

Work continues to transform former Akron golf course into park

Emily Mills

emills@thebeaconjournal.com

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The meticulously landscaped golf course looks more wild and natural now, with grasses and native wildflowers thriving.

It's part of the years-long work to transform the former Valley View Golf Club that was at 1212 Cuyahoga St. in Akron into Summit Metro Parks' newest parkland.

Valley View Golf Club closed in 2015 and was sold to the park district for \$4 million in 2016. The 200-acre property was a golf course for more than 50 years and a dairy farm for at least a century before that.

The park district had long wanted to acquire the property — it was even identified for future parkland in its original 1920s master plan.

It was the missing piece that now connects 1,900 acres of protected green space across three metro parks: Cascade Valley, the Gorge and Sand Run.

The latest phase of the transformation project from golf course to park is river restoration work at the Valley View Area of Cascade Valley Metro Park.

The work involves restoring nearly a mile of the Cuyahoga River, with floodplain excavation and in-stream habitat improvements for fish and aquatic wildlife. The work will also make the river more accessible for water-based recreation, like canoeing, kayaking and shore fishing.

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The park district received a \$2.5 million award from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and Great Lakes Commission Regional Partnership, made possible through the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, for the river restoration. The funding is in addition to a previously granted \$500,000 award for design and engineering.

“These improvements are not only critical to the Cuyahoga River itself, but they ultimately help protect water quality all the way to Lake Erie,” Summit Metro Parks Executive Director Lisa King said. “This work also sets the stage for an incredible new park area that will welcome over 2 million visits a year and result in an estimated \$2.8 million in annual tourism spending for our local economy.”

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“Projects like Summit Metro Parks’ work along the Cuyahoga River provide much-needed habitat for fish and wildlife, as well as valuable recreation and tourism opportunities for local communities,” said NOAA Fisheries Office of Habitat Conservation Director Carrie Selberg Robinson.

Work also continues on the renovation of the former clubhouse at the golf course, which was originally a dairy barn built in the mid-1800s. The park district recently awarded Cavanaugh Building Corp. a contract to renovate the building into a rentable public events facility.

While the site is not yet open to the public, the park district hopes to offer access soon.

It initially planned to open the park to the public this fall with a 1.5-mile trail. But those plans were delayed because of the ongoing construction on the barn, which is close to the site of the planned trail.

The first phase of the project involved removing non-native vegetation and restoring streams and wetlands covered to create the golf course, with more than \$1 million in external funding for the work from the Clean Ohio Green Space Conservation Program.

The park district has also conducted archaeological digs on the property to learn more about its past.

Crews explored Honeywell Drive, a former residential street built in the 1940s. Many of the residents were African Americans who traveled north for jobs in Akron’s industrial sector.

Crews also explored an area long rumored to have been a boatyard used to build boats along the Cuyahoga River for use in the War of 1812. No evidence of the boatyard was found.

*Contact Beacon Journal reporter Emily Mills
atemills@thebeaconjournal.com.*

