

**Cuyahoga Valley Communities Council
Highlights of 2004
Meetings of the Council**

The 2004 Annual Meeting was held on February 20th at the Clubhouse at Sleepy Hollow Golf Course in Brecksville. The Executive Director presented Highlights of 2003, and the annual election of officers and trustees was held. Council representatives also voted to approve a revised Code of Regulations. The event honored long-time executive director, Peter Henderson, who was retiring (effective March 31st) after twenty-five years of service to the organization. Dr. Stephen Kenzig (board member from Cuyahoga Valley Career Center and Cuyahoga Heights Schools) was appointed interim executive director and chair of the search committee to recruit and hire a new executive director.

Because of the search process for a new executive and the completion of the organizations strategic planning process, the Board of Trustees curtailed the number of meetings for the current year in order to more carefully undertake the steps to hire its new executive and to begin implementing the strategic plan. In addition to the Annual Meeting, only two other Council meetings (one in the Spring on April 28th and one in the Fall on October 27th) were scheduled for 2004. A motorcoach tour of the Cuyahoga Valley region was also planned for early September. The tour was designed by the National Park Service, Cleveland Metroparks, and MetroParks Serving Summit County to spotlight the various current projects being undertaken throughout the park systems. Unfortunately, the tour had to be postponed until Spring, 2005. (It has been rescheduled for Saturday, April 30, 2005.).

At the April 28th Council meeting at Cuyahoga Valley Career Center in Brecksville, Board member Jim Kastelic (Park Planner at Cleveland Metroparks) made a presentation on the “Lower Mill Creek Greenway Conservation Project.” Jim discussed a study recently completed by a task force comprised of representatives from Cleveland Metroparks, the city of Cleveland, the city of Garfield Heights, and the village of Cuyahoga Heights, and several non-profit organizations. The focus of the study was a 2 1/2 mile corridor along Mill Creek between Bacci Park in Cuyahoga Heights and Mill Creek Falls in Cleveland’s Slavic Village area. The corridor skirts along several sanitary landfills (Warner Hill and Harvard Road) and a construction-demolition landfill (in Cuyahoga Heights). The goals of the study were to develop a greenway conservation plan, to discover opportunities to enhance bio-diversity, and to establish the criteria for a green corridor between Cleveland Metropark’s Garfield Reservation and Canalway Reservation. The implementation of a natural resource management plan to improve the poor ecological health of the meadows and wetlands through which the trail meanders was deemed to be an important community goal. Such a “greenway trail” can also provide linkages and recreational opportunities for the communities bordering along the corridor.

Throughout the summer months, the Board of Trustees focused on recruiting and hiring a new executive director. The position was advertised in the Cleveland Plain Dealer and The Akron Beacon Journal, and 31 applicants were reviewed by the search committee. The Board interviewed candidates and hired Mr. Alfred (Chip) Cipolletti to serve in this position. Chip comes to the organization with over 30 years experience in education (as a teacher and school counselor, and as a school board member) and in entrepreneurship (owning and managing a travel agency with his family).

On October 27th at the Cuyahoga Valley Career Center in Brecksville, Biology Professor Terry Greathouse (from Cuyahoga Community College) made a presentation on the “West Creek Preserve Project” in Parma. Terry explained his work in coordinating the activities of the West Creek Preservation Committee (made up of environmental professionals from the Ohio EPA, municipal and county officials, workers from the Parma Service Department, students from Parma schools and his own college biology classes, and other interested citizens) to reclaim a two-acre portion of West Creek that had been a dump with an adjoining landfill. Under his watchful supervision, the site was rehabilitated through the establishment of a shallow wetlands. He explained to Council members how we can take steps to help a community to re-establish its priorities to address important environmental issues.

Implementation for Strategic Plan

The revised code of Regulations was mailed out to Council representatives for final review. The Council’s revised Mission Statement emphasizes that the Council is primarily a communications forum between participating units of government for coordinating efforts to preserve and enhance the resources of the Cuyahoga Valley. Key proposals arising from the strategic planning process included allowing other communities to be invited to participate in the Council, restructuring procedural issues for conducting Council meetings (such as achieving a quorum, rules for conducting meetings, and representation on the Council), and fostering an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect. Expanding Council membership to all communities that are taken in by the Cuyahoga Valley (from Cleveland to Akron) was seen to be an important step in ensuring a vital Council for the future. But previous rules of the Council presented some problems in this regard and had led to a good deal of discussion in the planning process.

Much thought was given to the previous cumbersome voting procedures which gave some communities two votes and limited other communities/governmental units to one vote. This system appeared to be a remnant of the bygone “era of apprehension” about the national park’s relationship to local communities, and the Board felt that it did not lend itself to fostering good communications and an atmosphere of mutual trust. The one vote/two vote dichotomy was originally designed to be based upon whether a community’s boundaries were located within the Cuyahoga Valley National Park, but in fact, under the present system, only

seven of the twenty-nine participating units of government had one vote—Fairlawn, Hudson, Cuyahoga County, Summit County, and the three park districts. Emphasizing that the focus of any communications forum should be open discussion and consensus, the reality was that in recent memory Council members were involved only in procedural votes (for example, to approve minutes and to elect trustees and officers). Thus, the recommendation from the Strategic Planning Committee was to adjust the voting structure of the Council to one vote per participating unit of government in order to give parity to all Council members. This recommendation to adjust the number of votes was also in keeping with a proposal to change the governance structure of the Council from a non-profit corporation to a Council of Governments (in accord with Chapter 167 of the Ohio Revised Code). The pros and cons of the Council of Governments proposal is still being discussed by the Council's Board of Trustees.

Representatives from Boston Township took objection to the revised Code of Regulations' change to one vote per participating unit of government and any expansion of the Council. At the Council's October meeting, Boston Township sponsored a proposal to rescind this section of the Code. A vote was taken at this meeting, reaffirming the revisions in the new Code of Regulations and setting the stage for inviting other units of government (including Brooklyn Heights Village, the city of Cleveland, Cuyahoga Heights Village, the city of Garfield Heights, Garfield Heights School District, and Newburgh Heights Village) to participate in the Council.

Gypsy Moth Task Force

With abatement of serious infestation in recent years, the Task Force had entered a monitoring mode over the past several years, working on identification of indicators which would give advance warning of degrees of infestation and enable local officials to better prepare for future problems. The Task Force met on July 20th to facilitate any community action plan(s) that might be deemed necessary during the remainder of the 2004 season, and David Adkins, Gypsy Moth Program Manager from the Ohio Department of Agriculture, gave a brief presentation of what planning was being done at the state level. It was determined that weather conditions would tend to alleviate any major infestation problem for the current year and that population surveys of potential infested areas should be reviewed again in Spring, 2005. The Task Force also briefly discussed impending problems that could result from the Emerald Ash Borer, which had been accidentally introduced via firewood into Northwestern Ohio. The insect pest has not yet appeared in our locality, but communities will need to be vigilant.

Continuing Communities' Support

Communities participating in the Council have again responded generously to request for financial contributions for the current fiscal year which began July 1, 2004. Seven cities, five village, five townships, seven school districts, two counties,

two metropolitan park districts, and the National Park Service continue to participate in the Council, a total of 29 communities. There are 49 representatives (and alternate representatives) from the participating units of government who comprise the members of the Council.