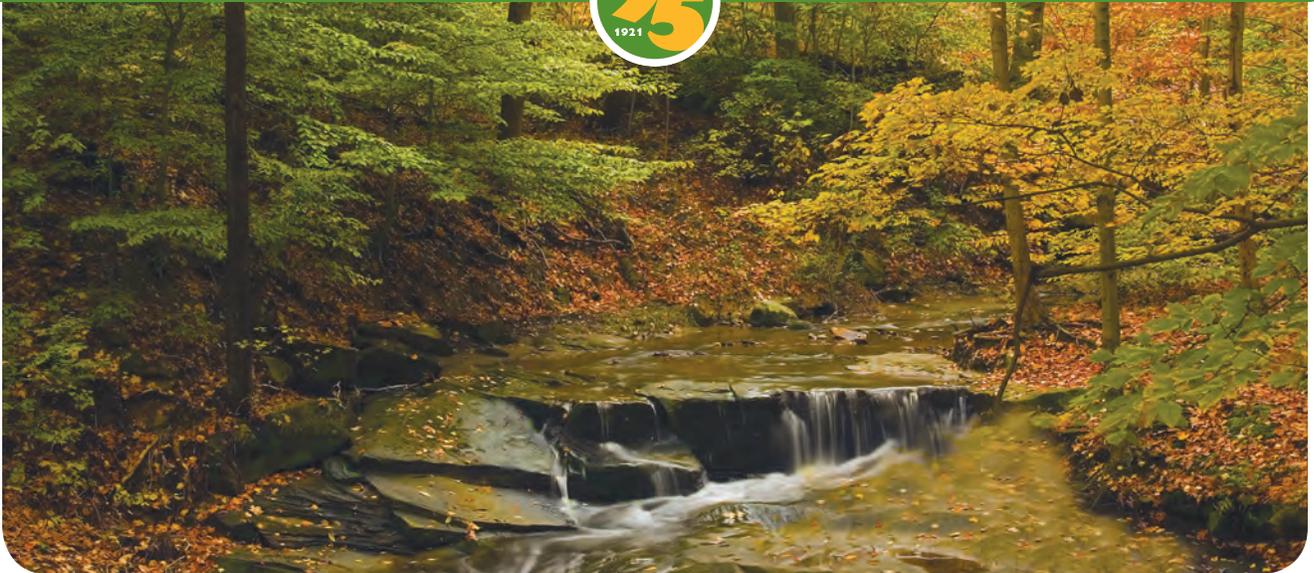


STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN



PROCESS SUMMARY

September 2016

Summit 
Metro Parks

Your Back Yard for 95 Years

summitmetroparks.org

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Process Summary

Experts stress that the most important outcome of any type of strategic action planning is to instill strategic thinking in an organization. They generally agree that strategic planning is only useful if built upon a strong foundation of organizational values and purpose, driven by customer interests and need, supported and championed by critical staff and leadership, and grounded in actionable strategies.

To be sustainable, public and non-profit sector organizations including parks and recreation agencies must regularly examine and adjust their strategies as situations change and opportunities arise. Today, scarce resources and a constantly shifting environment are forcing many organizations to reconsider their current strategies or to explicitly undertake strategy development for the first time. All indications are that future success will require much more rapid strategic rethinking and repositioning than are now the norm.

Summit Metro Parks initiated this strategic planning effort in the first quarter of 2016 with the intent of ensuring district improvement and effectiveness, and establishing a road map and guidepost for its operations through 2019.

The Plan was built on contributions made by various stakeholders including: Summit County leaders; current park users and visitors; and district staff. By engaging these stakeholders, trends and gaps in service, demographic and economic changes, and current and anticipated community and customer interests were identified. The Plan was developed to guide the district in creating an actionable framework that will allow for agile, responsive and creative management.

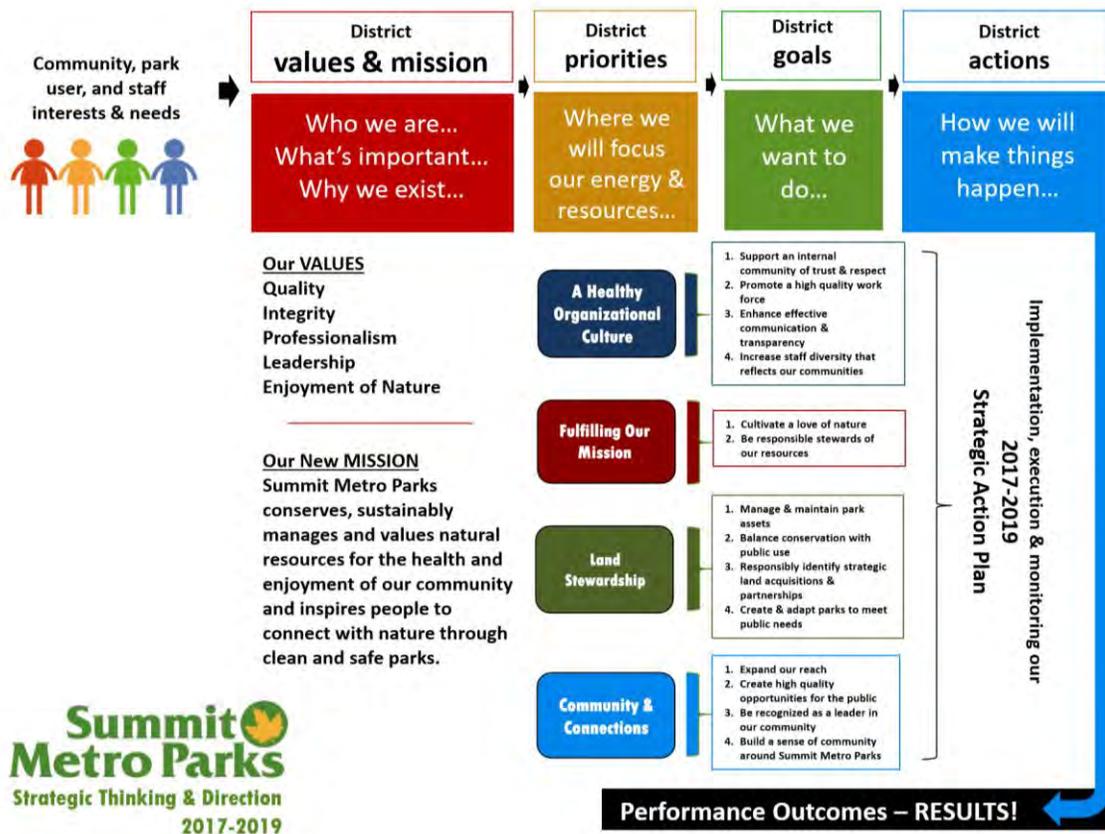


Plan development focused on those critical factors that tend to improve the probability for organizational improvement and effectiveness including:

- Development in cooperation with the staff who are ultimately responsible for carrying the Plan to fruition, and with input from community and customer representatives.
- Designed to be dynamic and capable of evolving with constantly changing market conditions.
- Development with the intention of being monitored and measured, both in terms of progress and value.

The process followed a methodical series of steps that guided the design and development of the Strategic Action Plan (beginning on page 12) ultimately resulting in the following outputs.

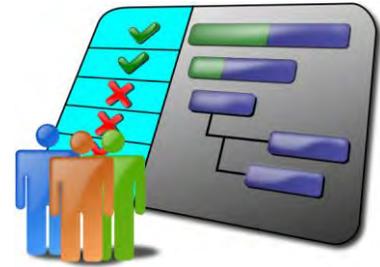
1. District values and a recommended update of the district's mission
2. A strategic action plan that includes:
 - a. *Four (4) district priorities* resulting from stakeholder feedback. These priorities are intended to direct district energy and resources over the next three years.
 - b. *Fourteen (14) goal statements* of intent that need to be met in order to affect, resolve or improve the condition of district priorities.
 - c. *One hundred twenty-two (122) actions* needing to be accomplished in order to satisfy goals.
 - d. *Timelines* which illustrate the dates (by quarter) for expectation of action completion.
 - e. *Staff teams/leads* that include the titles of those staff responsible for ensuring that actions are completed.
 - f. *Performance outcomes* that articulate the intended results of the actions.



Process Timeline

Community/Park User & Staff Focus Groups – February 2016

Community representatives, park users, and district staff, via a series of focus group meetings, provided personal perspectives relative to community-based recreational interests, needs and issues. Twenty-six focus group meetings were held over a four-day period that included the following individuals and groups.



- Community leadership - business owners and partner organizations
- Non-profit organization representatives
- Park users and visitors
- District staff

Staff & Board Workshops – February & April 2016

Staff and Board workshops provided an introduction to strategic planning and the benefits of this type of process to the organization as well as preliminary discussion and analysis of the district’s values (beliefs as they relate to the delivery of park services), mission (purpose), as well as trends, target markets and demographics, the competition, and other relevant topics.

Development of the Summit Metro Parks Strategic Action Plan – May - September 2016

As a result of all work completed to date, district staff met and engaged in a series of intensive work sessions to develop the first iteration of the Strategic Action Plan. Subsequently, the district’s senior management team met to further refine the Plan over the following two-month period with staff input. The Summit Metro Parks Strategic Action Plan is fully operationalized and includes the following key components.

- District priorities
- Goals
- Actions with timelines
- Accountability – staff teams and leads
- Performance outcomes



Gathering Community, Park User & Staff Perspectives



Staff and Board workshops, and focus group meetings were facilitated in order to gather feedback about conditions and factors that currently affect, as well as have the capacity to influence and impact the district moving forward. Conditions and factors of interest included: trends as they relate to the delivery of park services; political, environmental, social, and technological impacts; financial conditions; target markets and demographic shifts; the competitive landscape; and the district's perceived strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Below are those key issues and considerations that were repeatedly mentioned by staff, community and park users throughout the process as critical to district operations (comprehensive feedback summary is available under separate cover). Ultimately, these key issues would become instrumental in the determination of the district's mission and four (4) priorities included on the following pages.

Staff workshops
&
Commission
workshop
&
Focus Groups
meetings

Organization - centric

- Developing a relevant mission given community and park user interests – what is important today (preservation, restoration, acquisition, management, passive use, active use, etc.)?
- Identifying the district's niche'
- Organizational fragmentation – perceived lack of trust and communication
- Staff pride and loyalty to the district
- Heightened interest in enhanced and relevant professional development opportunities

- Accessibility challenges – transportation for Akron residents, cultural barriers, etc.

Fiscal & Physical Resource - centric

- Financial sustainability
- Duplication of services/fragmenting resources
- Imbalance between current land bank and available staff resources
- Future deferred maintenance demands – high level of interest in maintaining current infrastructure at a high standard

Community/customer - centric

- Shifts in community/customer recreational interests & demands – active use advocacy
- Interests in enhancing community/customer connectivity & outreach
- Interests in acquiring land
- Identifying visitor and user expectations today
- Partnership opportunities – strengthen and/or enhance current relationships, build new relationships, etc.

PEST (political, environmental, societal & technological) - centric

- Competition and competing interests for the same target markets
- Balancing passive and active recreational interests - the effects of active use on natural space
- Eco system management (e.g., bee safe initiatives, water quality, wildlife management, invasive species)
- Changing community demographics – conflicts between youth interests and needs with those of an aging society
- Technological changes & impacts

Defining The District's New Mission



As a part of the process, the district's organizational values were reviewed to determine continued relevance with a focus on what's important as it relates to the delivery of park services for Summit County.

Additionally, the district's mission statement (purpose or promise) was revised for consideration as well to reflect today's conditions so that it may act as a relevant guide for the actions and decision making of the organization moving forward.

Our Values

Quality... We work hard to meet and exceed the expectations of our community and park users. We pride ourselves on being responsive, courteous, and respectful of user interests, needs and desires.

Integrity... We are intentional in efforts to be trustworthy and honest. We say what we mean, mean what we say, and do our best to deliver on our promises.

Professionalism... We commit ourselves to staying current in the use of best practices, trends and issues that may affect our efforts to deliver the best parks services possible to our community and park users.

Leadership... We collectively create an environment that inspires and guides us all toward our shared mission.

Enjoyment of Nature... We provide for the care of places and spaces that allow for pure enjoyment of the natural environment.



Our New Mission

We conserve, sustainably manage and value natural resources for the health and enjoyment of our community, and inspire people to connect with nature through clean and safe parks.

Establishing District Priorities

Four (4) district priorities were identified as the guideposts for the implementation of the Strategic Action Plan and are viewed as critical to the future operational health and welfare of the district. These priorities, when addressed with intention and vigor, are expected to positively affect and influence the organization, enhancing service quality and creating more effective and efficient operations.

Priority #1

A Healthy Organizational Culture



Summit Metro Parks will prioritize the development of a healthy organizational culture reflecting a commitment to an internal community of trust and respect, effective communication and transparency, and staff diversity.

Priority #2

Fulfilling Our Mission



Summit Metro Parks will prioritize a commitment to a set of agreed upon and shared values, and purpose which includes the cultivation of a love of nature on behalf of the community; being responsible stewards of shared resources; and a steadfast focus on what it is that makes Summit Metro Parks special in the eyes of the community and park users.

Priority #3

Land Stewardship



Summit Metro Parks will prioritize its commitment to land stewardship through the responsible management and maintenance of park assets; a balanced approach to conservation and public use; the identification of strategic land acquisitions and partnerships; and by creating and adapting parks to meet public needs.

Priority #4

Community & Connections



Summit Metro Parks will prioritize community and connections by nurturing current relationships; promoting and fostering new connections that expand our reach; continuing to create high quality park opportunities; and by being recognized as a leader in Summit County.

Summit Metro Parks - Strategic Action Plan 2017-2019

District Priority: A Healthy Organizational Culture

- Goal 1: Support an internal community of trust & respect**
- Goal 2: Promote a high quality work force**
- Goal 3: Enhance effective communication & transparency**
- Goal 4: Increase staff diversity that reflects our communities**

District Priority: Fulfilling Our Mission

- Goal 1: Cultivate a love of nature**
- Goal 2: Be responsible stewards of our resources**

District Priority: Land Stewardship

- Goal 1: Manage & maintain park assets**
- Goal 2: Balance conservation with public use**
- Goal 3: Responsibly identify strategic land acquisitions & partnerships**
- Goal 4: Create & adapt parks to meet public needs**

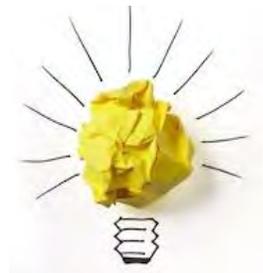
District Priority: Community & Connections

- Goal 1: Expand our reach**
- Goal 2: Create high quality opportunities for the public**
- Goal 3: Be recognized as a leader in our community**
- Goal 4: Build a sense of community around Summit Metro Parks**

[NOTE: The comprehensive Summit Metro Parks Strategic Action Plan including priorities, goals, actions, timelines, accountability, and performance outcomes is available under separate cover and designed for use by District staff as an operational work plan.]

Key Issues

As the result of the process, four key issues were identified as important conditions the district should initiate energy around in the early stages of implementing the Strategic Action Plan. Each of these issues is represented by a number of actionable steps within the Plan further emphasizing their importance moving forward. Efforts and investments made in these areas are expected to reap significant reward given each issue's reach and impact.



Organizational fragmentation and a perceived lack of trust

Staff representing all areas of the District suggest that a distrust exists in the system. However, there is strong consensus that with a new administrator at the helm there now exists a sense of excitement, renewed vigor, and hope that the District's culture will shift towards a healthier place and one that exhibits more collegiality, connectedness and function.

Balancing preservation & conservation with active use

Stakeholder feedback resulted in a "rub" between interests in both active and passive use of land. This conflict is a national stage issue and one that public land management systems grapple with at the local, state and federal levels. The district's interests in developing a clear philosophy as it relates to the difficult balance between active and passive use will provide a solid platform from which to continue to evaluate and assess this conflict moving forward. The modification of the district's mission statement as part of this process has provided a good first step in honing in on a philosophy around this complex issue.

Financial sustainability & resilience

Concerns were articulated regarding the long term financial viability of the district given the volatility of the economy and the unexpected nature of how it affects people's perspectives and decision making around investment. The district currently does not have a cost recovery philosophy which provides strategic direction as it relates to revenue enhancement and how finite tax resources will be used in the future. Interest exists for the development of cost recovery strategies that can provide guidance and justification for how tax dollars will be spent in both the short and long term.

Imbalance between current land bank and staff resources

Evidence through community, park user and staff feedback suggests an impassioned interest in acquiring land for the sake of preservation and legacy while at the same time, expression of concern about the district's capacity to manage and maintain these resources both now and into the future was shared. This dilemma positions the district to have focused discussion and thinking around how to develop a staff resource pool that is able to provide necessary care for the valuable park resources and inventory owned by the district.

Future Adaptation Considerations - Trends & Issues

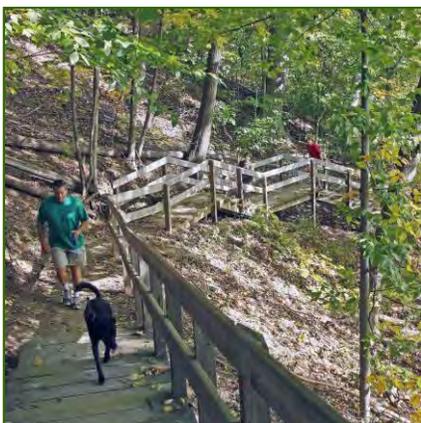
A review of futurist literature by scholars and professionals in parks, recreation and leisure studies that focus primarily on the decades of the 1990s and 2000s offers a background to the issues and challenges facing public park and recreation agencies today. Most of this is based on literature reviews, horizon scanning, and analyses of trend data, surveys and essays.

The First Annual Leisure Watch National Issues Survey (1989) produced a National Issues Agenda for the 1990s. An "issue" was defined as "a difficulty or problem that has a significant influence on the way an organization functions or on its ability to achieve a desired future". Similar surveys have been conducted since and have resulted in the same responses suggesting that although our social and economic circumstances have escalated, the prevalent issues have remained unchanged.

Recreation and park administrators, planners and educators in 13 states in the U.S.A. and in Canadian provinces were asked to identify issues that they expected would have the greatest impact on their organization's and/or clientele's near future. In order of frequency of choice, those issues identified were:

- Economy/consumerism - e.g., the need to better define economic impact of recreation opportunity
- Business management - e.g., increasing costs and decreasing resources
- Technology and science - e.g., genetic engineering/life prolonging technology
- Family/social relationships - e.g., growth of nontraditional families
- Politics/government/legislation - e.g., need for federal and state funding support
- Fitness/sports - e.g., motivating the nonparticipant (youth, disabled, aged)
- Medicine/health/wellness - e.g., growth of employee wellness services
- Education, learning, and training - e.g., prevalent illiteracy in relevant professional areas
- Environment/ecology - e.g., management of increased demand for open space/resources
- Workplace/employment - e.g., decline of the power of labor unions
- Demographics - e.g., an aging population; growth in Hispanic and Asian populations

Ironically or otherwise, these "dated" national responses are in direct correlation with today's primary issues and interests affirming that little has changed in the past 20 years. These collective challenges and broad opportunities continue to lie with public parks and recreation agencies. Those that are suggested to make the greatest long term impact are the following.



- *The economy and financial condition (funding, deteriorating infrastructure & deferred maintenance demands)*
- *Demographic shifts (aging; increasingly diverse populations, especially the growth of Hispanic and Asian communities)*
- *Increased competition*
- *The importance of a healthy citizenry*
- *Social connectivity*

Implementation & Monitoring

In order for any strategic planning effort to be effective there must be significant effort and resource dedicated to not only implementation, but also to monitoring and evaluating the Plan's execution – taking a periodic look at how the district is doing in response to goals and actions.

Monitoring the implementation of the Plan is important for a number of reasons. First, it helps ensure that the work is being done and that the district is tracking whether or not it is accomplishing what it intended to accomplish. Second, monitoring gives the district the opportunity to communicate progress. Third, it identifies where problems and opportunities lie and what has changed allowing for corrective actions including adjustment or setting a new course. Most importantly, monitoring demonstrates a commitment to the Plan, translating the planning effort into tangible reality rather than it becoming an occasional academic exercise.

- ✓ An all-staff meeting/open house should be held to “roll-out” the Plan, clarifying priorities, goals, actions, staff teams and leads, and discussing expectations in execution and evaluation. Similar efforts can be held annually to encourage an on-going commitment.
- ✓ The Plan should be shared with the district's Board to garner support.
- ✓ A hard copy of the Plan should be distributed to all staff.
- ✓ Timetables should be set for progress-reporting (e.g., monthly, quarterly).
- ✓ Forums or methods for electronic reporting should be developed (e.g., Access, Smartsheet, district meetings). This should include establishing mechanisms for updating the document itself.
- ✓ Hold all-staff Strategic Action Plan update meetings on a quarterly basis requiring that all “leads” report out on progress made for the actions for which they are responsible.
- ✓ Ensure that the Strategic Plan be a static agenda item on all division/department meeting agendas thus allowing it to be “front and center” at all times.
- ✓ Update Board members and community members on the Plan's progress on a quarterly or semi-annual basis via meetings, website, etc., ensuring transparency.
- ✓ The Plan should act as evaluation criterion for all staff performance reviews.
- ✓ At the conclusion of each year or in-line with the district's budget process, previous and subsequent year's goals and actions should be reviewed to determine their relevance moving forward. Adjustments should be made as necessary and appropriate.
- ✓ At the conclusion of each year, prepare an annual report (various modalities) which details Plan progress. Report on and distribute as appropriate.
- ✓ An electronic parking lot should be created that is accessible by all staff allowing for the collection of ideas, concepts, etc., to help strengthen the Plan and assist with the development of new priorities, goals, and actions.

Facilitation of Summit Metro Parks 2017-2019 Strategic Action Plan provided by:



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