

ERIE METROPARKS

# STRATEGIC PLAN



Conserving natural resources while connecting the community with nature through education and exploration.

2025-2030

## **MISSION, VISION, VALUES**

### **Vision Statement**

Erie MetroParks will be a responsible, progressive leader and educator in the preservation and conservation of Erie County's natural resources.

### **Mission Statement**

Erie MetroParks mission is to conserve natural resources while connecting the community with nature through education and exploration.

### **Core Values**

- Service: *We place people first.*
- Stewardship: *We are responsible caretakers of the public's land and money.*
- Integrity: *We do the right thing.*
- Community: *We achieve more together.*

## **BACKGROUND**

As early as 1915, Ohio conservationists saw the need to preserve some of the natural scenery, streams, woodlands, and open space near our urban areas for future generations to enjoy. In 1917, the Ohio legislature enacted the Ohio Park District Law making it possible for local communities to establish park districts and create autonomous boards with limited taxing powers and authority to acquire lands for the conservation of natural resources and to promote the use of such lands for the general welfare of the citizens.

In June of 1965, a park study committee recommended the establishment of a metropolitan park district to Erie County Commissioners. With the partnership and support of the Erie Regional Planning Commission and various local Erie County political subdivisions, an application was submitted to the probate court to establish a park district under the provisions of Chapter 1545 of the Ohio Revised Code within the boundaries of Erie County.

On July 8, 1968, Probate Judge James A. Young, by journal entry, created the Erie County Metropolitan Park District and established a three-member Board of Park Commissioners to provide policy oversight.

In 1974, a 172-acre parcel was purchased from the State of Ohio by the Erie County Commission and donated to the Erie County Metropolitan Park District. Today, that parcel is known as Osborn MetroPark and is Erie MetroParks flagship park.

Today, Erie MetroParks maintains 14 public parks, 3,300 acres, and 30 miles of trails within Erie County. Erie MetroParks continues to offer hundreds of *free* programs annually, reaching one-third of Erie County's population!



**BOARD OF PARK COMMISSIONERS**

Erie MetroParks Board of Park Commissioners is composed of three Erie County citizens who serve three-year terms without compensation. Board members are appointed by the presiding probate judges of Erie County and have policy oversight of the park district.



*(left to right: James “Don” Miears, Margaret M. Murray, Troy Wisehart)*



**A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

What an exciting time to serve as Erie MetroParks fifth director since its inception in 1968! Although I am new to the directorship, I am not new to the park district. Over the last twenty-three years, I’ve had the great privilege of serving Erie County residents alongside dedicated park staff, volunteers, and community leaders. Collectively, we preserve our beautiful natural areas while improving the physical and mental health of our community.

With your generous support, Erie MetroParks successfully passed a renewal levy in 2024 by almost 72%! With grateful hearts, our Board of Park Commissioners, dedicated staff, and I look to future goals and plans that adhere to our mission, continually seeking to provide park amenities and services that are important to our Erie County residents.

What an honor it is to lead Erie MetroParks into the future. I sincerely believe that the best is yet to come.

-Melissa Price, Executive Director, CPRP

## **INTRODUCTION**

Erie MetroParks employs strategic planning to set objectives that align with the organization's mission statement, to assess what areas are successful and what areas need improvement, and to provide valuable services to the community. A comprehensive strategic plan provides a vision of where Erie MetroParks is headed based on feedback from staff, committed partners, and the community. Once the strategic plan is formed, priorities are set, goals are written, and public funds are allocated within the budget.

Erie County's unwavering support for Erie MetroParks is the reason the park district has grown and thrived for over 55 years. In 2024, Erie MetroParks passed a renewal levy by 72% in every precinct. With the passing of a new levy and led by a newly appointed director, the District embarked on community outreach in the fall of 2024 to guide its five-year strategic planning.

The following pages will summarize the Erie MetroParks Community Survey results and how those results guided the District's 2025-2030 five-year strategic plan. Even the best of strategic plans must remain flexible. Communities evolve, and their needs, demographics, and priorities may shift. Erie MetroParks will review and adjust plans based on continued Board, staff, and community engagement.

## **A SPECIAL THANK YOU**

Erie MetroParks Board and staff would like to thank the hundreds of citizens who provided opinions and feedback as well as Arin Blair, Chief Planner for the City of Sandusky, and Jeff Kerr, Director of Planning & Policy for the Greater Sandusky Partnership, for sharing their insights and expertise.

## **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY**

Erie MetroParks formed a planning committee to engage the community in both virtual and in-person efforts. A comment card was provided within the Roger Johnson Nature Center, at public programs, and distributed among schools with a QR Code that linked to an online survey. Additionally, an online survey was scheduled on Erie MetroParks social media platforms and shared by other community members that utilize or follow those pages.

The park planning committee reserved a booth during the City of Sandusky's Christmas Market to reach urban areas and speak face-to-face with attendees. Additionally, staff presented at community groups to continue face-to-face engagement, as well as, promoting the online survey.

At an October Park District teambuilding, Arin Blair, Chief Planner for the City of Sandusky, lent her expertise and gave a presentation on the planning process to Erie MetroParks staff. Afterward, park employees broke into smaller, interdepartmental groups to provide comments, observations, and suggestions for future planning.

**Collection Methods**

*We Care.*  
Please Share.



Your favorite things about Erie MetroParks:

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**BE HERE**  
ERIE  
METROPARKS

Your ideas for the future of Erie MetroParks:

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**ERIEMETROPARKS.ORG**

(top: sample of a comment card, bottom: sample of community flyers)



ERIE METROPARKS  
**Community Survey**

**WE NEED YOUR HELP TO BETTER IMPROVE YOUR PARKS!**

Share your thoughts about Erie MetroParks in this 5-minute survey.



Scan the Code or Visit the Website Below to Take the Survey



**ERIEMETROPARKS.ORG/PLANNING**



**Collection Methods**



*(Above, Sample of social media post; urban outreach)*

*(Bottom left, Community engagement open house; bottom right, presentation to community partners)*





## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT RESULTS

433 comment cards were received from the community and park staff, and 566 surveys were submitted.

### What Were Park Favorites?

1. The nature center
2. The animals
3. The friendly staff
4. The variety of programs
5. The nature trails/being in nature



**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT RESULTS**

**...What We Heard...**

“We love the walking trails.”

“We have enjoyed exploring Erie MetroParks with the grandchildren. The nature center is a gem. Thank you.”

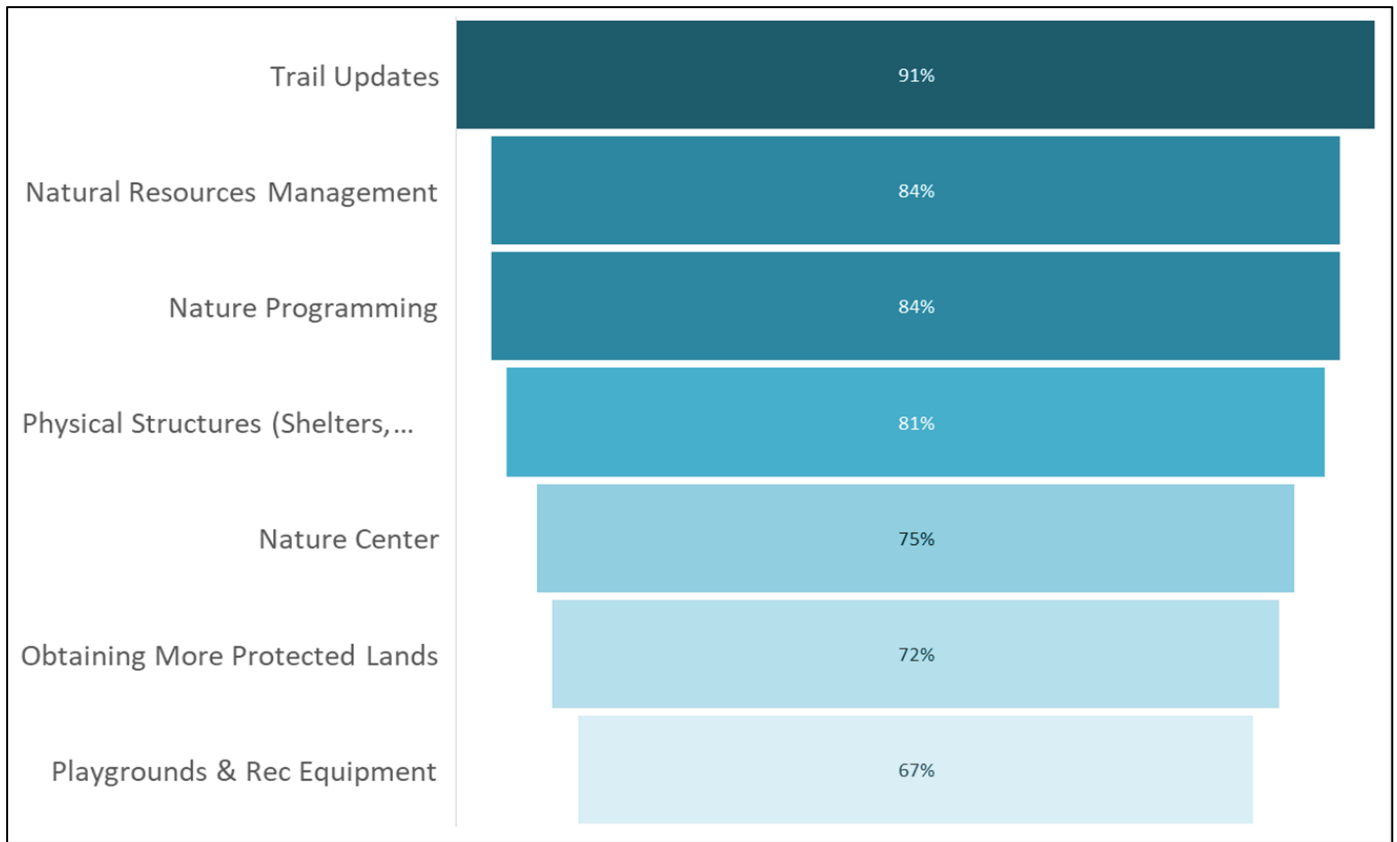
“Love the animal habitats...”

Our favorites are “the friendly and knowledgeable naturalists and the variety of programming.”

“Love the metroparks!”

“The new nature center is a great addition! Keep it up!”

**How Should Erie MetroParks Prioritize Investments?**



Although each category was “somewhat” to “very” important to our respondents, people felt most passionately about prioritizing trail updates, natural resources management, and nature programming. Overall, the community is favorable to any of the above-mentioned park initiatives, including obtaining and protecting land.



## **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT RESULTS**

### **Where Are Opportunities for Improvements?**

1. Programming: more programs for all ages at all times
2. Trail maintenance and updates: including restrooms at trailheads/parking lots
3. Communication methods: improved trail signage, more marketing to all demographics
4. Water access/launch ramps: more waterfront access in the form of trails and/or launches
5. Natural resources management: preservation of land, obtaining more land, increase native plantings

### **...What We Heard...**

“Please stop over improving the trails. Leave them somewhat rustic so they can be enjoyed by people who hike.”

“It is difficult to request trail maintenance.”

“Motorized wheelchair access to play equipment so grandma can interact with the grands. More motorized wheelchair accessible trails.”

I would like “more programs available for a variety of ages. Art-in-the Park fills up too fast...”

“Restrooms that are open all season.”

“Restrooms in some parks are sub par.”

I would like “more kayak access to waterfront areas.”

### **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY**

The community’s insights, suggestions, preferences, and comments were utilized to form Erie MetroParks plans and priorities for the 2025-2030 Strategic Plan. The engagement process helped build Erie MetroParks future funding priorities, refine goals, and ensure that we are meeting the needs within our jurisdiction.

Erie MetroParks is extremely grateful to those who took the time to speak with our staff, write comments, or respond to the survey. Your input is valuable, and our goal is to improve continually upon our amazing park district!



## **2025-2030 STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS & OBJECTIVES**

- 1. To provide safe, accessible, and sustainable trails that meet the broad community interests**
  - a. Create a trail(s) for motorized wheelchair access
  - b. Improve accessibility to the waterfront parks
  - c. Repair aging boardwalks within our parks
  - d. Implement a method(s) for park visitors to report trail maintenance/repairs
  - e. Update park and trail signage throughout the park district
  - f. Improve and enhance existing trail systems
  
- 2. To offer educational programs aligned with Erie MetroParks mission to Erie County's diverse population**
  - a. Continue to reduce barriers to nature education within underserved populations
  - b. Meet public demand for additional programming by expanding passive programming opportunities, building collaborative partnerships, and training volunteers
  
- 3. To effectively engage and communicate with community stakeholders**
  - a. Utilize a variety of communication methods to engage and inform all demographics
  - b. Cultivate and build on local and regional partnerships
  - c. Establish mechanisms for ongoing feedback to respond to evolving community needs
  
- 4. To ensure the conservation of Erie County's natural resources for present and future generations**
  - a. Increase native biodiversity within the park district
  - b. Monitor and reduce invasive species populations
  - c. Review and update land stewardship plans for each park property
  - d. Monitor and manage threats to sensitive/endangered native plant species
  - e. Strategically acquire land that provides ecological benefits to the community
  
- 5. To provide responsible fiscal management of Erie County's taxpayer dollars**
  - a. Provide transparent financial reports to the Board, budget managers, and the public
  - b. Enforce purchasing policies implemented by state law and park by-laws
  - c. Maintain a multi-year financial forecast to aid in future budget decisions
  
- 6. To provide safe, accessible, and well-maintained infrastructure throughout the district**
  - a. Improve ADA accessibility to park infrastructure
  - b. Repair aging infrastructure within the parks
  - c. Establish year-round accessible restroom facilities within the parks