:** Richard and Beverly Mugrage donate their 102-acre Windfall Road farm to Medina County Park District.

**2008-09:** Design consultants assist the park district's leadership team in development of a master plan; team conducts site visits with Mr. Mugrage to learn about the property; park amenities to include: a fishing pond, sledding hill, nature trails, dog park, inclusive playground, picnic shelter, restrooms, entrance drive and parking areas.

**2010:** Preliminary engineering takes place. A detailed survey of the property identifies the precise locations of natural resources, determines drainage patterns, and establishes sites for ponds and other features. Survey data and the master plan are developed into construction drawings to enable the project to be put out to bid.

**2011:** Construction begins but is slowed by wet weather throughout the year.

**2012:** With major grading complete, paving work begins. Paved trails, drives and parking areas all must be constructed to withstand not only normal park traffic but the weight of construction equipment for ongoing maintenance and development.

**2013:** Vault-style restrooms are installed, landscaping work begins, and a picnic shelter is constructed by park district staff. The park opens to the public. Fundraising takes place for the inclusive playground.

**2014:** The dog park opens with construction, again, slowed by wet weather. Inclusive playground completed. Trees are planted.

**2015:** A water fountain and dog-washing area are added to the dog park. The StoryWalk Trail opens. A parking lot expansion is planned. Tree planting continues.



Carolyn Ludwig Mugrage Park begins to take shape.



Park district staff builds the pavilion.



Workers assemble the inclusive playground.



The dog park at Mugrage contains fenced areas for both large and small dogs.



Donors Richard and Beverly Mugrage and their family at the park dedication

**Future:** Wheelchair-accessible fishing area, picnic tables, benches, interpretive panels, continued nature trail development, ongoing tree planting

## Black River Restoration Project: A Case Study

When Medina County Park District acquired Hidden Hollow Camp in 1984, it was one of the park district's richest sites in terms of natural resources -- but also one of deep concern.

Offering primitive camping opportunities for youth organizations, Hidden Hollow takes its name from the river basin that runs through the 146-acre site and through the future 105-acre Black River Park on adjacent land. The floodplain surrounding the West Fork of the East Branch of the Black River is home to towering sycamore, cottonwood and black walnut trees -- along with wildflowers not seen in most other park district properties, including blue-eyed Mary, Indian cucumber root, wild hyacinth and a majestic patch of Virginia bluebell.

However, erosion was taking a devastating toll, stripping as much as five to seven feet of earth from the riverbank each year and carrying the soil downstream. Erosion was destroying the pools and natural riffles that provide habitat for fish and invertebrates. It was removing trees and plants whose roots help stabilize the soil.

Disturbance of a creek during a runway extension project at Cleveland Hopkins International Airport resulted in the creation of an environmental impact mitigation fund. The park district created a proposal to remedy the damage being done at Hidden Hollow Camp and won a \$5.8 million stream mitigation grant to finance the entire Black River project at no cost to Medina County taxpayers.

Deflection wings were created in key locations along the riverbank, using large rocks to redirect the energy of rushing water to the middle of the river and away from the edges where it was causing erosion. Gravel riffles were installed to slow water flow and improve oxygenation. Four modified "V" weirs or funnels slowed the river further -- raising the overall water level by four feet. The deeper river fosters the restoration of habitats that had been destroyed.



**The banks of the Black River are protected from erosion.**



**Severe erosion on the Black River**

“The idea is to recreate what the stream wants to be and then let it become what it wants to be,” said park district Director Tom James.

Natural basins were created just beyond the edge of the river so that when it does overflow its banks in times of heavy rain or snow melt, the water and any sediment stays in the floodplain where it belongs instead of rushing downstream.

The park district required contractors to use low-ground-pressure construction equipment to minimize disturbance to natural areas. In fact, following completion of the work in 2001, sessile trillium returned in the tracks of the machinery the very next spring.

In all, the effort encompassed 8,000 linear feet of the Black River. The grant also funded the purchase of the future Black River Park property, restoration of a tall-grass prairie buffer, and paid for construction of a new enclosed shelter at Hidden Hollow Camp.

Today, 14 years after the project's completion, Ohio EPA monitoring shows an increase in water quality. Once-exposed soil is protected from erosion, and the shells of freshwater mussels found along the banks are testament to the revitalization of this section of the Black River, benefiting plants, wildlife, visitors and all who live downstream.