

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**FRANKLIN COUNTY CELEBRATES EARTH DAY
TODAY AND EVERYDAY**

Franklin County is fortunate to enjoy plentiful natural resources, beautiful park land, scenic rivers, and a bog, and protecting these for future generations is very important to the Board of County Commissioners. During April, local governments throughout America recognize the important roles counties have in delivering services to improve residents' lives, keep communities safe, including protecting our precious natural resources, and make neighborhoods stronger and more resilient. Franklin County is participating in these National County Government Month efforts, and as we celebrate Earth Day, the Franklin County Commissioners are calling attention to the work being undertaken to ensure Franklin County grows sustainably and green.

Franklin County Commissioners have made good stewardship of natural resources and environmental sustainability top priorities, making significant investments. Earlier today, Commissioners congratulated the county-supported Community Garden Grant recipients during an Earth Day program at Franklin Park Conservatory. Annually, the County invests in community gardens to help local residents access fresh, affordable and healthy produce for themselves and their families. This year, the county awarded a total of \$25,000 to eleven gardens throughout the community including in the city of Whitehall and at Upper Arlington Lutheran Church, the YMCA, Otterbein University and Riverside Elementary School. Franklin County also operates two community gardens – the Mound Street garden and the International Harvest garden (Frank Road).

“Today so many people are making informed choices in their daily lives that are good for the environment and their health,” said Commission President Marilyn Brown. “Community gardening, recycling and carpooling or riding a bike to work are simple ways to commit on Earth Day, or any day, to improving your overall quality of life.”

Leading by example, Franklin County installed solar panels in 2009 and continues to maintain two of the largest solar arrays in the state of Ohio on top of county buildings, including at the Franklin County Dog Shelter (4340 Tamarack Blvd.) on the County's northeast side and in downtown Columbus (80 E. Fulton St.). Other County efforts include replacing aging fleet car with more efficient e-85 or hybrid vehicles also continue. To date, 41% of Franklin County's 378 fleet vehicles are alternatively fueled.

And, while our community has become the fastest growing county in the state of Ohio and

the 30th largest in the nation, continued infrastructure improvement and investments are required. In fact, for some in Franklin County, the delivery of clean drinking water and the safe removal of sanitary sewer waste remain a concern. To ensure that more Franklin County residents have access to safe water and sanitary utilities, the Commissioners have approved an ongoing expansion plan and a \$2.5 million project to upgrade water and sewer systems to ensure EPA compliance.

“Our journey began with passing one of the nation's first local government sustainability resolutions in the nation,” said Commissioner Paula Brooks. “In that we called for compatibility of economic development and environmental sustainability and resilience. We have found that pursuing strong resilience efforts saves money and assures our future generations will enjoy a high quality of life, with natural resources like the Great Darby Creek conserved for them.”

Going green isn't just about preserving what we already have. It's also about preparing for the future – especially for green employment opportunities. Recognizing the importance of having a skilled, trained workforce to meet the expanding employment landscape, four years ago, the Commissioners created the Green Corps Program, a vocational training program that helps prepare low-income young people for jobs in horticulture-related industries. Since its inception, the Board has supported this program annually through a \$25,000 grant which provides participants with 32-weeks paid employment training at Franklin Park Conservatory in Columbus.

“Each of us shares in the responsibility to protect our natural resources and I'd encourage you to discover what you're passionate about and take action,” said Commissioner John O'Grady. “From cleaning up our majestic waterways and green spaces, to buying local at a farmer's markets, there are many ways to be engaged and go green.”

Franklin County's efforts do not stop there. In the coming weeks, Commissioners plan to unveil a new green energy initiative for Central Ohio called Energy Works which will help businesses, local governments, non-profits, and schools to retrofit or build with smart energy solutions that are good for the environment, good for business, and good for our Franklin County economy.

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