

BOARD OF PARK COMMISSIONERS

August 21, 2025

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, Vice President Kick Lee, Commissioner Susan Castellini, Commissioner Phyllis McCallum, and Commissioner John Neyer. President North called the meeting to order at 9:03am.

Acknowledgement of Public Comments

President North acknowledged three in-person public comments regarding conservation work in French Park and Northside, and the Burnet Woods dog park. President North also acknowledged public comments received via email regarding the Burnet Woods dog park and maintenance issues.

ADMINISTRATIVE ACTIONS

Approval of the July 17 Meeting Minutes

Commissioner Castellini motioned to approve the July 17, 2025, meeting minutes. Vice President Lee seconded. The motion passed by a unanimous voice vote.

Approval of the August 6 Special Meeting Minutes

Commissioner Neyer motioned to approve the August 6, 2025, special meeting minutes. Commissioner McCallum seconded. The motion passed by a unanimous voice vote.

ACTION ITEM

Mt. Airy Arboretum Building – Septic Repair

Director Jason Barron informed the Commissioners of urgent repairs needed to the septic system at Mt. Airy's Arboretum building. Staff requested the Board approve an award of work to JT Lohrer Construction Co. in the amount of \$49,995, with a \$15,000 contingency to be held in reserve, to restore essential services to the Arboretum building. Vice President Lee motioned to approve the award of work and contingency. Commissioner Castellini seconded. The motion passed by a unanimous voice vote.

INFORMATION / UPDATES

Planning & Design Update

Director Barron provided an update on projects including the Burnet Woods dog park, the Smale Lot 23 project, the Mt. Airy bike skills course, pathway, and comfort station, the Ault Park playground, Everybody's Treehouse, Parks' Sinton campus and Biochar facility, the Sawyer Point Playground, the hydrological study at California Woods, and various maintenance and repair projects throughout Parks.

Finance / IT Division Highlights

Division Manager of Finance and IT, Herta Fairbanks, shared updates on the Finance team's work in the early months of FY26 and continuing efforts to improve financial processes. Staff also updated the Commissioners on ongoing efforts being made by the IT Department to complete the City-wide upgrade to Windows 11, and to identify and cut costs. The Commissioners and Staff also discussed the June and July financial reports.

HR Update

Director Barron provided an overview of full-time staffing, including several new hires on the Division of Natural Resources and Events teams. Director Barron also introduced Parks' new Graphic Designer, Emily Feist, to the Commissioners.

ACTION ITEMS

Approval of Parks Private Endowment Distribution

Commissioner Neyer and Staff detailed the Investment Committee's process for developing a recommended distribution policy for Parks endowment funds. The Investment Committee and Staff recommended adoption of a policy disbursing 5% of the average of the preceding 20 quarters of the fund balances to support the Park Board's mission and operations while preserving future financial sustainability. Commissioner McCallum motioned to adopt the distribution policy as outlined. Commissioner Castellini seconded. The motion passed by a unanimous voice vote.

Per the adopted policy, Staff recommended authorization of a distribution for FY26 in the amount of \$623,651. Vice President Lee motioned to authorize the distribution as outlined. Commissioner Neyer seconded. The motion passed by a unanimous voice vote.

Approval of FY26 Fund 430- Private Endowment Recommended Budget

Director Barron summarized the strategy for the FY26 Fund 430 budget, guided by a comprehensive realignment of Parks revenue and expenditures. Staff outlined a proposed FY26 Fund 430 – Private Endowment Fund budget in the amount of \$2,383,711. Due to the realignment, Staff's recommendation for approval came in two parts:

- 1) Staff recommended approval of the FY26 Fund 430 – Private Endowment operations budget. Commissioner Neyer motioned to approve the budget as outlined. Commissioner Castellini seconded. The motion passed by a unanimous voice vote.
- 2) Staff recommended approval of an increase to the budgets for Funds 318, 326, 329, and 332 to accommodate the reassigned expenses. Commissioner Neyer motioned to approve the increase as outlined. Vice President Lee seconded. The motion passed by a unanimous voice vote.

Grants Application / Acceptance

Director Barron shared a grant opportunity from the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR), for investment in the long-term growth and development of local urban and community forest programs. Staff requested approval to apply for and accept, upon award, the ODNR 2025 IRA Urban Forestry Grant in an amount up to \$100,000. Vice President Lee motioned to approve application for and acceptance of the grant. Commissioner Neyer seconded. The motion passed by a unanimous voice vote.

DIRECTOR'S COMMENTS

Director Barron presented the following updates:

- Krohn Conservatory held a 30th anniversary party for the Butterfly Show
- Krohn's fall show, "A Healing Garden" is open and runs through October 12
- Cincinnati was ranked #2 in the nation for recreation by WalletHub
- Volunteer opportunities and events in Parks throughout August and early September, including Oktoberfest's return to Sawyer Point and Yeatman's Cove.

OPEN COMMISSIONER DISCUSSION & COMMENTS

The Commissioners and Staff discussed drainage issues and potential solutions at the Burnet Woods dog park. Commissioner McCallum shared her appreciation for and support of Parks' summer camp programs.

ADJOURNMENT

President North adjourned the meeting at 10:54am.

The next regular meeting date is Friday, September 26, at 9:00am.

ATTEST:

PRESIDENT



DIRECTOR



KICK LEE, VICE PRESIDENT

[External Email] Public Comment August 2025

From Stich Bear <stichbear@gmail.com>

Date Fri 7/18/2025 6:06 AM

To Parks, Cincy <cincy.parks@cincinnati-oh.gov>; Aftab, Mayor <mayor.aftab@cincinnati-oh.gov>; #COUNCIL <CityCouncil@cincinnati-oh.gov>

External Email Communication

"My philosophy is very simple," Representative John Lewis once told an audience. "When you see something that is not right, not fair, not just, say something! Do something! Get in trouble, good trouble, necessary trouble."

Park Commissioners and Park Director,

It is not right that you made the unilateral decision for a change of land use on public lands without the consent of the impacted community in regard to Burnet Woods.

It is not fair that community fundraising requirements that the project was "contingent upon" were not met, and that you decided to move forward anyway.

It is not right that you chose to remove truckload upon truckload of life giving soil, that had been building for over 150 years in Burnet Woods, to then turn around and purchase soil for the same project? Did I hear Jason Barron correctly at the July 17, 2025 park board meeting update on the project?

It is not right that you allowed heavy equipment to strip away the feeder roots and compact the soil at the feet of beautiful old growth trees that provide shade and homes for wildlife.

It is not fair that Commissioner Castellini accused Burnet Woods volunteers of only showing up to meetings to "complain" when what they are actually doing is standing up to the abuse of power and advocating for a Cincinnati Park that they have spent thousands of unpaid hours in, clearing invasives, picking up litter, organizing events and improving habitat by working alongside Park staff to plant and maintain native species.

It is not right that you allowed fundraising for a "universally accessible" dog park and were too stubborn to admit that the site topography made that goal impossible. It is unethical to raise funds on the backs of people in the community who need accommodations and then create such an unwelcoming, hostile environment where visiting makes it virtually impossible to keep themselves and their pets safe.

It is not fair that you chose to spend Parks limited resources on an unpopular pet project without discussing it first with park stakeholders. If you had taken the time to conduct authentic community engagement, the division this project has caused could have been avoided.

It is not right that accessibility in existing park structures was ignored and priority given to a dog park.

It is not right that this new dog park in Burnet Woods sits too close to residents homes.

It is not just that you chose to remove greenspace and replace it with concrete and gravel creating yet another heat island as we already see the effects of climate change and storm water flooding in this city.

It is not right that you have taken away the last bit of accessible multi use greenspace in Burnet Woods for a single use amenity.

It is not right that you ruined the design of a world renowned landscape architect, effectively destroying his canvas, and denying the community their right to maintain the historical significance of their public land.

It is unjust that you chose to remove habitat that our wildlife depend upon for their survival. Your decision impacts thousands of species and migratory birds without whom nothing can survive.

It is unjust that the E. coli contamination has gone unchecked by Cincinnati Parks decision to ignore crumbling infrastructure while unnecessary pet projects are prioritized. If our UC students and volunteers hadn't alerted the community, your negligence would still be potentially putting the public health at risk. Former staff member, Joel Gross, publicly stated during the Park Board meeting that prior to the repairs at the Bandstand comfort station, human waste was discharging directly into the wooded area of the park, did he not? What about the human waste from the comfort stations in the shelter next to the playground? Has that waste been dumping directly into the soil underground as well?

Has anyone investigated whether or not the underground lines that service the toilets at Trailside are doing the same thing? Are the lines that Parks are responsible for in good repair? MSD stated at the July Clifton Town Meeting that the portions of sewer line that they are responsible for are not compromised.

Has the quality of the lake been tested? Is it safe for fishing and canoeing?

I am justly advocating for prioritization of public health and safety in all of our beautiful Cincinnati Parks.

Shari Frost

Burnet Woods volunteer

[External Email] PUBLIC COMMENT 8/2025

From Stich Bear <stichbear@gmail.com>

Date Sun 8/10/2025 8:10 PM

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

External Email Communication

Dear Parks Director and Park Commissioners,

Perhaps consider a change of course with your plans for fencing the area off in Burnet Woods for off leash dogs and instead leave the area open for an accessible natural area for park visitors.

A few benches and more native pollinators would provide a quiet place for the community to gather and enjoy nature. Preventing contamination from a concentration of dog feces and urine from washing across the sidewalk and running down Brookline towards the Trailside Nature Center would certainly be appreciated by Park users.

Someone suggested even a small memorial to honor the Stephenson sisters, which I agree would be lovely.

Our community is greatly impacted by the storm water situation that is causing raw sewage to flow through the valley of Burnet Woods.

Imagine if this were happening across the lawn at Smale or Sawyer Point where people routinely use the grassy areas to spread a blanket or just lie on the grass to watch the clouds roll by.

Maybe you're unaware of the high numbers of people who regularly recreate in Burnet Woods?

Treat this the same way you would treat your own backyards where children play.

In support of the original architect of Burnet Woods, Adolph Strauch, who opposed fences, I propose that we honor his memory and eliminate the fencing off idea for Burnet Woods.

Sincerely,

Shari Frost

Park Volunteer

[External Email] Public Comment August 2025

From Stich Bear <stichbear@gmail.com>
Date Wed 8/13/2025 8:25 AM
To Parks, Cincy <cincy.parks@cincinnati-oh.gov>

External Email Communication

"When one tugs at a single thing in nature, he finds it attached to the rest of the world."
John Muir

Cincinnati Park Board of Commissioners,
The site choice for a dog park in Burnet Woods was a mistake from day one. Its impact on the community, our neighbors, and the environment will be detrimental.
Going forward, please respect the community stakeholders on public land, conduct authentic community engagement and allow the results to steer any future development in Burnet Woods prioritizing the health of the ecosystem that supports life on a warming planet versus any further hardscaping in an Important Bird Area. The forest needs the birds as much as the birds need the forest.
Sincerely,
Shari Frost
Park Volunteer

HMMMM.... WHAT ARE WE BLOWING AWAY TODAY?



#leavetheleaves #banleafblowers
pollinator friendly yards on facebook

[External Email] Public Comment 8/21 - Fishing in Burnet Woods

From Cynthia Duval <cynthia@preserveburnetwoods.org>

Date Fri 8/15/2025 4:32 PM

To Parks, Cincy <cincy.parks@cincinnati-oh.gov>; Boutelle, David <David.Boutelle@cincinnati-oh.gov>; Mobley, Jenny <Jenny.Mobley@cincinnati-oh.gov>; Courtney, Crystal <Crystal.Courtney@cincinnati-oh.gov>

 2 attachments (12 MB)

IMG_5772.jpeg; IMG_5773.jpeg;

External Email Communication

Please see below from Dr Conover.

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Denis Conover** <conovedg@hotmail.com>

Date: Fri, Aug 15, 2025 at 4:28 PM

Subject: Burnet Woods

To: Cynthia Duval <cynthia@preserveburnetwoods.org>, Bob Hyland <bob@preserveburnetwoods.org>, new steve pelikan <spelikan@gmail.com>

Hi,

I walk by the pond at Burnet Woods twice per day on the way to UC and back to my car. Something should be done to better regulate what the fishermen and women are doing there. They are using big fishing nets and they are very careless with fishing lines and lures which entangle birds and turtles. They are also fishing along the bank where we planted native plants that is supposed to be off limits to fishing. Thanks.

- Denis



