

**CITY OF INDEPENDENCE
STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETING
MINUTES
JANUARY 22, 2022 AT 9:00 A.M.
VIA ZOOM**

Vice Mayor Grendel called the meeting to order at 9:03 a.m. Present were Council Members, John DiGeronimo, Tom Narduzzi, Anthony Togliatti, Jim Trakas, Dale Veverka and Chris Walchanowicz. Also present were Mayor Gregory P. Kurtz, Finance Director Vern Blaze, Economic Development Director Jessica Hyser, Communications Director Alla Lora, Police Chief Robert Butler, Fire Chief Steve Rega, Service Director Ron McKinley, Technical Service Director Dave Snyderburn, Building Official Michael Gero, Recreation Director Tom Walchanowicz, Community Services Director Emily Thomas, City Engineer Don Ramm and Procurement Coordinator Dennis Zdolshek.

Vice Mayor Grendel said I want to welcome everyone here. This is kind of our annual get-together so that really we can share all of our thoughts. There is no right or wrong in any of this. The right thing for us is to share our views, the things that we would like to see happen. We want the emphasis for each Councilperson on your committee that you are Chairperson, but you can share all of your ideas; but we figure with seven committees and seven areas, that will get all of the areas covered.

Other than that, the rules are similar to what we did last year. I think it was very enjoyable, and I think very productive too that we were able to each share our views.

Our agenda will go as such, we are going to have the Mayor give about a 10 minute overview of the impact of Covid 19 on the City and on the different operations of the City. Then Vern you will have 10 minutes to give us a financial overview as we know things change almost daily or very often on the financial front too. So, we will get your views. I will likewise go about 10 minutes with some of the priorities, some of the things that I think are important for Council to focus on for this coming year, and then at that point, around 9:35 a.m. or 9:40 a.m., we are going to have presentations by each of the Councilpersons. We will start with Chris, you will see that was in our agenda there. We are going to go reverse alphabetical order this year. So, Chris you will be leading it off with Dale following you. Then after every Councilperson and Vern has given their presentation, around 11:00 a.m. we hope to have a bathroom break there, just about a 5 or 10 minute break. Then when we come back Mayor you will give your overview and your visions, and then we will finish up with a free-for-all where everyone can chime in on some of the priorities that we wish to have this year and then decide if we are going to have a follow-up meeting. If you have your calendars available, we will see maybe sometime in February we can have a follow-up meeting to this and narrow it down even further.

I believe Mayor a lot of our Directors are in attendance here virtually. So, Council while you are giving your presentation, if you want to bring any of the Directors in, feel free to have them also. They will be taking notes so that they will be able to be part of your vision for the upcoming year.

Without further ado, Mayor I will turn this over to you and let you take over the stage.

Mayor Kurtz said thank you Vice Mayor. Welcome Council, and I appreciate the opportunity to present today at the 2022 Strategic Planning session. You are correct Vice Mayor, a number of the Department Heads are online, and they want to hear, they want to absorb the information that is important to each member of Council so that they can craft a strategy that applies to each of the departments.

After nearly two years of upheaval and uncertainties, we appear to be transitioning towards the next normal. We must be realistic, optimistic and united in our efforts to serve all of our stakeholders. We will need to work together to prioritize projects, spending and come to a consensus with what is best for the City's long-term growth. We need to build upon the lessons learned during the past two years to position the City to permanently accommodate and support the way people are choosing to live, work and play. The world is not going to slow down and neither can the City of Independence.

The three goals that we need to keep in mind, growth, sustainability and streamlining operations to maximize resources and seize opportunities that may not have existed in the past. We need to continue raising the bar because that is what residents expect and deserve. The City's reputation is built on the fact that we provide exceptional services. Just as a reminder, we didn't lay off any full-time staff during the past two years.

In 2021 accomplishments, the list is enormous, but we will pare it down. Let's start with public safety. Since November Police Chief Butler has been evaluating the operations and making recommendations about staff, structure and promotions. As a matter of fact, we just promoted two more Lieutenants earlier this month. The need for uniforms, bulletproof vests, body cameras, dash cameras and training, that's a priority; and of course, we will have more robust discussions about the new Police station or satellite station.

We installed 31 surveillance cameras on heavily trafficked areas throughout the City and along the Independence/Brooklyn Heights border. We have a great working relationship with our neighbors, and this is just another example.

Another example would be making the right investment today will pay dividends for many years. We hired 5 new officers in 2021 to fill the positions that were left open due to retirements.

Another important area is economic development. The City raised income taxes, we increased our income taxes last year by over \$1,000,000. The Economic Development Department is driven to grow and maintain the City's tax base to provide top-notch services to both its daytime and bedroom residents. Independence must distinguish itself from its neighbors by being the premiere business-savvy community to locate, invest and grow.

Here are some of the significant achievements in 2021 that bled over into 2022. The CBIZ/Welty deal is probably the most significant. I want to thank City Council Members for their support

and leadership. CBIZ which leases 50,000 square feet for the past 20 years, and has been one of our top taxpayers. They will be anchoring a new 50,000 sq. ft. facility as part of the 160,000 square foot office building. It is the first Class A office building built in the last 20 years. This project will serve as a magnet to attract new tenants to the City. Administration and Council were nimble last year. Neighboring communities have been much more aggressive in offering tax incentives that are beyond what the City traditionally embraced. Negotiations had to be fluid and flexible. The City must consider updating the City's cumbersome and outdated zoning code. We will talk more about that later.

We matched CBIZ with vacant properties in the City. Again, delivering outstanding service that supported their needs and their vision. Our centralized location gives us an advantage that other communities don't have. We are not just competing for east side and west side, downtown, and Akron area companies. We are competing on a regional level because we are centrally located.

Saucy Brew Works took several years, but thanks to Council's leadership the City will soon be home of a brew pub and event center.

MAI, after 45 years downtown, MAI Capital Management is leaving downtown to move its new headquarters here in Independence. The firm manages over \$10,000,000 of clients' assets.

Redwood Living Real Estate and Management Company converted the former ADP building on East Pleasant Valley Road for their corporate headquarters. If you ever have a chance to visit that, it's a tremendously inspiring environment, and they have a lot to offer both their employees and their visitors as well as the City of Independence.

Of course Kichler, the lighting company, moved out of its distribution center to eastern Pennsylvania after it was bought out by a larger company. Their office operations have moved to the east side, but the real estate agent handling this national search for companies found it very interesting and intriguing in that the 600,000 square foot office, production and distribution facility is as they said "the bones are in good shape."

Branding and placement, which is signage, as we emerge from the fog of the pandemic, both initiatives will serve to refresh and bolster the City's image and unique identity to residents, businesses, visitors, and future stakeholders. Both our communications tools will present a cohesive, strong and distinctive message that is authentic and captures the City's exceptional position in the marketplace and resonates with the residents and business community.

Let's talk and turn to technology. In recent years residents have asked me if the City could explore technology that would make it easier for them to request City services, get a pool pass, sign up for classes and the list goes on. This year we started implementing Tyler Technologies. It is a complicated, time-consuming project where we will reap the benefits of that investment for many, many years. I want to thank everyone in Engineering, Service and Technical Service Department who have been working on this project over the past 6 months. Tyler Technologies will help the City streamline operations, reduce costs and better engage and serve our residents.

Now the Service Department under the leadership of Ron McKinley will need to make some tough decisions about upgrading the Service Department. We have millions of dollars invested in equipment, but the Service garage is outdated and inadequate in size. I believe it was built in 1976, before any of our times in public service. We are working on something. We have been to ODOT to see their state-of-the-art facilities, and we will be talking about this more in-depth at future Public Buildings & Lands Committee meetings and Finance Committee. It's going to take a combined, complete Council decision.

Something that we have been working on and we are very proud of is a new protocol to address property issues. I want to personally thank Mike Gero, Don Ramm, Jim Riley, and Angie Zeleznik on their collective and collaboration to help homeowners resolve code violations with a professional and personal touch. The new policy is that we talk to people face-to-face rather than just send a letter or drive by.

I am running a little bit late on my time so I will try to condense a few things, but the question is how has the City supported residents to provide some sense of normal among all of the restrictions, isolation, and instructions of the past two years.

Well we had the Spring Bunny Trail in March of 2021. That was a safe, socially distancing family event that was tremendously attended.

Home Days, the two-day event, attracted huge crowds, and even with the Saturday night rainstorm it couldn't have dampened the spirits. The majority of the people surveyed after the event, support the idea of permanently moving Home Days to the park.

We added Fall Fest and the clambake, and this year's September event was bigger than ever and brought out hundreds of families. Also, the new caterer served a delicious chicken and clambake, and the 2021 drive-thru holiday Tree Lighting. The synchronized light show with new displays including lights and tree lights in the Elmwood Park, extended the holiday season. The biggest challenge now is how do we top that in 2022.

Finally, the senior drive-thru lunches we started when the pandemic hit, it peaked out in May of 2021, more than 700 meals were being delivered every week, and it was a tremendous success. The whole purpose of that was as we talked about it numerous times last year, engaging people, getting people out of their house, making them participate, get engaged again. It was a huge success.

As we look to the future, we are talking about the Civic Center enhancements or expansion. Believe it or not, that building is 30 years old. It has been the hub of our community and the residents' activities. Last spring the Community Services and Recreation Departments surveyed the residents on expanding services and programs in 2022. I hope that we can work together to prioritize, plan and budget for this project.

Of course, our relationship with the schools is vitally important. The Administration along with Vice Mayor Grendel, we have held preliminary discussions with Independence local schools and other stakeholders regarding a new primary school. What to do with the existing property, and the possible need for another shared use structure like the Fieldhouse is in consideration.

The pandemic in some ways was an equalizer and that requires all of us to work in collaboration and in a collaborative way and make decisions quickly to respond to the evolving situation.

Looking to the future, we need to identify what does the City want, what are our wants and what do we need to be to stay out front, be competitive and differentiate ourselves as reliable leaders and partners.

That is my wrap-up for the first round, and I look forward to listening to Council's personal thoughts on where we should go, and we will put together a collaborative summary on all of this. Thank you very much, and my ears will be cauliflower for a while.

Vice Mayor Grendel said thank you very much Mayor. We move on now, Vern are you ready to give your report or your overview of the financial vulnerabilities and successes, an overview of last year, and like I say you have to be on your toes because things change rapidly, and you have to be versatile enough to meet those different challenges. So, Vern the floor is yours.

Finance Director Blaze said thank you for that introduction Vice Mayor. Very poignant words, very true. So, let me just share screen. So, you are seeing the picture of City Hall there. I just start out with the City's mission statement as well as the vision statement here. I think it's important for us today, every goal we set, every future vision we set, every plan we make, it all has to come back to helping us achieve a vision of the City and fulfill the mission of the City, and my role here and Vice Mayor and the Mayor asked me to talk about some of the financial highlights and vulnerabilities. My focus in the presentation is to help us today kind of know where we have been, where we are now, and that will help us chart the course of where we want to go and where we need to go as a community. Of course, finances and money underlie all of that. Plans costs money, visions cost money, implementation costs money. So, money is very important, and that's why a CFO has to have their arms wrapped around so many facets of the organization's operations.

I will start with Independence and just a summary. This is from the 2020 annual financial report. Obviously, we are only 22 days into the new year, so the annual financial report usually gets put out by the Auditor's office not until the summer of the subsequent year, so we are many months away from that, but the 2020 data is a good place to start to drive home the point of the breath and scope and depth of how big Independence really is. Even though we only have 7,600 residents. Total assets are approaching \$200,000,000. Let me qualify all of this. I am going to email this out to everybody. I will email it out to Debi so if residents contact her, residents contact me, this whole presentation will be available. So, I will just try to hit the highlights and not go word-for-word, but liabilities, we really don't have that many liabilities. A lot of that is

pension liabilities that we are required to put on our books, but it's really OPERS and the Public and Safety forces pension plans that own those liabilities.

Net position is like equity. We have over \$100,000,000 of equity. We finished the year with almost \$40,000,000 in cash last year. Depreciable capital assets, our roads, our sewers, our sidewalks, our Fire trucks, our ambulances, Police cars, snowplows, garbage trucks, \$155,000,000 worth of depreciable capital assets. That's a good size operation there.

Revenue in excess of \$50,000,000. Debt at the end of 2020 was \$28,800,000, and we will talk about that in a few minutes. We also have some interfund payables. We have talked in the past about how we internally "loan" ourselves some money to do some of these projects in these TIF districts that will eventually get paid back through the TIF revenues, but there's an additional almost \$25,000,000 outstanding of kind of internal payables that we owe ourselves. We will talk about real property in a little bit.

Full-time employees was down a little bit in 2020 because of Covid. The Community Services Department, the Rec Department were on even complete shutdown mode there for a while. A lot of square footage of buildings, over 100 vehicles. Ron has over 55 miles to maintain. Police and Fire, calls were down the Covid year, but still it's a significant volume for a small community like ourselves. The Building permit value keeps the Building Department busy for sure.

So, we will start with our main driver, and that as we all know is income tax, and the Mayor indicated up over \$1,000,000 in this year compared to last year. It is interesting to know that the inflation rate really kicking up in 2021 hit us in the backside there because we were doing pretty good, kind of staying ahead of inflation. That income tax was going up a little bit faster. Overall when you look at a longer timeframe, faster than the inflation rate was, but that 7% in 2021 caused it to almost equal out so that the income tax over the last 5 years is just a tad over the inflation rate, and so that's why the Mayor's comments about the importance of economic development are so true because the focus is very important on attracting, retaining and growing businesses in Independence because that's what drives this income tax. We have a little better handle now on the makeup of the income tax. You think in the past the State was as involved and RITA wasn't as sophisticated to break it out. That's why you see in 2021 net profits accounting for more of the total, still a relatively small percent. The withholdings are still the vast majority of the income tax total, but I am not so sure that it's because businesses have gotten 8 or 10 times more profitable than they did in 2018. I think it's more reporting that RITA is getting a little more sophisticated in breaking it out and providing us with more data there. So, that's an interesting slide to see the breakdown of our total income tax.

I threw this slide on there because yeah we do have a lot of income tax coming in, but there's some cost to collect that. Don't get overly excited or depressed about the gross cost of the RITA collection cost. Those are high numbers, but that's not the actual cost that RITA costs us to collect our income tax. We get that retainer refund every year, that number is several hundred thousand dollars each year. So, the net RITA cost is actually significantly less than what is shown there, but this is the amount that is booked as the gross cost. I want these figures to line

up exactly with what is in the monthly and year-end financial statements that are posted online. So, if anybody was really bored, and they wanted to back check any of these figures, they could go directly to the financial statements and see exactly where these figures came from.

The other kind of deduction from income tax is the grants, the incentive grants that Independence gives out are income tax based. So, I look at that as okay we have a gross number here of what we take in on the top line. We pay RITA to collect that. We pay the State a little bit to collect what they do essentially in Columbus, and then there is a significant portion that goes out in the grant category. So, you kind of have a little bottom-line net figure of how much that net income tax we have left over each year to then run our operations, fund our capital and infrastructure and pay our debt service.

The hotel/motel lodging tax, you can see obviously 2020 was the big drop off with Covid. We had a pretty healthy return last year, not quite back to the range. It has been a really consistent range there, \$1,300,000, \$1,400,000 range. We will see if this one just over \$1,000,000 from 2021 creeps up a little bit back closer to this range this year. It's a nice income streak to have, but certainly doesn't compare to well in excess of \$30,000,000 on the income tax side.

The TIF revenue, it took a big jump from 2017 to 2018 and kind of leveled off there for 3 years and then took a nice healthy jump in 2021. It's kind of how fast we approve TIF districts, how fast the building improvements get on the County's tax records and how accurate the County tax records are. I know Jess has put it as one of her to-do list items with her team is to work with Cuyahoga County to ensure that each parcel and each TIF district is correctly identified so that the City is getting full value of the TIF districts that have been created over time.

Property tax revenues have been very stable. It goes up a little bit as the tax duplicate gets up, and we will talk about that here in a couple of seconds. Another good source, we will talk about where most of that money goes too. Taxes are driven by the tax duplicate. We do talk about the tax duplicate quite a bit. This is the breakdown here, the 3 basic categories that are left, residential, commercial we will call it, and then for the public utilities. It's still a healthy amount, but not nearly as large as the residential and industrial.

The line here that is bolded that is listed tax duplicate, that is the official tax duplicate that we always have to cite. That is what is listed on the County records as far as the City's valuation of its property, but I do add this line here of exempt property and that's the TIF properties. These properties, although technically they are not paying taxes, they do write the same check to the County that we all do, and they are just not listed as legally as taxes, they are payments in lieu of taxes; but they pay bond issues, they pay taxes, they pay inside millage. The properties in the TIF districts pay every cent of taxes that any other property here outside of the TIF districts do. So, I feel that to really get a valid number of how much property assessed value the City has, we really have to throw this number in addition to the tax duplicate. Cuyahoga County does not have it calculated for 2021 yet, so we will update that figure when we get it. Since it has been in that \$75,000,000 to \$80,000,000 range the last few years, I expect it to be in that range. You will see that the commercial industrial took the hit in the most recent valuation while the residential was

our biggest increase. I would suspect that most of this decrease is attributable to the hit in the hotels. You see the 50% hit that the tax took. So, it probably means that hotel/motel revenue took a 50% hit, and so the County recognized that and decreased the value of those properties by a little bit.

Here is a breakdown of a tax bill. I think it's important for Council and anybody online to know okay in this tax year here, this calendar year, our residential gross millage was 65.18 mils. There is some reduction factors on that, and this year we will have an effective residential tax rate of let's call it 58 mils. So, this column is very helpful here to show, to answer the question, okay out of every \$100 of residential property taxes paid, where does that \$100 go? You can see that the school district gets the vast majority, about \$56.00 and Cuyahoga County is the next highest category. So, between the school district and the County, that 77%, that \$77.00 out of every \$100.00 that is paid, you can see the City here, we get about \$4.00 of every \$100.00. Not complaining about that, but property taxes are not our main income driver as we showed a few slides ago. It's still under \$1,000,000 a year versus income tax that was at \$35,000,000 last year.

It's always good to have a number, but what does that number mean compared to other communities. So, I just throw a few nearby cities here, not the villages, but the cities, and obviously Independence still has a very attractive residential property tax rate to our nearby cities and even when you compare it to outer ring suburbs that share similar dynamics as Independence, vibrant business communities. Each one of these communities have vibrant business communities like Independence, but also very attractive residential communities as well. We are still lower than the next lowest one of Westlake. So, that's a good barometer here, and I think that's one reason why we have seen the growth in our residential sector because Independence remains a very attractive place to work, and service wise obviously, and location wise obviously, but taxing wise as well.

We go to a poll question here. Debi, if you want to have some fun for just a second, if you could launch the poll. I want to test everybody's knowledge or guesses of the property that Independence owns. I have 4 questions here that if you could all just take a couple of sections. How many different parcels does the City own? Of those total parcels, how many acreage does it total up to? What value does the County place on all of the City's land that it owns, and what value does the County place on all of the buildings that the City owns? So, I would like to take a couple of seconds, and Deb I don't know the last time I looked it looked like there were over 20 people on line; so once you get over 20 responses, we will cut the poll off and then you could display the results. Then we will go through a few slides to see how we all did.

Councilperson Togliatti said it says on mine that the host and panelists cannot vote. It doesn't work.

Finance Director Blaze said we worked through that in our test the other day. Deb or Jess are we going to be able to work through that today or not? We didn't do a test run, and we got it to work.

Vice Mayor Grendel said we could cut the suspense Vern and just give us the answers.

Several people began speaking at once.

Mayor Kurtz said go through them.

Finance Director Blaze said okay, we will go to the property record database. We created a database here of every single property, and this will be a very interesting little Excel spreadsheet for you to have. It lists every parcel number that the City owns, kind of where it's located. We have a transfer date on it, who sold it to the City, how big the land area is, etc. By Cuyahoga County records, the City owns a grand total of 79 different properties. Those 79 properties comprise 360 acres of land. The County has that 360 acres of land valued at \$23,000,000. They have the buildings on the land that do have improvements on them valued at \$30,000,000, and add the two and it's a total of over \$53,000,000 worth of market value real estate that the City owns there.

Mayor Kurtz said you know Vern, that's not fair. I had \$75,000,000, and the right number was \$76,000,000 so I would have failed that pass/fail.

Finance Director Blaze said you would have been in the category, and if it would have asked for a specific number, you would have probably been the closest to the correct number. So, nice job. It's a pretty encompassing real estate portfolio there.

Economic Development Director Hyser said Vern you can redo the poll.

Finance Director Blaze said not after they got all the answers.

Economic Development Director Hyser said you have to slow down, sorry.

Finance Director Blaze said I'm probably over my 10 minutes. Let me finish up and wrap up.

I threw interest income on there. Obviously, interest rates have been as low as they have been historically, and a governmental entity with their hands so tied, safety is the number one criteria that a public sector treasurer has to chase, more so than yield where our arms are kind of tied as far as trying to stretch for yield. So, we keep the instruments, our investments, in some safe secure instruments. They don't yield double digits anymore like they did in the past, but we are at least getting some money on our money.

Debt is our second last slide. The City has used debt judiciously in the past to fund infrastructure projects. You can see we did change over from heavy reliance on short-term debt a couple of years ago. We converted that to long-term and locked that in for 15 years. Time will tell if it's the right decision, but it's starting to look even more and more correctly as the Fed has come out with their news that they are in the process of planning the rate increases. The Treasury market has already moved up. The Bond market has moved up. So, that would have affected us

significantly if we kept our money, a significant amount of debt in notes, the short-term notes that get renewed every year. That would have subjected us to the most interest rate risk. By locking in all of our short-term debt long-term and the all in true interest cost to that the City locked in was just under 1.6%. I think we could all sleep very well not having to worry, get up every day to see what the latest Treasury and Bond market and interest rate movements are. We have locked it in.

Special assessment debt, the property owners of the North Rockside Woods area pay that for the City, and the OPWC loans are 0%. So, we are sitting really good with an all-in interest rate of 1.6% under that for our debt.

The last slide that I will finish with is one of my most important spreadsheets that I pay a lot of attention to, those of you who have been with the City for a while know that I am very focused on cash. Where is it coming from? Where is going? How much do we have? We just kind of start out with revenue. We subtract off our expenditures, kind of the day-to-day type expenditures here. Subtract off our infrastructure and capital investments. Subtract off our debt service, and then it leaves with an ending cash position. So, once we have a budget passed officially for 2022, and once we have locked in what our capital and infrastructure investment level is going to be for 2022, we will be able then to make some more accurate projections here for 2022 because it's great to know where we have been. It's great to know where we are, but the whole focus of today and our leadership here is hey where are we going? Where are we going as a community? Where are our finances going? What is our finances going to allow us to do? So, this is great to know where we have been and where we are, but we have to turn that lens and look forward. We are going to know in the next couple of months that main driver of our general revenue, income tax, if it's going to be hey not too bad either way. If we are going to get hit. If we are going to get surprised on the upside. If I had to bet, I think we are going to get hit on the negative side. I think with the allocation of income tax now having to go where the work is being performed instead of where the employer is located, it will start hitting us in February; and after we see February, March, April and May, we see a 3 to 4 month trend, we will get a better picture I think of where 2022 will be overall. I try not to get overly excited or overly depressed about any single month that is a really high month or a real low month, but after we see 3 or 4 months in a row later this winter and early spring, I think we will have a good idea about what impact work from home and the remote work model is going to have on Independence. That will impact everything we do because that drives income tax, and income tax drives Independence.

I didn't even keep track of my time. I apologize if I did go too long, but I think it's important for all of the decision-makers online to know the financial resources that we have to work with and projected to have to work with so that our planning is actually meaningful. Thank you very much.

Vice Mayor Grendel said thank you Vern, very informative and very interesting report. I found it very intriguing. You don't think about the enormous amount of assets the City has, the magnitude in dollars and cents of our operation. It really brought that to light, and the

responsibility that we all have to make sure that it is utilized for the best interest for our residents. Excellent report.

Finance Director Blaze said thank you.

Vice Mayor Grendel said for my part, I don't have anything written. I just have thoughts in my head. Hopefully, I won't take all 10 minutes, but if I do, it will just be the 10 minutes.

I want to touch upon the topics that are on our agenda, and the first bullet point is public safety. I am excited with Chief Butler coming aboard November 1st. The whole face of the Police Department has changed tremendously, the whole attitude, our view of it. Chief, you have really brought a number of things to light with us just in the short time you have been here, the 2 plus months, but we see there is more public presence of the Police force. I noticed them there when I was shopping at CVS. We had a patrolman going through, just the presence there makes people feel safer in our environment. I know the same thing is true there on Rockside. I enjoy that. I enjoyed the one meeting Tom that you had with the Safety Committee in which we got not only the Chief gave us a presentation, but we also had a presentation from a couple of the members of the force. That to me was very interesting. I think you have plans to also show us some of the other talented members of your department, and I think that gives Council a better appreciation of the men and women that are working for the City. I know that Community Services has always had that approach, and Vern, Maggie is a big part of your department and some of the other folks, Dennis and that. It gives us a greater idea of the folks that work for the City, and the quality of work that they do.

As far as public safety goes, it's going to be very important for us to make a decision with the upgrades for our facility. Can we do it in-house? Can we do it at City Hall with the facility we have now or do we need to look at a brand new facility, and if so where? Do we need to look at a hybrid where we improve City Hall facilities and have maybe a satellite facility? So, those are important questions. We need to decide or at least move in that direction and say what's best for the City. Like I said, there's no right or wrong answer. No frontrunner as I am concerned. I would like to see the different options and how we can make that a reality.

We have schools here. We need to continue to work. The Mayor and I have met with the Superintendent and some Board members, but we need to be in concert with them and be able to again, like we did with the high school, the joint use facility there, again try to marshal our assets, marshal our resources so that for the best possible dollar we could have the best value for our children and for the parents of the children. We have a pretty young population with these new houses being built, and we need to be responsive and take that part, the primary school, to the next level. Once we have decided on the direction we go there, then the decision as far as what to do with the land that the school sits on now, but it's definitely not going to be a Service Department. So, we can knock that rumor out. We looked at it there, and we don't want to give the people that live in that area concern about that.

Economic Development, the Mayor touched upon it. That is a matter that we need to be on our toes. We have increased that department. It's important, you can see with the CBIZ project. We made tremendous effort with the DiGeronimo Industries to locate here, and we came up short. We need to keep on our game.

Pleasant Valley still is an area that we have to keep an eye on and promote to bring business in that area.

I still think the northwest quadrant, once we get those legal issues taken care, is an area that we can really, hopefully have development in the next 5 to 10 years, hopefully sooner; but that is an area that can be our next frontier as far as new economic development.

The downtown area, I know the Mayor, we haven't given up, we shouldn't give up on, although it's been a 50 year quest. We still keep in mind that some day down the road, and maybe it will be triggered by if we can acquire land that we have been talking about for years, to build smaller homes on smaller lots for people that are downsizing and maybe individuals, workers that have no plans of having a big family or raising family and need a wonderful home to live in that doesn't have a lot of maintenance issues and that.

So, land acquisition is going to be important in the next year or two, the property that abuts our recreational facility and our Service Department, that might be a good idea to look at that again. I know we did under Anthony's tenure and also the Mayor previously in your tenure. We will need it for expansion because our Service garage is totally inadequate. I would like to, Chris I know you have plans, but I would like to visit some of the other cities' facilities. We don't have to re-create the wheel here. I would like to be able to visit Westlake, visit some other cities that have a bigger Service garage to protect their assets, their trucks, to work more efficiently. So, that's what we need to do. Again, we need to figure out where to locate it, and that's another issue; but I think we want to keep it on the campus there if we can. I guess we can tour maybe even the new ODOT facility. I think seeing is believing. We see these things and not just hear about them, I think that would give us a greater appreciation for those things.

Again, it's going to help acquiring the ODOT property on Old Brecksville. It could be a stop-gap measure for the next few years that we can use to protect our assets because we have millions and millions of dollars invested in these trucks and heavy equipment that we can't afford to have them out in the elements, especially when it hits zero degrees and everything. It's not the best to have some of your high-priced equipment outside.

I am excited about our future and the Recreational facility area. I believe we are going to be upgrading our bocce ball courts and our splash pads. You don't think it being a major thing. When I talk with some of my children's friends that live here in town, the younger generation of younger children. A thing like a splash pad is a pretty big deal in the summertime for those mothers. Again, it gets the community together, and it's a source of pride that we can have it right here in town. Like with bocce ball, I talked to a number of my clients that I have that are in bocce ball leagues. I know when my mom was alive, that was a social thing that she looked

forward to. So, we keep these facilities safe and up-to-date and everything. I think you will make a lot of residents very happy, and it fulfills a certain segment of their life also.

I look at the streets, and Anthony when you were Mayor we had an aggressive approach to our infrastructure, to our streets, to our sewers. I think we need to maintain that. You have to keep on top of those things because little problems become big problems, and I still think in the next year or two, the Brecksville Road north of Rockside, we need to get that on its way and hopefully completed as well as Longano and Kleber Court. Those streets have long been wanting attention, and we need to fulfill. I don't know if some of this infrastructure money that the Federal government had passed will be available, if we can use it towards, like Jim you looked at the sewers and everything. We need to be aggressive as long as there are not too many strings attached that would be detrimental to the City.

The Mayor touched upon the Civic Center upgrades. Community Services, Emily has done a tremendous job to keep the programs during this time of Covid, still keep them available for the children as well as adults. I think that's important for us. We need to have a strong Community Services Department and Recreation Department, and so far I think the programming has been excellent, but we can always learn from other communities what they offer and see if it makes sense for Independence and keep on top as one of the forerunners.

Just as an aside, I had a call from a fellow from East Cleveland who was involved in their Council, and he said how do you do it there in Independence? He said we are such a mess here. I said I don't profess that we have the answers for your community, but I said it starts with people having respect for each other. The leaders have to have respect for each other and remember that they are voted to represent the people, the residents and not voted to feather their pockets or their families' pockets and that. It starts with that. If you have the right approach. If you are willing to sacrifice because it comes with sacrifice. All of this is a sacrifice on our personal life, things to try to accomplish for the City. I said it comes with a mental approach. You need to have the people that are in there for the right reasons, and I said then you can get things accomplished. As long as you have people with devious motives and everything, it's going to perpetuate, and a community like that has. He was happy that I took 45 minutes of my time to just explain maybe a philosophical because we are different communities.

That's the approach I take, we are here to work together. We are not here to play games or to tear another person down or embarrass a person. We are here to support each other, and by supporting each other in our views and visions. We are here to improve the City, and that's so important.

Finally, get down to branding and the signage and the wayfinding. Jess, I was really impressed and kind of excited by the workshop that we had in December. I hope that we are able to launch this in the spring of this year, and even the signage. You don't think much about signage, but again to me I think how Rockside Road looks, how we inform our visitors and even our employees here. I think it's so important, people's view of the City; and I think that would be one area if we can get that upgraded. Again, we spent a lot of money for that kind of, the

branding and that, and not much to show for it in the past. I am hoping that trend has changed this year.

The final thing is that the Charter Review is going to be launching, the Charter Review Commission here in February. It's important that we have quality people appointed. Each one of us has one appointment, and I think Mayor you have a number of appointments. I think that's the launching pad for some people. I think Anthony that was your first, you were on Charter Review back, and that launched your interest in government. I think it's so important you get some really good quality people, especially younger people. It will introduce them to what we are all about here in City government and hopefully they will take that very seriously, review the Charter and come up with maybe some ideas for us to put on the ballot this year.

All and all, I go back to land acquisition being important because I think that will trigger. If we can get the proper development near and in the downtown area, I think that would trigger the development there. You need to have more people, not that we want to have a huge spike in population, but we need to have alternative housing. We have had enough of the larger houses, but we need houses that will function for some of our empty-nesters that want to stay in town. I know we have a number of people that will support that idea.

Without further ado, we are a little bit behind our schedule. It's 9:55 a.m. We are about 20 minutes behind, but we are going to start with each Councilperson giving their presentation, their strategic ideas, and we will start with Chris. I see you there in my corner, and we will start with your presentation.

Councilperson Walchanowicz said thanks Dave. Good morning everyone. I will cut mine down a little bit, and maybe we can get back on a time track here a little bit. Vern pushed us back a bit. Sorry Vern.

I have a list, a few priorities. I won't mention them all. I know Council has talked about it for about a year and a half now. One of my main priorities in the Council office is some support for Debi. I believe everybody that works should have the opportunity to take their vacation, use sick time if they are off. If we hire a part-time person to help her out to learn the Council office, or if it's a full-time employee that splits between her office and whether it's Administration or Building Department. Somebody needs to learn the ropes of the Council office. We are not going to have Debi forever, and I fully believe along with the majority of Council who believe that we should get somebody in here trained and willing to help and take some of the burden from Debi.

Second is our public safety. Since Chief Butler arrived, I have seen a completely different Police Department. From vehicles doing neighborhood drive-thrus to Rockside, traffic stops. I have even seen Chief Butler out there, whether it was setting cones or water main breaks or running patrol. It is something that I haven't seen in Independence from a Chief; so he is doing a fantastic job. Like Dave mentioned, you can just see the morale, the department is far better now than it has been in years past. I like how the Chief has involved the patrolmen and women with our residents. I think our residents deserve some interaction with the Police Department so they

know hey the Police are not all bad. They welcome the community. They want to be involved in the community. Like over the weekend when we had a couple of officers helping one of our residents dig out the end of their driveway because they were nervous. Getting more involved with the schools so the kids know. I know the Chief and I had discussed how we have specific resource officers, but how nice would it be if there was a rotation where different officers were in the schools and the kids got to know different officers, not just the couple who have been there consistently over the years.

Those are some of my priorities. Some of my strategic plans with the City, one of them comes down to the safety and security of the Civic Center and City Hall. I know we have discussed over the last year to year and a half about how we can make our City Hall safer for the entranceway and stuff. I sat down this week with Dennis and Dave, and we went over stuff that needs to be done. I believe that you have to spend money to save money. Our building is 40 years old. It's not very energy efficient. I sat with Vern, we have in excess of \$900,000 encumbered for City Hall, which would cover new windows, new HVAC system, the security section of City Hall. We need to start looking into protecting this building that I sit in currently. It has been here for 40 years. I would like to see it here for another 50 years, but we have to put the money into it to keep it strong and going. I don't want to be in a situation like some of our school buildings where I believe some of the main maintenance on those buildings were neglected over the years, and that's why we sit where we sit now. So, I would like to invest back into this building, and we would see the benefits with what our gas rates do, and our electric rates do when you improve in that aspect.

I would also like to see, we had the meeting towards the end of November or December. We have to continue the thoughts on expanding and move forward with the expanding of Maple Shade Cemetery. You know every week we get emails of residents passing. Our traditional sites are dwindling, so we really need to step forward and get that rolling with the cemetery. I believe sooner than later. We have made vast bounds with Anne and her drawings, and I think we need to have a good conversation on when we want to get rolling with that.

Some of my concerns, like Vern had mentioned, the employer income tax and where are we going to sit in the next couple of months? What are our income tax numbers going to look like? Businesses like the Mayor mentioned earlier, what can we do to keep some our current businesses from leaving? What can Jess do in the Economic Development Department? If she knows that there is a lease maybe coming do, what could the City do to get involved prior to the lease deadline to try to keep people from looking elsewhere?

We started off last year with us getting on some of the residents for the way some of their properties look. It's all part of the Beautification Program. You have to keep your yards to a standard. I also feel that there are several commercial properties in Independence that need to be on the list as well, whether it's signage that is not up to code or just landscaping that's not up to code. We should increase our visions on those, and I look forward to hearing from the rest of my Councilmen to hear what their ideas are. Thank you for the time.

Vice Mayor Grendel said thank you very much Chris. I appreciate your input and insight. We move right along now to Dale Veverka. You are on the stage.

Councilperson Veverka said thank you Dave. I want to start off by acknowledging the Fire Department for their prompt response to the fire on Brookside. It was fortunate that the neighbors were able to get the resident out of the home. They are always very responsive related to ambulances and care for our residents.

Also, my wife and I were walking Hemlock Trail a week and a half ago, and we were pleased to see a cruiser come down and take a look. I had a conversation with the officer, all part of Chief Butler making connections with officers, and the quick response of the Chief when pointed out what residents said about the possibility of people collecting down by the Haydite possibly to make mischief. He was following up on that particular concern. Kudos to our safety forces, and my own observations as to what they are continually doing to keep our community safe and secure.

Also, I want to call attention to the Community Services new kitchen grant, and hopefully we are moving quickly to take advantage of that grant. I know that the kitchen is one that is needed to be upgraded so that we would have other potentials for that particular facility.

As I move on, we have done a lot of work during the past year or so related to sidewalks. We have taken care of Hillside East, Hillside West, and those projects are well-appreciated by residents that I have spoken to. That gives them the opportunity to get out and to get some exercise and possibly reconnect with some of their fellow neighbors where it was very difficult, particularly on Hillside Road for them to be able to walk safely. So, that is a big plus.

I am hoping that we seriously approach this next year and focus on the streets. I know that Kleber and Longano were already mentioned. I know that Brookside Road just received the new gas lines, and they are currently doing the connections for those individual homes. I would simply say as far as that goes, hopefully we are going to move forward on that section. It's the last segment of Brookside Road that needs attention, and besides that I live on it.

Additionally, so much looking forward to having meetings like this on an in-persons basis. We almost managed to get it done in December. We did manage to get a Council meeting and Swearing-In in January, and hopefully meetings like this, I go along with John DiGeronimo indicated in his email, the importance of being able to meet face-to-face particularly with a Strategic Planning meeting like this one. It is very critical in making sure that we have that connectivity between Council. We are not 7 isolated individuals but have that chance to talk face-to-face.

I will circle back around to something I have been saying for a long time my position differentiating between wants and needs. It becomes especially critical as we venture into a situation where we are no longer in the Governor's emergency declaration. Are they indeed things that are critical and important to the City in being able to delineate the difference. A

recent study that I heard the results of, they indicated based on Vern's financial report to us, there are 3 options. People will either stay in place, work in place. People working from home or hybrid. So, that particular study indicated that slightly over 40% of people were in some flux situation where it comes to how they are working. Conversations with a couple of the Finance people I know, they suggested that the potential consequence to the City of Independence could be somewhere in the 5% to 20% range, but again as Vern mentioned, he says you are kind of taking a shot at what you think. The reality is, it isn't monstrous doom and gloom, but it does require some focus in that particular area.

When it comes to the Police station, I think the upgrades to the Police station and City Hall are definitely due. On the other hand, I think it goes back to our concern, and Chief Butler has fulfilled a big portion of that by hiring the new officers. We have new officers, we have more boots on the ground. We are working on the structure by promoting those Lieutenants, and ultimately we will have some Sergeants promoted and eventually a Deputy Chief. I think his very deliberate attempts at doing those things along with potential upgrades in the current Police station is appropriate. I am convinced that a satellite station in a building is not as valuable as continued efforts to boots on the ground and officers being directly involved in the Rockside area.

When it comes to the center of town, I call it the center of town rather than the downtown area. As we were working with the DiGeronimo group, it was indicated that we thought that was our very best opportunity to try to develop that area, and that unfortunately did not come to fruition. I just ask deliberate kind of questions, is making sure that the target of what we do in that downtown area or any subsequent pieces of property are ones that are focused to the good of the most residents. I know that when the discussion was related to the housing related to the DiGeronimo project, the cost point was basically prohibitive for the vast majority of residents. They could not downsize to a home in the value cost that was mentioned in some of those discussions. I think we have to keep an eye on how we can best serve the vast majority of residents if we end up being involved in developing some smaller home situations, and we do it in an equitable way of finding an appropriate contractor to be involved in that so that there is no question that someone ended up with an inside track or anything else.

I already mentioned about the infrastructure and roads and sewers. We have some of the very best people working for this City, and I will echo Chris Walchanowicz's statement related to someone to assist our Council Clerk. She does an excellent job, but she is spread so thin. It is unfortunate that she can't even take advantage of her vacation, and the fact the need is there. Chris offered a couple of options, and I will go along with either one of those. Basically, it would be helpful to her, but especially helpful to us and also the Building Department where so much of her time is also dedicated too.

As far as economic development. I am very pleased with the efforts that Council has made along with the Mayor to keep CBIZ in town and develop a new Class A building, and those efforts, even though sometimes they seem protracted, it sure turned out to be an excellent result. So, I am pleased with that effort by the Economic Development Department.

The Pleasant Valley area, continued focus there so that we can get that Kichler Lighting facility utilized, and any other additional areas. I know that Jess is working hard with her group to make sure that we continue to work with our lessees to keep that going.

So, that basically kind of summarizes my main focus area.

Vice Mayor Grendel said very good Dale. I thought I was in an AT&T commercial there with the break ups with the gal that was talking to her kids and scaring the hell out of them. You had some really good stuff, and all of a sudden, we had a little pause in the action. It was very good Dale. You touched upon a number of good things.

We will move right along, and Jim you are like Paul Lynde in the old days of Hollywood Squares. You are right in the middle. You are next to present.

Councilperson Jim Trakas said I am not Elke Sommer, but I do appreciate that very much.

Good Morning everybody. I do believe Independence must be in charge of its own destiny and take the reigns in this uncertain world. Some of what we plan will be affected by outside forces beyond our control, so I suggest we stay ahead of the game, adapt to macro policy circumstance and take the regional lead by an aggressive approach with a sharp eye to stay within our budget. If we have big-ticket projects, let's consider deferring other projects with a very limited borrowing because I think the market will see increased rates in the foreseeable future. If the Federal Government is serious about handling inflation, you have to increase interest rates, and that will have a public policy consequence.

Our highest priority remains public safety to assure the security of our residents and the business community. 2021 saw a huge step forward, but with security one of the top issues for retention and attraction of jobs to our community, that's just on the general nature, and foremost in our residents' minds, we must continue the momentum towards making Independence a true sanctuary from criminal behavior. I suggest the following priorities along those lines. A thorough evaluation of current facilities, recommending that we have a Blue Ribbon Commission of Police, expert residents, facilities experts, elected officials and business community to look at our current facilities and capabilities and report back to the City its findings. With the advent of security cameras, the increase in our boots on the ground, let's look at our current Police station and study the impact of either a new or satellite station in the business district to determine if that is a need. Can physical structure deter crime by its very presence? We talked about this since I was in grade school. So, let's get the facts and see where they lead us and consider using our existing budget to pay for it. I think that it is really critical that we do prioritize this because we do have outmoded facilities and there is a more important issue I think from a residential and business community's perspective.

I strongly recommend that the City invest in further camera technology in residential areas most affected by crime as a pilot project to determine if they could help us to combat crime and help Police to identify suspects, either in real-time or after the fact. The technology exists, and this

could tie into my first point, but we should strive to further protect residents from criminal behavior. Increasingly, brazen criminals are stealing packages off our front porches, attempting to or actually breaking into houses. Ask the folks in the Chestnut Woods subdivision what they think about this. I believe a City with the resources we have could buy and maintain video doorbell and home protection for its residents who desire it. We would increase the comfort of our residents concerned about crime, and a program like this, once announced, could really work to deter potential criminal behavior which is really what we want to try to do.

Lastly, let's work even more closely with our business community and ask them how we can further protect our vital businesses. What do they need? How can we provide it? Safety is a key factor for business location. It is one of the top 6 of business locations and retentions. Let's do everything we can to enhance their experience and protect their investment and employees. Ideas like auxiliary Police patrolling parking areas, very visible and specifically trained to look for suspicious behavior would be one idea that I would have.

From a Utilities' perspective, I do support using Federal funds to help address stormwater drainage as well as what Dale talked about for streets and sidewalks as the Utilities Committee had discussed late last year. Now that the City has committed to increase our tree canopy over this decade, we can also take the step by activating our Tree Commission and putting them to work to devise a strategy that includes our residents, business community and City resources to act upon this goal and leverage the resources of the community to help us to lessen erosion, flooding and effects of climate change and further beautify our community. I also suggest a pilot project using permeable pavement, an expensive but effective technology, that can also address these priorities.

While I have many ideas about increasing the quality of life of our residents, today is not the opportunity to really talk about that, but I wanted to talk about the macro level of some big picture items. If safety is our priority, then business retention and attraction should be a very close Number 2 priority. In just 3 years the business world has truly changed, needs, priorities and wants. Next to policing, the economic development arm of our community really does need to be an absolute priority. I offer the following suggestions that we should consider. A focus on retention and enhanced quality of life. By this I mean, having the types of conversations that we are having, but aggressively advising businesses on the tools that we have at our disposal to help them both financial and with our amenities. Getting to know them better, hosting lunches, appreciation meetings, the personal relationship and bonds that are often forgotten in the modern world, but I think are essential.

I urge continuous improvement surveys of all of our businesses. We are talking about increasing communications. Let's ask them what their needs are. What they think of our existing services. What types of other services and incentives that they need to stay in town and an avenue to further their needs.

I also have been a big fan of former Governor Jim Rhoades. I used to work for him. He had the idea of having Rhoades Raiders, a team of economic development officials who would go to

other states and attract business to Ohio. Go and get it and bring it back. We could use this concept to attract our out of City and State and even Country businesses to our community, reach outside of our region and be super aggressive. The State of Ohio has economic development offices in other countries. We could utilize those and try to leverage investment into our community.

I still believe in establishing a Sister City Program with cities across the world to further enhance both a cultural appreciation and exchange but also attract investment into our community.

I would like to increase the economic development budget for geo fencing and heavy advertising in the region to remind businesses that Independence is open for business and ideal. Let's hit on the tangibles, not the feel goods, the tangibles, our low rate. We have a secure community. We have a high amenity community that people do things here that they want when you work here. Let's let businesses know that they can do better in Independence and let's focus on the bottom line of these pocketbook issues, what really make decisions for businesses.

I would further suggest that we consider eliminating fees for basic business paperwork. Make all of our filings electronic for ease of usage. This truly helps us to be business friendly. Let's put together a City-sponsored program of skills-based scholarships for Independence residents and young people to match people, our greatest asset with local business their greatest need. I strongly support internships and scholarships that would lead to retaining young people in our community and let our youth work in town. This secures our future and as a resource for the business community. The Number 1 issue people are trying to find is people, we have people. Let's match those two together.

I still urge establishing a business roundtable that meets frequently to go over the needs of the business community and thoroughly vet issues and ideas to enhance employer and employee needs.

I also think we should consider brainstorming some business-friendly concepts like considering lessening tax rates on capital gains, something CEO's and corporate boards could really appreciate. It's a tangible advantage to being in Independence, a unique opportunity that no other community offers anywhere to my knowledge.

Our center of town does remain an opportunity and perhaps what we may want to consider is a little bit of a different approach, maybe putting out an RFP to developers to provide priorities that would be defined by the community on the former middle school site as well as across the street. We can build in some parameters of what we would like to try to see, and let's let people come up with their own ideas. Let's involve our community, have everybody evaluate these ideas and see if we all think these are good ideas to pursue or if we need further input. I think when you get the community involved, I think you get a better process in a way because you define what your needs really are.

We have been asked to discuss education today, and while that's not strictly the City's domain, I do have some thoughts. I would like to help facilitate much closer links with the schools and our business community as previously outlined, but really concentrate on taking advantage of our smart people, both in terms of students, our expert teachers, a resource for our local businesses. This can tie in to be very valuable as a pipeline for employees and almost a job guarantee for graduates if we handle it correctly. Let's make this the place where we can work and live and put those two complementary together.

As it relates to facilities, whatever is contemplated, I do strongly urge that the City and the Board of Education if we do want to consider any type of a levy, it really should be thoroughly and publicly vetted beforehand with a thorough and comprehensive public process. Many public meetings ahead of time, renderings, wants, needs, should be flushed out well in advance of any type of request being put forward. We need maximum feedback from the community. Let's take that input, incorporate it in the plan, and then we could make those types of decisions. I think it is critical to involve the community up front, publicly and robustly and that if there is anything that goes to the ballot, then the people have already had a chance to help make, shape and form that decision-making process; and then they could make informed decisions later on.

Thanks for the opportunity to provide some of this vision. Let's incorporate all the good ideas that we have heard today and that were presented as good public policy for all of our people, both our resident and business communities. Thanks for listening.

Vice Mayor Grendel said thank you very much Jim. It was very well done. We move right along to a new Member of Council, but also one who has been here in all capacities, as Mayor and Council and on different commissions. Anthony, the floor is now yours.

Councilperson Togliatti said well thank you Vice Mayor, and Good Morning everyone. When I looked and thought about this Strategic Planning session, I thought what do we as Independence really want to be, and the City's vision statement is to be the premiere community to live, work, visit and raise a family. So, what does it mean to be premiere? Is it the highest median home value? Is it the highest average income? Is it the best quality of life? Is it the safest community? If we are benchmarking it on any of those, I don't think that Independence has really hit those benchmarks. So, we can improve. We can do better, and as a matter of fact, after searching our City's web page, I couldn't even find the City's vision statement anywhere which was rather surprising to me, but I did find a statement on the City's website on the About Us page that reads Independence is "an appealing place to work, live, visit and raise a family within the heart of Cuyahoga County."

I know I haven't been involved for the last couple of years, but did we drop our standards from being premiere or the best to just being appealing? I certainly hope that's not the case, and I am very happy to be part of today's Strategic Planning process that will help to get the City back on track.

So, what does it mean for Independence to be premiere? My initial thoughts are great services, low crime and low taxes, and I am pretty sure we hit two of those benchmarks, but being out and about in the community I am hearing residents tell me that they would never let their teenagers go down to Chipotle on Rockside or go anywhere on Rockside for that matter, and it really raises some concerns. We have a wonderful, prosperous community, but for some reason our residents will not allow their children, or themselves for the large part, to go down to Rockside. I have read the Police Chief's reports, and I really thank him for those, and I am really alarmed by the amount of crime that occurs at the Rockside Road hotels. If the City of Independence ever aspires to rank highly in the Cleveland.com ratings of the suburbs, we need to put Police on the streets. Bricks and mortar, whether it be an auxiliary Police station on Rockside or a new Police station elsewhere will not stop crime, but Police Officers will. We need to invest more heavily in our Police staffing, increase the number of boots on the ground, increase our presence and ensure the safety of our businesses, visitors and residents.

Based on the Police Chief's reports, the hotels are the hot beds of crime in Independence, and the City of Independence does collect a 3% bed tax from each hotel stay, which in years past as Vern has illustrated, equated to about \$1,300,000, although during Covid that amount has been lower. I suggest that we put that bed tax to use and hire additional full-time Police Officer or Officers with those tax dollars; and we can dedicate that Officer to just the hotel parking lots during peak hours. This approach gives back to the business community to ensure that they are safe.

We have collected say \$1,000,000 a year over the last 10 years from this bed tax, and that's probably an understatement. That is \$10,000,000 we have collected from these hotels. Let's use some of this money to help solve the safety problem and make Independence a safer and better place.

I applaud the City for expanding the Flock Camera Program. However, the residents are contacting me about homes being broken into on Chestnut Creek and Great Oaks, and there are no cameras in any of our residential areas. Perhaps we look to expand the Flock Camera Program into the neighborhoods. If we could spend \$20,000 a year on dashcams for our Service vehicles, would we not be better spending that same amount to secure our own residents. It's just something to think about.

Typically, the strategic vision for future is followed by planning sessions and ultimately implementation, and I have noticed that Council has jumped headfirst into property purchases without any long-term planning at all. The City of Independence should not function as a landlord, and any land acquisitions should only be made after proper planning for the future has been completed.

The City now owns the Kindl buildings on Stone and 21, which we bought for hundreds of thousands of dollars above appraised value, as well as the ODOT garage which we could have gotten for free rather than spending \$320,000 on. What are the plans for these and other properties that the City has acquired and continues to acquire?

The City began buying up property in the downtown area in the 1990's, and now we, the City, own empty storefronts, decaying parking lots, and many vacant parcels in our downtown. Independence has been buying it up since the 1990's. Are we helping it or are we hurting it? We need to put a plan together to maximize the use of the public property that we own.

In my opinion, the Hemlock Trail has been a huge success, and Covid has taught us nothing other than people crave to be outside, and we have an uncut diamond sitting in the downtown district. Let's work to tie the Hemlock Trail to the downtown area, build a public event space, program it, and bring people in. People seek out trails. We just need to make it happen. It would be great.

Strongsville just announced that they are investing \$3,000,000 in their town center for resident and pedestrian use, and then take a drive out to Mayfield Village and see what they have done with their parks, recreation facilities and amphitheater. These are the cities that we are competing against for residents, businesses and visitors. We really need to keep up.

When talking about the downtown, how about the streetscape. We could have had it done by now. We have been setting money aside, and those brick pavers, I think we agree look terrible and need to be improved. Let's take care of what we currently have before we add any more or buy any more, and that ties into a whole bigger issue. Brecksville Road from the Cloverleaf to Rockside is years behind schedule. It needs to be repaved, and it needs new water lines, and now Brecksville Road South from Rockside to Sprague is I believe also past due on its resurfacing and water main replacement. This is a huge, huge project, well in excess of \$10,000,000, let's talk about that need, plan for it and get it on the schedule because it just seems like it keeps getting kicked down the line.

In regard to finances, I think we really all have to start being real with each other about the current state of the economy. We must all realize that Kichler is leaving, Independence Excavating and DiGeronimo Companies are leaving. A major chunk of the Cleveland Clinic is already gone. These are 3 of our largest taxpayers, and that is all I know based on what I have read in the news. I am sure there are stories of other small companies that go unreported, and along with these job losses, we also have to realize that we are coming into 2022 having to pay back the first \$650,000 in income tax that we bring in. Our hotel bed tax is down. So, as much as I hate to say it, we are off to a slow start, but what really concerns me is the Wall Street Journal stories of companies like Allstate Insurance selling their 100 acre plus campus outside of Chicago and going to a remote model, and stories of other companies only working 2 or 3 days from the office.

Alright, so let's think about Rockside Road as a Monday through Friday business machine, which it really is. It's pretty much quiet on the weekend. Mondays through Fridays, 5 days, which each of those 5 days represent 20% of our income tax collections. So, if companies shift to a 3 day work in the office work model like Key Bank explained they will be doing, and this was an article in Thursday's Cleveland.com. What will happen to Independence? Well 3 days a week gives the City 60% of the income tax rather than the 100% of the income tax. So, there is a

40% reduction in income tax, and because of this businesses will most likely require less office space, so building valuations will begin to drop which will result in lower TIF collections for the City and lower property tax collections for the schools. Restaurants may have fewer customers because there will be fewer workers. Hotels will have fewer guests and so on, and now remember this is a worst-case scenario, but a very realistic scenario.

My suggestion for a strategic plan is to hold tabletop exercises in which the City experiences a 10%, 20%, 30% and maybe even a 40% income tax reduction and have Council and the Administration prepare a plan for each scenario. This is being pro-active. We all hope this doesn't happen, but it very well may to some degree and we need to respond, and we need to be prepared.

With all that I have said, I hope that we can all have a realistic perspective on the future and be prepared for anything that may come at us. I ask Council to take a very close look at the budget because as I see it, we are creating new jobs within the City at an unprecedented rate, and these additional costs compound and increase year after year. So, do we want to be payroll heavy or do we want to provide smooth streets, clean water, and great services for our residents? Because the future is so very speculative, I ask Council to be conservative and carefully consider what the City needs versus what may just be a wish. We need to spend our dollars wisely. It's a very uncertain world, and who would think that shovel-ready ground at I-77 and I-480 could go undeveloped and unsold when virtual land in the metaverse is selling for millions of dollars. We are in a rapidly changing economic environment and being nimble may not be enough. We have to look ahead of the curve and try to figure out what makes Independence unique. For decades it has been our location, but Covid has shown us that we can do most things from anywhere. Look at us right now, we are all sitting behind computers. We could be anywhere.

So, in looking decades into the future, we need to quickly adapt to all the change that is coming at us. Thank you for listening.

Vice Mayor Grendel said thank you, Anthony. We will move right on to Tom. I see you on my screen, and you are up now Tom.

Councilperson Narduzzi said thanks Dave. So, before I get started, Dave thanks for doing what you do for us. I listened to your 10 minutes which I think was more like 15, but who's talking. When you retire you should be an inspirational speaker because it was very uplifting, very positive. It makes me feel good when I get done listening to you, so kudos to you. I will try to be a little bit more positive than the last guy, but here we go.

So, hello everyone. I feel it's important to set new goals. I believe that we should take steps backwards and try to finish some of the goals that we have talked about in the last several years. The Strategic Planning meeting is an awesome tool, but unless we implement some of our plans for the future, it doesn't really do any good.

We have talked about redeveloping the downtown every year that I have been on Council, 12 years now. Although we were very close last year to establishing a developer for our downtown

area, we fell short again. I believe we must continue to march forward and develop a unique downtown area. I don't want to seem like a Debbie Downer, but I think that you can feel my frustration when it comes to downtown. In my 12 years as Council rep, we got close twice, and the first one fell short probably because of the developer, and the second one, I don't know if we ever had the momentum to really move it forward or not. I don't know, that's a questionable one, but I hope that Council doesn't give up on it and it sits flat for another 20 or 30 years. I think that's an important part of Independence. We need to develop it, not only for the residents' sake, but for an economic boom. We don't need to focus so much on housing in the downtown area. I think there's other land acquisitions we can make that would help the smaller homes on smaller lots. I don't know if I would want smaller homes on smaller lots in the downtown area, but you get my point. I don't want to let it go by the wayside. I think maybe instead of waiting for someone to come to us, maybe we should go out and find somebody and put a big effort into it.

Secondly, on public safety. I think every person so far has talked about that change is good, and last year hiring Chief Butler, the Police Department is up and running to full capacity ensuring residents and visitors a safe environment to work, live and play. I mean we still need to keep and give Chief Butler everything he needs to keep us safe, keep themselves safe, and I have to thank Chief Butler for coming here. I don't know if we stumbled on you, or somebody did their homework and went out and got one of the best, but I think that the Police Department is going in the right direction. I see it on the streets. I see flashing lights on Rockside Road. I haven't seen that in a long time. I see them in the center of town. I see Police cars going up and down Lafayette. I haven't seen that in years. I was in Dalepoint the other day, and I saw Police cars down there. I have never seen a Police car down there except the 2 guys that live down there. So, it's a good visual change, and while I am talking about that right away, I am going to talk about Chief Rega and his team.

He is like a fine wine, he just keeps getting better and better all the time. You never hear anything bad about Chief Rega's department. He has done an outstanding job with the economics of the department, and no news is good news when it comes out of Chief Rega's department, but then again we still need to give Chief Rega all the tools he needs to keep his department running as efficiently as it has.

Talking about the Police station, I know we talked for years about a satellite office on Rockside, and there are big questions, and people have different ideas about feet on the ground. I agree with that, but I also agree that it's time that we have some type of satellite office on Rockside Road. A visual of a Police Department does wonders. I think it's Newburgh Heights' is right on the corner of I-77 and Grant Avenue. You don't hear of any crime because the Police station is right there. That's just my opinion, but I think for a lesser amount of money or an inexpensive amount of money, we could provide Rockside Road with a small satellite office. I live close to Rockside Road, and I can count 5, 6 or 7 times a day where 2 or 3 Police cars are buzzing by Lafayette heading north. So, I think it warrants a look at, and I think if the Economic Development team thinks we can do it, I think it would be money well spent.

So, the Service Department. As Chief Butler has the Police Department, I think Ron is doing a great job with the Service Department. When I look at the way that the guys work, and there just seems to be a little bit more hustle in their step. I see Ron out there shoveling blacktop. To me, being a blue-collar guy that works with his hands all day, I love seeing that. I think that instills in his people and his team that you know what guys, we are here to do a job. We have to get this job done. So, I love seeing that stuff, and I thank Ron. I think the Service Department is headed in the right direction. I think our Service Department grounds are looking much better. It's nice and neat and well-kept. I think our Service Department facility may need a bit of an upgrade. I think we lack in some departments, but to put things in perspective, that's not on the top of my list. It's something to be on a wish list.

The Beautification of the City goes to 2 people. I look back at Ron and I look back at Jim Riley. What an asset both of these are to our City, and a guy like Jim Riley who can go out and talk to just about anybody has helped this City. People don't realize, but he has helped the City in a positive direction. He knows how to put out a fire before it starts, and like I said, he is the kind of guy that can sell ice to an Eskimo. He is a good member to have on our team and move the City in the right direction.

Our branding, so I am a blue-collar guy so branding in my mind is not on the top shelf, but I understand it; and I do believe that branding and showing what the City has to offer in a different type of way would be an asset for us. We might fall into some economic hard times here, and we have to be on top of it. We have to use every tool that we can to get over this hump.

So, in wrap up, I want to be as positive as possible. I think the City is moving in the right direction, and unfortunately we are in this state of Covid which has really depressed what we can do and set us back a couple of steps, but we are a strong community. We have strong leaders, and I think we will come out ahead at the end of all of it. Thanks for the time, Dave.

Vice Mayor Grendel said thank you very much Tom. I appreciate your insight and comments.

We move right along to another freshman member, and the youngest person on our Council and look forward to hearing John your view of matters. The floor is yours.

Councilperson DiGeronimo said thanks Vice Mayor, thanks everybody. I would like to start out just by thanking everybody that's on here. I have the benefit of being able to respond to some of the comments that each of you had. I think we are hitting on a lot of the same areas, but I really appreciate each of you reaching out to me, whether it was during the campaign or after, to offer your words of wisdom and encouragement and reach out personally. So, I really appreciate that. Some of you have mentioned that this is a thankless job, well you get thanks from me to start out the year. Years ago being in the park with my kids at night and seeing you guys walking into City Hall, I know you are putting the time in. So, we've all got more things, other things you would rather be doing even then. I appreciate your time for the prior years.

So, I am excited for the opportunity and chance to work with you, learn from you. Hopefully, we will all be in town here for a long time and be able to advise the next, next generations of what we are able to accomplish in these two years.

So, as a new guy I don't have the benefit of knowing all the open projects and everything that is in the hopper like you do, but I will do my best to kind of give my thoughts and perspectives. Chairing Economic Development and sitting on Finance and Community Services, those are some good catch-all committees where I think a lot of different ideas and discussion can occur. I also would like the opportunity to sit in on the other committee meetings as well and offer assistance where I can, get more into the detail and get up to speed here quickly.

Just on how I work, and what I like to do. I like having meetings. I like getting together. I know those committee meetings don't always happen all the time. I think I am going to try to work to build a good agenda, set some action items and next steps. So, with the committees I am on, hopefully we will put the time in to get together at least quarterly, even with some of those Council meetings, there is so much to get through, I think if a team is not getting together often enough there are too many good ideas that might die on the vine, don't know how to move something along or just doesn't become a priority.

Another item you will hear me bring up this term is just how we measure the programs that we are working on. I like numbers. I like statistics. How do we know if a program is successful or not. It's an old saying, but I really believe you can't manage what you can't measure. So, the GPS units discussed last week, I think that is a great example. We will have a lot more information more than we ever had with the utilization of our Service vehicles.

I sent a question to Jessica Hyser. I met with her last week, whether the Flock cameras can provide a traffic count where they are located. So, I would think that the number of vehicles in town at any given point could be an important indicator whether it's for economic activity, for staffing our safety personnel, or even determining the wear and tear on a road. So, if Flock can do it, great. If not, I think there is other technology out there we could be exploring to have some smart technology in town. Even in our infrastructure and our sewers, there are things you can put in your sewers to identify when they are stressed, when there is too much rainfall.

Facilities, I think we will hear from the Mayor later on updating the Civic Center and what Chris had talked about too. What is the utilization of some facilities and programs? If it's going to get tied to decision-making, we ought to have those numbers and appreciate it.

The racket court 30 years ago, I don't know if it's getting the same utilization as before. Would you like that or is it better off to be something else? I don't know. If measuring assets is a main objective of the Tyler Technology, then I am excited to see what we can learn and what the best practices are.

Other personal biases at various times. I lived on Hillside, Chestnut, Archwood and now Sunset, so always close to the park, always close to downtown and City events. I see the benefits of our

park system and Elmwood; so what we can continue to do to invest in our public space. Chris, I may be bothering you on your committee quite a bit.

I look forward to some of the little things we can do in the public spaces. So, if we heard some big picture ideas here, just look around and talk to people. There is probably something little, maybe a few bucks that can go a long way. Like Tom is saying, don't want to see something that gets stagnant. I think we have to keep investing. I think people and businesses, they want to be where a City is investing in itself and something's refreshed.

So, big picture ideas, we will wait for this puzzle piece, but at some point let's move on something, even if it's little, even if it's seen as somewhat temporary. I think people like seeing the investment.

One of those that came up because I think there was a comment at the last meeting about maybe connecting some businesses to restaurants on Rockside. So, to Anthony's point, what could we do unique on Rockside? What is the future? I bring that example up of paths and pocket parks, sitting areas on Rockside because that was also a comment 10 years ago. I asked Debi to send me all the Economic Development minutes from the prior years, so that was something that came up even 10 years ago, and we are still talking about it now. Maybe there have been some advances, but if we can at least put the framework together, changes don't happen overnight, but at least if you know what direction you want to go, we can make some progress there.

A lot of comments on economic development, so Jim I appreciate everything you brought up there. I do want to mention, and I will send you guys the article, I don't know if you saw it, if it came out yesterday or during the week in the Columbus Dispatch. Real interesting article about Intel moving into the Columbus area, a lot of comments from Governor DeWine and the Lieutenant Governor just on that process. Just to give you a scope on what that is, Intel comes to the State of Ohio in May and says we are looking for a site, do you have something? Tell us in 3 days. So, that's just the kind of speed businesses are looking to do. Now Intel is a Top 100 company, but that's the expectation that Governments need to react to businesses. So, Intel comes to the State in May, and they have a deal by October or November essentially. It will be massive for the State of Ohio. I hope it's a good thing.

So, I did sit with Jessica this week just to understand the challenges and opportunities in that department. We are complex. Cities are complex, turning one lever might give you one outcome and it might produce a different outcome you weren't expecting. So, to continue to have that proactive approach will be valuable. Jessica has a few tools to measure and connect with the business community, so I am excited to learn more. She did sign me up with the Team NEO event in February that is in town, more of a regional discussion. So, I am interested in learning about those strengths and opportunities in northeast Ohio. I do think if Cleveland is picking up and northeast Ohio, we will have our share of opportunities as those continue.

I do want to bring up, you guys were here for a long time, but the 2015 area plans. Those were big discussions in going back and getting that off the ground in 2012, 2014, 2015. To me that is a

gift. That is something that previous Administrations, Council invested in. If there are other plans like that, there is probably some validity today. I would hate to invest in something or that Council invested in, and something that sits in the drawer getting dusty. Any old ideas are still worth looking at. Maybe that has been approached. Once we have those area plans, just to kind of help guide us along the last few years. Whatever we can do there to bring up some old ideas now that we have new people in here who weren't here at the time.

Even the work from home, big challenges ahead. We don't know the future, but it really isn't new. These are discussions from 10 years ago that telecommunicating is here. It is coming, and Covid was kind of the trigger that really sped up this process. So, we will see what that speed continues to do, but like I said, people have been able to work from home for a long time. If now it's going back, or we are going to go back to just where we were 5 years ago where people said it's not worth it, we will see.

A couple of ideas on housing. We know what the challenges are, limited stock. One thing that I didn't hear discussed and something worth exploring. To be an attractive place, to continue to see us compete with other communities, how well do we know our housing stock? What is the data? There is so much information on the Auditor's website about real estate transfers. In some aspects, the people that are going to buy in town are somewhat our customers. So, how well do we know them? How well do we know where they are coming from, what they are looking to do? My personal experience of buying a small home in 2014, I don't think it was a good financial decision. Basically, buying a smaller home, the amount of time and money to renovate it versus outgrowing it in 5 years. So, if you are looking at a new homeowner saying I'm only 5 or 10 years, Independence too expensive, and we just might not see that turnover that would keep a town going. Something to consider, a new homeowner home renovation program, really targeting maybe some older homes, some 50 year old plus homes, smaller homes. If someone is going to move in and renovate, you would hope that they are going to put the amount of time and care into it to make, when you see that home, extend another 50 years. Again, keep the property values up. Keep us competitive. Otherwise, we are not a good deal. You are better off going to a new home or a larger home well here's the limited stock that we have.

Similar to the public/private partnership that we are doing with the sewer programs last year. Is there some other way to invest in our residents? I think part of that, if you are a younger resident, if you are new to town, to building some loyalty. If you are coming from another place, now you know that the town is investing in you.

Community Services kind of a segway to that. So many of our services are geared based on age base, so we do great with adults, young kids. Are we doing as much, and where are we not addressing all of our residents? I think Director Thomas pointed that out in a meeting last month that she noticed some gaps in our age-appropriate activities. So again, that's important, who we are connecting with and who we are not. I think there are other ways to put some activities together based on where someone is in their life. If you are a single parent, if you work from home, if you are a new resident, if you are a caretaker, those are basically all that could be considered affinity groups and what would the City's role be in connecting people in those similar circumstances?

The Mayor mentioned, there was a Community Services survey last year, let's not forget that. I think they got over 500 responses, and hopefully that is a guide for this year and going forward. So, connections would be a theme and a goal. Anyway, it's been mentioned here a couple of times, to meet the Chief, to meet Emily, to meet Ron, anything informal, whether for new residents or even just for all residents really. We have had a lot of new faces and new directors the last couple of years.

I was excited to see how popular that summer concert series became during the year. So, people that are upset about Home Days moving off the Square, we do utilize the Square, and we can grow that event. We can put some more attention to that. I think there is potential to grow it, so I would be for putting money into Public Square, including even Route 21 there to better connect the east and west side to make more utilization.

Speaking of the streets, one of the biggest and most dynamic ways that cities are reinventing themselves is considering the redesign of their streets and sidewalks and neighborhoods to give more of a priority to the people who are not in automobiles. You saw that difference in the Lafayette area. By adding sidewalks and crosswalks, it can really give a neighborhood a different feel. So, I think a lot of that comes down to how we design and engineer our roads, and it really is a safety issue for me as well. Maybe the biggest safety issue I see, I know we are going to put a lot of eyes on Rockside, that gets our attention. Light it up like Chief Butler said last month, but I can avoid Rockside Road in the evenings. I don't have to go to the restaurants and hotels after 10:00 p.m., but I really can't avoid the cars speeding through the neighborhoods when we are on the sidewalk. So, I would like to see some attention there. Again, that's a long-term strategy. It's not something that happens overnight, but anytime we are looking at a road, I would just really like to consider how safe is this for everybody, if you are traveling along not in an automobile. Chestnut Road for example, a 25 mile an hour road, very easy to do 45 miles an hour. So, if you want cars to go at 25, let's design a road that encourages it rather than design a speedway and ask our officers to enforce it. So, let's encourage cars to slow down, engineering controls, encouraging people to walk and bike more with better infrastructure, crosswalks, signals, curb bump-outs and bollards. All these controls exist as infrastructure, but they are not abundant in our City. So, I would really, really enjoy a Council workshop where a traffic or pedestrian engineer could walk us through things like road diets, traffic coning and pedestrian-focused infrastructure in areas of concern in our City as we move forward.

Anthony's question what makes Independence unique? To me it is in the people. It's investing in the people. It's the services. I have heard people say Independence is so charming. I don't look at Rockside Road and say this is a charming place. The old cat shelter, I don't know that it's a charming place, but the people, the ability to know the Chief, know the Service Director. You get a call from the Mayor every Friday, let's keep that up. Let's keep investing in our people. That's what is going to make us unique.

Thanks, everybody. I probably went too long too. Sorry, Vice Mayor.

Vice Mayor Grendel said John it's good to hear your voice, and hear your input and excellent insight. Again, everybody that has presented so far has given good perspectives, good views, and I think Mayor you have been busy taking notes there too. There is no right or wrong answer to this. It's good to have different approaches too.

I took some notes here too. First and foremost, I am going to start with Chris, the Council office operations. I know that Debi had provided the goals and that. Council is going to have a workshop here in February. Look at your schedules. We are going to focus strictly on the operation of the Council office to give Debi some help and look into the future because none of us are guaranteed how long we are going to be here, and Debi you have spoiled us because you have been so excellent at what you have done and you have improved. I think I gave everybody the email that you have reached that level of education in your profession. I guess we have kind of gotten spoiled, and we have put it off and put it off, but in February we are going to put together a plan so that we have the future of the Council office. These have been the golden years Debi, your years have been golden because I went through the years in the 2000s when we had far inferior people working in your position, and through illness and that we have had temporaries there. We have gone through things where we wouldn't have minutes for 6 months. So, Council please look at your calendar, and Debi maybe poll everybody to have a workshop date in February. It might just be an hour meeting, but we are going to focus only on the workings of the Council office. I know Jim that has been something you have been wanting to do too. As a matter of fact, all of us have stated that, but now we are going to put it into action.

Vern, as far as future Finance meetings. Once we have our Finance Committee meeting here on January 31st. We are going to plan to work on the Five-Year Plan. I think the approach that you had taken putting together the appropriations and us getting to see all the departments, will be a good approach to the Five-Year Plan too that we get together again. With what the possible doom and gloom, we have to be ready for anything that hits us. I think that if you had told us 5 years ago there would be a mass pandemic, unless you were a disciple of Bill Gates and that, you probably wouldn't think that would be possible. That happened, and we reacted to it, but we are going to do the Five-Year Plan. I think Vern maybe after about 4 months of income coming in, we will have meetings maybe to look at what the trend is. Like Anthony mentioned, whether it be tabletop, but we might have to discuss with our Department Heads and Council. If we do have to cut back, what areas do we cut back on? What do we need to do before it becomes a crisis situation? We might have a few more Finance meetings this year, maybe once a month, focused on certain topics and everything; but I think we have the makeup of the Finance committee, Tom and Anthony, that we can approach it in a positive and just try to come up with the best solutions that we can and all of Council to chip in what we can do to mitigate a situation. We have to be prepared, and we still have to be positive though.

I know it's been talked about by a few of you Anthony and also Dale about the Hemlock Trail, and Anthony we haven't had a Hemlock Trail Committee before. We had a Mining Committee before. The Hemlock Trail Committee I think again because your Administration was part of the building of that trail. I think we need to have a committee, and you would be the Chairman of that committee. There would be a lot of residents. We would put an invite out on our website to

residents that could be a part of your committee that see the positive. It would not only be Hemlock, it would be anything encompassing the Hemlock Trail. I think the creation of that committee will be very important, and I think again you said we have a diamond in the rough there or a gold mine there. We just need people taking advantage of that recreational facility, and I am so glad that Council stuck with it because we could have easily, when it got to be as expensive as it was, thrown in the towel and say that it's not worth it, but it certainly is worth it. It will be producing dividends for the next century.

As far as the status of our streets. I would like to incorporate back having a bus trip where Council would get on our mini-bus and take a view of all of the roads in town. It might take 3 or 4 hours, but let's see. When I ride that Patriot's Way, that is a disgrace. You are bumping up and down trying to get from Lombardo over to West Creek and everything. I know we have some plans for the northwest quadrant, but we could at least make that a smooth road or better for our people who either go to the restaurants or using the back roads to go between office buildings there. I think taking a bus trip with the Streets Committee and Council as a whole along with our Service Director and our Engineer, we could again visualizing seeing these things, getting out and looking at the crappy conditions there are in some places I think will give us a better idea than just to hear about it occasionally feel it and everything. We do need to again focus on our road projects and keep a plan in place. First and foremost, besides safety, I think and Services, our infrastructure is so important because a lot of our infrastructure is old, and we constantly have to keep it upgraded and at the best quality.

We talked about face-to-face meetings, and hopefully the worst of this Omicron, unless there's another variant lurking out there, it is great to get back to face-to-face meetings. Interactions and being able to sit down, and Mayor we will discuss it if February is the right month or March, depending on. Perception is also to the public if the number of cases is still very high, for us to have personal face-to-face meetings and then people getting sick, it would not be to anybody's benefit. We do like to be able to having these face-to-face meetings.

As far as housing goes, I still think that our focus is to attract housing that is a little bit more affordable as far as our empty-nesters, maybe our professional individuals who aren't focusing on family and focusing on their career, like a smaller maintenance-free home. We can see what areas would be available. That's where, I don't think we need huge homes anymore as opposed to the smaller ones. It would free up some of the bigger homes, but you would be amazed. I see it every day because I have had a number of clients who live in town, the homes that are vacant. People are maintaining them, but there is nobody living there. I can count them probably on both hands how many homes that we have in town that there's nobody in those homes. That concerns me too, especially homes that people haven't gone into or they go into just to check things out. I have an estate, and they had no furnace in that home for 10 years, they were living with space heaters right on Brecksville Road. It's amazing that people live like that right in our midst. They just stick to themselves, and of course I don't think the City was aware of the situation, but there are people living primitively like that.

Economic development, John we can't overstate the importance of that because the competition, the playing field changes almost yearly, and we need to be on our toes to attract and promote in any way that we can to have people look at what's available and be cognizant because with the economy, what happens today could be 2 or 3 years once the pandemic is behind us, it could be a whole different picture. You have to almost have an approach, you can almost plan on change as far as that goes. Things aren't going to stay the same like they did maybe like they did in the 1950s or 1960s. I don't even know if things stayed the same when you think of the turbulence that we had in the 60s and that. Flexibility is the key, and I think Tom had mentioned it too, having a positive outlook because people don't want to hear doom and gloom. They want to hear positive solutions and keeping a feel good about the environment that you live in. The older I get the more I want to be positive because I don't know how many more years I have, and I want to be positive to my kids and my grandkids that there is a future both spiritually and physically that they can enjoy. It's a struggle, I think that's why you see the problems with drugs and alcohol because people bury their problems in things that lead to destruction. I think a positive interpersonal is the way to go, and I think we need to incorporate that in all our programs.

Again, safety is critical, and Anthony you are so right, if there's anything we can do to make those hotels safer. I think we read in one of the last Police reports that a fight broke out at the Outback Restaurant, and you go there and when you go in the restaurant you feel uncomfortable. We need to bring back some order around there, and the Police presence, Chief Butler has done a great job with the Police presence and his program so far. We need to keep that up. If we need to do anything in our neighborhoods, like you suggested Jim, get one of these pilot programs going, show that we are serious to our residents that we want to make them safe in their homes and to be safe on Rockside to the best that we can. There's no guarantee. My daughter almost got carjacked right where she works on Pearl Road and was one of 3 victims that got threatened. So, it hits home, and it can happen anywhere. It can happen downtown. It could happen in the suburbs. It could happen out rurally. That's the kind of country that we live in right now, and it's unfortunate.

The last thing, just continue to see where we can save and also provide the ultimate services, whether it be in the Community Services area or in the Service area where we pick up the garbage, we do things for our residents. I think that the people realize that we strive to get the utmost best service possible, and that's what we need to continue. I am glad Mayor we have someone that is finally taking the social service aspect because many of my clients that come in, they rely on advice from the City as far as for social services, some guidance and direction. Even though we can't provide, if we can provide them a map where they could get help for their different issues, whether it be elderly or even people that have troublesome children and that. I think that is most appreciated also.

That's all I have, but I do want to plan Vern that we have Finance meetings, maybe regular meetings that might not last more than an hour, but on certain topics that we can address because this might be a critical year going to the new way of how people work. Like we talked about having personal meetings, I think businesses are going to realize that having people work remotely might be fine in some aspects, but you don't have the camaraderie. I know my son

works remotely once a week or twice a week, but he said I prefer being in the office so I can bounce ideas off of other employees and share that we belong to one entity. If you work out there as an independent contractor, I don't see where you have that same enthusiasm for your business. You are out there for yourself and everything. Some things might go through phases, and we just have to weather the storm as they come every year.

That is my contribution. I think Vern you are next on the list. You are the next and last, and hopefully, we are not too far, we are a little bit behind, but what the heck, it's a Saturday and it's freezing outside. Vern, do you want to go next?

Finance Director Blaze said I didn't know I was on. I thought I did my part earlier. So, I will just defer at 11:13 a.m. I know the Mayor needs to present. You guys want to synthesize all you heard and prepare some action steps going, and I think you want a bathroom break too, so I will defer whatever you had planned there.

Vice Mayor Grendel said very good Vern. You gave such a thorough report earlier that it kind of covered this report also. Mayor, I think everybody might need a little break here of 5 minutes. It's 11:14 a.m., so let's get together at 11:20 a.m., and we will come back with your vision Mayor.

Mayor Kurtz said it sounds like a plan.

There was a short break.

The meeting then resumed at 11:21 a.m.

Vice Mayor Grendel said we have heard everybody else's point of view, and if you have to digest some of the financial data that Vern gave us, I give the floor and all of our attention to the Mayor now.

Mayor Kurtz said thank you Vice Mayor and Members of Council. Everyone has shared so many great ideas this morning about how we can grow the City of Independence. We are a community of opportunity for individuals, families, and businesses. Everyone can prosper here and work together. Reflecting on the needs and values of our residents as Council identified several times, which total about 7,600 residents at the last census. I am committed to enhancing the quality of life and supporting our business community.

I want to recognize the Finance Director, Vern Blaze. The last 2 years we have seen such a sharing of knowledge, sharing of information. It is unprecedented in the history of our City in terms of allowing the Council to quickly make decisions that are in the best interest. I can't thank the Finance Director enough for being so thorough in his sharing of information, and he also participates, and people don't realize, being a member of the Mayor's Association on the Executive Committee and all and also being asked on the Income Tax Special Committee, it has allowed me to have insight and input into some of these challenges that were identified by

Members of Council today. We are thoroughly committed as a County, and all the Mayors in this County to watch and see and participate and see if we can change a few things as was done earlier last year. We were able to push back some of the changes that the legislature enacted for this year, they were trying to do that earlier. I know Jim Trakas has been very helpful in sharing information as it comes down the pipeline. Being on those committees, and being part of the Executive Committee and the Special Tax Committee, I have been able to work with the Finance Director and give him insight, and also he shares his position on some of these questions and the uncertainty going forward. I can't say enough about Vern, and the impact he has had not only the interactions of the Administration and Council but making sure we see the future as recently as locking in our interest rate. The vast majority of Council saw that in our best interest, and I think it will prove true at least we can go to bed at night and know we have certainty in some of our cost factors. So, Vern thank you and continue the great work you do. I know it's a sacrifice of time and effort, but I really appreciate all you do to help the Administration every day by your input and City Council and myself in terms of the global strategies that we are looking at.

One step further, as each of to the persons who identified the strong leadership team we have developed over the last two years. We took something, and we have been molding it to improve it every year, and today as many of you identified some of the specifics of specific departments. Let me state generally and globally in terms of everyone, every department has played a major role in this metamorphosis and this ability to transcend some of these challenges that we are dealing with, Covid and some of the challenges that it's our role to be the light, the bright spot in the community for your residents. I can't say enough about those Department Heads and those employees that as identified late last week with our Police Department shoveling people out, the extra effort of our Community Services Department, Rec Department staying open when other cities were shut down. The challenges we face, we talk about the budget, we talk about the employees, but you need to be aware as Members of Council, especially those in business, aware of the challenge of hiring employees. Now I collaborate with some of our fellow Mayors, and we are making sure that not one of the communities gets out in front of everybody else in terms of cost factors for some of our employees. So, trying to stay united in that so that we are not taking lifeguards from one community to another, but it's a challenge because now what you can get paid at McDonald's is a little different than what our pay structures are historically, which is one of the reasons we need to look at some of these things going forward in order to not only be competitive but to retain good employees. I have never seen, and this is my 25th year as your Mayor, and I have never seen the likes of people moving back and forth. We are in the public sector now faced with the same challenges of the private sector where people move laterally, they move left and right, and you have to continually find ways to incentivize them. That's the goal for 2022 and beyond is restructure some of our employee benefits, including the environment that they work in. Many of you talked about the environments, the facilities, technology, and the future.

Let me just run through a few of them just to, it's too much information. I know the Vice Mayor is going to kick me off the clock in a few minutes, but there is so much to share. I will just coddle together some of your thoughts along with what my priorities are, but we talked about public safety. Two years ago I recognized that we were falling short, and all of Council

supported the Administration's efforts to put boots on the ground. We now have the highest level of men on the ground. We have introduced technology. We are working hard through Chief Butler's efforts to communicate better, to make sure we are in the neighborhoods, make sure that we have the best equipment available to protect our people, the men and women of our departments. We are excited about the future.

We do identify facilities as being one of the challenges. We have a 40 year-old Police Department. Our neighbor to the south built a new one. I was talking to the Mayor of Brooklyn the other day, and they are building a new Police station. So much has changed from the original brick and mortar that we had put together 40 years ago, and the new enhancements, the way they deliver the safety services, the way they communicate through training efforts. It's all being done differently. Chief Butler is spearheading that concept of a new facility, renovation of the existing facility, where to put a new facility if we would consider that. Remote facility, satellite facility, what would be in our best interest, existing building, new building. There are so many as John indicated earlier, so many different variables out there that we have to be able to break down these complex issues into simple issues and then to build upon them to create a strategy like they do in the private sector that's going to protect us and enhance the quality of life of our residents for the next 40 to 50 years.

So, public service and the safety forces, and again it was also said, and I don't want to minimize Chief Rega and his team. They have been the spearhead of this effort to stay nimble for the past two years through this Covid situation. I can't say enough about the Fire Department under his leadership, and A.C. Wheeler to make sure that they share with the entire employee population safety regulations. We have been moving back and forward and being very nimble trying to make sure that our residents and our employees are protected as best as possible. We are not naïve to the situation, but we are also not going to bury our head in the sand and wake up one day and be behind. So, I appreciate the safety forces and the leadership during the past couple of years.

We talked about also, and this is under no priority, our relationship with the local schools, and I heard several of you, Chris Walchanowicz and a few others talk about the SRO's and their relationship with the students as well as the leadership team. Under Chief Butler's direction, we are making some modifications. We are going to get more people engaged in that process. We are going to plan ahead, and we are going to be able to take steps that are good for our students, their staff; but in the global sense of things, we need to look at our facilities. We have identified a primary school, a new primary school as being something that is a priority for them. Maybe upgrading the existing middle school. Our infrastructure, people talk about, I heard Councilperson Veverka and others talk about infrastructure, and what we have to do to make it a priority. So, Council is aware of the fact that infrastructure is important, but it's bigger than just one street. It is what's underground oftentimes that allows us to plan ahead, like whether we are going to do roundabouts. Whether we are going to enhance people in the campus area. What are we going to do to make sure that not only if we build a new facility, we have the right traffic pattern, the right safety elements in place so that we can look at this globally and with a long-term strategy.

Working with the schools and working with Council and the Administration, we will come up with a plan, but we need to break it down into the basics and then we can go forward once they share with us their needs. I know they are excited about getting on the ballot, but like Councilperson Trakas said, let's get on the ballot after we thoroughly vetted things, and we have a clear, sound plan to be able to share with our people what we want to do. You have to have a vision, but you have to be able to implement the vision. We don't have all the information. If we waited for 100% of the details, we would never make a decision, we would be paralyzed. Enough information where you are comfortable, where you know your percentages of success increase, that's when you make choices when you increase your percentages. So, working with the schools, it's going to take a heavy left. On behalf of City Council, Public Buildings & Lands Committee and all of Council as whole, we will have to weigh in on this, and this investment in our infrastructure as well as the continued cooperation with the schools. If we do add a Shared Use Facility on the elementary side of things, that would relieve some of the pressure from our existing facilities and some our programs.

Talk about programs. Programs cost money, and so if you choose to not invest in personnel because we can only run so many things with our existing personnel. Now if we talk about this change of how people are going to work. We are going to talk about the change and how people are going to live and deal with their children, we need programs at night. We are going to have to look at the impact on that and our workforce. The impact on our facilities, and our services and our serviceability. So, there is a lot more than just let's create a new program. The effect on our personnel, the facilities, all of that is so important.

Talk about facilities. You know the Civic Center, I think Vice Mayor Grendel said it's 30 years old, believe it or not, and their Director, Emily, and Tom Walchanowicz, they do a phenomenal job. Talk about decisions we have been making the last couple of years to raise the bar. It's by people, but then it's by their brains and their attitudes and their positive attitudes to want to do something. I don't want to be around people that don't want to take a little bit of risk. I don't want to be around people that bury their head in the sand and tell me all the gloom and doom. I want to be optimistic. If I fall short of the star, but I hit the moon, I am okay. If I don't even take a shot at it, you miss every shot you don't take my brother once said when we were in Germany. So, it's really important with the Civic Center that we really look at some of the potential enhancements and how they are going to reflect on our budget. This is something we will collaborate on. I think it's something we need to do, and how we do it and how we are going to go to the people if we need support there, there's a lot of different components to this if we are really going to take full advantage of every opportunity.

We talk about our businesses, and our diverse business group in our community, and the initiatives that we have taken through economic development. Two years ago we realized that we needed to change the way we go to business, the way we attract business, the way we retain business, and the CBIZ/Welty deal is probably, and on my way in Jessica Hyser indicated that she has a bottle of Prosecco because I think it closes on Monday. This started with an opportunity. We met with the developer 2 years ago. They wanted to relieve themselves of their

debt service on that property, the landfill property, and we turned that from a challenge to an opportunity because without that property the City is acquiring, the 13 acres, that we would have a 50,000 square foot office building on that 5 acres to the south opposite Embassy. Today because of the working relationship with Council and the Administration and the ideas and vision, we were able to, we are having 160,000 square foot building built, a Class A office building. We own the property for the parking area, and because of that property, we are able to support the property across the street which Saucy is intending to build on because they bought that property across the street, but they didn't realize they didn't have enough parking. So, we have had to work with them to solve their problem and to create an economic development opportunity. In other words, we took a problem that was created, and we unbundled it, repackaged it into something that is going to be good for the area. That property remember, as Council is aware of, and this is for the benefit of the new Council Members. That landfill area was used for the road; so there was no additional liability to us for this property. It took 2 years and there is a lot of back stories to this, and someday if you get a bottle and you want to open it up, and you want to talk about them. It's tremendously educational about the people and families and family business, and what you have to go through to get something like this done. Monday we should be able to celebrate, at least according to Jessica, finally finish it up.

Let me just walk through a few more of these things that are really important like communication. I think what you heard today, and I have heard what several of you have reflected, and I really appreciate that enhanced communication. It's identified clearly by Chief Rega's leadership and he shared with the employees and residents how to stay as safe as possible during this pandemic.

Chief Butler comes on board, and all of you have identified his contribution in the short time. If we can continue that for the long haul, and he has committed to stay here for the long haul, that's on the record, that this is going to be a phenomenal department and we are going to lead the way in so many different areas in the future. It's really exciting to sit here surrounded with such a phenomenal staff of people. They are excited. They come to work with a positive attitude. If we hit a bump in the road, we work through it, and we try to find a way to turn lemons into lemonade. It's just exciting working with this phenomenal group of employees.

You talk about beautification. I would be remiss if I didn't reinforce what was said earlier about the team effort that we have put together to solve some of these residential problems. Do we have a long way to go? Absolutely, but if you want to look at it in terms of a problem, or do you want to look at it in terms of solutions? I happen to be one who looks at solutions, and that's the way I think that Council should look at things because that's how we are going to get things done. We do it through communication.

We started a policy, when I got back in there was very little communication, it was through a letter or through a third party, and so we have learned. We have climbed out of some of those challenges, and we bruised our knees a few times, but today I can sit here and tell you that we really make a strong attempt to communicate directly with people. The evidence is clear that we solved some of these problems that we have been dealing with for 20 years, whether it be the

Grunt house on Bramley or some of these challenges with some of the residents. It's a hardship situation by the way. Sometimes there is more than meets the eye. It's real easy for me and all of us to critique the situation, but when you really get into the fabric of some of the residents and some of these family units that are challenged, you recognize that it's much more challenging and a complex situation than it is to say just paint your house or get the cars out of your yard. You realize you are dealing with a dynamic that is much deeper than that, and we work hard. I applaud the team. I mentioned earlier that they are really passionate about trying to care about the individual, the family unit, but has to balance that out with what's best for the community. That's what I think we try to do as this Administration, finding that balance between the law and then the human side of things. So, many of you have said over the past several years, and it's specific to today about how safety forces, communication, beautification are so important to the future of this community, and you are absolutely correct. We have to work on it every day to make sure that we are financially sound. We have to work on it every day to make sure that we are constantly trying to reinvent ourselves. If we didn't have an economic development team, if we don't invest in our economic development team, if we don't continue to find tools and people that can give us the edge as Councilperson DiGeronimo mentioned earlier about communicating with our businesses, getting boots on the ground in terms of the Police, boots on the ground in terms of businesses too. We have been doing that. We recognize, and the result of some of this interaction some of you identified these enhancements to our business community, whether it be walking paths, kiosks or some other new way of communicating and allow these employees to feel the quality of life, not necessarily live here. That is incumbent upon us as leaders to take some chances, invest some money into some of these business districts because it's changing. We don't know what some of these smaller businesses are dealing with other than relationships we hear. We talk to people. Being in small businesses, we sometimes interact with them, and we recognize that they are trying to sort out this next normal. They don't have the answers. They are trying to get their footing, and they are trying to figure out what's best for their organization and services or the products they deliver.

I happened to be in Columbus yesterday, and I happened to have the opportunity to meet with one of the groups of developers that landed the Intel project, and I was curious and I was inquisitive and I was trying to sort out, tell me why, tell me how you did that. Jim, you can appreciate this, the 6 different districts of Jobs Ohio, and Columbus is Number 1, not necessarily the highest, but they are District 1. This all came through Jobs Ohio. Every district had a chance to submit a proposal, and to everyone's credit, at this level of government, they didn't have, it was really kept under the radar screen for so long, but that's how they identified Columbus, Ohio, Jobs Ohio District 1 as the area. I was trying to learn what we can do on a global scale, and that's why my reference, we are a global, we have to sell ourselves as a global magnet, not just a neighbor magnet, getting with our neighbors. We really have to go back to what we were 20 years ago and become a regional magnet for some of these companies. So, I learned some information yesterday that I will be able to apply to some of these different techniques that we use in the future, and I am sitting right in the middle of this thing as they are making these announcements and it was listening to how they framed it, the importance. It's going to take 10 to 15 years. Everybody thinks this is a light switch going on. Well I think what we have all learned in this business, especially Council this last 2 years and the Administration for sure, this

2 year deal to put this CBIZ deal together; that's not a light switch going on. That's an investment of a lot of time, a lot of money. If you are not willing to make the investments and take the risks, then you have to identify that because this is what it's all about in this business, measured risks.

The business community is constantly working to find tools and take some risks and measure our choices in terms of percentages, that's what is important for us as we try to retain and attract new businesses going down the road. We are not going to win every contest. We are not going to win every competition. We just have to position ourselves to be competitive, and the last part about that before I move on is we have to continue to be nimble. The success of this previous Council, we were very nimble. We didn't agree on everything. We had our debates, but at the end of the day when we went to the public, when we went to Welty, when we went to CBIZ, I knew the parameters. Vern knew the parameters. Jessica knew the parameters. We were confident that whatever we came up with that Council would support us, and that's a key to this entire process of economic development. So, looking forward it's exciting about economic development.

You talk about the services we deliver. We are using technology. Tyler is going to help us. Tyler is going to be a major contribution to that important role that John mentioned earlier about the little things. Being able to get on your phone and be able to lock up a position at one of the classes, or be able to get your pass for the Civic Center or the pool. People want efficiency. They want boom; time is money. They just don't have time to waste, and they want technology to be their ally. So, we are cognizant of that. I will make sure that the survey, Tom or Emily would you make sure that the survey gets out to Council so they could absorb it. I know Councilperson Togliatti, you are Community Services, and you are going to play an important role. You didn't mention much about Community Services, but you are going to play an important role in how we develop these programs, how we invest in these programs and how leadership needs your support as the Committee's Chairman to work through and navigate some of these things.

Bringing on the social worker full-time, that is a result of Council's input, Council's support, and it's going to make a huge difference. It's going to make a huge difference going back to several comments that were made about all the age groups, not just our seniors, but young people. Its helping us develop a strategy to deal with some of the emotional and mental challenges that people of all ages in our community are dealing with. So, you talk about these programs that we have, and to Council's credit, getting people out of their houses to pick up food, and getting people engaged. Trying to make sure we are safe, but we are open. I applaud the leadership team for that again.

So, economic development we talked about. We talked about the residents.

Talk about housing, I just want to talk about that as several of you mentioned it. Yeah, we are working on some different opportunities for housing because we still have not solved the problem of losing good residents to other communities because we don't have an option. Well, a

couple of things. One, we have to have land to do it. You can't build a house on top of another house. You have to have the desire to do it, and many of you spoke in terms of that so I know you are passionate about it. We need to make sure that not only do we have land and the desire, but we also have the capacity and the ability. So, the Legal Department is going to have to weigh in, but we also have a Charter Review Commission this year, and that may be another tool we need to close that gap and narrow that gap between our financial ability and the realistic capacity to do it, the legal capacity to do it.

I know the value of some of these homes has to be measured carefully because we don't price ourselves out of having the ability to relocate some of our residents into a different house but keeping the same community. That's one of the things that we have been working hard at. If we stopped every time we fail, we would have stopped a long time ago. The one thing we don't have is the luxury of eternity here, so we have to continue to pursue opportunities even when people are against it or negative or find flaws. The verbal insults are not going to cut it. You have to be positive. You have to keep plugging away. One thing about it is we are very persistent, we just keep going. This is why Council and the Administration have worked so well together the last couple of years, but we will continue the beautification of our community. We will continue to, with Council's support, make sure we clean up some of these houses and businesses. I heard today, you are right, we need to pay attention to that, and we will. We will utilize our resources.

We picked up the ODOT garage because I think it's a good investment. Time will tell. We need something to band-aid our opportunity until we find the right location and the right facility to build for our Service Department. We have been to ODOT, they are phenomenal. We talked about a trip. Well we are lining things up. Director McKinley has been seeing different facilities. We are preparing that for the future.

So, City Hall upgrades, I know Councilperson Walchanowicz, and Chris you are correct, we need to get the safety as a priority in terms of our facilities. We need to make sure, I believe that Council needs an expanded Caucus room because you want to get together, you want to talk using new technology. You want to create a safe environment. You can't do it with the Caucus room we have. We still have those plans from years ago. We will pull those out and the Public Buildings & Lands Committee and the majority of Council want to go forward, we will start moving on some of those things. There's \$900,000 sitting there between safety and enhanced facilities, we have to start new and start over.

It's exciting about some of these different opportunities with facilities. We will put all that together Chris, and you will push us as you pushed us last year to make sure that we are comprehensive, but we will take these complex issues and break them down in their basic form and then we will build on those to do what's best for the community overall.

With that, we may not agree on everything. We may not agree on some things, but I think we can agree for Independence to become a community that is connected, proud and successful, it requires collaboration, resources, hard work, and discipline. You won't find a harder working group of employees at your service, and as I said earlier, the world is not going to slow down and

neither can the City. Despite the setbacks by the pandemic, we have moved forward, and we didn't sit back and wait for something to happen. We tried to make things happen. We made safety a priority, economic development a priority. At the end of the day we are going to look at our Zoning Code. The Charter Review Commission, I am hoping that they can look at it in terms of a long-term strategy and how to move forward. We will get those surveys out to everybody, and with that, we have a lot of smaller projects we are going to look at. At the end of the day though, it's about quality of life for our residents. It's about being optimistic. We have a lot of work to do, but by working together and staying positive for our stakeholders whether it be residents, whether it be our business community or the people that drive through our community, we will continue to be successful and be a premiere community.

With that, I will say the best is yet to come. Thank you, I know I overdid it Dave, but Vern gave me his time.

Vice Mayor Grendel said well Mayor thank you. You had a lot to digest with everybody's input, and I think where we are at now about 5 minutes before noon. My thinking is we all have our committees. We have Finance Committee meeting coming up January 31st, Safety on February 1st. Other members look at your schedules too as far as a lot of this can be done either through workshops or committee meetings and everything. So, hopefully we can schedule. I don't know Debi if you had all the input as far as scheduling a Joint Utilities and Streets and Sidewalks Committee meeting, but I think a lot of this can be done. Jim of course you were in the State legislation and everything, and a lot of it can be done in committees. We have freer input and time focused strictly on one or two topics. So, I urge everyone to take a look at your calendars as far as your own committee is concerned, get a hold of Debi and maybe we can schedule some of these committees whether they be on Tuesdays, Wednesdays or Thursdays, whatever the committee can agree to, and the Mayor's office could be represented too. I think we will get off to a great start.

Some great ideas today, and I think all we need is to have focus, and of course we can't tackle every particular issue, but we take them one at a time and be successful with them I think we will accomplish a lot. Hopefully there will be a time we can do it in person, but at least for now Mayor we will monitor that because you have an ear to the Health Department and everything what is going on. When we get back to in-person meetings we will definitely do so. A day like today thank goodness we have Zoom because we were able to see each other and communicate as well as we have.

At this point, as far as this particular, I don't know Council we have a number of issues, do you want to plan another Strategic Planning meeting or whether just hit the ground running and have our committee meetings. I like the idea Jim that you and Dale got your committees together because some are overlapping issues. This way you can get more Council Members involved and more Department Heads involved too.

I think Mayor we will leave it as individually try to set up meetings. We have two meetings, and I think the third one, have you got Debi the input for planning a date for the Utilities and Streets?

The Clerk said I am waiting for a couple of more people. It looks like though February 3rd might be a good day, it's a Thursday. If everybody could check their calendar and see. Don Ramm was busy on Tuesdays for the next few weeks; so if we could do that February 3rd if that's a good day to do that joint meeting. If everybody could get back to me and let me know.

Mayor Kurtz said I will have too much overlap on that day in the afternoon. Actually I have meetings all day that day. The Safety Committee was February 1st?

The Clerk replied yes.

Vice Mayor Grendel said right before Planning Commission Mayor.

Mayor Kurtz asked what time was that?

The Clerk said Safety was at 4:00 p.m. prior to Planning on February 1st.

Mayor Kurtz said right.

Vice Mayor Grendel said and the day before is the Finance Committee.

Mayor Kurtz said that is on Monday, and then Planning Commission is 5:30 p.m., right?

The Clerk replied correct. I will still work on some other dates for the joint meeting.

Vice Mayor Grendel said and definitely we want to have a workshop Debi, just maybe an hour workshop to talk about the Council office operations and getting someone for you too. That is high priority too. It's been pushed back too long.

The Clerk said I will send that out.

Vice Mayor Grendel said well thank you everyone for your contributions and spending the 3 hours together here. We got a lot of good ideas. It's good to hear from John and also Anthony, get your perspective to go along with the 5 of us that were on Council last year. Again, keeping an open mind, positivity because we are here to get things done, and to me there's no better way to go out these next 2 years just to have a Council that works together along with the Administration to benefit the City of Independence. That's what I am hoping for. I know we have the manpower and womanpower in the directorship and everything. We have the people in place that can accomplish great things. We just have to keep focused and keep a good, positive attitude.

Without further ado, unless somebody has for the better good of the organization, we will entertain a motion.

Mayor Kurtz said Vice Mayor I want to thank Council for all your ideas. We will integrate those, and all the Department Heads thank you for being on today. Department Heads I appreciate it. You have absorbed a lot of different information that Council articulated. Let's filter it, synthesize it, put it together and in our Team meeting we can further discuss it, prioritize it and then we will be able to be in a better position to respond and help support some of their suggestions, their ideas. Then we will coordinate that in terms of, I know some of the bigger ones, various departments like Engineering. Don Ramm, thanks for all you and your team do. I know we are developing their team, and there is a question as to some of the support that you need in order to continue to have that high quality of service. You heard a lot from some of the Members of Council what they want to get done. They are pretty ambitious in terms of spending money. I saw Vern putting his hand on the top of head and shake his head saying oh my gosh, tens of millions more. You have never shied away from an opportunity to really try to keep Council buoyant in terms of all the different requests. We will prioritize them all. Dale and Jim, the Streets and Sidewalks and Utilities, you guys will link up, and we will be able to talk about not just what we see on the surface but what it takes underground to be able to build a really nice project. We understand your priorities in terms of Brookside and Rockside Woods North and Longano and that. We are on the same team in terms of those issues.

For the benefit of new Council, there are always things that pop up that try to take us off our game, but Don has done a really nice job of always keeping us on point. Because of your support for the need for support for outside consultants, so Council thank you for that too.

Community Services and Rec, you guys are constantly on the game. I appreciate that.

I talked about economic development.

Steve and Robert thanks, and all the support team, Building Department, all the people that work as a combined unit. The orchestra really runs well when you are in sync with each other.

We had the storm on Monday, and some of the people were challenged, and we responded to that. When I drove other parts of the community and outside our community, it's like our quality standard is so high, what they expect is so high in our City that when you drive to Akron, you drive to Cleveland, and you see some of our neighboring suburbs and what they were dealing with, it's like wow. It's all because our bar is so high, but that's okay because every Department Head wants to keep their department as premiere. We want to make sure that we deliver high level of services, and with your support Council we will continue to do that.

So, thank you very much. Thanks for your time today, I really appreciate the ability to share and learn, and we will all grow from this experience.

Vice Mayor Grendel said thank you Mayor, and just also as a reminder, I know Jim you mentioned do we want to get that Tree Commission off the ground too? So, whatever Council support you need to get that going. Anthony, the same way with the Hemlock Trail and your

vision there. We want to support that and get that committee going for that aspect too. So, this way it kind of increases what we have done in the past. We need to focus on that also.

Mayor Kurtz said we need to get together because this Administration has ideas on both of those, so we will have to meet with both of you to do that.

Councilperson Trakas said we have some volunteers, so I will send them your way and maybe we could put something together on that.

Vice Mayor Grendel said great, very good. Anthony, you can even go wider than the Hemlock Trail. You mentioned trail connectivity with downtown and everything too. All ideas are on the table when it comes to that asset because that's a new kind of asset that the City has. We want to make sure that we utilize it, and there could be ways that we are not even aware of that your committee comes up with too.

All important, everybody had great ideas, and I thank you for your time. It gets us energized to get going here in 2022.

Mayor Kurtz said absolutely.

Councilperson Togliatti said I just have one question. The Mayor was talking about raising the bar and comparing the other communities. I was very surprised to see that our sidewalks are not plowed in our business district. There are employees walking down Pleasant Valley Road in the roadway because the sidewalks are not plowed.

Mayor Kurtz said I am shocked by that. I am shocked because I just happened to see them working yesterday. I am surprised. I saw machines. As a matter of fact, I was just wondering if there's a better machine. I saw them trying to take all that heavy snow and push it onto the road. I am just wondering, we had to bucket it off the sidewalk and put it in piles. It's going to be interesting to see how that melts and how we have to work from there. I saw when they were working yesterday, there were some definite challenges trying to move that material. Yeah, the fact that we have sidewalks, most other communities don't have to deal with that situation. I know some of the residents weren't happy with the fact that every time we would plow through, they would clean their driveway, and then we would end up having to push it across the driveway again. So, I know Ron is going to come up with a better machine to clean the driveways and do the sidewalks and not push the snow back in the driveways. Until then, we will continue to plug away. If we missed something, we will find it and fix it. I do have a couple of things Ron we have to look at. You did a great job, you and your team to get through that, and I appreciate it.

Vice Mayor Grendel said very good. Any other questions before we take that motion to adjourn?

Councilperson Narduzzi said I want to ask the Mayor if he could reach out to the senior snow plowers and have them when they pile up the snow, don't pile it up by the street and over the

sidewalk. If they could make a couple of pushes to the center of the yard or something or off the driveway in the center because I am looking out my window at Mr. Rajcan's property and he has without exaggerating a 5 or 6 foot mound on top of the sidewalk. So, that just makes a bigger challenge for when they do the sidewalks over here.

Mayor Kurtz said that's one of the challenges that I just eluded to. We push it one way, and then we, the big plows push it one way, the senior plows push it another way, and then the sidewalks push it another way. If it was your house I wouldn't care, I would let it pile up.

Councilperson Narduzzi said I figured as much.

Mayor Kurtz said since it's another residents, we have to be careful. There were some challenges because we sent people out several times. We even had City people go out and correct some of the challenges, but when you get that much snow in that amount of time, where are you going to put it? You said it Tommy, where are you going to put it all? I am sure we will be fixing some grass in the springtime too.

Councilperson Trakas said along those lines, and this is a good conversation, I don't want to belabor the point, and obviously we have technical people who can do this. Our RFP for the sidewalks are one push back and forth, and I think when you get that, while it's cost effective, it may not be effective for the resident. So, you have these walls and dams that develop, either in front of the sidewalk or in front of the garage door, and people can't get out of their garage. I don't have the City service, but my guy did the same thing. I opened the garage door, and there's 3 feet of snow there. So, it would seem that it could be counter-intuitive just based on the RFP, what we told them they needed. You might want to think about that for the future, maybe we just say hey do the job the right, and we will pay for it.

Mayor Kurtz said you know what, you are right because my driveway, I blocked my wife in the garage, and she could only blame me. So, she is going to fire me from that job too. Your point is well taken. We had a couple of residents that called, and we went out and corrected the situation. We had conversations, and we will continually monitor the situation with our contractors, and if someone doesn't do an adequate job, we will either replace them or won't award them next year. It's getting tougher and tougher to find people too.

Councilperson Walchanowicz said I think what everyone needs to realize is if they go back and read the ordinance for senior snowplowing, it states that we basically just have to do just one pass for emergency vehicles being able to enter and exit a driveway, and the residents are expecting their entire driveway to be clean when they are having this service. So, either we need to rewrite that ordinance and state that, or something has to be changed for that.

Mayor Kurtz said that would be an item for Dale. Could we put that on your committee?

Councilperson Veverka said sure, the description because I just recently read it because of the number of contacts I got after the snow event. Basically it says 2 passes, whether that means one

in and one out, I am not sure; but it says 2 passes. The other thing that relates to what Jim asked was they don't want you to hit the plow into the garage door. So, it's not to be expected to be within a couple of feet of the garage door.

Mayor Kurtz said you are right.

Councilperson Veverka said then you are going to have garage door replacements to be an issue. When you have a house where the garage faces the backyard, then it becomes a real issue. It's very convoluted.

Mayor Kurtz said it's 4 inches too by the way, not 3. I don't know how they measure things, that creates another change. If you wouldn't mind, we should put that on. It doesn't have to be right now, or if you are comfortable now, we should put it on the Streets Committee. Just as Councilperson Walchanowicz said, let's have the discussion about it so our contractors, and we will get Purchasing involved. It's a tough program to administer because every situation is unique, and every spring we get the calls about we destroyed the grass, destroyed the sprinkler system, we destroyed this, and they want all new driveways and stuff. It's like really people, but that's Independence. If it wasn't Independence, and we didn't have this high standard of doing driveways, and they are not just postage stamp driveways either. I think I'm going to join that program too so my wife doesn't have to yell at me.

Councilperson Narduzzi said all in all Mayor, we had a significant snowfall, and I think we were the only school open in Cuyahoga County on Tuesday. So, congrats again to Ron. I know it's hard to delegate and get rid of all that snow in a couple of days. So, if people had to walk on the street for a day or two, I am sure they understand, but I know Ron and his guys were out there doing the best they could do.

Mayor Kurtz said that's right. I give him a lot of credit and his team a lot of credit, and with this new technology we will be more efficient. I know he is doing a lot of different things as he further invents himself. Remember, he's new too, so we have a lot of great opportunities to keep getting better and better. It's exciting. I do appreciate the input.

Councilperson Veverka said with one of the conversations I had with Ron, that's what he said he wanted to do was examine it the next couple of snow events and then get into a conversation. So, that kind of comes into play. So, we will have some discussion about it as soon as we can pin down the Utilities and Streets meeting, but hopefully we won't have too many snow events before we pin the date down.

Councilperson Walchanowicz said if I can mention, I was out by 3:00 a.m. on Monday and on the phone with Ron at 4:00 a.m. Monday morning, and he was in a truck plowing streets at 4:00 a.m. on Monday. I don't know of another Service Director that we have had in the past that would be in a truck at 4:00 a.m. plowing our City streets.

Mayor Kurtz said excuse me Councilman, but I plowed the streets. I have my CDL.

Councilperson Walchanowicz asked were you out at 4:00 a.m.?

Mayor Kurtz said I did Brecksville Road one night.

Vice Mayor Grendel said well anything else, if not I think we are ready to call the meeting, so we will entertain a motion to adjourn and hopefully see everybody at the Finance meeting on January 31st. I don't know if there's anything next week or not?

The Clerk replied there's nothing.

Mayor Kurtz said nothing this next week officially.

The Clerk replied no.

Vice Mayor Grendel said let's try to set our calendars for maybe even a month ahead through February and that for everybody so we can plan accordingly.

Mayor Kurtz said thank you residents for attending and thank you for the Department Heads for taking time out of your schedules on a Saturday.

Moved by Trakas, seconded by Grendel, to adjourn the Strategic Planning Committee meeting of January 22, 2022. Voice Vote: 7 yes/0 no; motion carried.

The Strategic Planning Committee meeting was then adjourned at 12:13 p.m.

Debra J. Beal, Clerk of Council
Minutes Unapproved at time of Release 02/26/22
Updated 01/31/22
