

Remarks of Cleveland Foundation President and CEO Ronald B. Richard

Announcement of Centennial Legacy Grant for Lake Link Trail

Rivergate Park

Tuesday, Aug. 19, 2014

Good morning, Mayor Jackson, County Executive FitzGerald, all the other honorable public servants here with me and all of you here from the community who share a passion for our parks, our waterfront and the trails that connect us with the natural world.

We are here today to talk about a new connector – one that will link some of Cleveland’s prime ecological assets and, in so doing, will also draw together the people of this community and this region.

Creating, enhancing and providing access to beautiful public spaces for Greater Cleveland residents to enjoy is a fundamental part of the Cleveland Foundation’s legacy. Way back in 1919, our only-five-year-old foundation produced a recreation survey that jump-started publicly funded purchase and assembly of parkland to form our Cleveland Metroparks.

The Cleveland Foundation was instrumental in the 1977 acquisition of 30,000 acres of land for the Cuyahoga Valley National Park, which ranked 10th among most-visited national parks in 2012.

Last year, we granted \$200,000 to help transfer management of six lakefront parks from the state to the Metroparks. What a great investment that turned out to be! Brian Zimmerman and his colleagues have done a phenomenal job with those properties. Edgewater Park is now the place to be on Thursday evenings. What a pleasure it is to see Greater Clevelanders flocking to their lakefront.

Just last month, the Cleveland Foundation made an \$8 million centennial legacy gift toward the revitalization of Public Square. When that project is completed in 2016, it will include the new Cleveland Foundation Centennial Plaza.

Today, I am delighted to announce that, as part of the ongoing celebration of our centennial, the Cleveland Foundation is making a \$5 million dollar legacy grant to the Trust for Public Land for the Lake Link Trail project.

When design and construction are finished, the Lake Link Trail will connect with the Ohio & Erie Canal Towpath at the southern end of the Scranton Peninsula. From there, it will traverse a transformed 1.3 miles of abandoned railroad right-of-way running through the West Bank of the Flats. The trail will terminate at Lake Erie, in Wendy Park on Whiskey Island.

This creative project will achieve the critically important objective of connecting our city's neighborhoods with both of our major waterfronts: our lake and our river.

But connection is only part of the payoff. The conversion of an old railway bed to a multimodal trail will yield economic development, environmental and health benefits as well. Perhaps most important, by increasing public access to our waterfronts, this project should encourage a greater appreciation of these irreplaceable natural resources we are blessed with.

We can never overestimate the importance of protecting our waterways and creating green space. I commend all the partners here for their support of sustainability and the long-overdue effort to turn our gray city green. As more residents throughout our region discover the magic of its green and blue treasures, the constituency for their preservation cannot help but expand.

The Cleveland Foundation is proud to be part of this movement toward great places for our great people. With the gift we are announcing today, the foundation has made 13 million dollars in centennial legacy grants this past month to remake neglected urban assets into attractive destinations for residents and visitors alike.

It's important to note that this place-based philanthropy comes to you courtesy of our donors, the real champions. They are the ones who make everything possible, including:

- This series of centennial legacy grants
- Our surprise gifts to the community – one each month to celebrate our centennial throughout 2014
- And our regular grantmaking, which reached \$89 million last year

In addition to our donors, I thank the many partners on this project. And I thank all of you for being here today to celebrate this additional milestone in Cleveland's current and indisputable renaissance.

Now, I will turn it over to Pam Carson and Brian Zimmerman, who will discuss the next steps in the evolution of this exciting project.