



Date: September 15, 2016

To: The Board of Park Commissioner

From: Willie F. Carden, Jr., Director of Parks

Subject: **DIRECTOR'S SEARCH**

BOARD OF PARK

COMMISSIONERS

BACKGROUND

For sixteen exquisite Septembers, I have watched from my office in beautiful Eden Park as summer would fade into fall and the brilliant colors of autumn would begin to emerge. Though the vibrant autumn hues were captivating, equally so was a gentle snowfall that would invariably arrive soon thereafter---one that blanketed the grass and sketched each tree in vivid white. Then from the cold of winter, buds, flowers and green leaves would emerge each spring, bringing the delight and promise of warmer days to come.

This changing of the seasons, as most know well, is an apt metaphor for the changeable rhythms of life. And so it is that this will mark my final September as the Director of Cincinnati Parks—as I look towards a new season—that of my retirement—that will begin in the Spring of 2017.

I wish to emphasize that this date of my retirement—on the 30-year milestone of my work with the City—was set many years ago. In large part, it was a promise to my wife, who has had to endure my many years of long hours and seemingly endless work tasks. This was the time when we could begin to savor all of the seasons together. Now, having raised our family and achieved our professional goals, it remains precisely the right time.

OUR WORK TOGETHER

When I was appointed as the Director of Cincinnati Parks, June of 2000, the Board charged me with continuing to build on the legacy established in the 1906 Master Plan, while forging a new and reliable legacy for the present and future. My focus began with re-energizing the staff, understanding that the future success of the park system rest on the shoulders of a well-managed and trained team. Second, we established a business environment complete with base line principals and a focused annual plan.

In 2003, the Board asked me to rebuild the Cincinnati Parks Foundation and to forge a new 20-year Master Plan. All of the above was addressed along with the establishment of the 2007 Master Plan, which was approved by Cincinnati City Council. The 2007 Master Plan, was a vision for the future and called for a network of parkways, greenways and open spaces, natural settings for the community's outdoor leisure activities, education and growth; enrichment through programs, events and community celebrations; and distinctive parklands, beautifully designed and maintained facilities, gardens and greenspaces.

So, how did we do?

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WE HAVE A LOT TO CELEBRATE!

- The proposed downtown riverfront park —Smale Riverfront Park — has largely been completed. It has become the mighty green economic engine it was always envisioned to be. It has attracted millions of visitors annually, heightened tourism, drawn new businesses, new residents, conventions into the downtown corridor and become the site of numerous large events including community concerts, festivals, plays, movies, recreational events and more.
- The expansion and renovation of Washington Park in 2012 has had a \$100 million impact on the urban core. The resulting residential and commercial boom has attracted over 1 million visitors annually to the park for concerts, plays, community events, recreational activities, art and cultural festivals and more.
- Infrastructure improvements have been accomplished annually throughout the system.
- The street tree assessment was increased in order to address not only severe climatic challenges, but also issues like Oak Wilt, Gypsy Moth and the Emerald Ash Borer Beetle.
- Improvements at neighborhood parks including completely rebuilding some parks have taken place across the city and include the following;

Owls Nest Park (Evanston/East Walnut Hills)
Olden View (East Price Hill)
Geier (Oakley)
Ault Park (Mt. Lookout/Hyde Park)
Fleischmann (Avondale)
Seasongood Square (Avondale)
Fairview and Bellevue Parks (CUF)

Kennedy Heights Park (Kennedy Heights)
French Park (Pleasant Ridge)

Hoffner Park (Northside)
Wilson Commons (East Price Hill)

Stanbery Park (Mt. Washington)
Mt. Echo (West Price Hill)
Alms Park (Mt. Lookout)
Classen Park (CUF)
Hauck Garden (Avondale/Corryville)
Eden Park (Walnut Hills/Mt. Adams)
Burnet Woods (Corryville, CUF, Clifton)
McEvoy Park (College Hill)
Jergens Park and Parkers Woods (Northside)
Rapid Run Park (West Price Hill)

- New master plans have been developed for Ziegler Park (OTR/Pendleton), Montgomery Triangle (Pleasant Ridge), Lytle Park (CBD), Auburn Triangle (Corryville/Mt. Auburn) and Ault Commons at Ault Park
- Parks worked with MSD on numerous “green” infrastructure projects and has created sustainable features ranging from rain gardens and green roofs to geothermal systems and solar powered panels and electric car charging stations

- From 2002-2015, our numerous Sister City international collaborations have leveraged over \$1.85 million in park and cultural exchanges here and abroad. These meaningful exchanges of art and parklands with Gifu, Japan; Munich, Germany; Harare, Zimbabwe; Taipei-Hsien, Taiwan; Liuzhou, China; Kharkiv, Ukraine; and Nancy, France have resulted in international recognition for our City and our Parks.
- Alternative, **non-taxpayer supported sources** have successfully been developed for many projects. These include developer payments for park improvements, common area maintenance charges (CAM) to support park maintenance, fees for rentals of park property, user fees and special permits. They also include parking revenue, special event charges and permits, leases of park property (such as for Moerlein Lager House), and other revenues – all to **reduce the burden on tax-supported funding** for park operations and maintenance.
- Parks developed **partnerships** with CPS, 3CDC, Millcreek, Hamilton County Parks, and numerous other public and private entities to manage and improve parks
- **Volunteer opportunities** and participation has been expanding annually
- The Parks Foundation and Park Advisory Councils advocate for parks fundraise and work with staff on programs and activities in parks. Significant private funds were raised for the construction of Smale Riverfront Park
- Land management activities include removing invasive species and replanting the urban forest though budgets are still insufficient to cover the needs
- Energy conservation, environmental programs and other “green” projects are well underway including the use of other environmentally appropriate technologies and practices

As I leave, what will remain here—in perpetuity— is the daily execution of the critical mission of this City’s nationally recognized Cincinnati Parks system: To conserve, manage, sustain, and enhance parks’ natural and cultural resources and public greenspace for the enjoyment, enlightenment and enrichment of the Cincinnati community.

With this in mind, a process has been initiated to solicit proposals from prospective candidates throughout the country to become your new director of Cincinnati Parks. This will be someone uniquely qualified to guide this department towards the continued achievement of our many service, business, technical, resource, cultural and stewardship objectives.

We will ask much of this individual, as we have of ourselves these many years. This job comes with immense and diverse responsibilities; and as such, the successful candidate will possess an array of core competencies, upon which the individual’s multi-dimensional skills

will be set and implemented. These competencies include strong leadership, excellent people and communications skills, conflict management, problem solving, collaborative abilities, commitment to diversity and more.

But there's another essential ingredient for success that cannot be overlooked—and that is creativity. Because ultimately, what we must acknowledge is that our Parks system is a living, breathing, growing, ever-evolving, rapidly-changing public body that understands the fluctuating times in which we live and seeks to respond by providing superior opportunities and experiences that produce the greatest value—every single day—for our citizens.

This creative spirit must be deeply embedded within the annual business plan that the director is required to develop and communicate to the team. Indeed, innovation—partnered with knowledge, skill, leadership and reliability—has earned our parks yearly accolades from prestigious national and regional organizations including the Trust for Public Land, Trip Advisor, WalletHub, CityNova, Prevention Magazine, the New York Times, CityBeat, Cincinnati Magazine, Cincinnati Family Magazine and more

The business plan is an annual roadmap for the Park Board. It sets the overall direction of the Park Board team as well as performance targets for the upcoming year. It must consider the financial/budgetary outlook for the Park Board, capital improvement and construction needs, programming needs, staffing requirements, safety concerns, maintenance costs, and more.

The business plan is a way forward for the staff team to fuel the green economic engine that is Cincinnati Parks. We know that by establishing prioritized annual targets for achievement, we can absolutely power all the way up to our full potential; and realize for this community the myriad benefits that reach well beyond the enriching, memorable moments spent in any one of our parks.

What are those benefits? Well, we can all agree that our parks offer innumerable health benefits to our citizens with clean, safe, reliable, enriching, beautiful, green, free and accessible spaces for both physical recreation and emotional comfort.

Data shows that our parks also help to increase property values, attract new residents and businesses, and draw tourists and conventions to our region. The environmental benefits of thousands of acres of greenspace within this city are significant. Indeed, a green economic engine.

The way I see it, it is a matter of **PARKENOMICS**. The theory is rather simple: Where there are vibrant, beautiful, clean, safe parks, astonishing things happen.

- Neighborhoods are safer, juvenile delinquency rates decline, and social ties are strengthened.
- People experience less anxiety, better moods, and have lower risks for diseases like hypertension, colon cancer, heart disease and diabetes.

- Children have safe places to play where they develop muscle strength and coordination, language, cognitive thinking and reasoning abilities.
- Real estate values rise.
- Public/private partnerships are formed to create even better parks. Businesses are attracted to the community.
- Trees and vegetation reduce air and water pollution and help keep cities cooler.

PARKENOMICS. It's simple and it works!

OUR WORK CONTINUES

Is there still work to be done? Absolutely.

With all of the inspiring opportunities still ahead, the Park Board must continue to find ways to enhance revenues to offset our growing—and concerning— budgetary challenges to achieve all of our targeted objectives. Still, from 2003 through 2015, the Park Board returned 42, 46, 50, 51, 62, 66, 68, 83, 73, 83, 84, and 75 cents in cash leveraged funds and services--respectively--- for every taxpayer dollar received by Parks. Again, innovation and focused excellence is the key. Growth will result---even though we are constantly required to do more with less.

One last comment on this bears emphasis: Innovation can make many things happen, but innovation alone cannot carry the day in the face of \$55+ million dollars in capital maintenance needs. This is an urgent need that must be addressed by the City if our aging infrastructure is to survive into this century.

THE TRANSITION OF LEADERSHIP

As you know, the Chairperson of the Park Board has been working to solicit proposals to bring on a professional search firm to assist with the process of advertising and securing candidates to fill the Director of Parks position. Four firms were engaged and two firms submitted proposals. The proposals will be vetted by the Board and one will be selected to work with staff to generate candidates for interview and ultimately selection as the next Director of Parks.

BEFORE I TRANSITION...

There has never been a better time to live and work in Cincinnati. It has become a city transformed; a vital, vibrant, growing and thriving center of extraordinary community life and experience. A new season is coming, and with it, even greater opportunities to build on the successes of the past for an even brighter future than any of us can now imagine.

It has been an honor to serve this Board and this community — my home and yours — these past 16 plus years. We have done some great work together. And there is great work yet to

Attachment F

be done. And it will be done. May the wind always be at your back and thank you for all your support.