

Centerville-Washington
PARK DISTRICT



**2020 National Gold Medal
Award Application Summary**



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MISSION, VISION, VALUES



MISSION STATEMENT

Deliver fun, healthy, and outstanding park experiences that connect the community with the outdoors.

VISION STATEMENT

To become the outdoor recreation destination of choice for the community we serve.

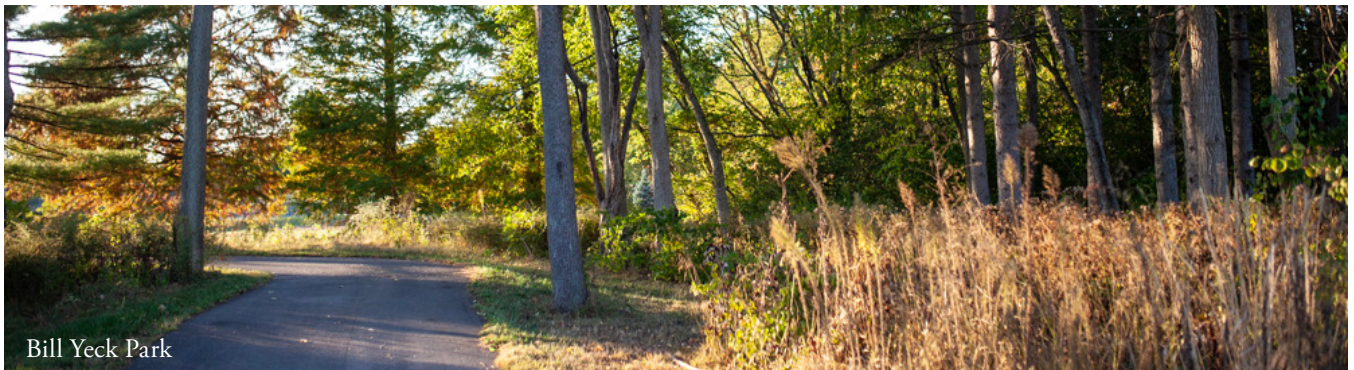
ORGANIZATIONAL VALUES

- Creating positive memories
- Integrity
- Public service
- Fiscal responsibility
- Environmental responsibility

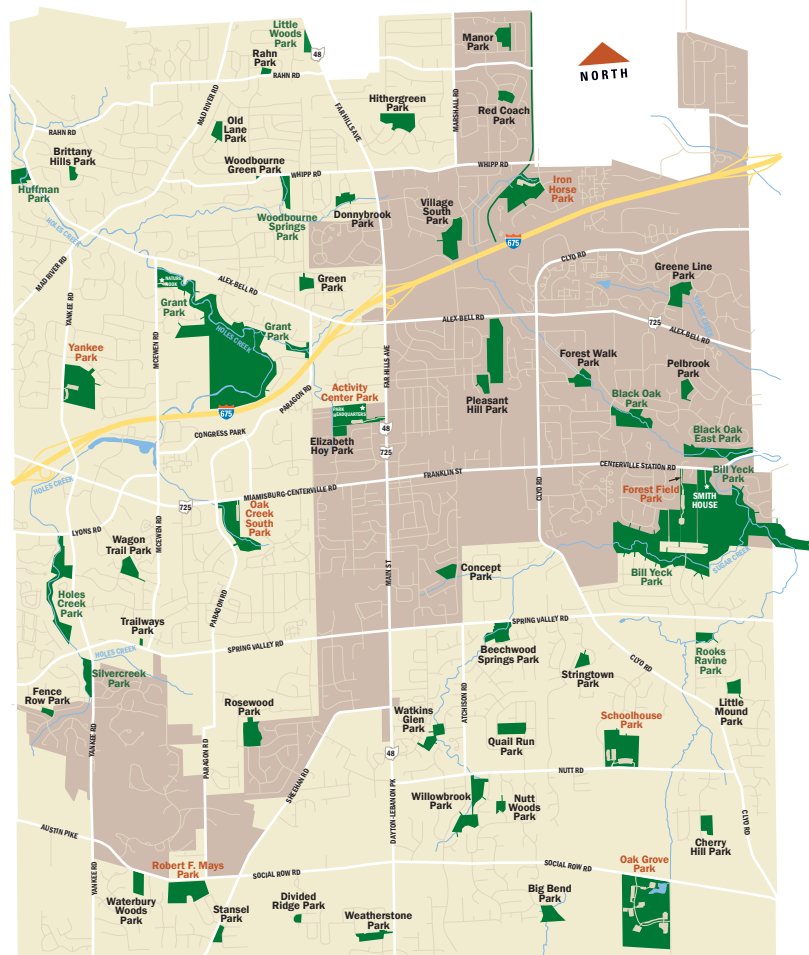
FOREWARD

Founded in 1959 as the Washington Township Park District, the Centerville-Washington Park District now operates eight community parks, nine nature parks and 34 neighborhood parks encompassing 1,030 acres in Centerville and Washington Township. Each of the 51 parks has varying amenities. You'll find a sprayground, a dog park, a skatepark and an archery range; top-notch sports fields; hiking trails and nature preserves; and more, all within the boundaries of one suburban Ohio community of 56,000 people. Thanks to the foresight of the Park District's founders, there is a park to explore within walking distance of every home in the community.

In addition to maintaining the parks, the Centerville-Washington Park District also offers outdoor recreational programming throughout the year for the community to enjoy. Several large special events are planned each season — from Big Rig Gig to the Holiday Luminary Walk! Popular day camps are held each summer, encouraging children to learn about nature and enjoy the outdoors. We are passionate about creating positive memories for the families of Centerville and Washington Township!



A DOUBLE HELPING OF PARKS



A DOUBLE HELPING OF PARKS

The Centerville-Washington Park District's mission is to **deliver fun, healthy and outstanding park experiences that connect the community with the outdoors.** That starts with plenty of outdoor places! Per NRPA statistics, the typical agency offers one park for every 2,277 residents, and 9.5 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents. With [51 parks](#) in a community of 56,000, we double the national average, offering one park per 1,100 residents and more than 18.5 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents.

10-MINUTE WALK A REALITY

In the 1950s, the District founders dreamed of a park within a half-mile of every home. Their vision became reality — nearly every home is now within a half-mile of a park. The average person walks a half-mile in 10 minutes. We were early adopters of the 10-Minute Walk — a nationwide movement to improve access to parks and green spaces! We added a 51st park in 2019,

making the 10-minute walk possible for our last neighborhood in district.

According to The Trust for Public Land, only 33% of Americans can claim this life-improving benefit.

BIG BANG FOR TAX BUCK!

According to NRPA Metrics, we spend less and deliver more than other communities our size. CWPD spends \$1,604/acre of park versus the national average of \$4,505/acre. Total operating expenditures are \$4,142/acre versus an average of \$11,354/acre. Still, residents consistently report, “We love our parks,” and, “We moved back for the wonderful parks!” Also, without adding full-time staff, CWPD has steadily increased the number and variety of programs to further “connect the community with the outdoors.”

Tell us your story about how your agency positively impacts the community you serve. Provide 5 actions or activities your agency has been involved with or undertaken in the past three years.

Busy residents can't always make it to scheduled programs. Therefore, we added social media promoted [Pop-Up Park Challenges](#) to encourage park visits and outdoor activities. Over 1,200 people have participated in 90 challenges in the past 3 years. When these fun, educational challenges get residents outdoors, we hear comments like, "Thanks again for helping us stay outdoors all winter long!"

Volunteers abound! CWPD noticed a developing trend. More and more people wanted episodic volunteer opportunities. For 2019, we shifted the emphasis from on-going volunteer opportunities to more "one-and-done" opportunities. The result was overwhelmingly positive. Volunteer hours increased by 65% from 2018! These opportunities not only improve parks; they are delivering outstanding park experiences connecting volunteers to the outdoors.

There were few recreation opportunities for residents with disabilities. In 2017, CWPD took the lead in forming a triad partnership to remedy that. Now, with the Washington Township Recreation Center and the Washington-Centerville Public Library, "AccessAbility" brings multiple programs each season. Also, partnering with Capabilities, Inc., creates purpose and recreation opportunities for adults with disabilities as they stock and clean Little Free Libraries in our parks.

Listening to residents, with an eye on our ADA transition plan, [a one-mile nature trail was rebuilt in Bill Yeck Park](#) to be sustainable, accessible and educational — allowing more people the opportunity to hike through woods, meadows and to an apiary. An elderly couple said, "Thank you! We haven't been able to hike this park for years, but now we can."

By pairing traditional and nature playgrounds in a new design, we built a hugely popular play destination in [Forest Field Park](#). Response has been overwhelmingly positive, with the playground nominated as one of the Best in Dayton and earning an MVLNI Connect to Nature site distinction and a Great Lakes Park Training Institute best park award. The majority of the project was funded by grants and donations from the Centerville Noon Optimist Club!



Winter Pop-Up Park Challenge



Capabilities group stocking Little Free Library



Bill Yeck Park's new purple trail



Forest Field Park playground

There are few resources more critical than public support, citizen involvement, and staff engagement. Please cite one outstanding or innovative example for each of these three characteristics.



Willowbrook Park community meeting

PUBLIC SUPPORT

In Ohio, voters must re-approve property tax levies every 10 years. In 2017, following more than 200 new programs and three new parks, voters renewed the tax levy by an outstanding 78.3% YES vote. That is the highest YES vote OF ALL Ohio park districts in 2017, 2018 and 2019, and the highest in CWPDP's 60 years. It is the direct result of actively asking residents for input, listening and acting upon their priorities. Community engagement and CWPDP responsiveness works. We repeatedly hear, "Thank you for listening and please keep asking us!"

CITIZEN INVOLVEMENT

In 2018, we developed a new Design Thinking process for planning future park improvements. Unlike traditional public input meetings, attendees didn't just sit back and listen, they participated in planned exercises designed to cull out and define the neighborhood's unique priorities for their park. They build a community consensus around those priorities. Forty neighbors of [two neighborhood parks participated in the initial phase](#). In 2019, we refined the process with 85 neighbors [planning our 51st park](#). They were so into it, they didn't want to leave! The Design Thinking process powerfully connects the community with their neighborhood parks.

STAFF ENGAGEMENT

We approached strategic planning differently in 2019. With guidance from a consultant, the entire plan started from "the bottom, up". We invited all staff, including part-time, to idea-generating and opinion workshops. The guided exercises steered the overall priorities. Months earlier, all staff attended a brief seminar by Mr. Dirk Richwine on the value of, and approach to, CAPRA Accreditation. When it was time to forge the [Strategic Plan](#), small groups of staff tackled different areas, using CAPRA chapters and standards as guidelines. Similarly, volunteer staff workgroups are actively and methodically implementing the plan.



Hithergreen Park community meeting

Public entities have been increasingly called upon to demonstrate the results of their services and practices to decision-makers and the general public. Please cite 3 results, impacts, or outcomes you have measured and brief background about the outcome(s) and how the results were secured.

The most important measurement of park programs is participant satisfaction. This, more than any other metric, tells the Board, partners, and residents how well we meet their expectations. With the increased programming, measuring the impact of the new, expanded and improved programs was vital. Our primary customers are technology savvy. To make better connections, we shifted from paper evaluations to email. The response rate is higher and growing, at 18%. Feedback shows a 94% program satisfaction rate. More importantly, the program team acts on the data. Feedback has stimulated dozens of program improvements and new programs.

The 2016 community survey revealed residents liked the quality of our park programming, but they wanted us to offer MORE programs in every category. In response, 99 new programs were added in a year, a 33% increase. Surveyed again in 2017, they still wanted more programming. We responded with a 17% increase. In 2019, we surveyed our residents again. Results showed that they are now happy with our level of park programming! We uncovered an opportunity through surveys, acted on it, and have impacted our community's satisfaction! As a result, we are getting more people than ever to spend time outside!

Minimizing the cost of services is paramount to most public officials. Since 2015, CWPD has aggressively and doggedly pursued available grants. On average, over the last five years, CWPD has supplemented total revenues by \$534,000 per year. This equates to 14.5% of the total District revenues. To demonstrate the value of this practice, we compare the average grant supplement over the previous five years which was just \$76,800 per year — an increase of 595%! By highlighting this impact, the Park Board has more readily acted to “green light” many of the projects and programs identified in this application.



Park and recreation agencies have long been known for creativity and innovation. One of the desirable outcomes of the Gold Medal program is to identify these efforts and approaches. Please cite and briefly explain 3 innovations implemented by your agency within the last 3 years.



CWPD was the first to [install outdoor AEDs](#) in Ohio! The action was precipitated by a life-saving AED used on a local high school lacrosse player. CWPD saw the need and benefit to adding outdoor AEDs at our sport fields. With the support and 50% financial assistance of all five local youth sport organizations, we installed AEDs at eight community parks. The innovation was covered by newspaper and television stations, prompting other Ohio agencies to ask for advice on doing the same.



CWPD has lost over 4,000 trees to the emerald ash borer. How could we make up for that? Enter [Operation Forest Re-Leaf!](#) The initiative launched in 2019 and was supported by a local foundation grant. CWPD invited local schools to participate. Schools jumped at it; children planted more than 300 trees at three parks in the first year! Schools follow the tree growth as part of their math and science curriculum. From the Park District's standpoint, more trees are being replaced. However, just as important, a generation of school children are getting in touch with nature and the outdoors!



How could we encourage more visitors to our smaller neighborhood parks? Approximately 60% of households own one or more dogs. Our popular 3-acre dog park is in one of our large community parks, but it is not easily walkable. What about a dog park people could walk to? We purchased portable fencing in 2019 and developed a [traveling dog park](#) sponsored by our local Rotary Club! Initially scheduled to visit three parks a summer, due to popularity, it was extended to five parks in 15 weeks. Residents are eagerly waiting for the pup park to go on the move next summer!

How has your agency addressed the NRPA Pillar of Social Equity in the last 3 years?

We won a grant in 2018 to build our fourth accessible playground, including sensory elements and musical instruments. The park now features accessible restrooms and half-mile paved trail following the ADA transition plan.

CWPD won the top [2018 Ohio Parks and Recreation Association award “Programs for Special Populations”](#) with Adapted Action Day. The event, for individuals with special needs and their families, gave opportunities to try fishing, archery, kickball, biking and crafts — all adapted for inclusivity. The success gave birth to new, year-round “[AccessAbility](#)” programs.

CWPD joined BOGG Ministries, Miami Valley Crime Stoppers and Shoes 4 the Shoeless for our first event at Centerville’s Section 8 housing. Games and crafts encouraged outdoor play, attracting 40+ families, 100+ children, to get food and new shoes!



How has your agency addressed the NRPA Pillar of Health & Wellness in the last 3 years?

“... people who exercise outdoors have better energy levels, decreased tension, ... and lower stress than (those) who only workout indoors.”
— www.bodybuilding.com.

CWPD provides healthy experiences in the outdoors. Multiple outdoor programs satisfy that goal. Varied, year-round fitness and wellness opportunities are offered only in parks. Perennial favorites and popular newcomers include Tai Chi, Trail Trekking, Hike for Your Health, Yoga in the Park and Trail Running.

When residents requested more outdoor fitness, we responded for all ages, greatly increasing weekend and evening options. In direct response to requests, we boosted fitness and wellness programs by 119%. Special fitness events added to the fun with new family 5Ks, Ultimate Warrior Challenge, parent/child strongman challenges and outdoor, nighttime YoGlow (yoga).



How has your agency addressed the NRPA Pillar of Conservation in the last 3 years?



The community has enjoyed a natural habitat explosion in the parks — including wetlands, monarch waystations, rain gardens, National Wildlife Federation certified wildlife habitats and Xerces Society certified pollinator habitats. We created 94 acres of pollinator habitat in 25 parks from 2017 – 2019! We’ve also planted more than 700 trees in three years in response to the reduced tree canopy caused by the emerald ash borer.

We began a community garlic mustard pull to draw residents into efforts to control invasive species. In the first two years, volunteer teams combined to pull 1,500 pounds of the invasive plant from parks (2017 – 2018). In 2019, more teams joined the effort, pulling 2,040 total pounds, beating the first two years’ combined total!



What challenges has your community and/or agency experienced over the past 3 years and what steps or actions has your agency taken to resolve these challenges? Cite the agency's role with the challenge, types of actions/steps taken, and effectiveness of approach.

In 2015, Washington Township relocated their senior center from a former school building into their recreation center. The aging school building was too expensive to maintain. It sat on a nearly 15-acre lot that the surrounding neighbors had come to see as their neighborhood park. The Township's plan was to sell the property to developers.

Neighbors were extremely unhappy with the pending sale, resulting in several years of unpleasantness — contentious Township public meetings, rejected development plans, voter petitions and a referendum to block development.

Neighbors implored the Park District to purchase the land and create a park, but it was beyond our financial capability.

However, the Park District worked to find a solution. CWPD would purchase the land if grant funding could be secured. In 2018, we succeeded with [a \\$558,000 parkland grant](#) for demolition of the building and for land restoration. The grant funding made this park a reality and solved the community's challenge of what to do with the abandoned site. In 2019, the building was demolished and the land was prepared for park use. We have engaged park neighbors in the park planning process and [Hithergreen Park](#) is open with future improvements planned!

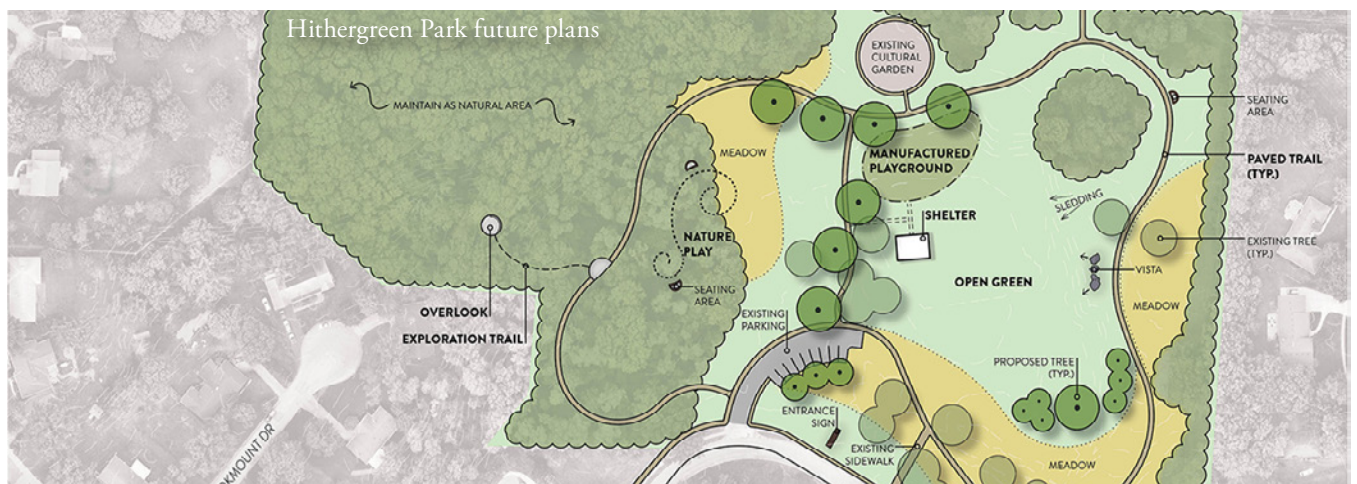
The Township recovered their investment, and the neighbors can now enjoy the park for which they fought tirelessly! A win-win for all involved!



Hithergreen property



Neighborhood meeting





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