



2026 – 2030

STRATEGIC PLAN



Executive **SUMMARY**

Given their unique role as the county's only metropolitan park district, Summit Metro Parks is positioned well to serve communities while addressing environmental challenges facing the county. This strategic plan covers key community, recreation and conservation goals for the next five years.

That said, the collaborative strategic planning process was designed to help the Metro Parks team and partners think big, and the team regularly came back to the core questions of, "How can the Metro Parks plan for changes and challenges that the county will face over the next 100 years? What is our vision for the Metro Parks for 100 years from now?"

While Summit Metro Parks strives to be the voice for both conservation and outdoor recreation, as well as connectivity of trails and wildlife corridors, this plan is intended to be a collaborative effort. Implementation of this plan will only be successful if it is supported by strong, reciprocal partnerships. Together, we can continue to provide welcoming, accessible park spaces, nature centers and facilities where all people can convene and enjoy time together. At the same time, we will partner with the community to support multiple generations of stewards who care for the parks, plants, and wildlife, ensuring that nature in Summit County continues to thrive for the next 100 years and beyond.



MISSION

We conserve, sustainably manage and value natural resources for the health and enjoyment of our community, and inspire people to connect with nature through clean and safe parks.

100-YEAR VISION

Our natural areas, people and communities will forever be connected and thriving, because our lands are cared for by passionate stewards.

The comprehensive strategic planning process included ample community, staff and partner engagement, which informed the final goals of the plan, which focus on the following areas:





Overview of **SUMMIT METRO PARKS**

Established in 1921, Summit Metro Parks has been Your Back Yard for more than 100 years. The park district manages more than 16,000 acres including 16 parks, two nature centers, one visitors center and more than 150 miles of trails, including 22 miles of the Ohio and Erie Canal Towpath Trail.

Each year, Summit Metro Parks welcomes approximately 5 million visits, a reflection of the deep connection our community shares with nature. Signature programs such as the Fall Hiking Spree and Spree for All draw thousands, while an ever-expanding calendar of events and public offerings invites visitors to engage with the parks in meaningful ways throughout the year.

From hiking, cycling, paddling and fishing to Nature Play and access to other amenities like courts, courses and playfields, the park district offers a diverse range of recreational experiences. Whether seeking solitude or shared adventure, our visitors find spaces that speak to their individual needs and preferences.

Strong partnerships help extend the reach and relevance of the park district's mission. Through collaboration with local municipalities, schools, nonprofits and regional organizations, Summit Metro Parks strengthens community ties, broadens access and helps shape a shared vision for a healthier, more connected future.

The Metro Parks are home to a rich variety of habitats, including wetlands, forests and meadows. These unique landscapes support an equally diverse array of wildlife, including several state and federally listed endangered species. Our leadership in conservation and habitat restoration, balanced with public access for recreation, reflects a long-standing dedication to ecological health, both for today's visitors and for generations to come.




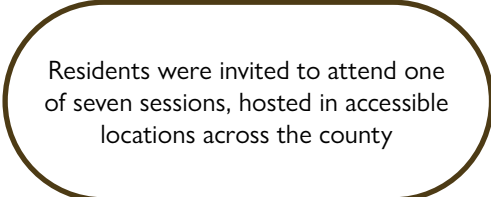

The Strategic PLANNING PROCESS

Taking place from December 2024 through August 2025, the strategic planning process was a collaborative, in-depth process that included extensive stakeholder engagement and emphasized good communication and transparency.



The team used a holistic approach to see how conservation and recreation are connected to other parts of society. For this reason, the team included data and feedback from other sectors, including health and social services, economic development, arts and culture, housing, transportation and education.

The strategic planning process engaged staff, Board of Park Commissioners, community partners, private sector partners, and residents at various points throughout the process. Highlights from the community engagement:

 <p>73 community partners engaged</p>	 <p>Residents were invited to attend one of seven sessions, hosted in accessible locations across the county</p>	 <p>886 comments collected</p>
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Summary of 25 & 5 YEAR GOALS



Goal 1 Expand Conservation Impact

25-YEAR GOAL: Collaborate to increase conservation footprint in order to improve biodiversity, protect ecosystem services and preserve cultural heritage.

FIVE-YEAR GOAL: Increased support for biodiversity and cultural heritage throughout Summit County is achieved through creating a conservation plan that results in expanded property protection.

Summary of strategies:

1. Complete a collaborative, evidence-based conservation plan
2. Undertake meaningful land acquisition
3. Provide communications and conservation support



Goal 2 Manage Assets & Natural Resources

25-YEAR GOAL: Responsibly manage amenities and resources to promote excellent park experiences and healthy ecosystems.

FIVE-YEAR GOAL 2A: Standards, aligned projects, and effective communications have created long-term operational, cultural, and natural sustainability.

FIVE-YEAR GOAL 2B: Targeted investment in and care for existing assets has resulted in sustainable and impactful ongoing maintenance.

Summary of strategies:

1. Maintain consistent standards
2. Conduct regular master planning
3. Share public updates regarding park projects
4. Develop maintenance prioritization
5. Accomplish green sustainability



Goal 3 Connect People & Nature

25-YEAR GOAL: Foster nature-based programming and visitation that improves quality of life for all.

FIVE-YEAR GOAL: Improved accessibility has led to more participation, new park users, improved health and well-being, and safety and enjoyment for local communities.

Summary of strategies:

1. Conduct outreach to diverse audiences
2. Address barriers to accessing parks and programs
3. Enhance visibility of safety measures
4. Nurture and create new community partnerships



Goal 4
Strengthen Community Support

25-YEAR GOAL: Relationships with the community have been fostered that engage, inform, and inspire the public to increase support for park district priorities.

FIVE-YEAR GOAL: Relationships with Summit County residents have been developed, nurtured and strengthened through intentional and inclusive interactions, resulting in increased public support and recognition of the park district's unique identity.

Summary of strategies:

1. Build Metro Parks capacity to engage more residents
2. Enhance brand awareness
3. Improve diversity and flexibility of communications



Goal 5
Sustain Financial Security

25-YEAR GOAL: Sustain a diverse and reliable financial strategy to support organizational goals.

FIVE-YEAR GOAL: Financial risk is being managed, revenues have increased and been diversified, and a levy has successfully passed.

Summary of strategies:

1. Diversify financial strategy
2. Successful levy passage
3. Ensure successful levy passage



Goal 6
Recruit & Retain Talent

25-YEAR GOAL: We have invested in a skilled, culturally diverse, cohesive workforce.

FIVE YEAR GOAL: Recruit, engage and retain top talent, build a strong culture, drive employee engagement, and invest in their development paths.

Summary of strategies:

1. Recruit talent
2. Maintain competitive compensation and benefits
3. Continue to improve organizational culture

THANK YOU

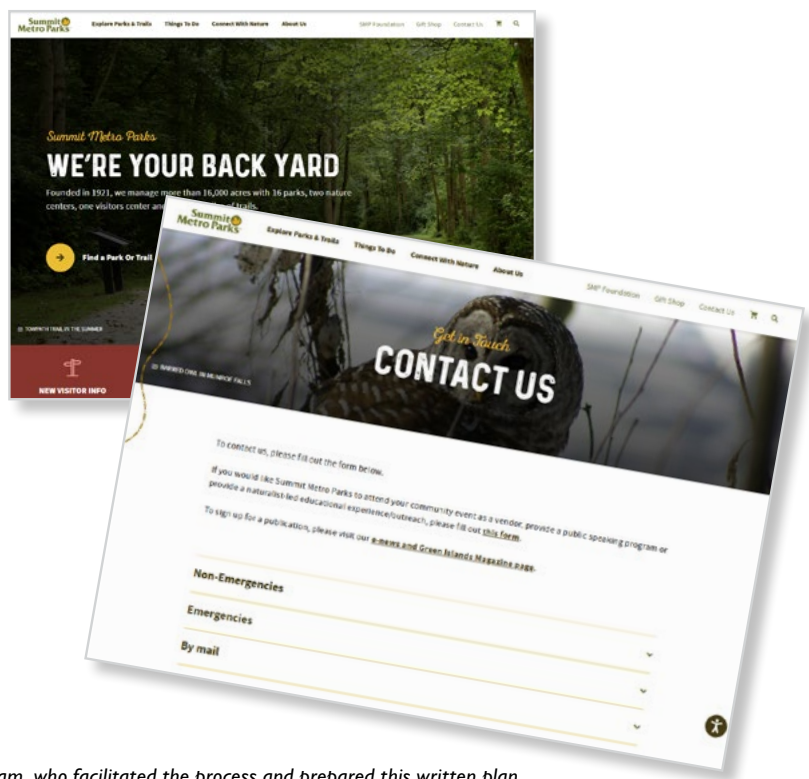
*to all who contributed
to this plan.*



We are grateful for the time you spent attending our engagement sessions and interviews and for providing thoughtful feedback. Where possible, we have worked to incorporate your recommendations.

summitmetroparks.org

For any questions, please go to our website and click on the “Contact Us” link at the top of the Home Page. We welcome you to submit your questions and comments via the contact form.



Thank you to the consulting team, who facilitated the process and prepared this written plan.



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