



FINANCE

MetroParks Financial Outlook • Strategy

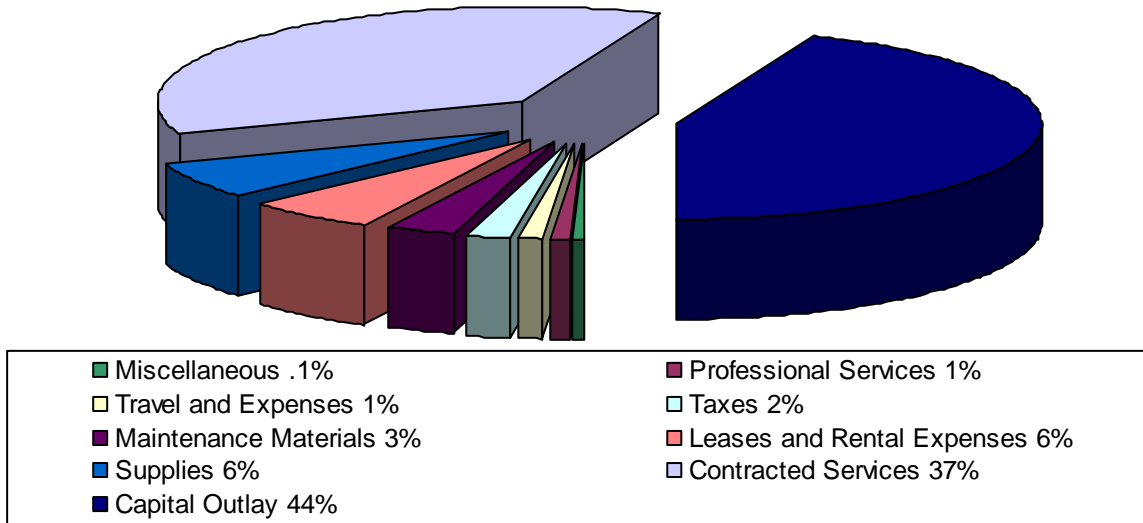
Finance

- Most of Trumbull County MetroParks' spending is in Capital Outlay for building projects and Contracted Services, which are required for park maintenance as well as new development projects.
- MetroParks receives some funds from the Trumbull County Commissioners, government appropriations, the Ohio Department of Transportation, various grants, and royalties on oil and gas wells located on park district property.
- In the future, Trumbull County MetroParks will continue to increase its internal streams of income, coordinate with volunteers and donors for material and help in building new park amenities, and will also investigate whether or not Trumbull County residents would support a park district levy.

MetroParks Financial Outlook

Much of what the park district can accomplish in the future will be based upon the growth and strength of its human structure. However, financial capital is also critical to continue providing important services such as trail maintenance, equipment repair, landscaping, waste removal, and portable lavatory service. The park district's income is very limited. In recent years, however, Trumbull County MetroParks has worked to enhance its income stream through attaining local, state, and federal grants and allocations. Additionally, the park district has begun to receive donations from area citizens in support of its efforts.

Trumbull County MetroParks 2007 Spending



In 2007 the bulk of MetroParks' funds went to cover the organization's capital outlay and contracted services. Capital outlay includes all of the equipment that the park district had to purchase in order to keep existing parks and trails maintained. Some of these items include lawn tractors and bollards for the Western Reserve Greenway. Contracted services include all trash removal, lawn care, and independently contracted services. Because Trumbull MetroParks is a



small organization with a relatively small budget, changes in spending may fluctuate frequently over a period of several years.

It is important to note that the local economy has been lagging over the past several years. The county continues to lose population at about the rate of five people per day, mostly as a result from job loss that forces working-age people to leave in pursuit of better economic opportunities. The Mahoning Valley is unique in the fact that it has very few major corporations headquartered within the region. Trumbull County is home to only one of the top 100 publicly owned businesses in the state of Ohio and not one of the top 100 privately owned firms. Mahoning County has none of either category. Although several entrepreneurial ventures have been started spurred on in part by business incubators and entrepreneurial start-up organizations, it may be quite some time before the rate of job starts surpasses those of job losses.

Although financial difficulties loom in the horizon, the park district's mission is perhaps more important than ever. While parks and recreation have little effect upon local economies, their existence makes an important contribution to an improved quality of life. Regardless of its financial outlook, Trumbull County MetroParks will strive to make the county more comfortable for citizens while providing free opportunities for education, exercise, and recreation.

Park District's Financial Advantages

Trumbull County MetroParks has had great support from generous citizens and organizations, such as the Trumbull County Disc Golf Association, the Trumbull County Commissioners, and the Ohio Department of Transportation. The park district is thankful for all of those who have helped to build the Trumbull County MetroParks system, from volunteers whose services save the park district hundreds, if not thousands of dollars, to those groups who donate funds to provide amenities such as waste removal and on-going equipment and infrastructure maintenance.

Most of the park district's newly acquired parklands only allow ecologically-sensitive improvements, such as nature trails, signage, and pervious parking. Once built, these items are relatively inexpensive to maintain. While services such as portable lavatories and waste removal incur an expense, little additional labor or materials are required to sustain a nature preserve, unlike maintenance-intensive parks such as Clarence Darrow or Canoe City. Even in times of great financial difficulty, it may be possible to keep many of these parks open with minimal help from volunteers.

Park District's Financial Disadvantages

The park district is almost fully dependent upon annually-dispersed funds from the Trumbull County Commissioners to cover the cost of its operations. The gas companies which service the gas wells on park district property will provide Trumbull County MetroParks with a small amount of royalties based upon production, which typically fluctuates from year to year. Because allocations from other government agencies are often inconsistent from year to year, planning long-term projects is very difficult. Additionally, there is no guarantee of funding from year to year. This is particularly problematic when dealing with maintenance issues along the expanding Western Reserve



Greenway and at opened parks. Other avenues of funding will need to be pursued to diversify the park district's income streams.

Strategy

The primary financial strategy of the Trumbull County MetroParks will be to continue diversifying its income streams. Rather than rely on only a few sources of funds, the park district will actively pursue state and federal budget allocations, continue to apply for local, state, and federal grants, and seek contributions from individuals and corporations. The park district will also investigate other funding opportunities, such as a park district property tax levy.

Pursue Government Allocations

In addition to being provided several county resources, substantial government allocations have arrived to the park district through the Trumbull County Commissioners. Park board commissioners have an opportunity to appeal to Trumbull County officials before the beginning of every fiscal year for the funds needed to keep park district projects afloat. Though the County is under no obligation to fund the park district, the County Commissioners have routinely provided substantial funds, the exception being in years of grave financial difficulty during which time the park district received no funding. Although the Trumbull County Commissioners' support has been unwavering through the years, difficult budgets and other financial difficulties may restrict appropriated funds for the park district in the near future.

Federal and state funds are another avenue of receiving funds for improvements. For example, the park district submitted a congressional appropriation request in 2008 for the development of the Mahoning River Water Trail. The park district has also applied and attained funds by state appropriations for the Sunside Trailhead and the Mahoning River Water Trail. Trumbull County MetroParks continues to detail park projects and request funds allocated from federal and state budgets. It is recommended that project proposals be continued created ahead of time and shared with interested officials to gain support for such appropriations.

Ohio Department of Transportation's MetroPark Program

MetroParks presently receives funding for road and parking lot improvements from the Ohio Department of Transportation's MetroPark Program, which is presently administered by the Ohio Parks and Recreation Association. Awards are based upon the percentage of registered Ohio drivers in each MetroPark jurisdiction. The funds, which come from taxes imposed on motorists, may only be used for improvements related directly to vehicle usage, such as parking areas, driveways, and roads. With regards to the program, there is little to do but continue working with the appropriate officials to complete desired projects.

Seek Internal Streams of Income

MetroParks has internal streams of income that include rental fees and royalties. Although the amount of money that the park district receives from leasing space for a



vending machine or renting out canoes is minimal, royalties from gas and oil wells located on park district property have provided the park district with more substantial funds, most which have only recently been acquired through land purchases made possible with the Clean Ohio Program. It is important to keep in mind, however, that gas wells routinely fluctuate in their level of production from year to year, and the amount of revenue they bring in through royalties changes accordingly. MetroParks will continue to take advantage of such opportunities in the future with the expansion of its park system.

Investigate Opportunities for Park Levy

Another option for the park district is to pursue a park levy. MetroParks understands that Trumbull County citizens already shoulder a heavy tax burden. With the funds it presently receives from taxpayers, the park district has worked hard to demonstrate a return on investment for area residents, successfully attaining additional funding from state and federal sources through grant writing and appropriation requests while also saving tremendous costs by collaborating with partnering organizations and volunteers. However, without funding for a staff, Trumbull County MetroParks is limited in how fast and how large it can grow. Proper staffing, funded by a tax levy, would allow MetroParks to pursue additional grants, implement a greater number of projects, and add additional services for Trumbull County residents, representing a significant return of investment. Under current conditions, the amount of funds needed to fully support MetroParks' current operations as well as to hire park district employees and budgeting for projects would likely cost a property owner of a \$100,000 home between three and seven cents per day. Depending upon future funding issues and levels of interest, the park district may develop a levy feasibility committee to investigate the possibility of placing a Trumbull County MetroParks' property tax levy on ballots for a future election, giving all Trumbull County voters an opportunity to determine the future of the park district.

Grants

As with many park districts, grants have provided MetroParks with most of its funding for park projects, including land acquisition, installation of equipment, and construction. While the park district has been successful applying for and attaining grants from entities such as the Ohio Department of Natural Resources and the Trumbull County Tourism Bureau, the Trumbull County MetroParks must be diligent in identifying and applying for future grant opportunities from which the park district could benefit:

- Nature Works
- Land & Water Conservation Fund
- Recreational Trails
- Watershed Coordinators
- Urban Streams Program
- Cooperative Public Boating Facility Project
- Navigational Aids
- Wetland Restoration
- Community Foundation Grant
- Road Tax Allocation
- Surface Transportation Program



- Transportation Enhancement (State)
- Transportation Enhancement (Local)
- Congestion Mitigation Air Quality
- Water Resource Restoration Sponsor Program
- Clean Ohio Program

Volunteers & Donations

Every year, MetroParks receives funds from organizations and individuals. The Friends of the MetroParks is the park district's primary support organization. Members provide the park district with funds generated through membership fees and donations for use on park projects or operations. The Friends of the Western Reserve Greenway has a history of providing funds to support projects along Trumbull County's only regional trail. Volunteer organizations, such as Boy Scouts of America, minimize the labor costs associated with making important park improvements and sometimes even procure funds to help cover the expense of many materials and projects. Other agencies, companies, and sole proprietors provide the park district with significant discounts for critical services. Additionally, MetroParks has also received all of its present real estate through donations, many of which arrive through other public agencies, and also from private corporations and individuals. In the future MetroParks will continue to seek donations from individual park supporters, organizations, and also corporate sponsors.