



Testimony to the House Civil Justice Committee
Tuesday May 23, 2023

Chair Hillyer, Vice Chair Mathews, Ranking Member Galonski, and members of the House Civil Justice Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide opponent testimony on House Bill 64. My name is Stephania Ferrell; I serve as the Director of Parks and Recreation for the City of Gahanna. I am submitting testimony in opposition to House Bill 64, as it would significantly impede our communities from conducting public infrastructure improvements. As these needs continually change, our duly elected local government officials must have the flexibility and authority to meet the demands of our residents.

Development of trails has consistently been indicated as a top priority of Gahanna residents and was identified in the City's GoForward Gahanna Strategic Plan and the Parks and Recreation Comprehensive Master Plan. The Comprehensive Parks Master Plan requires significant community and stakeholder participation to be successful. The input and guidance from community leaders, stakeholders and the general public is vital to create the guiding principles of what the community desires and expects from the City of Gahanna. Stakeholder interviews were held individually to provide adequate time for feedback and dialogue. Focus groups were conducted to gain perspective and understand priorities from many different user groups. Community surveys and public town halls were conducted to provide additional opportunities to provide input from local leaders and community members.

The 2022-23 Parks Master Plan identified the top two improvements most supported by the community. The top priority identified was developing trails and connectivity of trails throughout the community and secondly, improving the existing trail system. In addition to assessing the needs of the community, the Master Plan survey results also associated a Priority Investment Rating (PIR) to capital improvement projects for the City of Gahanna. The PIR equally weights the importance that residents place on amenities and how many residents have unmet needs for the amenity. Based on the PIR, multi-use paved trails scored the highest with a PIR of 165 with the next amenity trailing far behind with a score of 149. Unpaved trails, including nature trails, scored seventh with a PIR of 115. The community is passionate about the trail system and wants to see continued connectivity within the system.

We are deeply concerned about language in House Bill 64 that would remove recreational trails from the definition of "public use" in Ohio's eminent domain law. Trails are a critical asset to Central Ohio, both for recreational purposes and commuting, and are widely used across the region.



Trails are integral to a community's quality of life and offer numerous benefits to residents and visitors alike. They provide space for health and wellness activities, and are a key component in our transportation network, connecting neighborhoods to jobs, schools, health care, retail, and greenspace. Restricting our ability to expand and enhance them will only hinder us from improving overall quality of life for our community.

We also recognize that trails are just one part of a robust transportation network, and as transportation needs evolve in any community, local governments must be prepared to respond. New development, jobs, and housing will always bring new public service challenges and greater transportation needs. While local governments and park districts rarely use eminent domain for trails, it is a necessary tool of last resort when making significant investments in complex networks. House Bill 64 would eliminate this option and make it more difficult to fill gaps in regional trails, such as the Central Ohio Greenways network.

Chair Hillyer and members of the House Civil Justice Committee, thank you again for the opportunity to submit opponent testimony on House Bill 64. We strongly urge you to reject these measures and protect our ability to meet constituent needs. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at Stephania.Bernard-Ferrell@Gahanna.gov.