



**METROPARKS  
TOLEDO**

# Rooted in the Community

**STRATEGIC PLAN | 2021-2023**

A dramatic sunset over a river with a rocky foreground. The sky is filled with vibrant orange and red clouds, reflecting on the water. The foreground shows a rocky bank with small pools of water. The text "Translating Vision into Action" is overlaid in white.

# Translating Vision into Action



## **Rooted in the Community**

The new strategic plan is our roadmap for the next three years.

The goals and objectives of this ambitious plan were determined after a lengthy process that involved the Board, leadership and staff from across the park system.

The last strategic plan guided the park system through an historic period of growth and culminated with Metroparks becoming the best park district in the country! Under the new plan, we will continue that momentum and make significant improvements, such as Glass City Riverwalk, additional trails connecting parks and people, and new ways of engaging with – and making a difference in – our community.

Many of the goals are familiar. Maintaining financial stability, taking care of what we have and being a leader in conservation are imperative to delivering on our promises to those who have invested in us – the taxpayers. Other goals remain from our previous plan, too, with new or revised action steps and desired outcomes that reflect the future of Metroparks.

Actions related to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion come directly from the new vision statement adopted by the Board of Park Commissioners. Along with organizational health, strategic community partnerships and telling the story of our great region, these steps are vital to the future of Metroparks and Lucas County. Connecting with others is a common theme, which is why we chose the title, Rooted in Our Community.

By fulfilling these goals, as our vision statement says, we “will elevate our region and transform its identity.” I am so appreciative of the tremendous effort and commitment the Metroparks’ team showed over the last three years. It is inspiring to pursue such important work together.

A handwritten signature in purple ink, appearing to be 'T. D. B.', is located above the title of the Executive Director.

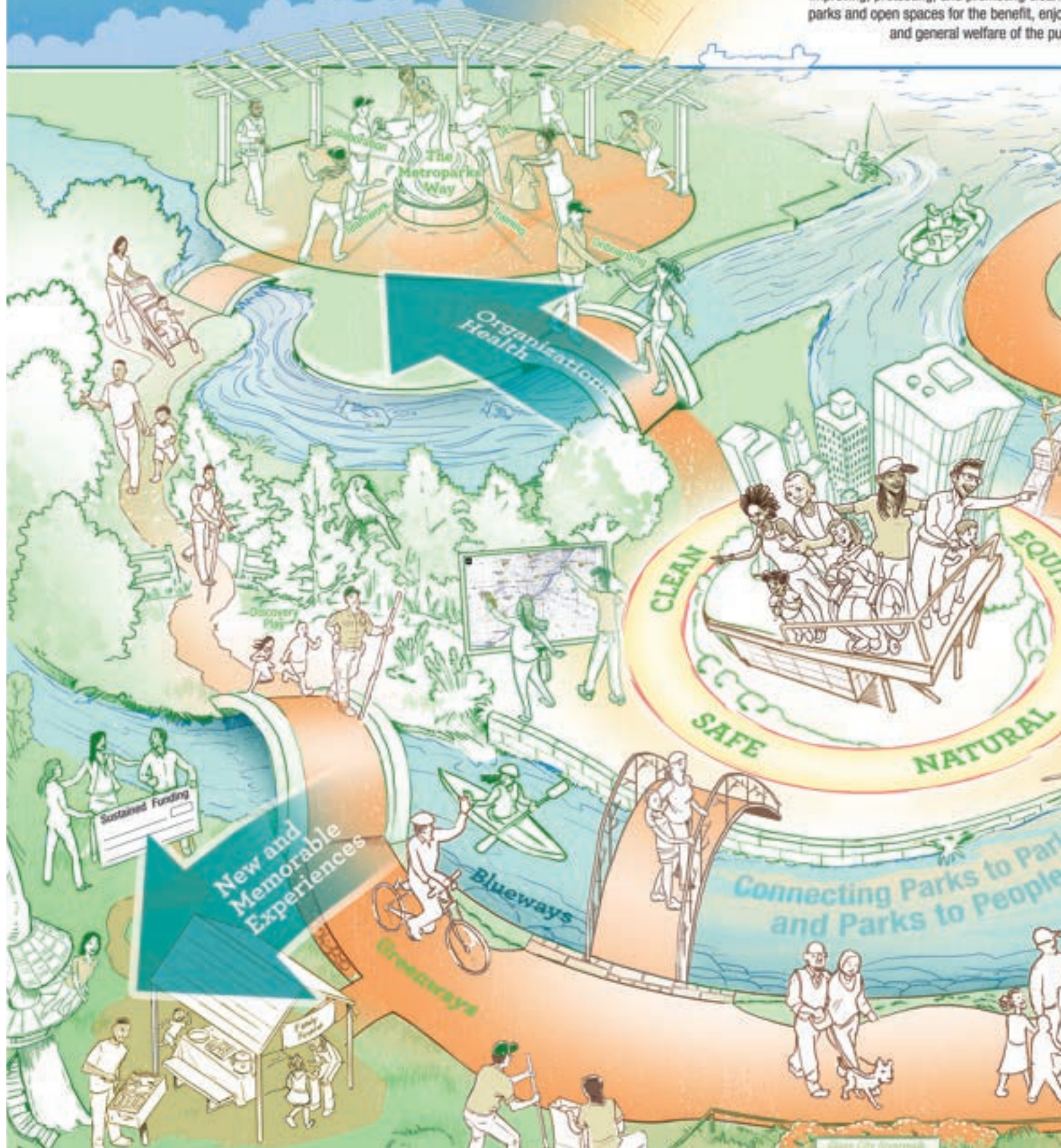
*Executive Director  
Metroparks Toledo*



# METROPARKS TOLEDO

## Mission Statement

Conserve the region's resources by creating, improving, protecting, and promoting clean parks and open spaces for the benefit, enjoyment, and general welfare of the public.



Sustained Funding

Blueways  
Greenways

CLEAN  
SAFE  
NATURAL

Connecting Parks to People  
and Parks to People

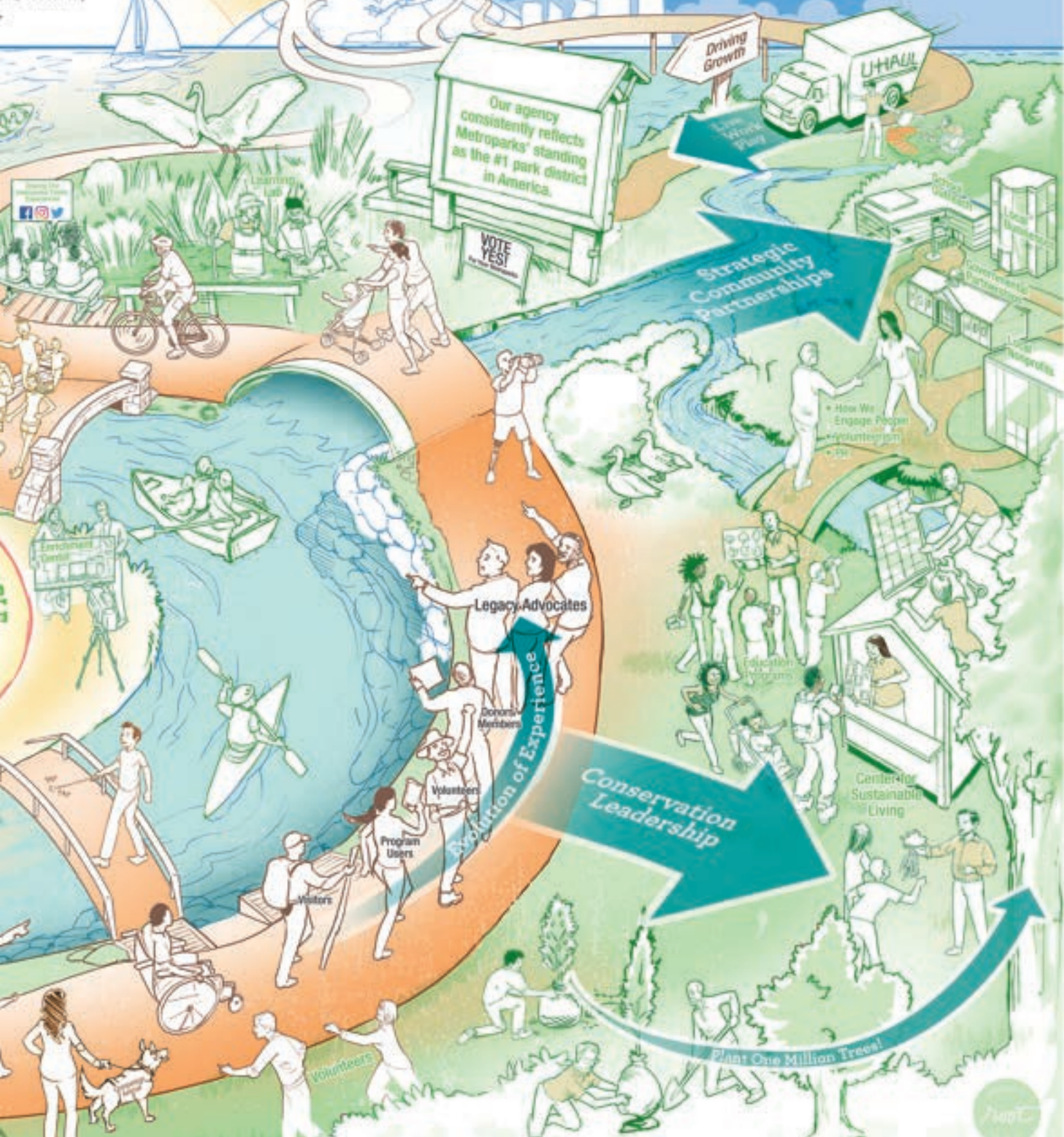
# Vision

## Enhance Regional Brand and Identity

Metroparks Toledo will be, in its culture and community engagements, the beacon for conservation of natural resources, diversity, equity, and inclusion; and the activation and promotion of spaces that enhance physical and mental health.

The communal pursuit of these aspirations will elevate our region and transform its identity.

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# The Metroparks Way:

## A Place to Work Where You Can “Get Outside Yourself”

The Metroparks Way is to maintain a fun atmosphere, while valuing high achievement, accountability, creativity, employee well-being and a dedication to mission and vision for the community's future.

*We achieve The Metroparks Way by:*

### **EXCITED & COMMITTED**

- Advocating for Metroparks with a positive outlook and a strong belief in the future
- Staying adventurous, vibrant and fun
- Being passionate about and committed to the Metroparks Mission
- Embracing Metroparks Culture

### **CREATIVE & NIMBLE**

- Being visionary, open minded, innovative, always evolving, changing and anxious to seek new challenges even when it means risking failure
- Acknowledging the need for flexibility

### **COLLABORATIVE & INCLUSIVE**

- Asking hard questions, speaking up, challenging the norm and giving others permission to do the same
- Valuing all ideas and seeking input from all
- Cultivating camaraderie among our staff and partners through trust, respect and support
- Being leaders who develop others
- Communicating up and down

### **INTERNAL DRIVE EXCELLENCE**

- Thinking big, pushing for excellence, going beyond what is expected of us to “wow” people
- Having the self-motivation and discipline to do what is needed; juggling many tasks to make things happen while meeting high standards
- Never making excuses or blaming others
- Having humility, a willingness to learn from mistakes and accepting guidance from others
- Having a personal commitment to learning, developing and the growth for ourselves, our staff and our organization

### **HAVE THE PRIVILEGE TO SERVE**

- Focusing on the visitor experience
- Feeling honored to represent Toledo and northwest Ohio

### **DIVERSITY**

- Being welcoming and accessible to all
- Staying focused on community outreach and engagement

## OUR MISSION

Conserve the region's resources by creating, developing, improving, protecting, and promoting clean, safe, and natural parks and open spaces for the benefit, enjoyment, education, and general welfare of the public.

## Strategic Priorities to achieve Our Vision

### **Maintenance of Core Services –**

Deliver a consistent clean, safe, and natural experience by preserving and restoring natural resources, maintaining parks to the highest standards, and making all visitors feel welcome.

### **Organizational Health –**

Advance Metroparks as an employer of choice by cultivating an atmosphere of both high performance and satisfaction among team members.

### **Diversity, Equity & Inclusion –**

Commit to the core values of diversity, equity and inclusion to ensure they are applied universally across the park system, at all levels of the operation.

### **Become the Leader in Natural Resource Conservation –**

Launch long-term initiatives to drive strategic partnerships that accomplish significant restoration outcomes for Northwest Ohio. Educate and inspire citizens to change behaviors to improve conservation regionally so that our community is the national leader on how to live sustainably.

### **Engagement in Our Story –**

Clearly and consistently communicate internally and externally the value of Metroparks and how it impacts the Toledo area's reputation as the place to live, work and play.

### **Strategic Community Partnerships –**

Continuously strive to foster creative, mutually beneficial collaborations that advance the Metroparks mission and vision and improve quality of life for all residents.

### **Sustainability of Funding –**

Deliver maximum value to taxpayers through financially sustainable practices and a variety of revenue sources.

## VISION STATEMENT

Metroparks Toledo will be, in its culture and community engagements, the beacon for conservation of natural resources; diversity, equity, and inclusion; and the activation and promotion of spaces that enhance physical and mental health. The communal pursuit of these aspirations will elevate our region and transform its identity.

# Maintenance of Core Services

Deliver a consistent clean, safe, and natural experience by preserving and restoring natural resources, maintaining parks to the highest standards, and making all visitors feel welcome.

## DESIRED OUTCOME:

Metroparks commitment to clean, safe, natural parks is the priority above all else

## STRATEGIC ACTIONS:

- Commit 2%-5% of the value of fixed assets on major maintenance annually
- Develop benchmark for and commit funding to the improvement and maintenance of natural areas
- Create messaging that articulates our district-wide Natural Resources management approach and plan; communicate internally and externally
- Enhance the long range park improvement plan
- Update the 3-year summary of planned major maintenance, capital renewal, and natural area restoration projects with estimated budget and staffing needs, specifically to plan for new 2020 levy funding for district-wide projects
- Develop an annual summary that captures accomplishments and specifies whether projects were completed, deferred, or canceled
- Proactively plan for the improvement and maintenance of natural areas and structures informed by data-driven analyses
- Develop a reporting mechanism to project the expected lifespan and required maintenance of significant assets; use this information to plan and budget for major upgrades and maintenance
- Deliver ongoing communications to staff to increase the understanding and transparency of major maintenance

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Operate parks efficiently and in a way that supports the environment

- Investigate ways to increase efficiency in how we operate
- To the fullest extent possible, standardize park operations to minimize complexity and increase our ability for maintenance crews to work in similar ways in every park
- Introduce more environmentally friendly standard operating procedures and supplies
- Integrate Natural Resources standards and approaches to ensure operating decisions and practices promote conservation

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Welcome increasingly diverse park visitors to all Metroparks

- Adapt operations and outreach approaches to ensure a welcoming, positive experience for all
  - Seek honest conversations with residents with a commitment to action and accountability
  - Work collaboratively among operations, programming, community development, and law enforcement to support outreach and deliver programs, events, and activities with a focus on equity and inclusivity
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# Organizational Health

Advance Metroparks as an employer of choice by cultivating an atmosphere of both high performance and satisfaction among team members.

## DESIRED OUTCOME:

Evaluate and implement the most effective staffing model

## STRATEGIC ACTIONS:

- Update organizational structure
- Scale administrative functions to support agency growth and changes
- Evaluate staffing models; assess duties to ensure proper staffing levels and efficiency
- Complete a compensation review and implement recommendations

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Enhance labor effectiveness

- Foster collaborative labor relations by regularly and openly communicating to effect changes that benefit staff and the agency
- Ensure that all staff are performing at or above expectations

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Improve staff diversity

- Redefine recruitment and onboarding practices to ensure an exceptional, diverse team and foster an environment where all feel included
- Create and enhance training, mentoring, outreach and other methods to provide immediate and long-term employment opportunities across all areas of the agency

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Prepare staff for personal and agency growth

- Enhance bench strength with a comprehensive training strategy that includes on-the-job, stretch/special assignments, and formal training
- Develop clear succession plans for every role that is determined to be critical in the organization, and growth plans for everyone interested
- Address the challenge of promoting from within to inspire and develop staff who desire to advance in the agency
- Simplify the pay for performance approach to drive and reward desired behaviors
- Link individual goals to agency strategy

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Improve the delivery of Employee Services

- Elevate Employee Services to become a solution-oriented department that proactively identifies and resolves talent management challenges to meet the needs of the agency
- Embrace assessment of Employee Services and implement changes to deliver results
- Maximize the usefulness and efficiency of the Predictive Index, Asure, and other HR technology
- Modernize recruiting approach to enhance responsiveness and effectiveness acknowledging shift to social media platforms
- Drive the engagement of supervisors in the hiring process

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Enhance culture by continuing to hold ourselves accountable to The Metroparks Way

- Inspire staff to champion change, improvement, and growth at Metroparks
  - Launch a change management approach to foster ongoing two-way communication between staff and the leadership team, and empower creative problem solving at all levels in the agency
  - Track progress with an annual engagement survey and Net Promoter Score (“How likely are you to recommend working at Metroparks to a friend?”)
  - Develop and manage annual action plan to address engagement opportunities identified through survey
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# Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

Commit to the core values of diversity, equity and inclusion to ensure they are applied universally across the park system, at all levels of the operation.

## DESIRED OUTCOME:

Evaluate current state and define aspirations

## STRATEGIC ACTIONS:

- Complete a strategic planning and public input process to evaluate the current state of DEI at Metroparks
- Establish future state vision for DEI

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Create action plan to bridge gap from current to desired state

- Define Key Performance Indicators
- Determine and engage internal and external resources to successfully implement the action plan
- Review strategy and action plan with Board of Commissioners for feedback, refinement, and support for moving forward

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Establish change management approach to inspire and empower the entire continuum of experience (visitors, volunteers, donors, and staff)

- Foster an environment where DEI thrives without exception
- Incorporate candid conversations, learning opportunities, and support within every initiative
- Review awareness/knowledge gaps for all stakeholders (visitors, volunteers, donors, staff)
  - Develop an internal training plan to engage staff in leading the desired changes
  - Create an external two-way communication approach with visitors, volunteers, and donors

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Give staff a voice to shape services, programs, activities, funding, volunteer, and employment opportunities

- Benchmark and clarify approach to team and affinity groups
- Clarify purpose to articulate expected ways in which affinity groups shape agency initiatives
- Begin with two groups: Women, Multi-cultural; appoint executive sponsor and co-leads; develop charter and purpose for each group
- Establish additional affinity groups
- Evaluate Community Volunteer Leave and other staff programs to intentionally promote awareness of and connections with Metroparks' DEI priorities

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Ensure our written documents (policies, practices, procedures, and handbooks) set the proper foundation for diversity, equity, and inclusion

- Thoroughly inventory written documents to compile a comprehensive list of necessary updates
- Review all board policies as they relate to DEI, and make necessary updates, in particular:
  - #10 (Staff Treatment)
  - #20 (Diversity)
  - #23 (Diversity in Procurement)
  - Update the Employee Handbook
  - Update the Ranger Handbook

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Enhance partnerships and business opportunities with diverse groups/companies

- Implement changes in practice to diversify partnerships and business opportunities, and in accordance to updates to Board Policy #23 (Diversity in Procurement)
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**DESIRED OUTCOME:**

**Cultivate and engage new and diverse audiences who have been traditionally underrepresented at Metroparks**

**STRATEGIC ACTIONS:**

- Become active members in diverse community groups and professional organizations
- Develop DEI strategic plan for philanthropy
- Updates to membership program
- Establish a “think tank” diverse leadership group that meets regularly to guide the direction of DEI initiatives at Metroparks
  - Build a candidate pool of diverse professionals who are interested in becoming involved with and working for Metroparks
- Improve staff diversity
  - Support and inform the efforts Employee Services to ultimately improve staff recruiting and retention

**Drive the continuum of experience for new and more diverse park visitors**

- Create and launch a marketing and communication strategy focused on reaching more diverse audiences
- Refine strategy for the Glass City Enrichment Center as a community hub for central city and East Toledo
- Identify methods to overcome barriers to visitation at each Metropark

**Diversity, equity and inclusion within each of our programs**

- Ensure the needs of diverse members of the community are represented in all programming decisions
- Develop, produce, implement, and present programs and special events that focus on the inclusion of diverse populations
- Identify community populations at risk of exclusion and work with them to identify ways to eliminate obstacles to participation
  - Develop and coordinate partnerships with organizations that assist in the goal of reaching diverse populations as it relates to program attendance

**Spearhead regional conversations to position Toledo to become a national benchmark city for DEI**

- Establish a working group of companies, agencies, and community organizations who develop approach for establishing Northwest Ohio as a leader and example for inclusive communities



# Become the Leader in Natural Resource Conservation

Launch long-term initiatives to drive strategic partnerships that accomplish significant restoration outcomes for Northwest Ohio. Educate and inspire citizens to change behaviors to improve conservation regionally so that our community is the national leader on how to live sustainably.

## DESIRED OUTCOME:

Define aspirational goals for regional conservation efforts

## STRATEGIC ACTIONS:

- Create a long-range conservation action plan including, but not limited to:
  - Meaningful improvements to Lake Erie and its tributaries in the Western Basin
  - Establishment of a conservation trust to permanently fund local actions as well as provide financial resources for initiatives outside of Lucas County
  - 1 Million Trees Initiative
  - Staffing and financial models that align necessary resources
- Drive partnerships with those whose involvement will deliver even greater collaborative impact
- Coordinate a national public relations campaign to highlight environmental efforts and improvements and position Toledo as the benchmark to inspire national and global change

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Develop an approach to educate and inspire our community to live more sustainably. Compel other communities to similar action to collectively mitigate global conservation issues.

- Launch a regional education effort to inspire individuals to permanently rethink behavior toward improved conservation
- Reinvigorate the former National Center for Nature Photography at Secor Metropark so it becomes a hub for community conservation engagement, focused on behaviors such as local food, gardening, cooking, reducing consumption, alternative energies, and positively impacting our natural world in a variety of additional ways
- Focus on engaging children and youth in the delivery of programs, development of school partnerships, and creation of curriculum standards
- Use virtual tools, online content, and social media to expand accessibility and our reach
- Development of communication and programming approach to further drive behavior change by showing the link between individual contributions and global conservation issues such as biodiversity loss and climate change
- Share our regional story, approach, and results in a way that compels others across the nation to take on similar sustainability initiatives. With our example as a starting point, encourage individuals, agencies, and communities beyond Northwest Ohio to do their part to mitigate biodiversity loss and global climate change.

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Implement innovations which maintain and enhance our conservation impact

- Establish processes, procedures, and guidelines to inform decisions at Metroparks in support of conservation – especially related to natural resource management, park development, park improvement, and operations – so that we continue to be the national leader in stewarding the resources entrusted to us
  - Position ourselves as a thought leader by conducting and publishing research to broaden our understanding and quantify the impact of our actions on conservation
    - Leverage partnerships with experts and local universities
    - Clarify the questions and situations which would benefit from additional research and analysis
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# Strategic Community Partnerships

Continuously strive to foster creative, mutually beneficial collaborations that advance the Metroparks mission and vision and improve quality of life for all residents.

## DESIRED OUTCOME:

Connect with individuals, community groups, and organizations to collectively transform our region – elevating it to the place where people feel welcome to live, work, and play

## STRATEGIC ACTIONS:

- Lead and participate in collaboration efforts among community leaders to deliver local and regional transformation beyond what any agency or individual could achieve alone
- Including representation from private, public, community and faith-based entities
- Collaborate with individuals and groups to engage people representative of the county we serve
- Drive the long-term ecological vision for Northwest Ohio and the Lake Erie basin and a plan to achieve it

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Establish a comprehensive program for corporate engagement

- Create a strategy for corporate participation along the entire continuum of engagement with Metroparks
- Develop an action plan for businesses to engage with Metroparks in a variety of meaningful ways
- Assign an individual or small group to launch the plan and proactively cultivate and manage long-term corporate relationships

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Launch an inclusive, supportive Enrichment Center that enhances lives and improves neighborhoods

- Engage with neighborhood residents to develop a unified definition about the intended purpose and outcomes for the Glass City Enrichment Center
- Develop a plan for partnerships and programs to best utilize the Glass City Enrichment Center. The plan will seek to:
  - Establish the Enrichment Center as a consistent, safe, and welcome space for everyone
  - Serve as a year-round, key access point for a variety of programs and services
  - Improve the efficiency and sustainability of services through the sharing of resources

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Clarify our approach to establishing and managing partnerships

- Inventory existing arrangements (partner agreements, leases, permits, etc.)
- Develop a consistent approach to evaluating, entering into, managing, and exiting partnerships in accordance with the Partnership policy
- Clarify and define the scenarios that should be considered partnerships
- Develop administrative procedures, forms, and agreements for ease and consistency

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Assistance in Implementing Aspects of our Comprehensive Master Plan

- Engage stakeholders to support land acquisition and connectivity portions of the comprehensive master plan
- Engage TMACOG to create a regional open space master plan

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Youth Engagement & Education

- Develop strategy and plan with Toledo Public Schools and other Lucas County Schools to increase visitation, inform school curriculum and career tech programs, engage students and families in programs and experiences, and create a pipeline of eventual candidates for employment at Metroparks
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# Engagement in Our Story

Clearly and consistently communicate internally and externally the value of Metroparks and how it impacts the Toledo area's reputation as the place to live, work and play.

## DESIRED OUTCOME:

Metroparks is cited as a national leader in transforming a region through conservation practices

## STRATEGIC ACTIONS:

- Develop messages and get national media attention as the model for how to leverage open space and represent diverse populations to support neighborhoods, drive economic development, and enhance regions, including:
  - Development of the downtown Toledo riverfront and Glass City Metropark/Riverwalk
  - Our Natural Resources approach and impact throughout the park district
  - Partnerships and programming with other local agencies to scale our impact
- Continue promoting and celebrating our agency's rich history and contributions to our region and residents over the years
- Apply for and win regional and national industry awards to build credibility and demonstrate effectiveness

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Our agency leads efforts in changing regional brand and identity

- Serve as the community connector and thought leader for re-positioning Toledo, Ohio and surrounding communities as a highly appealing and accessible place to live, work, and play by engaging other thought leaders and quality of life institutions in an aggressive strategy and campaign
- Support the development and launch of a new regional brand, gaining national traction for seeing our region in a new light

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Communication reflects our commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion

- Gather stories and lessons learned regarding DEI to share our success
- Establish and support ongoing two-way communication internally and externally

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The sources and uses of funding is clearly understood within the agency and by taxpayers

- Synthesize financial data and share it openly within the agency to better inform decisions and planning
- Clarity of 10-year financial forecast
- Ensure consistent understanding of sources and uses
- Develop tools and communications to educate on annual budget, long-range financial plan, and sources and uses both within the agency and more broadly

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Empower candor, transparency, and accessibility in communication among all staff in the organization

- Develop a communication approach, cadence, and reporting methodology within the agency to:
  - Continually share information among departments
  - Foster open communication to and from the executive director, leadership team, and staff
  - Invite, listen to, and act upon candid feedback from every staff member at Metroparks
  - Empower every staff member to tell our story

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Our agency consistently reflects Metroparks standing as the #1 Park District in America

- Complete and implement a brand audit to ensure signage, communication deliverables, uniforms, park assets (vehicles and supplies), and other methods consistently and uniformly support our brand standards
  - Consistently evaluate and improve ways in which we deliver on our promise to taxpayers and standard of excellence in everything we do
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# Sustainability of Funding

Deliver maximum value to taxpayers through financially sustainable practices and a variety of revenue sources.

## DESIRED OUTCOME:

Foundation raises funding for the Glass City Metropark/Riverwalk and long-term district-wide sustainability

## STRATEGIC ACTIONS:

- Complete the Glass City Metropark/Riverwalk campaign
- Increase and align long-term managed funds to support park priorities
- Continue to support and foster relationship with Metroparks Toledo Foundation
- Facilitate donor relationships between Metroparks stakeholders and the foundation
- Deliberately broaden and diversify base of supporters
- Acknowledge and celebrate the impact of the entire agency's efforts on philanthropic giving

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Continuous pipeline and effective management of grants

- Refine grant management approach to ensure continued compliance with grant awards
- Proactively seek new and recurring grant opportunities
- Invest in relationships that create awareness of our past work and future aspirations and open doors to funding
- Leverage the exceptional work and projects that have been funded by past grants to demonstrate impact and serve as proof points for winning future grants
- Acknowledge and celebrate the impact of the entire agency's efforts on grant success

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Increase earned income

- Optimize existing earned income and seek additional opportunities aligned with the Earned Income policy
- Develop and maintain earned income plan and forecast, including use of and accounting for funds
- For entire district, and specifically for Glass City Metropark/Riverwalk, identify and engage partners to operate certain Glass City Metropark functions

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Effective planning and financial forecasting

- Align and manage funding sources with long-term strategy and needs
- Maintain funding sources/uses and strategy that ensures upkeep of existing facilities and support for future endeavors
- Update financial plan, park improvement plan, and budget at least once per year
- Contrast capital plan and future operating expense against current resources
- Track and manage all existing and potential funding sources, including: philanthropy, grants, earned income, Tax Increment Financing, and others
- Evaluate levy funding needs and future approach
- Determine cash flow timing and adjustment to fund the Glass City Metropark/Riverwalk project
- Enhance the transparency of the budget process to improve collaboration and empower the leadership team and department managers to make decisions about what is most important and align resources with needs

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Simplified approach that empowers visitors to view, share, and book registrations for rentals, programs, events, and other Metroparks experiences

- Evaluate the existing rental and registration process and software to identify needs, gaps, and a plan to address them
  - Invest in enhancements to software and training to simplify use (both internally and externally) and maximize park engagement
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**METROPARKS  
TOLEDO**