

BOARD OF PARK COMMISSIONERS

August 20, 2026

CALL TO ORDER

A meeting of the Cincinnati Board of Park Commissioners was held on this day at 950 Eden Park Drive. Commissioners present: President Molly North, Commissioner Susan Castellini, Commissioner Phyllis McCallum, and Commissioner John Neyer. Vice President Kick Lee was not present. President North called the meeting to order at 9:02am.

Acknowledgement of Public Comments

President North acknowledged one public comment received via email regarding storm damage to trees. President North thanked the Parks staff for working tirelessly to respond to damage caused by the recent major storm.

ADMINISTRATIVE ACTIONS

Approval of the July 16 Meeting Minutes

Commissioner McCallum motioned to approve the July 16, 2026, meeting minutes. Commissioner Castellini seconded. The motion passed by a unanimous voice vote.

Approval of the July 29 Special Meeting Minutes

Commissioner Neyer motioned to approve the July 29, 2026, Special Meeting minutes. Commissioner Castellini seconded. The motion passed by a unanimous voice vote.

INFORMATION / UPDATE

Owl's Nest Field Renovation Plan

Charley Frank, Executive Director of the Reds Community Fund, presented plans for a major renovation of the Owl's Nest Park ballfield. The project aims to increase field accessibility, reduce rainouts, and improve playability for youth and high school sports. Enhancements under consideration include a turf infield, new dugouts, bleachers, fencing, scoreboards, signage, and outfield improvements. Eric Schmidt, CEO of Playground Equipment Services, described a patented turf system designed to be recyclable, ADA accessible, lower maintenance, cooler than conventional turf, and highly permeable for drainage. The Commissioners discussed community engagement, potential sources of financial support, and the overall projected budget and project scope, and shared excitement for the project.

Conservation & Land Management (CLM) Update

Crystal Courtney, Division Manager of Natural Resources, and John Aguilar-Dwyer, Crew Leader, provided an update on the CLM team's staffing structure and management of Parks' 3,820 acres of naturalized land and 61 miles of natural-surface trails. Staff explained that more than 80% of Parks land consists of forests, natural areas, stream corridors, and wildlife habitat, versus maintained lawns. Much of the CLM team's work includes invasive species removal, forest restoration, native seed collection, trail maintenance, deer population management, and environmental education. The CLM team highlighted its volunteer network as one of its greatest resources and successes. The Commissioners thanked the CLM team for their work, and for their efforts to track their work and make it measurable.

ACTION ITEM

Miles-Edwards Drainage Basin Modifications

Travis Miller, Division Manager of Planning & Design, requested approval to proceed with a contract with Rack & Ballauer for the construction of a stormwater drainage solution at Miles-Edwards Park. Commissioner Castellini motioned to approve \$110,600 towards the project, with an additional 10% contingency. Commissioner Neyer seconded. The motion passed by a unanimous voice vote.

INFORMATION / UPDATE

Planning & Design Update

Division Manager Miller provided progress reports on the Sinton Campus, Owl's Nest Park upgrades, Glenway Park community engagement, Smale Lot 23 project closeout, McEvoy Park planning, and the Eden Park Steps project.

Finance & IT Division Highlights

Jason Barron, Parks Director, informed the Commissioners of several projects currently underway within the Parks Finance & IT Division, highlighting the re-opening of the Cincinnati Financial System (CFS) for the new fiscal year and work to improve wireless internet access across Parks facilities.

Director Barron provided a high-level overview of the previous year's financial results. Parks spent approximately \$28.3 million against a budget of roughly \$29.6 million. The Commissioners and Staff discussed spending on insurance and taxes, and efforts to more accurately reflect revenue. In addition, Director Barron reported that endowment investments grew from about \$25 million to \$29 million during the year.

Capital Budget Transfer for Sinton Facility Renovation Project

Director Barron gave an update on the status of the Sinton Campus renovation project as it nears the bid stage. Staff identified capital funding sources based upon estimates from the project architects and proposed a reallocation of \$1,026,800 from the Riverfront Parks Stabilization capital account to the Sinton Facility Renovation capital account. President North expressed a preference to defer a vote on the transfer, as final construction bids have not yet been received and total project costs remain uncertain. The Commissioners chose to defer action pending more information.

HR Update

Derrick Gentry, Supervising Human Resources Analyst, reported on multiple active recruitments, including laborer, horticulturist, engineering, and administrative positions, and updated the Commissioners on safety reporting and OSHA compliance.

ACTION ITEM

Grants Application / Acceptance

Director Barron outlined two grant opportunities:

- From the Parks Foundation: \$6,198, to be used to reimburse the labor costs associated with the July 4 Ault Park fireworks event.
- From the Ohio Department of Natural Resources: \$5,000,000, to be used to rehabilitate existing structures, including the historic pavilion.

Commissioner Castellini motioned to approve the application for and acceptance of grant funds from the Parks Foundation in an amount up to \$6,198, and from ODNR in an amount up to \$5,000,000. Commissioner Neyer seconded. The motion passed by a unanimous voice vote.

Commissioner Castellini left the meeting at 11:03am.

DIRECTOR'S COMMENTS

Director Barron presented the following updates:

- Mayor Aftab spent a Saturday morning volunteering at the Krohn Butterfly Show
- Local non-profit IKRON (Integration of Knowledge and Resources for Occupational Needs) volunteered with our East District staff to remove graffiti and replace trash cans
- The Parks team did an incredible job cleaning up damage after August's severe storms
- Groundwork Ohio River Valley's Green Team celebrated the end of the season
- Events throughout Parks in late August and early September.

ADJOURNMENT

President North adjourned the meeting at 11:12am.

The next regular meeting date is Thursday, October 15, at 9:00am.

ATTEST:

PRESIDENT



DIRECTOR



[External Email] Public Comment, August 20, 2026 Lack of care for our forests in our city parks. FW: Unhealthy trees are more vulnerable to storm damage. How to spot them - from The Enquirer

From mschafer1@zoomtown.com <mschafer1@zoomtown.com>

Date Tue 8/18/2026 10:24 PM

To Parks, Cincy <cincy.parks@cincinnati-oh.gov>

External Email Communication

I am appalled at the level of neglect occurring in a number of our city parks! **I urge this park board and director to step out of your offices and visit some of these situations.** For example, just pull in the 1st parking lot in Drake Park off Red Bank Rd and walk up the connecting paved path that runs along the edge of the woods there. It is shocking! There were 3 large (unhealthy) trees that had recently crashed onto this short walk. **You will see massive, invasives vines encasing large areas.** One area has been completely devoid of trees for many years - and these vines now also cover the worthless enclosure that was installed a few years ago – purpose unknown. A man advised that hiking in this area is not safe as a number of trees are partially down, large branches partially down, etc., etc., There are several natural paths branching off further into the woods (are human-created). But hiking is more of an obstacle course – and may well be too dangerous now.

As you already know, E.coli contamination has already been reported to you involving other parks. **Do you not have anyone in Natural Resources Division that has a graduate level degree in Ecology?** Your top priority should be addressing the unhealthy trees, etc., in our forests! Please see the Enquirer article below.

Lastly, as I said, I have training in **botany and zoology, at the college and graduate level.** I also have taken additional training elsewhere. The level of forest mismanagement of our city parks is shocking! The one bright spot appears to be the work undertaken by residents in Ault Park, and possibly a couple of others. **For God's sakes! Stop blaming forest degeneration on deer – the blame should be on the park employees who should be dealing with invasive species, thick canopies, unhealthy trees, etc., etc.**

Millie P. Schafer, PhD
Executive Director & Coordinator
Cincinnati Urban Deer Advocates (CUDA)
Cincinnati, Ohio
513-351-9957

P.S. I own a small woods and have worked, and still am working, to turn this into a viable habitat for wildlife while eliminating invasive species, sick trees, planting new trees and bushes after removing unhealthy trees- was a non-viable area years ago. Massive vines exist in this area too – and I've had to remove a lot of them. They also will grow back rather quickly. It's amazing what a viable forest area does – bird populations increase pretty quickly, especially when the right trees and bushes are planted. The few deer that move through here pose no ecology issue at all! (nor is my landscaped yard destroyed either because of the consideration given to planting deer-resistant bushes, trees, guards, etc) We can all co-exist but it requires education – including wildlife education.

From: mschafer1@zoomtown.com

Sent: Tuesday, August 18, 2026 8:33 AM

To: millie p. schaffer <mschafer1@zoomtown.com>

Subject: Unhealthy trees are more vulnerable to storm damage. How to spot them - from The Enquirer

Unhealthy trees are more vulnerable to storm damage. How to spot them

An intense "derecho" storm knocked down countless trees in Greater Cincinnati last week. Here's how to spot a vulnerable tree.

Check out this story on cincinnati.com:

<https://www.cincinnati.com/story/entertainment/2026/08/18/how-to-spot-unhealthy-trees-vulnerable-storm-damage/91335969007/>