



August 5, 2020

Dear Friends,

For 90 years, Great Parks has been a valuable asset to Hamilton County as the leader in conservation. Great Parks enriches the region through nature-based experiences and helps build strong and healthy communities.

As leaders of an organization that manages more than 17,700 acres of land, 21 parks and nature preserves, and 78 miles of trails, we continually look for ways to maintain the parks' assets the public has entrusted us with for the benefit of the community. The best way to accomplish this is listening to our residents and park users through community engagement to better understand what they expect from their Great Parks.

Over the last three years, Great Parks has engaged taxpayers, park visitors, and community leaders through the creation and implementation of our Master Plan. After hundreds of meetings and thousands of completed surveys, you provided us with a vision for Great Parks of Hamilton County over the next ten years.

Great Parks is also dedicated to operating as good stewards of taxpayer dollars and has been awarded the Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting by the Government Finance Officers Association 21 times for outstanding financial reporting. We only ask the voters of Hamilton County for additional funds when there is a real need and now is one of those times.

In order to build for the future and maintain the excellence that the community expects out of their parks, in January 2020 we began exploring funding options including a possible tax levy to give the community an opportunity to have a voice in shaping the future of Great Parks.

Then COVID-19 hit the world, our nation and our community. The last few months have been difficult due to the medical and economic impacts of the pandemic. While the world has rapidly changed around us, Great Parks made a conscious effort to be a place where people could escape. This year we have seen a 77% increase in trail usage alone. We can say with confidence that Great Parks is one of the few destinations to see an increase in attendance during this difficult time, and we are proud to continue to serve a role in helping our community stay emotionally and physically strong during the pandemic.

greatparks.org

10245 Winton Road
Cincinnati, Ohio 45231

Board of Park Commissioners:
William Burwinkel • HC Buck Niehoff
Joseph C. Seta • Marcus Thompson
Geraldine Warner • Todd Palmeter, Chief Executive Officer



It is clear that people need their parks now more than ever. And while we have been thrilled to keep our parks open to serve our residents, Great Parks has not been immune from the financial impacts of the pandemic. To account for massive lost earned revenue, we have had to cut our budget by \$4.7 million for 2020 alone and this financial impact will continue in 2021. This put Great Parks in a position where, in order to address over \$60 million in critical infrastructure while also meeting the needs of the community evidenced in the Master Plan, the Board made the decision to place an additional 1.8 mill tax levy on the November ballot.

The response we received from several elected officials and well-respected leaders in our community was something we did not expect. However, it was important that we listened and kept an open mind to better understand the current needs and priorities of this community. While people support and love their parks, a variety of reasons and motivations exist making it clear that now is not the right time. Given this information, the Board has decided to not place a levy on the ballot this November.

While we intend to pursue a levy in 2021, Great Parks will look different to the voters over the next several months and until the successful passage of additional levy funding. It will be necessary to operate services at a minimum including limited access to certain areas of parks, closing of facilities and amenities as well as reduced program and educational opportunities.

We look forward to continuing our engagement with the residents of Hamilton County, key business leaders, and elected officials as we have done for many years. As we continue to work hard to provide the Great Parks you deserve, we encourage you to continue to seek refuge and find wellness in your parks.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Todd E. Palmeto". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of each name being capitalized and prominent.

Todd Palmeter
Chief Executive Officer

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