

Spring Finish: Little Miami Trail Extension Phases 1 and 2 on Track for May Completion

Phases 1 and 2 of the 1.6-mile Little Miami Scenic Trail Extension project are underway and could be complete by May this year, if all goes well.

Initial construction on the project began in January. The Little Miami Trail extension project, planned for Newtown Road to the Mariemont Branch Library, is being constructed in three phases. The plan also includes direct access to the trail through the 50 West Brewing Company's new burger bar and beer garden restaurant, which is planned for the former Pizzelli's site.

The jointly funded, private-public partnership between the township, Great Parks of Hamilton County and 50 West Brewing will "create greater access to shared-use trails and outdoor experiences for the residents of Hamilton County. We are proud to begin construction of this important connection between several Great Parks, the Columbia Township and Mariemont communities, and the Little Miami Scenic Trail," said Todd Palmeter, CEO of Great Parks of Hamilton County.

"Completion of this link of the Little

Miami Scenic Trail will have a tremendous impact on the business community along Wooster Pike," said Trustee President David Kubicki. "With innovation and improvements coming from 50 West Brewing, we see this area being a destination for riders and walkers along the 78-mile Little Miami Trail."

"Columbia Township has been committed to investing in the bike trail and we are happy to see the first phases finally getting finished this spring," he said. "

The trail extension has been a long-term project in the township, discussed over the last decade or so, said Mike Lemon, township administrator. Columbia Township has contributed \$125,000 to the plan thus far, with costs estimated at \$903,146 for the first of two phases. Lemon said the township and Great Parks are looking at ways to secure funding for Phase 2 construction costs. The township has agreed to pay \$75,000 for Phase 3 costs, with the balance paid by Great Parks and other sources.

Tim Zelek, chief of planning for Great Parks of Hamilton County, said, "Great Parks has worked with the Little Miami



Conservancy for decades to secure this critical corridor which protects the amazing natural resource we have in the Little Miami National Wild & Scenic River. In addition, this trail extension enhances local communities by expanding the network of walkable and bikeable trails in our region."

Columbia Township is working with the Ohio Department of Transportation on a pedestrian mid-block crossing area east of the intersection of

Continued on page 4

Melissa Taylor Named New Columbia Township Administrator

Economic developer and community builder known for strong relationships and getting things done.



Columbia Township has named Melissa Taylor its next administrator. Taylor comes to Columbia Township after working in the public and private sectors, most recently as an executive-on-loan to Cincinnati-

Dayton regional communities from the Ohio Department of Transportation's Jobs & Commerce partnership with JobsOhio - the state's business attraction and retention agency.

Continued on page 3

Mike Lemon Retiring After 18 Years as Administrator

Experienced public servant led planning efforts, infrastructure improvements, solidified finances and pushed economic development to improve the future of the township.

The township administrator who several trustees have called “one of the most important people in Columbia Township’s history” is retiring on March 31.

Administrator Mike Lemon’s tenure started in 2002, taking the role as top administrator after Columbia Township had weathered several difficult years and many transitions in leadership in a short period of time.

Under his almost two decades of service, Lemon brought significant expertise to many areas of township concerns. He developed and implemented comprehensive township planning, initiated numerous important infrastructure improvements (including 68 percent of township streets redone), developed economic plans that positioned the township for improved business development and retention, and provided financial leadership that led to budget

stability and increased township reserves. Under his tenure, the township reserves improved from \$1.6 million to the current \$6.8 million.



Trustee President David Kubicki praised Lemon, saying he and the team he leads “brought financial stability, sustainability, and richly restored this community to credibility after some difficult years. He will be sorely missed.”

Vice president Chris Kritikos honored Lemon’s integrity, which is “at the top of the list of his attributes,” he said. “He has been a wise, intellectual teacher and his shoes will be hard to fill,” he said.

“Mike has been a devoted administrator, professional and intellectual, who came to us with lots of experience,” noted Trustee Susan

Hughes, who has worked with Lemon for 18 years. “He has looked after the township with strong morals and unquestionable integrity.”

The administrator said he is most proud of the resurgence of Columbia Township, strong effective governance and his work on economic development and financial stability, producing new revenue and long-term sustainability of township services.

Lemon’s plans include traveling, tutoring, volunteering and performing marriage. (He has officiated more than 120 weddings in his career.)

“I believe the township is markedly improved, stronger, and much better prepared financially and organizationally for the future,” he said. “We have elected officials who support one another, appreciate the value of teamwork, and cooperate with each other for the betterment of Columbia Township. The future is bright.”

What people said:

Mike leaves a legacy of good governance and good neighbors. When he arrived two decades ago, the township was mired in political cronyism. He was relentless in turning around mismanagement and toxic culture. Today the township is respected region-wide for its fiscal stability, responsiveness, neighborliness and business appeal. Mike’s the reason residents don’t move away. His vision, professionalism, approachability and negotiation savvy have made Columbia Township’s “nine islands” some of area’s most desirable suburbs in which to live and work. — LINNEA LOSE, RIDGEWOOD

Mike is the consummate professional administrator. Focused on achieving the policy directives of the trustees and the public good, Mike helped bring the township into the 21st century. As a result, the township is ready to handle the new challenges facing it because Mike helped to identify them and to proactively address them. He also brought fiscal discipline and good management principles to aid the trustees to make the decisions necessary to keep the township moving forward. His strong, steady, visionary leadership will be sorely missed.

— BRYAN PACHECO, TOWNSHIP ATTORNEY

Mike’s passion and commitment to making Columbia Township a thriving community is evident by how much he genuinely cares about the township, its residents and their future.

— DUSTIN MONTGOMERY,
SENIOR DEVELOPMENT SPECIALIST,
HCDC

Mike leaves behind a legacy of outstanding public service that extends beyond Columbia Township’s borders. As a colleague, he has my utmost respect. As a friend, I will always remember the support he offered when I first stepped into the township administrator role. — VICKY EARHART, ANDERSON TOWNSHIP ADMINISTRATOR



Lemon with students at Good Shepherd School on a day when seedlings were distributed.



Arbor Day tree planting



Mike Lemon, right, with former Ohio Governor Ted Strickland signing legislation allowing Columbia Township to become a limited home-rule township.

Lemon's Top Accomplishments Since 2002

- A township comprehensive plan with two updates leading to stability and consistency in planning and operations
- Limited Home-Rule Township designation and associated statutory authority
- Studies of business districts with special public interest zoning designations approved for some areas, Wooster Pike and Ridge and Highland Master Plans, and a Plainville Business District study
- Township-wide Community Reinvestment Area designation (commercial and residential)
- Tax Increment Financing (TIF) agreements for economic development
- Joint Economic Development Zone established
- New businesses: CBT; UC Health; Woeste Investments; 50 West Brewing; Walton Creek Shopping Center; Walgreen's; Froggy's; Sweeney GMC; Kroger expansion; Panera Bread; Aldi; Triumph Motorcycles; Flipdaddy's; Green Papaya; Mariemont Promenade reboot; Madtree Brewing; Metalkraft; Pro-scan expansion; medical marijuana dispensaries and many others
- Streetscape improvements on Plainville Road, Ridge and Highland; Gateway landscaping, park improvements and a Playscape partnership with Good Shepherd School
- Exterior Property Maintenance Code (commercial and residential) implemented
- Tree program and maintenance; first Tree City USA township in Ohio
- Little Miami Trail Bike Path Extension
- Gas and electricity aggregation, saving residents and businesses money
- More than \$8 million in grant money obtained
- Repayment of \$600,000 building loan
- Excellent biennial state audit results
- Reduced reliance on levies for revenue
- Initiated successful police and fire contracts
- Upgrade in communications with residents through website, newsletter

New Decade, New Leadership

Continued from page 1

Taylor's experience is in "building vibrant communities with thriving businesses" by developing business districts, commerce parks, downtowns and neighborhoods. Her early background includes leading the first economic development departments for West Chester Township and the city of Mason – where she helped bring a mix of growing businesses to help fund schools and high-quality public services.

Trustee Vice President Chris Kritikos, who worked with Taylor during the hiring process, said he sees the new administrator as a "strong leader with strong communication skills, a critical thinker who promotes economic stability."

Trustee President David Kubicki said he looks forward to working with Taylor and believes her reputation as a visionary leader will help continue economic development momentum already alive in Columbia Township. "I've known Melissa for many years," Kubicki said. "Melissa is an experienced leader in both consulting and management and is respected for her energetic, collaborative attitude," he said. "She will bring the necessary tenacity to push projects to the finish line," he said. She's also had experience in working collaboratively with municipal, township and regional leadership across 23 counties to deliver more than \$150 million in local infrastructure for new industrial and office projects and commerce parks, he noted.

"I'm ready to talk to every person who wants their voice heard for what Columbia Township should be in the next decade," said the new administrator. "What values do we share? How do you want our team to best serve you? How do you want to serve others in the community ... and region?"

"And – this is really important," Taylor noted, "Let's decide how we'll continue to build a sustainable economy to pay for all the great things we have – and want for our future."



Trustee President David Kubicki, new Administrator Melissa Taylor and outgoing Administrator Mike Lemon

State Capital Budget Grant Applications Awaiting Approval

One proposal focused on renovation of historic fire house in Madisonville, another along Little Miami Bike Trail entertainment area.

Columbia Township continues its push for economic vitality with two proposals under review for state funding.

Redevelopment of an iconic 1930s former fire house in Madison Place (6904 Murray Ave.) is one of the proposals under review by Ohio officials working with the State Capital Budget. With neighborhoods quickly redeveloping in and around Madison Place, township officials seek to take advantage of the momentum to restore the former Madison Place Fire Department building and create a combined retrospection of the fire department history and possible restaurant. The hope is to attract new neighborhood-focused services to the area, according to Trustee President David Kubicki.

The site is surrounded by some of the region's wealthiest communities and faces the Mariemont Village Square. Kubicki said neighboring communities have become among the region's hottest locations, thus increasing the future value of this property.

The estimated \$668,000 project, which includes \$200,000 of private investment, could receive a \$250,000 boost through the State Capital Budget. If the grant is approved, Columbia Township would buy and renovate the fire house facility, then lease or sell it.

Kubicki sees renovation projects like this as important to Columbia Township's future because they strengthen small neighborhood business districts. "After decades with no true downtown, Columbia Township's future lies in the revitalization of gems like these that tie communities together."

The second project under review is redevelopment of a blighted half-acre property at 7541 Wooster Pike. As part of the effort to revitalize the Wooster Business Corridor, the township hopes to purchase a property that has been idle for years. The former gas station and repair/parts shop built in 1953 is in poor condition and has two mobile homes located on it.



Former Madison Place Fire House



Blighted property at 7541 Wooster Pike

Recreational activities along this corridor are increasing, as are new businesses, with upgrades to safety and accessibility planned in the future. The township is working with Great Parks of Hamilton County, the Ohio Department of Transportation and 50 West Brewing to shape a new future as a recreational destination using the bike path and its surrounding businesses.

The grant request from the Ohio Parks and Natural Resources Fund is \$250,000. Columbia Township will commit \$275,000 in Tax Increment Finance funds for the project. Kubicki said the property acquisition was estimated to be \$350,000, with the rest of costs in remediation and demolition.

"The addition and development of this blighted property on Wooster Pike will help accelerate the entertainment district's regional draw and attraction of jobs," Kubicki noted.

Trail on Track to be Completed in May Continued from page 1

Wooster Pike and Ashley Oaks. The easement leading to Wooster Pike will be through 50 West property.

Phase 3 includes continued extension of the paved trail from Walton Creek downstream along the Little Miami River behind Kroger. The trail will emerge at Miami Run near the entrance to Mariemont Landing. From there, the trail will cross Miami Run and travel along the Kroger Fueling Center to Wooster Pike. ODOT will determine the most feasible route along Wooster Pike for the final .3 miles, with the trail terminus at the intersection of Wooster Pike and Pocahontas Avenue adjacent to the Mariemont Branch Library.

Great Parks is managing construction of the trail.



Construction began in January 2020.



A new restaurant is planned along the bike trail extension.

Infrastructure Upgrades Coming on Three Township Streets

Three Columbia Township streets will undergo construction this year, with plans for completion of both projects by the end of 2020.

Columbia Township was awarded interest-free loans in 2019 for significant upgrades to Maphet Lane and Ebersole Avenue, with widening, resurfacing, new utilities, new curb and water mains and more planned for the road. Currently, Maphet Lane is only 10 to 12 feet wide in some spots and is difficult to navigate for snowplows during emergencies.

The loans were awarded from the State Capital Improvement Program (SCIP) which assists communities in financing public improvements. The state program will contribute half the cost of each street and the township covers the other half through a 30-year interest free loan. Costs for the upgrades are estimated at more than \$3.2 million for both projects.

Maphet Avenue will be widened at the top of the street. "Due to significant changes in the alignment of the street to

conform to the legal right-of-way, there will be extensive work on properties at the boundary of the right-of-way," noted Township Administrator Mike Lemon. Along with new gas and electric lines, properties with outdated lead water lines will have the opportunity to replace those lines with new lines at a discount.

Residents met with township representatives in January to discuss upcoming changes. Work on the project was scheduled to start in early March. According to John Servizzi, road superintendent, construction on this project should be finished by June 30.

Reconstruction on Hill and Dale Drive also is planned this year, including replacement of the existing water line, new concrete curbs, resurfacing and a new water main. Any homes with lead water lines will be offered a discount from Cincinnati Water Works to change them out. The township will go out for bids in spring or early summer on the Hill and Dale road project.



Maphet Lane will be reconstructed this year, along with two other township roads.



Columbia Township is planning to upgrade its office on Kenwood Road. Improvements will add safety enhancements and updated office space.

We're a Part of the Tree City USA Program!



TREE CITY USA®

Columbia Township takes an active role in planting and maintaining trees growing along its roads. Did you know-Columbia Township was the first township in Ohio achieving the Tree City USA distinction? The township has received this designation for the past 11 years.

Two of Columbia Township's employees are ISA Certified Arborists and they help care for over 700 street trees in the township.

This year Columbia Township will celebrate Arbor Day with a seedling giveaway at Good Shepherd School.

Township Responds to Beavercreek Tornado Cleanup

Columbia Township road crew employees were part of a team of 34 government agencies who responded last year to help the city of Beavercreek with tree debris pickup.

A 2019 Memorial Day tornado created havoc in the city of Beavercreek. Winds of 140 mph ripped off roofs, drove gutters into the sides of buildings and tore out

trees. Cleanup continued all summer and is not yet complete.

Columbia Township has been an active member of the Public Works Officials of Southwest Ohio for many years. "As a member of the public works organization, we have been called on several times to assist other communities in both tornado and flood clean-ups," said John Servizzi,

road superintendent. "The Beavercreek tornado destroyed well over a thousand trees which had to be removed from their right-of-way. This task would be impossible for the Beavercreek maintenance crews to complete on their own," he said. "Columbia Township was proud to be a part of the mutual aid that was given to Beavercreek in their time of need."

Call to Set Up Delivery of Free Compost, Wood Chips

Two dates set for limited supply of recycled products available through Columbia Township.

Monday, April 6, is the first day Columbia Township will provide free compost and wood chips delivered to your home. However, as was the case last year, supplies are very limited.

The only other date township employees will deliver the recycled materials to township residents' homes is Monday, May 4. No other dates will be included in the free service. Residents will be called before delivery to verify the request.

"Since we will have a limited amount of leaf compost, we are only delivering a maximum of one truckload (about three yards) of leaf compost per house per year. This will allow us to accommodate more residents," noted John Servizzi, road superintendent.

Servizzi said the recycled landscape materials will be available on a first come-first served basis.

Call the township at 561-6046 to sign up. Or check the township website, ColumbiaTwp.org for reminders and signup information.



Important Phone Numbers in Columbia Township



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 272-7870
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Trustee
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JEDZ Tax Administrator
Jane Fette
 272-9954
JFette@fairfaxoh.org

Property Maintenance Code Enforcement
 792-7256
columbia@sycamoretownship.org

POLICE PROTECTION—Emergency- 911

Columbia Township—
 Non-Emergency
 825-2280

City of Cincinnati—
 Non-Emergency
 765-1212

www.cincinnati-oh.gov/cpd

Hamilton County—
 Non-Emergency
 825-1500 www.hcso.org

FIRE PROTECTION—Emergency- 911

The Little Miami Joint Fire & Rescue District
 271-3636

Station 1 Wooster Pike
 271-3636
<http://lmfr.org>

Station 2 Wiehe Road
 531-2022
<http://lmfr.org>

Deer Park—Silverton Joint
 Fire District
 791-2500
www.dpsjfd.org