

2019-2023

ATHENS CONSERVANCY STRATEGIC PLAN



OUR LONG-TERM VISION

The Athens Conservancy protects lands to preserve wild and scenic places, maintain healthy ecosystems, preserve water quality, and protect biodiversity, habitat, and ecological processes. Our conserved lands are valued by the community and connect people with nature for recreation, education, research, and inspiration. The community supports our work and mission as dedicated volunteers, passionate stewards, donors, allies, and partners.

OUR STRATEGIC DIRECTION

Athens County is the place where we live (or visit), work, or raise our families. It is a place that is special to us all for many reasons, some of which are reflected in the Athens Conservancy mission to protect natural lands in Athens County and surrounding areas.

As our community and others grapple with a changing climate, contend with persistent threats to water quality, and navigate changes in the economy, our work is more important than ever.

In the Athens Conservancy, we have a positive vision for our region's future. With the help and support of dedicated volunteers, forward-thinking elected officials, local and state partners, and supporters, we are working to preserve important natural lands, waterways, iconic landscapes and views, and sustainable family farms. We strive to maintain our region's ecological integrity, preserve water quality, invest in our community's health and character, nurture environmental education and awareness, and promote local jobs and economic prosperity tied to the lands we all love.

We have a passionate, focused, and committed board who lend their time, talents, and expertise related to land and water conservation, biology, land management, ecology, land use, finance, volunteer engagement, community organizing, communications, and nonprofit management. Over the years we have we have been successful in securing grants from the State of Ohio and we have relied on the partnership of local units of government to protect significant lands.

We are aware of the realities of our current capacity. We have relatively limited means and face significant challenges as we work to accomplish our mission. This strategic plan reflects what we can do, incrementally, over the next five years to increase our capacity as we move toward our long-term goals and vision.

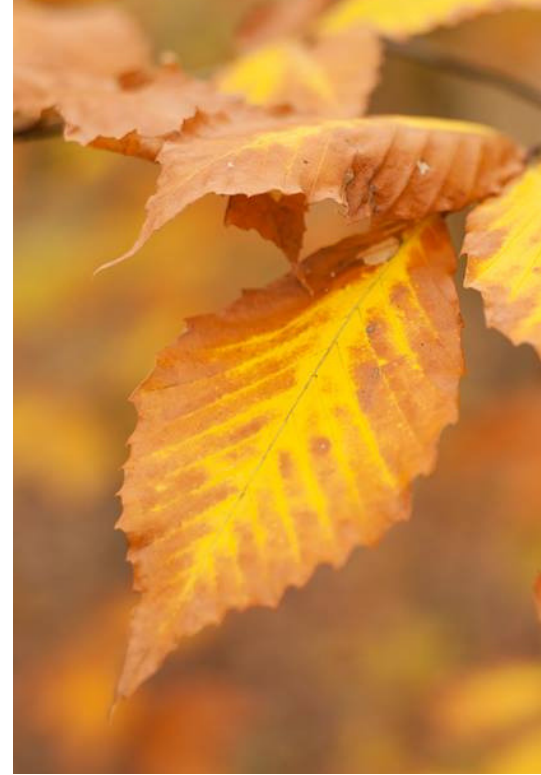




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**Athens
Conservancy**

2019 - 2023 STRATEGIC PLAN

STRATEGIC GOALS + ACTION STEPS

1) BUILD OUR ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY TO PROTECT, PURCHASE AND STEWARD MORE LAND



GOAL A: Hire a Development Coordinator

The board intends to follow a structured process to recruit, hire, and oversee a staff person. The board will make its hiring decisions by consensus. The board will also develop an Employment Handbook and will adopt human resources policies, with guidance from the Land Trust Alliance, prior to recruiting and hiring the staff person.

Recruitment Process:

A committee will refine the position's job description, including roles, lines of authority, and skills and competencies required.

The full board will approve the job description, roles, and lines of authority for the position.

The position will be publicized through specific local, statewide, and/or national networks as needed and related to the roles and scope of responsibilities identified.

Salary and benefits will also be approved by the full board and will be communicated when the position is posted.

Hiring Process:

1. The committee will determine when to begin considering candidates. (Day 0)
2. The committee will vet applications and rank applicants to interview by phone. (by Day 14)
3. A committee member will conduct phone interviews with identified candidates. (by Day 30)
4. Based on the outcomes of the phone interviews, the committee will select candidates to interview. The organization will not pay for candidates to travel. (by Day 45)
5. The committee will host interviews and will then recommend the three top candidates for the position. (by Day 45-50)
6. The full board will interview all three candidates. (by Day 60 or sooner)
7. The board will decide by consensus to whom to offer the position. (by Day 63)
8. Post-offer, the President, Treasurer, and one more board member (with experience) will negotiate salary limits (that have been set ahead of time by full board) and start date. (by Day 70)

GOAL A: Hire a Development Coordinator, cont.

The organization intends to accept applications until the position is filled. Once the process begins, the board will follow and complete the process with the knowledge that if an ideal candidate cannot be found or if negotiations regarding salary cannot be met by consensus, the organization will repost until a suitable candidate can be hired.



Supervision Process:

1. The supervision of the new employee will be overseen by a group of three board members. One will be a member of the Executive Committee, and others will serve in this role who have experience tied to the role of the position (e.g., fund development or stewardship).
2. Week 1 – The supervision team will train the new staff person.
3. Week 2 – The team will provide weekly in-person and phone contact with the staff person.
4. Week 2-4 – The team will work with the staff person to develop a work plan with a clear set of benchmarks and expectations.
5. The supervision team and staff person will meet quarterly to evaluate work plan progress.
6. The staff position will have a probation period of 3-6 months.
7. The staff person will attend all board meetings, in the short-term.
8. The staff person will provide a written status report to the board prior to each meeting.

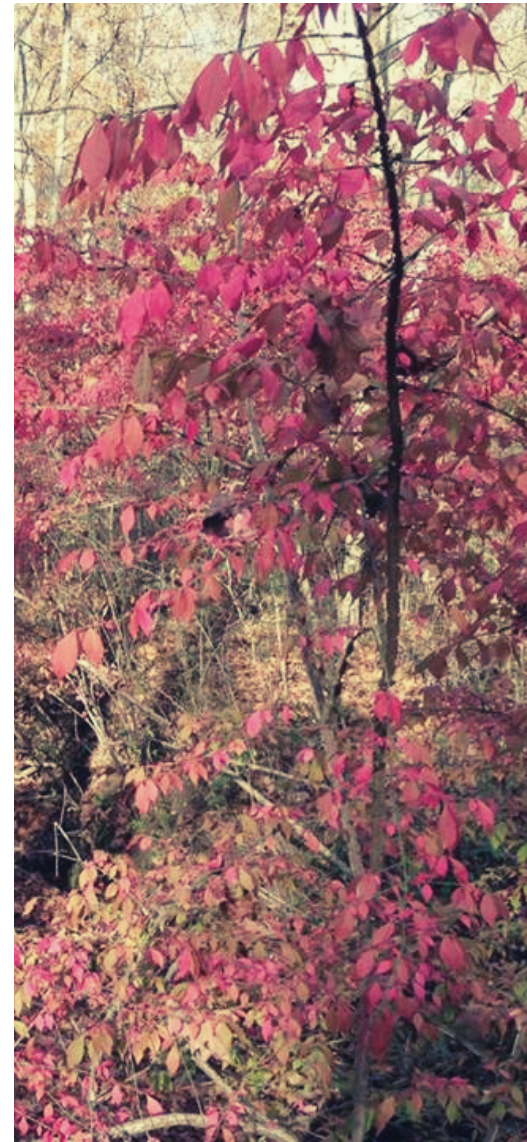
GOAL B: Invest time and energy in board development and navigate a transition in board leadership

The board discussed the importance of transitioning the Board officer roles to new people as current officers complete their terms.

The President's position, in particular, serves as the public face of the organization and requires a future-oriented and big-picture leader who can serve as a good steward of board meetings and board processes and is not task- or issue-focused.

The board uses consensus-based decision-making processes, and while the President serves an important role, board leadership is shared and there is no one particular leader. Core competencies of the President position that were identified by board members include:

- Good facilitator
- Ability to share leadership
- Adept at crisis management
- Has good people skills and truly likes people
- Strong verbal and written communication
- Good listening skills
- Ability to override own ego
- Big picture/visionary
- Creative
- Well organized
- Comfortable working with legislators, politicians, and others with political decision-making authority



Activities:

1. The board will continue to assess potential candidates for these roles. (April – July 2019)
2. The board will consider creating an Executive Secretary role to “co-chair” board. April – July 2019)
3. The board will consider creating a stronger committee structure where the board delegates specific roles and decisions to committees, and the President would effectively manage committee processes and the full board. This may include developing job descriptions for each committee as well as communication expectations for each committee to follow. (April – July 2019)
4. Board officers will maintain their “role and tasks lists” and will share them with incoming officers. (By July 2019)
5. The President will document how decisions have been made and reflect on board processes and will share these reflections with the incoming President. (Past practices documented by June 2019, Ongoing)
6. The board will revise bylaws as needed. (Ongoing)

GOAL C: Create more robust systems for volunteer recruitment, training, and engagement

Activities:

1. The board will develop job descriptions for key volunteer positions, including those already performed by current volunteers. These job descriptions will include the required skills and strengths, and also the time commitment required for the role. (By June 2019)
2. The board will use the job descriptions to advertise and recruit volunteers from within the community. (July 2019 – ongoing, as needed)
3. Depending on the nature of the job, new volunteers may be paired up with a current volunteer to learn how to do certain tasks. This will help build organizational bench strength around key volunteer positions such as grant writing, land stewardship, monitoring and other important activities. (July 2019 – ongoing, as needed)
4. The board will regularly determine volunteer training needs and will make investments as needed to effectively and successfully accomplish the work of the organization. The board will have the sole authority to determine and approve all training expenses paid by the organization. (January 2020)
5. The board will create an evaluation and feedback process in order to encourage both the volunteer's and the organization's growth and development.
6. The board will celebrate volunteers and their service.



GOAL D: Continue to nurture and identify additional opportunities for spin-off organizations, as needed

Activities:

1. The board will continue to partner with the organizations that it has spun off, including the Athens-Belpre Rail Trail, Athens Nature Center initiative, and the Art Bench Project, as needed.
2. The board will seek opportunities to generate and nurture additional spin-off organizations as they arise.

2) ESTABLISH PROTOCOL TO IDENTIFY PRIORITY LANDS TO PRESERVE



GOAL A: Use scientific and other tools to identify priority land at the landscape level

Activities:

1. Document how the organization has prioritized past land protection decisions. (By April 2019)
2. Develop clear criteria for future project prioritization (refer to Land Trust Alliance standards and practices). (By June 2019)
3. Evaluate criteria and commit to reviewing priority parcels annually. (Annually, in January)
4. Commit to using the priority map to make land protection decisions. (On-going)

GOAL B: Develop partnerships

Activities:

1. Remain open to partnerships. (Ongoing)
2. Develop a list of active partners and set specific goals and action steps for each partnership, considering both what we are interested in gaining from and what we can give to the partnership. (By December 2019)
3. Actively explore potential future partnerships. Develop an internal list and consider how partnerships might align with strategic goals and needs. (By December 2019)



3) ADDRESS CHALLENGES PREVENTING PROTECTION OF LANDS OF SIGNIFICANCE

GOAL A: Build strong relationships with local elected and appointed officials and other partnerships

Activities:

1. The board will consider adding business owners or key trustees to the board or to serve as advisors. (By June 2019)
2. The board will appoint a liaison between Athens Conservancy and each township, who will be responsible for building and maintaining the relationship.(By June 2019)
3. The board will nurture connections with supporters who live and work in the townships served. (Ongoing)
4. The board will identify and prioritize relationships with the City, County and other townships, as needed. (Ongoing)



GOAL B: Continue to work with local government and agencies on recreational projects

Activities:

1. The board will continue to communicate, educate, and work with local government partners. (Ongoing)

4) DEEPEN OUR COMMITMENT TO LAND STEWARDSHIP



GOAL A: Establish protocol for development of management plans for all Conservancy lands

Activities:

1. The board will establish a Land and Steward Program Committee. The committee may include non-board members. (By July 2019)
2. The committee will develop a Stewardship Plan, which will establish benchmarks for biomonitoring, hunting, and nurturing the health of Athens Conservancy lands. (By December 2020)
 - a. The Stewardship Plan will include goals, action steps, and timelines for specific properties, as well as identify stakeholders including volunteers and property neighbors that may wish to take on specific tasks.
 - b. The Stewardship Plan will also include roles for volunteers and a handbook and training materials for volunteers.
3. The organization will consider delegating property management activities to interns and volunteers, as appropriate. (Ongoing)
4. The organization will consider hiring a part-time Land Steward Coordinator who would oversee the coordination and implementation of a Stewardship Plan, including volunteer coordination. (January 2020)
5. The organization will provide clear guidance and regulations in order to preserve important habitats, water quality, and ecosystems and will conduct annual monitoring to ensure they are followed and enforced to the best of our ability. (Ongoing)
6. The board will consider using technology to monitor property uses. (By December 2020)

GOAL B: Identify and prioritize lands most in need of management activities

Once management plans are completed (some have rudimentary plans in their respective grant applications), the stewardship committee will set criteria for identifying priority stewardship tasks, rank current projects, and create protocol to assist with the prioritization of future stewardship projects. (by June 2021)

5) DEEPEN AND DIVERSIFY CONNECTIONS TO NATURE AND ACCESS TO RECREATION

GOAL A: Grow and maintain the public's awareness and appreciation of nature and biodiversity

Activities:

1. In the short term, the organization will continue to host hikes and volunteer engagement events. (2019-Ongoing)
2. In the long run, the organization intends to hire a staff person to support education and outreach activities that connect people with protected lands. (2023-2024)



GOAL B: Partner with diverse groups to connect more people to nature and recreation using our preserves

Activities:

1. The organization will continue to work closely with its nonprofit spin-off, the Athens Nature Center initiative, to promote sustainable connections between people and nature, establish and operate a nature center, and preserve biodiversity by engaging people in nature education, conservation, citizen science, and ecotourism.
2. Members and volunteers will connect with community organizations that serve the interests of students, families, runners, bikers, and other outdoor user groups as well as those serving minorities, seniors, and people with disabilities to share information about protected lands and discuss ways to work together to connect diverse audiences of people with nature and create more access to outdoor recreation opportunities. (By June 2020)
3. The board will continue to recruit and develop relationships with volunteers (who are not board members) to take responsibility for the stewardship of specific properties and trails. (Ongoing)

6) INCREASE AND DIVERSIFY REVENUE SOURCES BEYOND CLEAN OHIO



GOAL A: Continue to write grants to secure public funds for land protection

Activities:

1. The board will work on and submit grant applications judiciously in accordance with our priority list, if priority lands become available and we have the capacity to write a grant application, administer a grant, and steward the land. (By June 2019)

GOAL B: Research and apply for grants from private foundations

Activities:

1. Research private foundations to determine those that will support our mission and apply for project funding. (After hiring Development Coordinator, Ongoing)

GOAL C: Nurture relationships with potential private donors to leverage private funding to protect more land

Activities:

1. Develop relationships with and thank Athens area donors. (After hiring Development Coordinator, Ongoing)

GOAL D: Continue to educate ourselves and pursue diversified and cutting-edge sources of funding

Activities:

1. The board will develop revenue goals and targets prior to recruiting and hiring a Development Coordinator. They may work with a local advisor to develop these targets. (March 2019 – Ongoing)
2. Once hired, the Development Coordinator will work with the board to develop revenue goals and diversify funding sources. This person will focus on building relationships with individual donors and private foundations.
3. The board and Development Coordinator will explore the creation of an endowment fund at the Columbus Foundation. This will require a \$10,000 contribution. (By December 2020)
4. The board will explore social impact investing opportunities. (By December 2020)
5. The board will seek to divest from fossil fuels. (by December 2021)

GOAL E: Continue to explore working with Athens County to develop a parks district