

**CITY OF INDEPENDENCE
STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETING
MINUTES
JANUARY 23, 2021 AT 9:00 A.M.
VIA ZOOM**

Vice Mayor Grendel called the meeting to order at 9:03 a.m. Present were Council Member, Kathleen Kapusta, Tom Narduzzi, Kenn Synek, Jim Trakas, Dale Veverka and Chris Walchanowicz. Also present were Mayor Gregory P. Kurtz, Finance Director Vern Blaze, Law Director Gregory J. O'Brien, Economic Development Director Jessica Hyser and Communications Director Alla Lora.

Vice Mayor Grendel said welcome everyone, and I also welcome Vern and Jessica and Alla; I see you are here. Greg O'Brien is here. The group is all here. Hopefully, next year we will have a meeting where we can all be together, and hopefully even before the end of the year, not that the virtual is bad; it is sure nice to have face to face contact and dialogue too and just camaraderie. I don't know what annual Strategic meeting this is. I think Jim Crooks started this if I'm not mistaken over a decade ago; and we had it even at the Bramley House for a year or two and at various locations. It's great to get together on Saturday morning and kind of share ideas for the love of our City that all of us have and kind of get us going for the calendar year 2021.

As you see in front of you, there are two agendas actually; but we are going to go by the one that has the time slots in it and everything. This is the very first part of it, welcoming and reviewing the agenda and the process. For 10 minutes or about that much, there is going to be a brief recap of the impact of Covid-19 on the City and on the Administration and how we do business here in Independence. Mayor Kurtz you will be leading that and kind of giving us an idea how things have been going for this past 10 months; and also Vern will give a synopsis of the financial impact of Covid.

Then from 9:15 a.m. to 9:25 a.m. there will be a review of the various topics as you see there, and that will lead right into our strategic vision. This we thought in talking with the Mayor that it would be better that each of us would have 10 minutes where we express our thoughts. We will start with the junior members of Council, Chris you and Kenn, give your ideas. There is no right or wrong for this, it's just kind of putting out there what you see as your strategic vision for the City. I guess the purpose of this, Greg correct me if I'm wrong or Alla or Jessica, is that the Minutes that are being produced from this meeting; the group that we have hired to do our branding and everything, akhia is going to review them and give them ideas from the other members of Council on some of their ideas so that they can get a better idea. We had a great meeting on Tuesday which kind of introduced them to some of the key components of what we view as important as Independence is. Again, they heard just from Kathleen, myself and the Mayor. This way everybody on Council will have a say in the matter; and we are hoping with this, we are going to have meetings. I think Jessica we will probably have meetings later with Council and with akhia to share ideas. This way, every step of the way we will see the work that this group is doing for us; and I think we will have a better idea if it's money well spent or if it's

not. We will all be part of the process, and we will have a chance to evaluate their services for the City of Independence.

I will keep time there, and we will try to keep it to 10 minutes throughout this so you have your 10 minutes and sharing of ideas. That will also include Vern, he will give his 10 minute spiel at the end of that group. You see the order of presentation in the agenda.

Then we will take a 10 minute break to have a little stretch, and then we will finish it up, the last hour the Mayor will start it off with giving his vision for about 10 minutes; and then there will be discussion. If you take some notes and everything, we will have a discussion to prioritize maybe some of the ideas that we find a common theme for most of us on Council and determine the next steps, how to implement again in a brand new different world than we were a year ago as far as planning goes because we didn't have Covid at least on our radar last year at this time. Then we will discuss the possibility of follow up meetings, maybe on a Saturday where we can be just focused on the planning portion of our jobs.

So, without further ado I think I will turn this over to the Mayor and have you start off with the first part of our agenda.

Mayor Kurtz said good morning everyone. Thank you Dave and also I have to recognize Dave's support and help in putting this together, framing this event. So, thank you very much for that.

When I was preparing for today's strategy session, I thought back of how the City scrambled to adapt to the extraordinary circumstances that were thrust upon all of us last year. My conclusion, because we embraced the need to change we owned it, the City kept moving forward. I sincerely believe that had we residents had not adapted and just waited things out, we wouldn't be in the same position that we are today. Now yes we didn't have the Fourth of July fireworks or the Home Days, but we did have extended summer concert series and a spectacular holiday tree lighting event, socially distanced programs at the Civic Center, the opening of the outdoor pool for residents, and other activities provided an escape from the isolation and the anxiety brought on by the Coronavirus. As many cities hit the pause button and kept their facilities closed, we diligently kept ours moving forward all the time.

We did not cancel the 55+ lunch program; as a matter of fact, with your support, we expanded it and turned it into a twice a week drive-thru service that is growing in popularity. We also reached out to seniors on a more regular basis. We added a number of seniors to the weekly wellness check call list. That has been very educational and informative, and it's amazing how long people want to stay on the phone and talk.

The weekly Swiftreach calls keep residents informed and connected to the community. Actually not a week goes by without someone stopping me and saying thank you. The only problem is they want me to always mention their name when I am talking about the Swiftreach program. I told them that Jim Trakas said I can't do that.

Let me thank you, the Members of Council for your support this past year. Everyone contributed to finding solutions, making pandemic related decisions in real time. Thanks to your support, the City is preparing to install surveillance cameras on Rockside Road to enhance public safety.

I am proud that we were able to navigate the pandemic without having to lay off any full-time staff. Yes, we adjusted schedules and assignments to optimize staff resources which included covering for quarantining employees. Departments were nimble, but they are also stressed. Some of the stress related factors had little to do with the crisis, but had more to do with the outdated operating systems and procedures and lack of technology. I will talk more about that when in my later 10 minute session.

We are here to talk today about the future. I believe any successful strategy must be built on the fact that Independence has a stable secure and responsive government and protecting and enhancing our residents' quality of life is paramount. Independence blends old and new in a way that provides solid support for our business district, regardless of their size. They could be small mom and pop shops, or they could be a large corporation. I respectfully ask that everyone think out of the box today and not rely on how things used to be. Our lives are never going back to the way it used to be pre-pandemic to 2019.

Now let's re-imagine the City's potential and recognize the possibilities that may not have existed in the past but have emerged in the wake of the pandemic. It really was not that long ago that major businesses on Rockside were the Lincoln car dealership. We had a floral shop over on West Creek, and I remember when it was four lanes; we all remember when it was four lanes. I remember sitting in Chester's, and we were able to pave the entire street, resurface the entire street in one weekend. Boy, things have changed.

Before it was built, many people did not think the Civic Center was essential for residents. Boy how things have changed.

I want us to envision the City's future as an exceptional residential community and a premier business destination. Departments must consider new and cooperative ways to work with other departments to improve services and reduce the redundancy and the paperwork and all the waste. It means all employees must consider consequences beyond the scope of their current responsibilities. We learned a lot about that during this past year. Projects and operating procedures must be prioritized to support the City's needs. I will talk more about that in my 10 minute segment later.

Here is the question that we need to answer to help us define the best strategy for 2021 and beyond. What makes Independence unique and a premier place to live, work and raise a family today? Why do people want to live here and what attracts businesses to our City?

Every organization has room for improvement and potential growth. The question is what challenges does the City need to overcome? As a community, the question is have we considered how people will live and work in the future? What is the best way for business to

operate in the post-pandemic world? Those questions should give us all pause as we attempt to influence and navigate the future. Thank you.

Vice Mayor Grendel said thank you Mayor. Vern, I think now it's time for you to give us a financial impact that Covid has had on the City and operations and also revenue and expenses.

Finance Director Blaze said sure. Good morning everybody, and thank you for this opportunity. Debi, I hit the share screen button.

The Clerk said you should be able to share.

Finance Director Blaze said on the screen you will see Municipal Income Tax Revenue, is that what everybody is seeing?

The Clerk said that is correct.

Finance Director Blaze said I just had a little high level facts and figures for us this morning, kind of figuring that today was meant to be a little bit high level, and there are other opportunities if we want to dig into the weeds so to say and drill down deeper into any of these silos.

This first slide that I put up is just obviously I don't have to repeat it, but I will repeat it anyway. Our primary revenue source, so this is the one that we all track the most, and you can see the last five years and the amounts. I would call 2018, 2019, 2020 just kind of flat here. They vary by a couple of hundred thousand either way; but we have been in that mid to upper \$33,000,000 range for our annual municipal income tax revenue. I think we would all agree that we were blessed in 2020 to achieve that \$33,870,000 income tax receipt level that we did in 2020 given what took place last year across the planet. So, where that is going to end up this year is anybody's guess as long as employers keep employees on the payroll; and even if they are working remotely, the current laws are structured to have that municipal income tax still funneled to the City where the employer is located so that does benefit us at this time. We do have down those who are challenging that, but that's the income tax. Again, we were blessed in 2020 as far as the Covid-19 impact on our primary revenue source.

Where it did have the most impact was here in our hotel/motel lodging tax revenue. It dropped a full 50% last year. Fortunately, none of our other revenue sources being at this, a couple of the other slides coming up are TIF revenue, our property tax revenue, interest income; all of those pale in comparison to the municipal income tax that the City takes in each year. So, these, I don't want to say we can afford to have them drop; but if anything is going to drop, I would rather have this category drop like it did 50% than the income tax one dropping 50%. So, it was pretty stable here our lodging occupancy in Independence 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019; generally that \$1,300,000 or \$1,400,000 a year range, a little bit over \$100,000 a month dropped in half to a little bit over \$50,000 a month last year. So, of all of our revenue sources, that was the one that took the biggest hit there.

TIF was kind of consistent there based on existing TIF districts 2016 and 2017; and then in 2018 tax year some other TIF districts must have gotten finally on the books so to say. It has been hovering in that \$2,000,000 to \$2,100,000 range the last three years, 2018, 2019 and 2020. We will have to watch this category and the next one here coming up; and this is the property tax revenue. It was in the \$800,000's for three years running, and then in 2019 and 2020 it jumped up a little bit into that low \$900,000 a year range. I say we have to watch that, the Mayor had talked about the pandemic and its impact. We are getting some word and feedback, and you keep your tentacles out there and you are surveying what's going on in the market, just not here in Independence but northeast Ohio and the nation. A lot of commercial property owners feel that the pandemic has impacted their property values, and most of them not positively. So, the expectation is that there's going to be significantly more challenges to existing property values than there were the past few years, mostly on the commercial side. Residential, I don't think; that's a whole different market, I don't think a lot of people have a strong leg to stand on and challenge that if their properties have been valued by the County Tax Assessor at a reasonable value. The residential property market across the country has been quite strong right through the pandemic. So, the property values that we have to watch are more in that commercial sector, more specifically the office buildings and possibly any of the retail buildings that they feel that they have suffered a little bit because of occupancy, or we can't even look at just occupancy because even though a strip center, let's use retail as an example. A strip center could seem like it's doing okay because it's still occupied, but we are not seeing the back story to the financials; and just because a business is in that space does not necessarily mean that they have enough business right now currently to pay the rent or pay all of the rent. So, there's been a lot of negotiation going on this past year between landlords and tenants because building owners need the rent to pay the mortgage, and unless the mortgage holder is cutting the landlord a break on the mortgage, the landlord is a little bit pinched to be able to give a break to the tenant on the rent. So, it's a vicious circle between the people who hold the debt on the property, the people who own the property and the people who pay the rent on the property. So, that's what Jess is trying to stay attuned to monitor that and make sure any impact on Independence is fairly minimal.

The last one on an income basis, the interest dropped in 2020 not because the investment principle dropped; but because of interest rates dropping dramatically. That cuts both ways as a benefit or a detriment. It is a detriment in this sense in that the miniscule interest rates that we are getting on all the safe investments that a community has to hold; they are paying such a nominal rate that we are getting, the term everybody uses in the investment world, is we are getting next to nothing on our money. On the flip side though, that did benefit us tremendously last year when we used that to our advantage to lock in those historical low long term rates and lock that in on those 15 year bonds that we sold. So, I will take that. We are going to benefit for 15 years, and we are blessed to have a fairly large investment portfolio at this time. It's not earning a lot of interest right now at this point and time; but I could think of a lot worse problems to have, mainly not even to have that principle to call an investment portfolio that maybe some other public entities are in that position.

This last slide that I have is just a high level, you wanted to touch a little bit and it was termed on the agenda capital redistribution; and I didn't want to get too deep into the weeds on individual departments, line items and so forth. So, I just said look, here's kind of what helps me just get a high level view of how is the City's finances doing as far as what's coming in and what's going out and what does that leave us with at the end of that period of time. So, you can see, back in 2016, the City started with just say \$20,000,000 in cash, \$50,000,000 came in total, that gave us about \$70,000,000 to use. Then \$40,000,000 went out, and that left us with \$30,000,000 at the end of 2016. You could go through that process every year, leading us to where we are. We started 2020 with around \$40,500,000, and we ended the year at \$38,500,000. That doesn't necessarily mean that the City deficit spent. This is an all inclusive snapshot here, and I purposely where it's cash in and cash out, I don't use revenue and expenses because the cash in portion, a couple of those years the City borrowed some money to finish that Rockside Woods Blvd. North project. So, when you borrow, technically that's not revenue in a technical sense to the entity; but it is a cash receipt. So, that's why I labeled it as cash in; so we might have gotten a couple of years it looks like oh boy you guys did really good. You took in all this money. You didn't spend it all. You are being really good, disciplined on your spending. Yes, that could be part of it, but part of it could have been hey you borrowed the money in December of that year, and you just haven't spent it on these big infrastructure projects. So, it made it look like you took in a lot of money, and you didn't spend a lot. Technically, that's true, but then they would be in the subsequent year; that's when you spent that borrowed money, and it makes your outgoing cash out seem a little bit more.

Overall, I would say on a 2020 perspective with the pandemic we did pay off some of that debt. We started out, we had the option to roll over up to \$17,375,000 of those short term notes. We paid \$2,000,000 off in principle, and the short terms notes that we converted into long term was just \$15,250,000. So, some of that \$70,000,000 that went out was principle, above and beyond what was scheduled there.

So, that's about all I have on this segment as far as the finances. I don't know if this is structured to be any Q&A or if we are just going right down; but if you have any questions, and now is not the time because we have this timetable to hold to, jot them down, call me, e-mail me whatever, and I will be glad to run through any of this six slides with you or anything else you wanted to cover that maybe I didn't this morning. So, thank you.

Vice Mayor Grendel said thank you Vern. I think Mayor we really don't have much, the Q&A is going to come I think the last hour of our meeting. Right now it's for each of us to present. I believe that's how we set up that to discuss and prioritize our ideas. So, this way we can have this flow more smoothly, and each of us give it a chance to give our presentation without any kind of interruptions or getting sidetracked which sometimes happens when you have some vigorous discussion on certain issues; and you get sidetracked and end up not getting as much done.

Mayor Kurtz said you are the timekeeper today Dave.

Vice Mayor Grendel said very good. I won't take much time. We are talking about 2020, 2021 priorities and the new normal; you kind of imagine the new normal. I go back, and there are a few ideas in my 18 years on Council, and one of them that is unique that took planning, that took discussion, that took give and take. I go back to Elmwood Park the way it's configured right now. I know Bob Zuber, may he rest in peace, was a visionary. Bob at that time was coaching baseball. He had an idea. He had seen a lot of different facilities, and it would be ideal to reconfigure our baseball diamonds we had there and have a centrally located press box which could also serve with restrooms and also provide amenities to the fans who go there; but then have the ball diamonds kind of like a wheel, the configuration there. I tell you, the planning that the City made, and I believe, Mayor correct me if I'm wrong, that Independence Excavating did a lot of the work to get the grounds prepared. You can see now basically almost 15 or 16 years later that it still looks brand new, and that was a vision that people on Council and the Administration at that time had and carried through different Administrations. You can see the working together what we can accomplish.

Another one is the Joint Use Facility. You look what's up there with the Fieldhouse and with the high school facility; that was a joint effort from two boards of government that a lot of people said that couldn't be done. It was done, and again the financial part of it turned out and made it a lot more affordable for the community to have that joint effort. It's a beautiful facility. Yes, it has some flaws and everything, but I think Kathleen you were on that committee too from the School Board's standpoint. It was a good program, it had give-and-take from both the City and the schools; and I think the outcome was that we have a beautiful high school facility. Again, it's been 16 or 17 years that we have had the school there.

The other thing too was Rockside Road. That was an undertaking that we see Rockside as it is now, but the planning of putting marginal roads and things of that nature; so out of these discussions we are having today, and the input from each of the Members of Council, it is very important as well as the Mayor and the Finance Director. We were able to accomplish a lot of great things for the City. So, no suggestion is too minor. I think it's so important that we get our input in, and that's what the next period is going to be that each of us will provide 10 minutes, hopefully we will take some notes and see if there is a common thread, a common interest from Council. Again, we have a number of constituencies that we have to remember, first and foremost are the residents who elect us, who we are responsible for providing a number of services including safety and your basic services of garbage pickup and things of that nature; but we also have the business community on Rockside and Pleasant Valley and the Cloverleaf, all the other areas that again we need to work with them and constantly keep that at a high level of efficiency so we can continue to attract new business and maintain the ones that we have here.

Then we have our visitors, our commuters; it's down now, but hopefully in a couple of years our hospitality industry can pick up where it left off. I know it's going to take some time to get back to that; but remember we have a heavy investment, or there is a heavy investment for those kind of facilities in our community.

So without further ado, there is no limitation on the 10 minutes that you have for each of you, and I think at this point get strategic visions for the City from each of our Council Members as well as our Finance Director. Kenn, if you are ready, we will start with you.

Councilperson Synek said going first in this on one hand it's an opportunity to set the tone for the day; but on the other hand, they say people remember most that which they hear last. So, we will see how this goes. Thank you for the audience, thank you for your time and attention everyone.

Three times the people of Independence have given me the great honor and opportunity to serve as an elected official. Each time I was sworn in, I took an oath to uphold the Constitution of the United States. I can honestly say that the first time I took that oath, I really didn't know very much about the Constitution.

In the nine years that have passed since I was first sworn in, I have made a concerted effort to study and to learn more about the Constitution. Some say the Constitution is the single greatest invention in the history of the universe, and they will get no argument from me about that. It truly is a magnificent document. Studying the Constitution has taught me **so much** about the practical and philosophical foundation of our American system of governance.

I think any discussion of strategic planning or visioning for the City of Independence has to be rooted in the Constitution. As we begin this planning and visioning process, I think it is imperative that we have a clear understanding of the primary **purposes** and **objectives** of city government. We need to be **mindful** of the proper role of Independence city government in the lives of our residents and businesses.

I also think that as this process unfolds, we elected officials have to guard against being **poor listeners**, guard against being **arrogant**, and guard against being **overly ambitious**. We are first and foremost representatives of the people. It is our job to lead the people wherever it is that they want to go.

In my view, elected officials **must not** use the power of government to **implement a vision** that is not widely supported by the people. Throughout this visioning process, we must strive to be servant leaders who put the desires and needs of our citizens ahead of any personal glory or personal agenda.

The Mayor and Vice Mayor have asked me to comment about my vision and my priorities for residents and the business community of Independence. Before I get into any specific strategies or actions, I would like to share 3 basic principles that are the bedrock and the foundation for the decisions I make, and the policies and procedures I advocate for, as a Councilman.

1. Government exists to protect the natural rights of its citizens, which is to say that government must ensure the safety, liberty, property rights, and freedom of expression of its citizens.
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2. I believe in limited government. Government should do for the people only those things that they cannot do for themselves.
3. I believe in free markets. Government intervention in the operation of a free-market economy stifles creativity, wastes public funds, and rewards the few at the expense of the many.

So, what exactly is my vision for Independence city government as pertains to our residents and businesses? In a nutshell, first and foremost, it is to keep doing what we are already doing. That is clearly not very exciting, but it is very important.

The City already provides a wide array of top-notch services to residents. The City has also spent **millions upon millions** of dollars on infrastructure, which has enhanced or created the conditions necessary for our residents to thrive, and our businesses to prosper. These services and infrastructure investments make it possible for our constituents to pursue their dreams and ambitions in peace and safety. I am quite certain that those essential city services and infrastructure improvements can and will continue.

That being said, I also have to note that human nature comes with a bias toward action, and an insatiable drive for more. So as good as things are now, human nature says “gimme gimme more”. My hope for this visioning process is that we will remain keenly aware that government cannot and should not solve every problem. There are limits to what government can do.

In addition to maintaining our existing services, we also need to increase our efforts in the public safety arena. The homicide at the Sunoco station on Rockside, the armed robbery at the Winking Lizard, and vehicle thefts from driveways strike fear in the hearts of our residents. People living in fear will never reach their full potential. We have to work to restore the public’s confidence in the safety and security of our city.

Whatever the outcome of this visioning process, we must be good stewards of the abundant financial resources at our disposal. Pandemic or no, the City of Independence has financial resources that are **the envy** of virtually every other local government in the great state of Ohio.

The pandemic has disrupted everyday life, but it hasn’t changed human nature. Our prime location and relatively safe and secure environment will continue to make Independence a desirable location to live and work. Our finances will never be immune from the inevitable ups and downs in the economy, but our treasury is, and always will be, healthy and strong.

My Number 1 most important strategic objective is, and everlastingly will be, to find a way to share the City’s bountiful financial resources with the Independence Schools. You will recall that last spring, I laid out a plan whereby the City could reduce its property tax levy, which would then in turn benefit the Independence Local Schools, and result in no tax increase to our residents or businesses.

Due to the unique properties of inside millage that I won't delve into now, a small change by the City would be **monumentally impactful** for the Independence Schools. There is no other strategy our city government could pursue that would have a greater positive long-term benefit for all of our constituents than this one. If the City were to relinquish some of its inside millage to the Independence Schools, our entire community – residents and businesses alike - will reap tremendous benefits for generations.

So to summarize, here's the three key takeaways from my perspective:

1. We should keep doing what we are doing with respect to services provided to residents and infrastructure improvements.
2. We should increase our efforts with respect to prosecution of offenders, crime prevention, and public safety.
3. We should implement a revenue sharing plan with the Independence Schools

Thank you so much.

Vice Mayor Grendel said thank you very much Kenn. I appreciate your thought and then your presentation. We will move on.

Councilperson Synek said I will just yield the balance of my time to Councilperson Trakas because I am sure he will need.

Vice Mayor Grendel said you are on the good side here Kenn, you had 4 minutes to spare. You were even saving there with time for our programs, so thank you.

We will move on to Chris. Chris, the floor is all yours.

Councilperson Walchanowicz said thank you. I will do the same, I will keep it quick so Councilperson Trakas has more time.

The first year for me went by awfully quick. I was not expecting the majority of our meetings to be Zoom. I enjoyed the first part of last year in person, getting to know everybody and seeing how this all works. So, the start was a little difficult doing the Zoom just because I like to see how people's reactions are, body movements, stuff when you are discussing different topics. So, Zoom made that a little bit difficult, but all in all it was a great year. I felt the City has done a lot of tremendous good for our residents.

Moving on from that, so moving forward through this pandemic I feel like there's a lot of weight that has been on Jessica's shoulders to keep our revenues coming in, keeping our business districts as plentiful as we can. I feel that maybe she could use a little bit of support or help from all of us instead of all that weight being on her. I have asked myself a question, if you guys have

ever thought of, have we ever considered some public/private partnerships whether it has to do with housing or the business district with TIFs? Anything that we can do to create more revenue, more income for our tax district; you know they are projecting us to be down like 7 ½% more this year than last year. So, our help with her moving forward I think is going to be huge. It all kind of fits together for me with our downtown, moving forward with our housing as our first step for that. Somehow built in with what we can do for our current residents who want to move out of a bigger home and not have to take care of yards, how we can get them into those properties once it's going first, what we can do to help that go through.

Then I am going to go off with some future stuff for some of our public lands and buildings. One of them is our Service Department. We spoke at the end of last year with the millions of dollars in equipment and trucks and stuff that sit outside, and what can we do to keep our investments lasting longer, whether it's a new Service Department or we look into the old ODOT more serious so we can keep all this money under cover.

I think we need to look into some more resident programs for both our seniors; I know we do a lot for our seniors. There were a couple I had talked about last year that could help our seniors or older residents stay in their homes a little bit longer. I know Valley View has a nice program with helping the residents with lawn care and fall cleanups and stuff. I was thinking maybe we could discuss a program for that because we know with this pandemic people's money is a little bit tight; and if you hire a landscaper, grass cutting is not cheap anymore.

Also with that, I have had a lot of our young residents with young children contact me about programs for younger children. I know a lot of our programs start 5, 6 or 7 years old. If we have anything that we can do or start for the younger children to start trying to get together before they have to go to pre-school or kindergarten.

I know this is one of the last ones I have is I remember years ago and back in the past, a lot of our, this has to do with our City employment; and I know the Mayor and his Administration takes care of that. I am open to questions about what your thoughts are of looking into the future employment of residents. If we have openings in the Service Department or the Recreation Department or that, going back to hiring more residents for jobs because I feel that if you live here and you work here, you are going to take more pride in your job. You will be more committed to your job, and I think the City would all in all be a better place if we had more residents working in our certain departments.

With that being said, I complete my probably quick 5 to 6 minute spiel.

Vice Mayor Grendel said very good Chris. You are right on 5 minutes, but again as you and Kenn continue your journey as Councilpersons and everything, the experience that you gain is going to be very, very valuable. It was tough. You were at a disadvantage this year because of the interaction that we do have with personal meetings; but all in all, both you and Kenn have contributed greatly. We appreciate everyone. That's what I like, I get so sick of hearing the fighting that is going on in Washington. I don't know if it's going on in Columbus; Jim you

probably have a better handle on that, but what's good here is we collaborate. We don't always agree 100% on everything, but we respect each other's ideas. We respect as persons and everything, and it makes our jobs that much easier when you have a feeling that we are collaborating and working together as opposed to spending time trying to sabotage the other person. So, I appreciate again your input there, and we will continue to move on. You fellows have saved us some time on overall picture; so we will move on to Dale. The floor is yours, and you have 10 minutes sir.

Councilperson Veverka said 10 minutes, wonderful. Well in that case, I can go back to 2008; and 2008 was a notable year for me because that's the year I retired after 34 years as an educator and immediately began looking forward to an opportunity to develop some involvement with the City of Independence, becoming more involved with government, just being more of an involved resident and involved citizen.

I know that many residents and citizens are very happy as long as their rubbish is collected and the ambulance arrives in a timely manner, the Police cruiser goes past every once in a while and realize that those particular situations are what most residents are concerned about; but the reality is that there is so much more that is involved in the government process that many residents are aware of. Notably, if you take a look down at the counter down at the bottom, you will notice that there approximately 20 people tuned in to this particular Strategic Planning session. If you count the people on your screen, one of the first things you will notice is that by the time you tick off the Council, the Finance Director, the Mayor, the legal representation, the Council Secretary, Jessica and the rest of the other folks who are on here, we have only a handful of citizens that are attuned to this Strategic Planning session, which to me is unfortunate. It would be nice if more people would be directly involved with the process.

So, as I started in 2008 one of the things that I did was began attending regularly Council meetings, and the other meetings that we have like Zoning Board of Appeals, Architectural Board of Review and all the additional meetings that go on in town to do the business of the City, to keep us at the level that we need to be, do all those things that we need to do to have this City be the successful community and the City that it is.

So, that's where I got my feet moistened initially is just attending a multitude of sessions, Council meetings, Kathleen's meeting with Community Services and Streets & Sidewalks and so on just to become involved. Then I gradually worked to the point with that involvement to deciding to run in 2013 for City Council. I jumped that five years because getting your feet wet to really get your thumb on the pulse of the community; again it was only connection with fellow Council people, people directly involved with the program.

As I decided it was necessary to try to throw my hat into the ring as a Councilperson in 2013, I thought the only way to try to become involved with the community was to, as Vern does, get out my bicycle; and in the initial time I visited over 2,600 homes, virtually every home in town. At that time listening very much to the residents of Independence, and I followed that in 2015 after I was unsuccessful in 2013 and went out and visited residents again. I was unsuccessful in

2015 and followed with another run in 2017 where I first came on board with City Council and actually had an opportunity to try to represent what I had heard. Each of the election periods I visited anywhere from 2,600 now to nearly 3,000 residents and had an opportunity to speak with them directly face-to-face and because of all of those meetings, there were a number of things I campaigned on in the past that I intend to be involved with in the future. I heard already my fellow Council people mentioning that people are pleased because of the wonderful services that we provide, because of the things that we do as a government to best help as many of the people as we can. We have a focus on doing good things for most, and to me that is an extremely important thing as we develop and as we look at plans. We are trying to make sure that we are focused on those good things for those people that are the biggest group of people.

As I approached and as I campaigned each time, I felt one of the biggest pieces of the puzzle was the differentiation between wants and needs. Wants being those things, those pie in the sky in some cases, but other cases things that would be really nice; but what is the level of necessity? Needs being those items that are truly critical to run a City as we have been, because we are blessed with a pleasing income tax level, I would say that sometimes it's very easy to get deflected away from the needs and moving in the direction of wants. I would have to say we have to really keep our fine focus on what the needs could be rather than what the wants are for this. The idea of prioritization, being very careful, being very aware of what we need as a community as compared to what would be really nice and what we might want.

The other piece that kind of goes along with that is what the City's role might be in land collection or land purchase; and I am really concerned when we start getting to the point with one of the main focuses of the City is land acquisition and land purchase. I don't see that as a major role of what the government is according to what my interpretation and what many people's interpretation is. Obviously, the government's role is not to acquire property, but rather to deal with the central themes of government. I don't see our role as being a realtor. I see that a major role is the opportunity for individuals in the community to be able to purchase property to be able to develop property, to be able to improve their situation and not have the City play a role that should not be in our valuation, not be in our main area of concern.

The impact of certain pending developments, I tend to run on the cautious side. There are a whole number of things that I think we need to be cognizant of. One of them being of course the fact that we are currently under the same state of emergency that was developed back in late spring by the Governor; at that time the Governor indicated that we were under a state of emergency because of the pandemic situation. At that particular time that froze the situation related to where you work and where your income tax comes from; and fortunately for us then as Vern showed with his demonstration with the income tax revenue, there's been only a minor effect on income tax revenue. I would say that's because we are under the protection of the Governor's edict. The Governor's edict basically said it's status quo, we are not going to deal with it.

In the meantime down in Columbus, we have a large number of communities that are saying hey the money is out there, the people are not working in this on site locations and are working off

site. They are working in our home community, in our town or in our city or in our area; and it doesn't seem to be appropriate if these communities that provide the home base for a company, if those particular communities derive all of the income tax and all of the opportunity from the employment of these employees who in reality are living at home. So, the people who are working in Seven Hills, who are working in Broadview Heights or Hinckley or in Macedonia or wherever, that is where they are providing their work from; but as it currently exists, we are protected. The reality is somewhere along the line based on the presentation of vaccines and providing for the safety of the people of the community, what we know is that the situation could very easily change. For that reason, I might sound like some sort of an old fuddy duddy, but the reality is we need to be especially careful and very cognizant of supplying money for the needs that we have and be very cautious when it comes to those items that many people would consider to be wants. It was important in the past, and it becomes even more critical now as we face the situation of potential changes and as mentioned size of offices, the amount of people who will be present in those offices, the income tax from those particular commercial buildings; but all those items will definitely come into play.

I think also one of the other items that we need to continue to make an effort at, and that would be to make sure that we get the Police Department back up to the levels that they need to be. I am extremely happy that Council went along with the plan to get the cameras to best modify the situation, Number 1 on Rockside for the commercial area; but even more important, Item Number 2, the cameras on the Pleasant Valley area which basically could put the bad guys in a large area of the residential people in this community. So, the idea of focusing money on Police officers, men on the street, I think that is really critical. In addition to that, as we look at other areas in staffing that might be appropriate to deal with; I think that is important. I go along with what was said, obviously focusing on Independence residents, we are able to work with Independence residents for various jobs and opportunities. I think that is very much appropriate.

So, as a summary then I guess I would say it goes back to what I thought back in 2013, I still consider today. I have always been a conservative spender with my household and always tend to act as a conservative spender when it comes to the City. I think we need to look very carefully at we decide and what we do.

One of the areas related to what we decide and what we do is the number of people who potentially could be affected by development. I understand the needs of a number of community members in town, those who have fairly expensive homes, homes in the \$400,000, \$500,000, \$600,000 range; and I understand the fact that they really want to stay in town and to satisfy the needs of that particular group by developing a number of small homes. I understand their needs. On the other hand, as I have realistically visited those nearly 3,000 homes, as I looked at each home, I kind of evaluated to myself what's the potential of this individual or this individual to go from a home that is valued substantially less than \$250,000 and to be able to legitimately take on a home, a small home which would be valued at substantially more than they could get from their existing home. So, I am apprehensive about developing very many small homes in the fact that it would serve a small portion of Independence residents; and I am not saying they are not important, but the reality is a great number of people from out of the area would be coming in

and taking many of those spots. So, with a limited number of spots for small homes, it would satisfy a very small number of Independence residents' needs and would take up the property potentially the property that could be enjoyed by the community as a whole. So, as we move forward, I hope that my colleagues consider carefully that we are doing those decisions that best represent the largest portion of residents of the City, and that concludes my remarks.

Vice Mayor Grendel said well thank you Dale. You benefited from our two earlier presenters and gave you a little extra time there. I was a little more generous to have you continue giving your thoughts. Thank you very much Dale. You brought up some excellent points. We will keep moving on now, and Jim it is your chance to have the floor and have a good presentation.

Councilperson Trakas said thank you, and thanks to my colleagues for saving time. Thanks for the opportunity to provide some suggestions for our City's present and future. With strategic vision being the order of the day, I offer the following:

With respect to overall macro, I would say first of all, let's not panic and launch headlong into unproven and unchartered territory. I do believe in all that we do as we have, let's continue to think through policies, get robust public and expert discussion, plan our community's needs according to established and successful proven principles. I am not much for experimentation but for careful consideration, fact finding and base decision making based on proven and effective principles, like we really have; but I think with the post-Covid world we have to really adhere to these types of things.

From a macro-economic perspective, I think we should all be concerned about a return to national high tax, high regulatory economy and what that means for our community. An example is a doubling of the Federal minimum wage that can seriously restrict the ability of our hospitality industry to bring on new employees and could adversely impact their ability to invest in our community so I think we have to be cautious about these things and responsive.

I foresee a low national growth economy, so we should be able to plan accordingly. An operational suggestion on our prioritizing capital improvements to identify needs and problem solving for at least the near future; if we can get a year or two out of extra vehicles or equipment, let's see if we can do that. Let's see if we can bank money and see how this post-Covid economy plays out. We of course need to provide the tools to our City employees to do the job that they need to do, but let's also see if we can maintain what we have well and be cautious about adding in the next few years.

Some residential priorities, from a safety perspective I encourage our Police to continue strong presence in our neighborhoods, but also consider neighborhood safety meetings where we point out best practices, how to identify suspicious activity, get some feedback to and fro, truly taking policing directly to our streets and to our residents. Let's consider establishing neighborhood block captains and neighborhood watch programs in our streets and developments that benefit all of us and proactively engage our citizens in their own protection.

Let's rethink some of our approaches to stormwater and drainage. Flooding is increasingly a major problem for residents. We have responded exceedingly, but our response is expensive; and our flooding problems continue with hundreds of reported problem areas every year. Thus, I believe we should consider weighing several options. First, planting more trees, and I do have some legislation along that, and perhaps we can talk about that later; but I think that really will help us quite a bit with respect to stopping some of the flooding that we have.

I think we have to stop granting variances to existing and new developments that we know will increase flooding. Sometimes you have to say no, and I think that's something we really have to consider. We use expensive but proven technology to consider on permeable pavements and hot spots for reconstructions and new bills that could better handle water flow. Yes, it's expensive, it also may solve some of our problems down the line so that our sewer system could take in what we have got. We need to aggressively work with surrounding communities to address known water routes that lead to flooding and work united in purpose to addressing these watershed issues at their core and commit multi-community resources to flood abatement. This problem is not going away, it costs residents and the community and businesses lots of money annually. I think re-thinking some of these approaches and collaborating a bit more with our neighbors may help out.

I would formalize through legislation, and you have something to start with as a debate in February, something we talked about a little bit is the private/public partnership program that addresses residential and perhaps business stormwater and infrastructure improvement partnerships to address needs and assure that they do not linger due to personal financial commitments. By being aggressive and not allowing problems to linger, we can improve the quality of life of all of our citizens.

Perhaps we could ask our Community Services Department and Purchasing Coordinator to establish kind of like what Chris was talking about, a local vendor program. Negotiate citywide pricing on common tasks that can benefit our residents. Let's make a published vendors' list of tasks like lawn mowing, snow plowing, home improvement, landscape, plumbing electrical repair services and similar that we could do for any other City service. See if vendors will put together a citywide price for these services, a base price that could benefit our residents. We could leverage the purchasing power of nearly 3,000 households, not just one. Senior citizens I think would appreciate this; oftentimes we just don't know who to call. A published City list and suggested pricing can really be a benefit to our citizens, part of an Independence advantage that we gain by living here.

We could create an Independence Advantage Card, solicit participating businesses to provide discounts and incentives to have people spend money locally and truly help the local economy. Like the Golden Buckeye Card, every resident could get a discount at a local business and truly live the buy local philosophy. Community Services, Economic Development and Purchasing could collaborate to make this a reality with local participating businesses. We could spend money locally.

Let's consider ways to help residents by asking our Economic Development Director, our City Council Economic Development Committee to consider policies, incentives, technology, zoning changes that would acknowledge and encourage methods for residents who work out of their homes in office settings and to encourage building or renovating homes where residents work from home, recognizing that the Covid-19 pandemic has changed work habits and as such a policy incentive technology or zoning changes may help our residents and/or attract new residents to our community.

As it relates to our center of town, I do hope that everything we do with City owned property for development be a very public and competitive process. That our community does not just pick a development partner, but that we create a bid process of multiple partners so that we have a robust public and best value process that is established. I think robust public request bid processes yield better results; and I do hope we will consider a highly competitive partnership program. I think you can benefit in many ways.

Should we consider working with our school district to establish a program for Independence students to have internships with local businesses. Along these lines, should we establish with our private sector a private student loan program to help our businesses to have students major in studies where they could come back home, live and work here with jobs waiting for them. I know George Chase did that for me, and I got a chance to work in manufacturing after I graduated from Ohio State because I knew there was a job waiting for me.

From an economic development perspective, obviously this is a relationship business, and having the best intelligence in our existing businesses, regional, state and national trends, has been a strength, but particularly in today's world, keeping our ear to the ground and acting is truly essential.

A few thoughts, should we establish a formal business roundtable that meets, identifies needs, wants, issues to be resolved and act as ambassadors and help recruit existing companies, vendors, customers and other people who they know, maybe they are serving on corporate boards, to live and work in our community. We can do this by business segment and rotate members, have a permanent developers roundtable to hear the needs and exceed expectations of our developers who we know invest so much money in our community, and we derive the benefit thereof. Having a data driven approach to our business related needs can supplement our existing approach. Small businesses, retail, hospitality, all of our business residents could have strong say in how we move forward and respond to needs.

For some of our Class B offices, should we consider approaching developers to create service oriented shifts in their business model? Perhaps creating regional server farms, kind of like what Bluebridge Technologies did in Cleveland's Sterling Lindner building? Can we attract the new and here to stay firms like Zoom, Webex, cyber-security firms, e-commerce firms, providing a greater service to our residents and business alike, but also investing in the future economy?

The creating of a dedicated team of City employees who would perhaps even loan opportunities and leverage other private and public resources to improve buildings, enhance technology to adopt to the new world order? Independence already enjoys a great reputation as a place to work, but a functioning team of engineers, service, Police, Fire, public relations and other needs to serve the business district may be able to help even further enhance our reputation and responsiveness to our business community.

Should we consider establishing a well-regarded sister city program with strategic cities across the world? I know Mayor Kurtz travels a lot internationally, and we perhaps might be able to partner with people in Germany, Poland, Australia, Japan, Great Britain, other nations who might be seeking to do business in the United States. Maybe Independence could be the gateway then to the American economy. We can bring jobs here and leverage relationships with our overseas partners and friends.

Our motels and hospitality industry are wonderful partners in progress, but they also create challenges. Accessibility and proximity bring in people who also may want to prey upon our consumers and residents. When we hire Police, let's deploy some plain clothes and uniformed to really show the flag and aggressively root out criminal elements and be public about it. Let people know that we are doing it so that we can discourage crime. I know we already do a lot of this, but I think a stepped up and very public commitment will discourage crime.

Lastly, I just want to echo what Kenn talked about and consider stronger partnerships with our school district to leverage tax dollars for the betterment of all; but also to make sure that the kids that are graduating from our school district are coming back and living here in Independence and working in Independence and creating programs thereof. Thanks for the opportunity to say a few words this morning, and I look forward to working with everybody and all of your good ideas to implement this year and the following years.

Vice Mayor Grendel said thank you very much Jim. You were right on spot there. It was just slightly under 10 minutes; so you did a great job and covered a lot of great areas in a short period of time. Thank you for your presentation.

Now we will move on to one of our more senior members, Tom are you ready?

Councilperson Narduzzi said I finally passed that big senior moment Dave Monday; so I am joining the ranks of the big guys over here, right?

Councilperson Kapusta said I wouldn't go that far Tom.

Mayor Kurtz said you don't look a day under 60.

Councilperson Narduzzi said next year when we have this, I hope we are all back together; and I hope I don't have to follow Councilperson Trakas again. Spoken like the true politician you are Jim, great job. You covered a lot of things. Good for you, and thank you for your input.

So, let me start here by saying, first of all I wanted to thank Jim Crooks for starting this. I don't know if it was 12 or 14 years ago, but I think it's my 10th or 12th one; and it's a great way for Council to interact and be laid back and just kind of share and you get the feeling of what other Councilpersons want to do or what they want to accomplish. So, I think it's a great way to do it. It's a lot better to do in a public setting. We used to sit around and eat Debi's good cooking, and it was just very relaxed; and we had great conversation. So, this is a little bit more structured, which is okay, but I kind of like the old way better. So, I will start.

There are two priorities that I would like to focus my vision on today; and one of them is the safety forces. By safety forces I mean Police and Fire. Although Rockside Road is the City's lifeblood, it does bring unwanted challenges. We have seen over the past 3 to 4 years events that have taken place that we would have never thought would have happened here in Independence. We may never be able to stop unacceptable events from happening, but we should prepare ourselves to be able to deal with the unexpected situations in the fastest, safest ways possible. We must provide adequate funding for the Police and Fire for personnel, equipment, training and communication. So, not only Rockside Woods, but going back to the residential part of it, and also we are in charge of two major highways that we have to keep people safe on. I would love to see a bigger presence on Rockside Road as far as Police go. I think that the sight of a Police car always made me as a kid, my heart would pound a little bit, although I wasn't doing anything wrong, it makes you look. I remember we had a discussion years back about having the Police officers take their cars home and parking them in their driveways; and I don't care who you are, if you are driving down the street, and you see a Police care in the driveway, your first reaction is to hit that brake. So, if it's to get them to slow down, if it's to put out awareness to outsiders coming in, looking for an easy take, I think it's a great thing. I think the more Police cars we have parked around town, the better off we are. So, it leads me to believe that the more moving patrol cars or Police force that we show on Rockside Road can only help. So, funding for a bigger Police presence on Rockside Road, more officers.

For Fire, just thinking outside the box, possibly a physician's assistant to ride along with our paramedics to be able to supply better care in the shortest amount of time; equipment, like we already started with cameras to be installed on Rockside Road and Pleasant Valley. Funding for training to keep our officers, paramedics, firemen up-to-date with the latest techniques, practices, acknowledgement of safety operations and funding for communication; in the event of an emergency, time is of the essence. We must have the quickest and most up-to-date equipment on the market so that our response time is to a bare minimum, and communication also with the residents. I have said this for years; and finally it's coming to fruition that Council should be up-to-date with incidents that happen throughout the City. For the first time, I have been on Council for 12 years now; and for the first time, we had within hours or early next morning an update of what has happened. So, the wild spread of craziness doesn't spread across the City. At least we have the truth, sometimes we don't like to hear the truth; but we have the truth. We can distinguish or put out these crazy things like the gunfire that was down at the Embassy. While we don't want to see it, my God from what I heard from my neighbor, I thought that there was World War III going on down there. It was a bad incident that happened, and we extinguished it quickly.

So, that's the kind of communications I am talking about. So, we are blessed to have safety forces, but the technology changes every day, and we must continue to invest dollars that will pay dividends for tomorrow. That's my safety spiel.

My other priority is somewhat redundant, year after year, but we must consider some type of alternative housing; and not only for seniors, but for young professionals and singles. It saddens me to think of the people who have moved away that have given this City so much because we had nowhere for them to go. We must also think about young professionals who do not want or desire to have a large home and a yard to take care of. They leave the City and give their time and talent to neighboring communities. Times have changed, and people have changed. People want different opportunities for different times in their lives, and we only offer one. So, if you are looking to go into a city, and they have one thing to offer, it kind of puts the city at a disadvantage; and it used to be great, and believe me growing up I thought this was the best place to live because it's nice to keep it small and quaint, but times are different now. I firmly believe that maintenance free living is something that we have to look into; and I don't think it will change the way we look at our town as a small-time town with a lot of charm. I think if we do it right, and we position ourselves in a way that it doesn't hurt us and help us, I think it would be a great thing.

I have heard about this for 30 years, or probably longer; but even before I was involved in Council, I went to meetings with my father and my uncle Louie and senior housing was always there, every year and always around election time it would come up. It got some strength and it fizzled out; and I think we have the Council, and we have the opportunity, we have the land, I don't know about the money. We have to talk to Vern about that. We have all these things that are finally coming together that we have the opportunity now that I think it's the best time to do this because of the changing markets. We have to get out of that thought that now that we are in Independence we don't want anybody else to come here. I welcome other people to come into this town because the more diverse you become, the stronger you become; and I am not saying diverse, I didn't want to go down that path; but I am trying to keep the young people here, the young professionals from moving away. My daughter was blessed to be able to buy a house here in Independence, and my other daughter is in Seven Hills. She is getting involved in politics now. She goes to the meetings. She talks to the Mayor. They had some issues with land, and they are getting involved. Those are the things that we need to keep here to keep our City strong, for not now but in the future also. We are all getting old, and somebody has to be able to fill our shoes who are young professionals who want to get back into this.

I was lucky to maybe have the right name to get into politics, and it's been a blessing for me. We need young minds to keep the City fresh. I just don't want to get stale, and once you become stale you stand still, and other people start to pass you by. I don't think that's what we need. I think we need to think out of the box more, and I think I'm getting off the path of housing; but it's all part of it. If we can give different opportunities to different people, I think we would be a better place in the end. So, that's my two cents for this year.

Vice Mayor Grendel said very good. Thank you Tom, I appreciate your input and your insight too which is again, that's the beauty of this. We look at these from different focuses and everything else, but it's good to hear everybody's vision of what they think the City is in dire need of. I appreciate very much your input, and now we move on to someone who has input as a long-time member of the School Board and a long-time member of Council, and that's Kathleen. Are you ready?

Councilperson Kapusta said yes, thank you Dave. First of all, I would like to preface my remarks by saying since I'm the only female speaking this morning, I think there's an inequity in assuming that I can do that in 10 minutes, but we will go from there.

I would like to acknowledge the legislators and the Administration for your comments. As I sat here this morning and listened to you, it made me feel even more honored to be serving with you. The breath and depth of your remarks, many of them I have seen a common thread going through. We may have differences of how we approach things, but it is certainly apparent to me that we are all pretty much on track with the same issues.

Having been, as Dave remarked, on the Board of Education for 11 years and Council now this being my 8th Strategic Planning meeting. In almost two decades of meetings, I have never sat and prepared for one in the same context as this. 2020 as we have all said was a year of chaos. It was a year that was surreal to us. I think if we had read about it in a book, we might have not imagined something of that same genre. However, I would like to reframe 2020, and I think we all do, and we can look at it as a growth tool for us. Where do we go from here? It's sometime difficult to answer still, I understand that because we are uncertain of what 2021 will hold for us from a financial perspective, from a health perspective and so forth; but I think that the main thing that we look at when we look back at 2020 is the loss. When I talk about loss, I talk about loss of lives, and we know that we have lost residents through the normal course of demise, but we have also lost some through the Covid process. So, our hearts are heavy for that without a doubt.

When we look at strategic planning, I know it's a strategy of where we want to go; but of course as we all said this morning, we look also as well as where we have been. It's more critical than ever though I think now with our escalated needs and perhaps diminished resources. Vern is laying that out for us, so there is some uncertainty there that priority is more important than ever. I think our role is jointly too with the Administration, to create the vision; and I think a leader has to be a visionary. Sometimes we have to create the path. We have to go where we don't think maybe our populous is already. We have to engage, and we have redesign and we have to make sure we are still meeting the needs of people; but I do believe that our role is to be creative and to be a leader in that respect.

We are happy today to be able to, as always, acknowledge that we do have a partnership with our Administrative staff, some of whom are here today with us; and that is very important in order to make any of this work.

Interactive communications creating a synergy towards a common goal; we can't solve all the problems, I understand that, but we have to be the engine that's kind of leading the charge on this.

The concerns, the economic horizon; obviously you heard me say that I feel that whatever I am remarking, and we are all remarking this morning, has to be couched in some uncertainty about that what change may come for us. We do feel good because we know that we have some economic tools that are being developed, and as Dave eluded to earlier, he and I had the pleasure of being involved in one of the first meetings with Ahkia and talking about our pulse on the community and where we are going; and I walked away from that meeting feeling very positive. So, I think that we will use our ability to prioritize so that we can take and expend for those things that are of the greatest need for our community.

Relative to the education scene, as many of you have said already this morning, I don't believe, and it was said this morning earlier too, it's not the government role to solve all the problems; and I think that's extremely important when we look at our educational scene again, having served those 11 years on the Board. I think we are wanting to collaborate with our school system. So, we need to design a plan and a response based upon what they tell us their needs are as well, not just maybe what we think they are. I know that we have a levy that was pending in the past, and I think it's important for us to work with our Board to understand where we may be. Again, in these uncertain times we do need to understand that.

We talked last year at the Strategic Planning, when I reviewed my notes about developing in 2020 a liaison committee because of the people we went through last year; I am not sure that ever developed. I certainly would encourage that again for this year as a possible consideration.

Several of you have eluded to the safety, and I understand we look residential, we look commercial, we look municipal safety; and we have taken some great steps towards municipal safety this year as well. I feel very positive about that. When we look at identifying the issues for our safety, I think we look at internal issues right within our community such as our municipal buildings and municipal properties and then of course our surrounding. We have also said the media, the media as much as it is our friend, it is our enemy. So, it's extremely important to use Alla and her team and what we can get from that to create the proper message to our community to help maintain accurate communications as we have all said again this morning.

With safety we have to look at, of course, the residential or the safety component and what input can we get our safety forces; and I certainly value that we get from our leaders, our Chiefs in both areas who have served us exceedingly well. I also think we have a lot of brain power, a lot of combined history with our safety forces, and I would like to incorporate more of their input as we look towards this process.

Finally, with area plans, we have talked and many different comments; and it really boils down to me, when those area plans were created, I think we had a very strong buy in from our administrative and our legislative body. I think we have kind of shelved those to a degree. We

refer to them, but I think we need to maybe resurrect them to a higher extent. Take what's worthwhile from them, and discard that which is not. I do think that we have some benefits if we can look to that. We don't always have to recreate the wheel because it does address our gateway and Cloverleaf and what we are trying to start to do there and continue to do. I think we need to very strongly, as I have heard many of you say this morning, to engage more our stakeholders, whoever is involved in those different areas and the process so that we have a higher sense of collaboration with them.

Downtown redevelopment, I want to know what is our strategy. Just like Councilperson Narduzzi said, we talked about it for so, so long; and I think we need to bite the bullet and move forward and be the leaders that I talked about earlier.

That kind of takes me into my last point which is community beautification, and I think that when I look at this, I look at it in a broad spectrum because it's some of the very things that Councilperson Trakas has introduced with the tree canopies and so forth. It is also to me, it's also our whole property management thing, and I know Mayor has been very strong on that. Mayor Kurtz has been leading us down a direction, and I would like us to do more because I think that we do have residents in this community who might want to do more by their properties and bring them to a higher level but can't for some reason. I think that we could be a tool in helping with that.

Finally on a housekeeping level, I appreciate the flow of communication; and I hope that continues to be enhanced throughout the year, both with my fellow Council people as well as our Administration. I love what we did last year with our follow up to the Strategic Planning meeting. As I looked at my notes, I think besides the January 11th meeting we had, although virtual as they were, May 19th and May 26th. That's something that I never thought of us doing in my tenure, and I think that's critical because we spend all this time and effort on creating some ideas and then it's good to just get some touch points to see how we are going. We may discard some of them through the year, but I think just doing that is very helpful.

We also talked last year at our Strategic Planning about increased use of committee as opposed to our workshops; and I saw that we did that. We also (inaudible) this year, I found it very beneficial. Again, even though it might have only been through the Zoom meeting, I found it very good; and we had great participation at those so I would like to continue that.

My last point, we always mention this, and I will go at it again, backup for Debi. You know we talk about some of us getting older, not all of us, but some of us; and you know there may come a point in time 10 or 15 years from now when Debi might want to retire. So, I think we need to just be sensitive to that, and even if it were not for the retirement, even if it were just for now for her feeling the pressure that she can't take time off because we know how dedicated she is to us; and I don't think we shouldn't support that by getting her some support.

Thank you very much for your time.

Councilperson Narduzzi said so I was going to put into legislation that Debi can never retire.

Councilperson Kapusta said second.

Councilperson Trakas said let's have an immediate vote.

Vice Mayor Grendel said we will have to look into the cloning process.

Councilperson Walchanowicz said Debi will you call the roll please on that.

Vice Mayor Grendel said thank you Kathleen. Again, you brought up a good point, at least from your perspective we have from a female member of the Council, and again you bring a unique perspective too from your experiences that you have had and also your work through the City with the elderly and that too. We appreciate again your perspective and take on a number of these issues. So, thank you very much.

I guess we will move on. Last night after I came back from my son's basketball game there in Painesville, I started putting down a lot of ideas that I will mention; so I will get right to them. My mind was flowing all day because that basketball game yesterday was a real downer.

What I have looked at, I looked at a number of areas; and I am going to touch upon each of these areas briefly. They have been touched by previous members' presentations too.

Again, new housing options, and it was touched upon by Tom and Kathleen. I look at the smaller homes on smaller lots as being the one that is available to us. In my 18 years, of course I have been an attorney in town since 1986 so I take the input from people who come in, the residents who come in and even from people from out of town. I ask them questions about Independence, whether they live there, their reactions, their feelings about our City and the people who live here, some of the concerns they have. Again, I think all of us can say that a number of residents who I have had the privilege of knowing through the years, they were key contributors, they contributed to the community greatly and wanted to stay here greatly too. They had no opportunities. They either were forced to go out to Brecksville, Westlake, Medina, you name it, where there were other opportunities for them to downsize. I think that allowing the opportunity for that. Again, you can't fit the needs of everybody with the land that we have available, but to make it available is a key thing. I think it handles two things; it also handles developing downtown as well as it handles, it takes care of the needs of people who want to stay in town, stay close to their families but not have the \$400,000 or \$500,000 or \$600,000 or \$700,000 homes to maintain.

Mayor, I know that's a key on your agenda is to develop and institute a plan for the middle school property to have housing maybe towards the back, the east end of that property; and I think in the downtown development what I would like to see is to have a buffer, some greenspace in between the housing and then the retail that will be up Brecksville Road. I think that would provide a great amenity for people to walk and maybe be able to have benches there

to meet with the neighbors when this pandemic business is over. I see orderly planning and getting that started this year. It's a key, and the retail development should be limited probably to just the east and west side of Brecksville Road. We have been talking about that for years. The City owns a lot of that land; so I think the time has come and we put plans and discussion to action this year.

With the additional housing, if it proves to be successful, I think we all believe it would be; to see if there would be an opportunity to expand that kind of housing development maybe south of Stone Road too down the road. I do think that's a need, and Tom mentioned too, not just for seniors or empty-nesters but there's a lot of younger professionals, either they are married or single who would like to have that kind of home too and be close to the businesses that they work at maybe on Rockside or Pleasant Valley.

I think the time has come. We really don't have a whole lot of land for million dollar homes or \$800,000 homes; I think the need is to have again quality housing but housing that fits the needs of not only our residents but other residents too. We should be welcoming with the opportunity, but I would like to see if possible our residents have that opportunity to continue to live in town.

The next area is working with the school district. I think it's been key, I have been on Council; and we have had a lot of partnerships with the schools. That's how we have the Joint Use Facility, made that a reality; and I think we have tried to offer as much help with the schools providing emotional and mental stability. It disturbs me, it saddens me greatly when I hear or see another suicide that has taken place by our young. There's so much to live for, and there is so much pain and suffering that is brought upon families when that occurs. We should continue to strive to get help to these youth to let them know that people do care, not only their family members but people in the community care. That they should have the same opportunities that we have had and nothing should ever come to the point where they would want to take their lives. I think that partnership, we do everything we can until hopefully we have a number of colleges there on Rockside, and partnerships between those colleges and our schools that we have too. Explore what we can do to bring the business community, the school community and the resident community together. I think everybody mouths the point that our future is our children and how important education is; but it needs to become a reality. Again, education that enhances the thinking process and does not indoctrinate people to certain ways of thinking, and to me when you are allowed to on your own develop your mindset, I think that's important to develop.

The third thing I came up with was our hospitality business. We talked about how down and out they have been, and you can see from 50% cut in our revenue on the taxes produced by the hotels; we need to develop a strategy. Hopefully, this pandemic might not last more than a year or so; but we need to get these businesses back on track and give them help because we have a number of hotels and quality hotels. We need to work with them to see what we can do to kind of bring their businesses back.

Again, along that line with hospitality and amenities, we should be in the market of really working some more opportunities for the restaurants we have. I think I talked to Greg on Tuesday that we have a number of sandwich shops and things of that nature; but quality restaurants like Delmonico's and that are few and far between.

I remember growing up, to go to Broglio's was a big thing. When you talked about elegant and not really super expensive; those kinds of restaurants, I think our business community could use to have once again. Once again, once we have business meetings and entertaining, it would be nice to have.

I am surprised at Crown Centre that the old Cooker's has been vacant for so long. I would think that the owner of that building would like to have an amenity for his people who work there in his building and for the Clinic, the people who go to have medical services at the Clinic.

When it comes to economic development, I would like that we should explore the possibility with the existing stock of office buildings. What is the future wave? Can we use those buildings for other things? What is going to be the future use? Could we have like the incubation of new businesses and promote like Jim mentioned, the technology. The wave of the future is already here, and to have new businesses possibly locate in some of our older office buildings and that potential. Explore the potential we would have in the Cloverleaf. I think Mayor you mentioned that we might have a presentation from Independence Excavating sometime this year with what they are planning because they are the big property owners down there. That is our gateway. We know what it looks like now, we could imagine if we had something that would really enhance that area and enhance the City financially as well as just our position. That company and the family of companies is important that we keep them in town here because the name says it all, Independence Family of Businesses; and we need to again keep them and keep companies like them and bring companies like them into town.

We have great potential. I mentioned the Cloverleaf, but the northwest quadrant. We haven't even discussed that. We have that contract with that company, but I would like to see again that stay on the forefront as well as there is some area in the southwest quadrant. It would be nice to look at different opportunities and see what we can do to bring private businesses and match them up with these opportunities.

We have the Rockside Woods North, there are still opportunities there, and again always working with businesses to keep them on the forefront as far as what we need to maintain them staying in town and also to try to recruit new companies to come here.

Again, the downtown area has been on the docket for probably 4 or 5 decades. We need to have a plan there, and I think bringing the housing to the downtown area and bringing foot traffic there and still having an eye on greenspace and having space for the public, I think a blend of that would be a great enhancement for the downtown and really have a practical view of what that corridor could look like. I see other communities such as Chagrin Falls and Brecksville that

they have the quaint downtown areas, and the potential is there. It's just that we have to really work hard to make that a reality.

Again, the continued innovation of our Community Services Department, and it's amazing what they have done during the pandemic. When other communities like the Mayor said were shutting down or putting a pause on their services, our Community Services Department has gone, I know there are a number of things this summer that they had with movies and things of that nature and the concerts. They really engaged the community, and the people really looked forward to those events.

Then finally as far as the safety forces go, I think and a number of people have mentioned boots on the ground, having that presence there and again communication. When something comes out such as the car thefts and that, to communicate to the public like we have been doing lately to let them know to be extra cautious and vigilant and to work hand-in-hand with the Police. I think these cameras are going to be a big help, and again I would like to see a few more Police officers. I would rather invest in actual officers than an auxiliary facility at this time, at least for now to see if that would help stem the tide.

Last but not least, the infrastructure; and I know Jim you have worked very close to make improvements on getting to these projects and being cooperative with our residents and everything and also I know Dale has worked hard on our road infrastructure. That's primarily, like Kenn mentioned, our basic services are still the focus that we should be concerned with. That's safety and the infrastructure of our roads and sewers in making sure that flooding is kept to a minimum, and I think that the program works well. It works well, and Kathleen mentioned it, the use of the committees. I think we all take ownership. Jim has taken ownership of the utilities area. Kenn now we have Economic Development. We have more Council involvement with that and oversight. Chris you have been enthusiastic and keeping track and promoting Public Lands & Building issues. Tom with the Safety; so we each have an area; it's impossible to try to concentrate on all the areas, you get exhausted. If you concentrate on your area and bring Council along with you, I think we can accomplish a lot more and work with the Administration a lot more intelligently.

I guess there's one more final is that the swift and accurate communication from the City. I think now with social media being as such on the forefront, half of the stuff, maybe even over half of the stuff is not true; it's more opinion than fact. We need the City to communicate with the residents, communicate with us as the elected representatives of the residents of what the accurate story is before these rumors run rampant and take a life of their own. So, I know that it's very important for us to stay on the forefront on the social media issue too.

So, that covers my report. It was kind of scattered there, but I wanted to mention as many things as possible that go through my mind; and again, all of this, there's no doubt that we are all dedicated to this City. The big thing is to work together. If we can accomplish even a small part of these or half of these, we have done our job. Again, it takes work with both the Mayor, the Administration and also Finance to see what we can afford or shouldn't get involved with to

make sure the financial future of our City is a staple too. That's my report. So, I think we move right on, Vern you have the floor next.

Finance Director Blaze said thank you Vice Mayor, Mayor, Council, thank you for the opportunity to participate this morning. I heard a lot of great input already, and you know what, I'm going to start my timer to make sure I keep to 10 minutes here.

I feel honored to be able to participate in a forum and venue like this where the leadership team that the community has selected is gathered together to plan the City's future. I think that's a great opportunity for all of us.

Councilperson Synek you said it cuts both ways about going first. Don't forget that old saying, first impressions are lasting impressions. So, you kind of set the bar for us and thank you for that this morning.

Vice Mayor Grendel you mentioned Councilperson Crooks in having some hand in starting this planning process, and Councilperson Crooks and I, when we served on Council back in the early 2000's we kind of developed a relationship because both of us had developed an interest in strategic planning and this whole planning process. On a cold, gray, drab, dreary winter mornings like this on Saturdays, Jim Crooks and I used to take Jon Jensen, he used to live on Brookside Road who was a high up in the Precision Metalforming Association and was critical in bringing that organization as an entity located in Independence. We would take him out to breakfast on Saturday mornings like this, and we would pick his brain about strategic planning. He would brain dump on us, and we were just like sponges and absorbed all of his experience and all his knowledge. He had some great stories. He had some great learning tools for us, and his strategic planning mindset that he engrained in us is with me today. I try to take it in all the time and my service here to the public, and I am going to share the screen again and hopefully that screen is up; and you can see on the top it starts with Strategic Planning Basics. I guess in my remaining whatever time period I have here, I am just taking a little bit different focus than what the 7 of you have done already. I think everything that you have said and done to this point is a critical component of this whole strategic planning process, and Mr. Jensen always emphasized that as basic as the mission and vision is, sometimes it gets short trimmed or it's done once, and then it's kept at the same mission and the same vision forever and ever. I think he had a valid point that those two topics should be revisited every once in a while just to make sure they are still applicable for the organization. I think a number of us today, this morning have identified that the world has changed quite a bit in the last 12 months; and even if the pandemic didn't hit in 2020, we are still living in a constantly changing environment. So, answering that question, why does the City of Independence exist is valid to revisit every once in a while because of just the changing dynamics in society.

Then the vision which a lot of you are touching on this morning about your visions for the future of Independence, describing in our case the City's ideal future state; and I appreciate what Mr. Jensen engrained into Councilperson Crooks and myself in that trying to keep things as simple as possible. Simple doesn't mean easy, but trying to present things in a manner that people could

understand. Sometimes if you throw out the concept of hey let's have this strategic planning process, some people's eyes glaze over, and they are like geeze another long meeting. Well, it doesn't have to be any more complicated than what a couple of you have identified already this morning; and that's just simply identifying where's your organization now collectively after the discussions have been had, the visions have been crafted and so forth, where does the organization either want to be, should be or need to be in creating that land to get you from Point A to Point B. It's really no more complicated than that, even though that process could be very encompassing.

Another thing that he always emphasized to us too was why the mission and vision was so important. Look in a business you have a lot of decisions to make, but in a city, in a public setting as a governmental entity, we have a lot of decisions to make at times whether it's legislation or policy or the Mayor and the departments and day-to-day decisions. I love this point, he said that any decision you make, again legislatively, policy, anything, if you keep in mind what the mission and vision of the City of Independence is, every decision you make, if it serves to enhance and validate the mission, and helps achieve that ideal future state, that vision, then you are making the right decision; and if you have a decision to make between yes and no, if your answering no or maybe on one of those then it doesn't well achieve the City's mission or it doesn't help achieve the City vision, then maybe you have your answer that maybe you are not quite locked in on the solution yet.

What I have here is some of the basic steps to that planning process, and I think today we are concentrating this third one, the vision, and then kind of implicit in that is the fourth one in goals. I think after the Mayor speaks our final goal was to develop some plans of action; and I think that Councilperson Kapusta you are on the right track with the follow up meetings. Look, I think we are all human, nobody wants to have any more meetings than they need, but if us as the community leaders are representing the City at a high level and help setting that strategic vision where this community wants, needs and should be in the future, we do need to get together at a strategic level a couple of times of year because it's important and it's encompassing.

That page I had at the first page, it was so engrained in me, these steps, that I actually typed this out yesterday from memory. I don't have to refer to notes, and it's not to brag or anything; but it's just when you have a passion for a subject, and you had a great mentor and teacher that taught it to you in a way that is easy to understand and easy to apply, I engrained these planning steps in my memory, and I always thank Mr. Jensen for that because it would help me crystalize my public service.

The next page I had, this I did pick a piece from various sources on line, and if everybody wants a hard copy of this, I will be glad to forward it to you. This page is not my page, but it is just a couple of short paragraphs to help in a planning process to kind of set the people who have a seat at the table, make sure that everybody is pulling in the same direction.

So, then I just use my final time, and I will use my final two minutes here just to present just at a high level, I went through an abbreviated version, I didn't make it all the way through because

obviously we have a Finance Department to run here; but I did set time apart, and trying to go through very abbreviated version of a strategic planning process starting with the vision statement. I would just throw out, I think our vision statement might be right for revisiting and discussion, not saying it has to be changed; but I believe it's focused on essential services in the most effective and efficient manner. It might need revisiting and discussed because I think all of us will agree that the City of Independence is well beyond just providing essential services. We provide services that tie into our vision statement that make us a premier community; and if we are just stuck on a level of providing essential services, then maybe we are just a community like every other. That's a detail, that's in the weeds, just a thought for a future meeting.

I listed some strengths, I didn't apply these in writing because I think last week in my weekly report; and as we develop our goals and action plans, if we can keep these strengths and any other strengths that the collective body on this wall can add to, I think every decision we make at that point will then be the right decision for the City.

I wasn't able to come up with a ton of weaknesses, not to say that they are not out there; but I didn't focus a lot of time on that. I focused time on opportunities. I know this meeting is heavily economic development oriented. A lot of the opportunities we have are economic development related, and those tie into our finances; and then those tie into us being able to provide services beyond a basic level and help make us a premier community.

I too see a number of threats. We don't know how this remote work trend, if it's going to be a short term coping mechanism or if it's going to be a long term trend; and then how either the Ohio Supreme Court or the U.S. Supreme Court is going to rule on the ability to tax people who aren't physically present in your community.

The hotel/motel lodging, we talked about that. It's a good thing, it's great to be able to host events and have people come in the community, stay in the community, visit the community; but it's also a threat too because if Chief Kilbane was on the line, I think he would agree that a lot of his team's time and energy is devoted to issues at our lodging establishments, especially this past year, because of their economic situation. That ties into another threat, the crime.

Housing maintenance, I really think our focus on that, that we have embarked on is critical to stay on that and develop an even more, that could be the slippery slope of the community's downfall decades out. If certain things that homeowners or commercial property owners are allowed to do or allowed to get away with, if that is allowed to continue, and it multiplies, eventually we become like every other community. So, maintaining these high standards, not in a heavy handed way, but in a way that people understand. You come to Independence, there is an expectation level here, and I agree with the City's vision statement pretty much as it is. I put "the" and "a" in parenthesis. It's debatable if you want to be "the" premier community or "a" premier community, splitting hairs; but I think if we are on the same page that look we believe we are a premier community, everything we do is focused on not just maintaining our premier status but elevating it and multiplying it, I think we will be pulling in the right direction.

That's where I was running out of time when starting to set goals. Okay, what kind of goals, if I was just doing this by myself, what goals would I set to capitalize on Independence's strengths and opportunities and attenuate our weaknesses and threats. That to me is the focal point of everything we have to do with our vision, our goals and our action plans.

Making sure our strengths remain strengths and trying to even multiply those strengths, trying to capitalize on opportunities that either are presented to us or that we create ourselves through entrepreneurship and innovation ingenuity and then identifying and being true to ourselves, hey we are weak in this area. These are threats, but what goals and action plans could we put in place then to attenuate those weaknesses, attenuate those threats so at some point we could achieve that vision which is our ideal future state of the City.

Thank you for letting me go over 2 minutes.

Vice Mayor Grendel said thank you Vern, and I wouldn't mind having a copy of that outline that you have there just for future reference too. It was well put together.

We are at the point now where we have that 10 minute break here; so let's take a look. The time is 11:01 a.m., so maybe if we could get back, and Mayor we will start your vision at 11:10 a.m..

Mayor Kurtz said sounds like a plan.

Vice Mayor Grendel said very good. Thank you everyone wonderful job on your presentations, and we will be back in about 10 minutes.

Mayor Kurtz said don't let them hang up Dave.

Vice Mayor Grendel said we still have the Mayor, and we still have to share some ideas too, but we are doing pretty good staying along the timeline.

A short 10 minute break was taken.

Vice Mayor Grendel said the Mayor is back, and I believe all of Council is here. So, Mayor the floor is yours now for your vision.

Mayor Kurtz said I hope Council appreciates the new format we put together. I know I appreciate it because I have had a chance to listen to each of you share your thoughts and your priorities. I appreciate that very much. I also want to take a minute and just say how much I appreciate the cooperating and the working relationship we have developed over the past year. There is no way we would have been able to achieve what we achieved without that open communication and making decisions and moving forward. So, I really appreciate the successes of 2020, and I am excited about moving forward to 2021.

I was listening to everyone, and it provoked both passion and a protective guard for me. I get very passionate when I listen to the energy that's being generated from the comments that you were making, and then I become protective when I think of the challenges we are experiencing on the outside right now, the Government executive order; and the number of Zooms I have participated in. They asked me to participate in the Tax Committee that the Mayors' Association is addressing, the income tax, which several of you mentioned in your discussions and the impact that's having on us. So, I spent an inordinate amount of time on issues outside of the community, but that's the protective part of me that takes hold when I start thinking what's going on Columbus and other places.

I also believe that listening to some of your comments, the importance of planning and the idea. It starts with an idea, and I will go back to the Civic Center. We had an idea, we created a plan that we got buy in from everybody; and then we implemented that plan. We constructed it, and then I like to as a business person, I live to review our success. One of the things I remember was, we built this on the concept of bringing people together, that sense of community. Then I got a call one day, and Dorothy Ornas was telling me, she was the first Community Services Director, she said it's not quite working the way you thought, people coming in here. I asked why, and she said come and sit in the parking lot; so I did for a couple of days. I saw what we created was a glorified babysitting service. People would drop off their kids and then take off and do something and come back. So, that's morphed into our before school program, our after school program; and so all of this starts with an idea, and then by persevering and moving forward that we continually find ways to refine those ideas into something that is benefited by the community.

I think back, and I may be the longest serving Mayor, but I could tell you in my many years of service, I have never been tested like this health crisis has tested us. It has tested not only myself, it has tested our staff; and I am sure it has tested each one of you, both as a Councilperson and individually. I would like to think that for sure, like the rest of the world, we will be transitioning; and we are in the middle of that transition to the next normal, not a new normal, a next normal.

So, as we define the strategy, and we allow ourselves to keep moving forward; we want to make sure that we have that strong sense of community, that we maintain the residents' quality of life, and we support our business districts. So, the question is how do we do that? Well I believe we have to be very proactive. We can't sit around waiting for something from Columbus or something from Washington to come out and say here's the direction you are going to take. Our business community is reinventing themselves as we speak, and we have a pulse on that through our various departmental heads. We need to be more engaged in that process. I heard you say about making sure we have the right number of staff people to take advantage of our resources, but also utilize our resources to help support our business community and enhance that quality of life for our residents. So, we need to make sure that we are doing that. You have helped in that process by our branding. That is one small tool, and if Debi would put up the screen. I was thoroughly inspired, we had a get-together with a small group on the first initial kickoff of our interview and processes that are going to take us through this process. The timeline you see on

your screen gives us some discipline, gives us some coordinated effort in order to make sure, and what they heard was, look it, they expect results. They expect a timeline that the Council is going to expect results, and we can do that if we follow a disciplined strategy; and what you see before you is the disciplined strategy they put together in working with Jessica and our Economic Development, our core people here. We intend to adhere to this schedule as practical as possible, and I really appreciated Councilperson Kapusta and Vice Mayor Grendel's input. I think that they will, like me, you have become very passionate about when you think about the history, the experience that we have all gone through, and then being able to know you can participate and make a difference in the future. That's really what we are trying to do.

I think that this branding exercise, it may sound like a small thing; but it really creates a cohesive nature of bringing things together, ideas, people. So, it's going to take on a much greater effect and impact than just our initial thoughts.

As we talk about branding, and we talk about the future; we have to talk about the digital age and the citywide integration. What do I mean when I say that? We have to catch up with the world quite frankly. We still pull out a box and talk about who is at what plot in the cemetery. There are so many better utilizations of technology; and quite frankly if you talk to younger people and even ourselves, without our smart phones what would we be able to do? You talk to the schools, you talk to the people how they shop today, how they are reworking their whole thought process and how we go to school, how we shop, how we live, how we work. It's all being driven by time, efficiency and technology. We need to improve citizen services with better cross-communication between departments and resolve some of the resident issues. Although we do a great job in so many respects, we can do better; and we will do better with your support as we introduce new ways to communicate more effectively. You planted the seed several years ago when you introduced technology to the Building Department, and by doing so, you gave us a great foundation to move forward and we are in that process right now. We are preparing to deliver to Council a strategy that will allow us to incorporate additional technology and cross-communicate with each department and be able to better utilize our assets, maintain our assets, track our resources, our projects, our events and not have to do a silo effect but crossing over silos we will be able to move interactively through the silos rather than having to stay disciplined with each individual silo. We intend to do that by presenting legislation to you in the near future that will allow us to further expand what we did with the Building Department.

Now we are going to need some people. Several of you eluded to the need to look at how we can enhance our quality of life for our residents and assist our business community. A GIS Specialist, it has become much more apparent to both the Engineering group, the Economic Development group and the Building group that we need to have someone that is dedicated to making sure that all the information we generate is available, properly utilized and can enhance our service and serviceability.

An Economic Development Specialist, that was also mentioned. Making sure that we can communicate more effectively with our business population and the changing dynamic that they are going through and that we are pulsing on a daily basis.

Community Resources Coordinator/Social Services, we know there is a void there; and it's not that we have avoided the situation, it's that we are trying to accept the challenges with Marilyn's death, along with the Covid, along with trying to navigate through and protect our employees from a health perspective. We are not blinded by it, but we are prioritizing it for 2021. So, a lot of this is transitioning through a post-pandemic environment.

You talked about downtown. Yes, through your support we have hired Dimit. We have also, we are talking with several developers about a strategy, both working with St. Michael's on the west side and their professionals and then driving the engine on the east side. We have concluded, and several of you have announced the fact that downtown housing is important. Getting the housing issue off the blocks and get it moving; and then we will gravitate into the retail and the rest of the Route 21 impact, Brecksville Road itself. We are going to work through that, and we are excited about it; and we will be presenting to Council hopefully in the near future some of the opportunities for you to further digest and then determine if we can be cohesive enough to create a strategy to move forward yet this year.

Public safety has been another issue, a number of you mentioned it; and we agree. That's why we created the legislation through your support and Council committee support with the cameras. That's only step one; I have authorized the Civil Service Commission to create two lists for Police Department, one would be for new hires and one would be for lateral moves. We would hope to get that in the first quarter, and we would hope to be able to begin stabilizing our workforce, both from a numbers standpoint, but also from the ability to get training on board and make sure we move the ball forward in that area. I do agree with you that there is a mere presence of having officers on Rockside Road is important, making sure that our residential community also is supported. So, we are moving forward with both technology and personnel. I have also asked our existing personnel to give me their perspective on our existing facility so that we can see. That building is going to be 40 years old next year, and so we need to really explore what we want to do with that facility, what we need to do to make sure that we are getting the best, it's the best environment for our people who work there. Those are just some of the things we are looking at upgrading to make sure that safety is a priority.

I can talk a long time about the lesser important issues such as fencing, such as some of the technology, some of the law enforcement tools that we are going to utilize, but I would like to stay on a higher level; and then we can gravitate to that at committee meetings in the future.

Economic Development, look this is probably one of the biggest areas that several of you have shared your thoughts and consistent with the Administration's at this point, rethinking how we support our business community as they emerge from the pandemic. Talking with not only the CEO's but also the people in the trenches, we need to find an opportunity to deal with both the way things are evolving, how people shop, what they expect, the conveniences of the employees, they need walkable, they need convenience items. They need to be able to live and work, or at least work and have some support while they are at work. It's no longer just 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. and go home to your family. It's integration of 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. work, but family is going to be part of that integration process. So, this is how things are evolving in terms of what

we are hearing and pulsing from our business community. We are looking at how we can quickly adapt and adjust to the next normal for our business community because each and every business is trying to figure out what they need to be successful and continue their success in the future.

A little ancillary issue is that NOACA has picked our location as one of the areas they would like to see charging stations for the next evolution of electric vehicles; and so it has to be on public property. That is one of their provisions. So, we are working on that, and I will be presenting something to Council hopefully in the very near future that addresses some of these next gen type of concepts.

Community appearance was also an item that you discussed. We hired someone, we created a whole new normal of how we go to business. We don't just drive by and write a letter to somebody. We drive by if people call us, or we identify a problem area; we drive by, we identify it, confirm it, and then we stop and talk to the people. We now try to engage the people and ask them as it was mentioned, is there a personal problem? Is there a financial problem? Is it something that we can work with you over time? Or do we have to take the next step of there's got to be some discipline. I have brought several different initiatives to Council because when it gets to your point, I have exhausted most of my opportunities to communicate with them, or at least it sets a new foundation for future communication with them. We have achieved both of those through the legislative process. We have had better communication with those who have been delinquent, and we have also had to take steps to say okay we are done, we have exhausted every other avenue. So, with your support, we will continue that. I think you are going to see more clean up, more property protection; and we are going to try to do it in a way that affords people the opportunity to help us help them. If that doesn't work, then we will go to the next level; but so far we have had some success, and we have been able to intercede between two disputing neighbors in some elements. You have helped us with some legislation. So, through this legislative effort, we are making progress, and I think we will continue to see the benefits of that this year.

Also, you talked about, another important issue is schools. I communicated with the Superintendent, the Treasurer as late as this week; and they are motivated, and we are going to come to Council. We believe that some of you indicated that the success of our past public/private partnerships, the School/City partnerships, the fact of sharing resources, sharing dollars is something that's been beneficial with the Shared Use Facility. I think the Superintendent and myself and of course you will make that decision when it comes to money and property; but we see the opportunity, especially since we have been dealing with Covid, of an elementary Shared Use Facility, something that we can do the same on the lower end as on the upper end. So, you would go to school at the primary school, and then the City would manage that wing of the building to keep those students, the young people engaged. It would help the parents also. So, the schools and our initiative, that's going to be something that I will be talking to each of you about and take the temperature in terms of if you are willing to participate and to what extent and how we can move this forward.

It's really important that we stay focused on some of these issues that we planted seeds with. We talked about downtown development. We talked about property. We have talked about a number of different things throughout this community. It was mentioned that, I am hoping to see a local strategy for the Cloverleaf area in the near future. Once that comes to my attention, I will make sure I bring it to Council's attention because that is an uncut diamond. That is something that I think we can transition to something that's not only as the Vice Mayor eluded to, keeping some of our better customers, but also to enhance the quality of life, whether it be to utilize the river, whether it be used to clean up the Cloverleaf area as one of the entrance points to our City. Also, to be able to merge businesses into that area that will enhance our revenue stream for the future.

When we talk about the northwest quadrant, you know, keep in mind that things have changed, people have spent 2020 trying to hold on to some of their resources, trying to figure out what is going to be the next best thing; and so I don't find fault with the contracted company that we are dealing with for the northwest quadrant. We push and prod a little bit, but we will see how we work together to create something that's going to be of value for decades to come. The old traditional model that I was part of over the past several decades is not the one that's going to take us to 2030. So, we need to be nimble. It's going to take a very concerted effort and cooperation. It's going to take everyone to be willing to have a greater appreciation of what it's going to take to go forward and how we can go forward together to enhance our business community.

The areas in those quadrants, some of those areas, they may not have buildings on them. They may have other different structures that enhance that experience, the employee experience, whether they be walking paths. Walking paths and trails throughout the community is going to be an important component going forward. As we discovered this year with our residents taking walks and the number of calls that I get from residents who told me about the ailing goose in the park, and how people are identifying specifics to each of the areas that we manage this year because they are spending more time doing those things. So, what makes me more aware of the fact that we have an opportunity to take advantage of some of our natural resources and properties to be able to put our trails in. Hemlock Trail has been a huge success. So, now we have to look at the next phase or the next dimension of that throughout other areas of the community to get people safely throughout our City to our main campus.

So, these are just some of the things that add flavor to this discussion as we think about our assets, asset management, our people. So, at the end of the day, again I want to reaffirm the fact that we have had a great relationship this past year. I love the fact that we don't always agree, but we find some common thread to get through this and find a conclusion that will measure our success going forward. We will continue to work as a team even though I know it's election year for some of us; thank God I am not one of them. I can tell you one thing, I have no qualms about telling the public that working with this team has been good for them, good for our community.

So, with that, I think I probably went over my 10 minutes Vice Mayor, and I apologize for that; but this is but a drop, a thumbnail of all the different dynamics we are dealing with. I can't say enough about how important some of these more global issues, whether it be at the Federal level,

or the State level, could impact our community. That's why I am engaged. I got back on the Executive, they put me back on the Executive Committee for the Mayors' Association; and I am on the specific Tax Committee because I need to pulse this for our benefit because this is going to be huge. I have been out talking with the business community. Everyone is trying to figure out. I am confident that we can move forward; and as long as we find the appropriate vehicles to take care of our business community, to make that a magnet for them to stay in Independence, for those who drive through, who work here and those who live here, enhance the quality of life, and you are experiencing it in the City of Independence. This next normal will be to our advantage.

With that, again thank you all for the cooperation this past year, and I am excited about the future this year and what we are going to be able to achieve together by working together.

Vice Mayor Grendel said thank you Mayor. Again, we have had some good discussions, and I think now and I look at the agenda and it says discuss and prioritize Council Member ideas and themes. I know Kathleen you mentioned, and a few of you have mentioned how they enjoy working through the committee process. I think we have had, especially the last few months, it seems like we have had a number of committee meetings which we have stayed focused on certain things. I think what we can do maybe, it's kind of hard with some of these to put them into a committee form; but definitely Mayor you mentioned the downtown development. It should be one of our items that we prioritize for this year. So, if we can together, maybe make a list here of maybe 5 to 7 or 8 items that we feel that are important to be addressed this year and then somehow incorporate that in our meeting, maybe at the future Strategic Planning meeting like we had last year, we had a few at the beginning of the year.

To start off, I see Tom on the screen there. Tom, maybe something in the safety area that we can work with; I think Mayor you mentioned about maybe hiring some new Police officers. I think we talked about, we are having the cameras installed; so see how that has worked. Are they installed already Mayor or are they in the process of being installed?

Mayor Kurtz said they are not hooked up. They are in the process of being installed.

Vice Mayor Grendel said I see because I would like to have a follow up after about 3 or 4 months of operation as to how these are working so we have a better idea. We can explain to the public this is how it has enhances our safety there in these areas where they are implemented. So, Tom I am thinking maybe in your area of safety, what would you like to prioritize for the coming year?

Councilperson Narduzzi said as the Safety meetings go Dave, I think this Council we always get together no matter what committee is having a meeting, Council seems to always be there. So, on the big issues like safety, I mean I think a workshop would be better because we aren't going to be talking about little specific details. That we can have Safety meetings for, but for the big picture of what we want our safety forces to accomplish would be better done in a workshop. More minds are better than just the 3 of us talking about it.

Vice Mayor Grendel said our committee meetings have seemed to turn in to be workshops because the attendance is excellent instead of just the 3 committee meetings. I have seen a majority of them have at least an additional 2 or 3 Council Members there. As far as a workshop goes, I would like to see that we put it all together as far as manpower, the cameras, other strategies, so that again we are not reactionary, but we are being proactive as far as trying to address some of these issues.

Councilperson Narduzzi said I don't think the implementation of how we are going to do this, that's up to the Mayor and the Chief to decide. That's their jobs. I want to be able for Council to give us the funding, make sure the funding is there to let them be able to implement what they want to implement. I am not a Safety Director. I don't have any clue of what should be done, but I want to be able to give them the tools that they need to do what they think should be done. You have to see where I'm coming from.

Vice Mayor Grendel said our job is for oversight and again to provide the financial wherewithal, but also to be aware of what is taking place; so this way we can disseminate information to the public that we are on top of things as far as safety in their neighborhood and safety on Rockside and in certain areas. I think that gives people, knowing that we are on top of things and planning; they know that we are aware of issues like that. I think safety is the premier one, the premier service that we provide.

Mayor Kurtz said Vice Mayor if I may. What you are saying is that as you prioritize today's discussion, safety is one of the priorities; and of that what we will do, we will then through our safety personnel, we will talk about personnel, technology, communication and facilities. Then we will frame that as a discussion for the committee, and then if it morphs into more of a workshop, that's fine. We will create the foundation so that you can determine the funding, and the end result will be funding and communication.

Vice Mayor Grendel said very good because I look back, I was the Chairman of the Safety Committee back during the first go around and everything; and I had regular scheduled meetings with Pete Nelson and John Nicastro at the time. I thought it was good. The Council was aware of the issues coming up. We were made aware of their needs and also grants that they were involved with. It kind of gave us a greater appreciation that we were able to share with the community; this is what we have. Both of those gentlemen, like the two that we have now, Chief Rega and Chief Kilbane, they have a done a great job. The communication of that, just reinforcing that, especially with these Zoom meetings, we can have a quick hour meeting; and we are up to date on matters. That's the big thing that Council wants, that we like to be kept up to date and informed so that we can share that news with the public that we know what's going on with the Administration and with these important issues, not be reactive but again be part of the process and be able to understand the thinking behind this. We appreciate more what you are trying to attempt at the administrative level.

Mayor Kurtz said the first one is safety, that's one of the priorities.

Vice Mayor Grendel said because social media is big on exaggerating things that are happening. We are in the dark. We are not sure what's going on. Part of this safety part is the communication, which Tom mentioned and I agree. The Administration has been much better getting the information out to us so we know what is fact and not exaggeration that's brought on. It's a number of issues, but I think having a workshop or a committee meeting may be here in the springtime will set the tone for the year.

To me, that's one of the priorities is safety; and again it's not one particular issue but an accumulation of a number of things; and Tom I know that is your Chairmanship so we will rely on you as far as when you want to call a meeting or how we handle something like that.

This committee thing, if we take ownership of different areas, it makes it easier because Council has a person there who is getting the information and deciding when it's important for all of us to get together and go over those ideas.

Now I see Kenn there too, and Kenn you had a couple. I know you are with the schools and so is Kathleen. This is not in any specific order, but I am looking at maybe the school issue to take the forefront too and maybe trying to again, we are not supplanting their priorities with ours; we are trying to be in a cooperative effort where we are working with the schools and trying to reach common ground and trying to facilitate the use of assets. So, I would call that the schools should be a priority. We did have one meeting early last year with the School Board, and maybe look into something of that down the road. Greg, once you and Superintendent feel it's the optimum time to present ideas to us. I think that would be a priority again to have that in the near future. We want to be allies with the schools, we don't want to be opponents. So, hearing these and hashing them out I think is a positive.

Mayor Kurtz said we have had open communication in terms of Covid impact and challenges of being in session, educating remotely; so it's been a moving target all year.

Vice Mayor Grendel said this has been a tough year. The school officials have had enough issues of their own with Covid that it's kind of hard, but again we want to have an eye on the future and be able to, once we are past this Covid pandemic issue, that we can hit the floor running and be working with them to make sure that our educational needs are being met. For communities, if you don't have solid schools, everything else might go right down the tubes as far as our residents are concerned. I had that as Number 2, and then since Kenn you are on the screen, Economic Development which you are the Chairman of. I think that's very critical because we are going to have to transition, and I think it's important again, I would like all of Council to be able to judge on what we are paying for with ahkia to work hand-in-hand with them and maximize what they can provide for us. This will give us a far better opportunity than we had with the previous company we had for branding that we are able to really see if that's good use of our monies. So, I think that's going to be ongoing, and I think that we are going to have a lot of economic development dialogue and work here in the first half of the year.

I see Kathleen on my screen so Kathleen you are of course, you have a long time with Community Services, not only on Council, but also actively working in that department. So, I think you do an excellent job in the periodic quarterly meetings that you have, but again that's something that we have to keep on top of because I think they have done a super job in being productive during this pandemic time for all of our residents. Any thought about that Kathleen?

Councilperson Kapusta said I have heard the Mayor say in the past that he's looking at the organizational structure and the manpower; and I know that it's been a bit now since Marilyn has been gone. I have to believe that the staff on her side wants some ongoing direction. Amber I think has been doing a great job in leading the team, but I know they want to start to move to the next level. We know that there is activity also on the physical structure of the building with some interest in do we need to change some things in the kitchen through the grant that Councilperson Trakas was instrumental in getting as well as some of the other things like the entryway that we have talked about for so many years, and now seems to make even more sense to me in terms of when we look at collectively at our safety issues we have been talking about. We know what issues we have been dealing with in terms of the pandemic. Now it seems like it's almost a given that we have to put some effort on assessing whether that's a viable option for us to make a joint entryway to that building.

I think the third point with Community Services on both sides, I believe we have seen them do a yeoman's job in getting their programming adaptive to these unique times; and I know that they are looking towards what are we going to do now? What does that adaptation mean for the oncoming year because in talking with one of them for instance the goal was let's do a bingo, let's bring some of the seniors back to the building, very structured with registering and everything. So, it was all good with social distancing. That didn't quite go as they wanted; so I know they are regrouping, and that's going to be an important thing to focus on this year as well.

Vice Mayor Grendel said very good, and Mayor I have a question. In Kathleen's old position, Social Services, again meeting with a lot of residents in my office doing legal work for them or tax work and that; with the elderly they miss someone in Kathleen's position, they look forward to someone in the City who can give them guidance on a variety of issues and everything, a person who they can trust. Kathleen, your name has come up many times with people, and also your predecessor. They rely on in this crazy world that they hear all these things on TV; they rely on somebody from the City who they can trust to give them guidance in certain areas, whether it be Social Security or Medicare or any number of issues. Is there any plan to bring a person in that position?

Mayor Kurtz said I apologize because when I framed it in my additional staff needs, I asked for an Economic Development Specialist. I said Community Resource Coordinator/Social Worker. That's how I defined it, but it's the same position.

Vice Mayor Grendel said very good.

Mayor Kurtz said it's going to be more important the post-pandemic, believe me. Kathleen is spot on.

Councilperson Kapusta said and to reinforce that, Mayor knows that I just passed on communication to him that was forwarded to me how one of our residents reached out to the City of Brecksville saying I need to talk with somebody in a social worker capacity, what do you have. So, I wanted the Mayor to be aware of that. The need is definitely there.

Councilperson Narduzzi said that is so true on a personal basis. I have a father-in-law who doesn't believe what his kids tell him. They don't listen to us anymore. I guess that's just the way it is. They want to speak to somebody who they think knows it all on a professional level. I can see where the elderly miss having that person to contact.

Vice Mayor Grendel said very good, thanks Tom.

Let's move on as far as different areas. I see Jim, and I think I can put this both to Jim and Dale. You are our main point persons on Council as far as infrastructure goes because that's an area that the City really owes more than anything else to their public to make sure that their infrastructure continues to support the residential area, the commercial area. Jim, I think you had brought up in your presentation a few things you would like to see done as far as a private/public type of partnership in different areas like that in how you handle issues. Any additional input on that?

Councilperson Trakas said I would like to have a series of hearings on all the ideas that everybody came up with today, including the Mayor's left over from last year and some of the new ones that are coming up. Obviously, the community's priorities on infrastructure are huge and having the opportunity to address each and every one of these ideas I think is important. So, we will probably have a monthly meeting to go through this and maybe when we check back in May or June in a mid-year review, we might have some answers and also be able to promulgate some policies or legislation in support of, in combination with some of these ideas. I thought that the Joint Streets & Utilities meeting was particularly productive a few weeks back, and maybe we could consider doing a few of those because there is a lot of overlap between the two.

Mayor Kurtz said one thing if I may Vice Mayor. Several people eluded to the focus on the one dimension of real estate, but I need to make sure it's clear because the City is embedded of every aspect of real estate within the community because every time there's a challenge, whether it be a road, a sewer, there is right-of-way, there's easements, there's ownership. So, we sometimes get caught up, I see myself getting caught up in the one silo of what we own or what we don't own; and really it should be a broader stroke of what we manage. We manage almost every piece of real estate in one way or the other throughout the community. So, that's where the challenge I think in trying to coordinate all of that comes into play; and we sometimes focus on pieces of property that we are purchasing or we bought. Really, the real nuts and bolts of it is all the right-of-way and the easements that we have to deal with on a daily basis throughout the community.

Vice Mayor Grendel said thank you Greg.

Then Dale I will let you have an opportunity. Also, we have road projects. We had a big rush two years ago of a number of projects. We still have some this year, as well as our maintenance program too and everything. I think again we need to keep on top of those projects and to prioritize what the most important projects are. Do you have anything to add to that Dale?

Councilperson Veverka said well the one thing I would mention obviously someone indicated to me there wasn't very much done at the January Council meeting, but I look towards putting your money where your mouth is for 2021, and Ordinance 2021-5 through 9 were all critical issues related to infrastructure. I mean we added money to each of those areas, whether it be sewers or whatever other contract, service contract, those things that basically we need to really stay on top of that are really critical needs to continue to move the community forward. I was very pleased with the fact that all of the Council Members recognized that, and that it was put forward in that direction.

I did enjoy the combined meeting with Utilities because Utilities, Streets & Sidewalks, they do go hand-in-hand as far as making life most livable for residents, whether it's the creek maintenance, whether it's the street pavement or rebuilding; but maintaining that emphasis in those areas is critically important as we go forward as the times will be.

Vice Mayor Grendel said very good. It is critical I think both with Jim and Dale and your committees that we meet early on to see what our goals are for the year, maybe the financing available, talking with our Finance Director to see what's reasonable and what we can accomplish this year. If there is bids to be had, the earlier the better because a lot of times we don't have the bids ready to go out, and we are all of a sudden going into mid to late summer or even fall and starting these projects. It would be nice to get them early. So, it's good to have that planning session early on so we have an idea; and of course there's always the opportunity coming up, and we addressed that with Schaaf Road this last year and a few other things. It is good to have at least a game plan going into the year; and I think a lot of that is going to happen when we do our Finance Committee meeting here on February 2nd where we are going to review the Five-Year Plan. We will take a hard look at that to make it more realistic on what we are going to accomplish this year, what we need to maybe push to the right and be able to have a workable plan there with that. That goes hand-in-hand with both of your committees.

Councilperson Veverka said and Dave I made contact this past week or the end of last week with City Engineer Don Ramm in the process of trying to get things set up because I know that this is when we tee up the ball for street projects; and I know that a couple of years in the past we got off to a little bit of a slow start. We were battling the fall and the questionable weather and could we get the asphalt down. I know that when it came to Hemlock Trail, we weren't able to get accomplished what we hoped to because the winter hit early. So, I have been in contact with Don related to looking at when we could set up a meeting; and again, in my mind's eye, it doesn't necessarily need to be an extremely complicated meeting, but basically a focus on just

simply those main areas that we need to make sure we kick off in a timely manner. He said he's spending a lot of time with the easements and other things related to the sidewalk projects on Highland Drive; and I understand that. I am looking for hopefully a meeting that will be more of a thumbnail and just an indication to us that we are on target with those projects kicking off in a timely manner.

Vice Mayor Grendel said thank you Dale. Now Chris you are next, last but not least, with Public Lands & Buildings. We had an important meeting at the end of the year, and you have a number of issues, the least of them being the enhancements we are going to make to security to the City Hall and the Civic Center, as well as the issues down there at the cemetery. I will let you have the floor and what you see some of the goals in your committee.

Councilperson Walchanowicz said I think goal Number 1 is security for City Hall and obviously the Civic Center, taking advantage of the amazing grant that Councilperson Trakas was able to help us get for Community Services in the kitchen. I know that's long overdue, especially I know a lot of the meals aren't cooked here, but I think that would help a lot, getting all of that situated for those folks.

The cemetery, although it may not be with these times priority Number 1, it's still something that needs to get some traction. We are starting to be limited on space. That would not be one of my top priorities the first quarter, but definitely getting the Civic Center and City Hall started during this Covid time when we don't have as many people there as we do when we have talked about it before, getting that knocked off.

I am interested to see the drawings of what the Mayor and GPD and Mr. Casini will have for the canopy and the entrance because I think that's going to make things a lot easier and a lot safer for our residents to come in and out of the facility.

Moving forward with downtown and getting Kin properties handled so we can get the ball moving downtown.

Mayor Kurtz said if I might add a couple of more. We want him to work extra hard this year don't we?

Vice Mayor Grendel said definitely.

Mayor Kurtz said depending on the appetite of Council with the elementary Shared Use Facility, something to talk about.

I mentioned it briefly, but this electronic charging station. It has to be on public property. So, we have several different options we are reviewing right now, but at the appropriate time we will bring it to Council as a Lands Committee meeting and take the temperature on that one too.

Vice Mayor Grendel said very good Greg.

I think getting to the Finance Committee, and I look forward Vern to begin working with you on keeping the forefront. There are a lot of things we would like to accomplish. There are a lot of things we have to keep a mindful eye on, and that is the revenue coming into the City, the different issues you brought up to us already which a decision won't have to be made until later in the year about that refinancing of some of that debt that we have. Everything overlaps what we want to do that has to deal with money and the proper handling of it and the proper planning of it. So, there will be Finance meetings throughout the year that we would like to be able to make sure that we are accurate with our planning.

I know a few of the Members have been, I know the Five-Year Plan isn't an accurate reading; and we use it as a guide, but it's one that can change at the drop of a hat with opportunities and fluctuates from time to time. We will try to enhance even our planning and take an opportunity to understand better the financial aspect of these things because you give us some of your thoughts; and we need to keep a mindful eye on that we might want a number of things to get accomplished, but we might only be able to afford doing so many of them and maybe keep an eye on as far as our borrowing goes too.

Throughout the year what I see is that we should have Finance meetings, and we will make sure that we keep in our planning that we keep that in mind that don't overspend. That was why I was concerned last year with the creation of the new Sewer Department. We have to really study that to see if it's an enhancement or makes financial sense or what we are doing with specialized companies doing some of this work and having them contract out. We have to do a good financial analysis of the pros and cons so the Council Members can be on top of things too with the idea that it sounds good, but maybe it's a little costly for us or maybe we have to plan a little better financially to account for that or pay for that program. That's going to be ongoing, especially with the pandemic and that, we have to keep in mind that it's a moving target too as far as what we can expect for revenue; and we have to keep up-to-date and informed on that. You do a good job in your weekly newsletters keeping us informed on the most latest developments and that.

We have a framework here for each committee because this way we take ownership of what we can handle in our committee, and then take active part in other committees too. So, I believe this leads into when we can plan on having our next Strategic Planning meeting, and I think Jim you mentioned spring, maybe sometime in April or May when we can have an update to see how we are coming along with some of these that we rated as high priorities. Any input from Council on that thought?

Councilperson Trakas said I would just say maybe we have like a May and then a September so you have several follow ups. You have almost a quarterly Strategic Planning, how we are doing on the plans. Do we need to update them? Those types of things so that we keep on track towards our goals.

Vice Mayor Grendel said very good Jim, and what's good in that regard too because there might be a new issue by the time April or September comes up. We might have something new on the plate to assist the Mayor with.

Greg, what's your thoughts as far as having a meeting either in April or May to follow up on these issues?

Mayor Kurtz said I agree with the strategy of having committees settle in, prioritize their different issues the first quarter; and then we get into the second quarter, May somewhere in that time, we would probably be settled in and advancing the ball on some of the issues; so we will have more to report. Then we can refocus or reprioritize at that point if necessary because like you said, things change on a dime right now. I am agreeable. I think that would be appropriate.

Vice Mayor Grendel said very good. I like the idea, by May we will have a pretty good idea of how we are working with ahkia and their feedback in on branding and things of that nature.

So, I don't know if the rest of Council have your calendars in front of you, but we can tentatively pick a Saturday in May. There are five of them to choose from, and we can always move it if necessary, but May 1st is a Saturday. I know Memorial Day is late this year, so the 29th we will want to keep away from that because that's a holiday weekend. If anybody has a suggestion what would look good, the middle of the month, May 15th? Or either of those dates really. My calendar right now they are all free.

Councilperson Trakas said May 22nd and 23rd I have a military obligation that weekend. Other than that, I am available.

Mayor Kurtz said it looks like the first two or three weekends are the only ones.

Vice Mayor Grendel asked how would May 15th work Mayor on your schedule? That's right in the middle of the month.

Mayor Kurtz said May 8th would probably be better for me if that's okay.

Vice Mayor Grendel asked any input, is May 8th a good date for everybody?

Finance Director Blaze said Vice Mayor I will throw out if that a Saturday in May is the chosen date, I will make every attempt to work on that. It's one thing to meet on a Saturday in January, in May some of us have spring coaching obligations with sporting events on Saturday and so forth. Saturday is a little bit more difficult once the weather starts breaking, not impossible. So, if Saturday works for everybody, that's fine with me, I will make it work; but just throw that out that it's a little different dynamic meeting on a Saturday in May than it is meeting on a Saturday in January.

Mayor Kurtz said that's a good point Vern. We have to be sensitive to people's their weekends. January like we said, we can do this, we can do it next month; but once the weather changes and people have obligations. I agree with you Vern. I apologize.

Councilperson Narduzzi said we could keep it on a Tuesday like all of our other meetings and just start earlier.

Mayor Kurtz said that's an idea. We could start, two hours is all we want. I don't think it has to be a three hour, it could be a two hour.

Vice Mayor Grendel said I'm just looking to have an hour and a half to two hour meeting a summary of what has taken place and everything.

Mayor Kurtz said a Tuesday would work, that's fine for that.

Vice Mayor Grendel said looking at that part of it, the first Tuesday we have Planning Commission to work with too; but we could look at April 27th which is a Tuesday.

Mayor Kurtz said or May 4th because even if we go 5:30 p.m. Planning, and we do a 3:30 p.m. Strategic Planning, either one, we will make it work.

Vice Mayor Grendel asked what's Council's preference, would you like to have it on a separate Tuesday or do you want to have it the first Tuesday and have a 3:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. session?

Councilperson Veverka said I like April 27th.

Councilperson Narduzzi said either date works for me, whatever is good with everybody else.

Councilperson Kapusta said either date is good.

Vice Mayor Grendel said since it's far in advance, let's plan on April 27th. Things can be changed depending on circumstances, but let's have a 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. session.

Councilperson Narduzzi said perfect.

Vice Mayor Grendel said this way like I said, we have it set up so that almost each of us have a department or have an issue that we are responsible for. So, we will probably do the meeting the same way with the Councilperson who is in charge of that committee or that issue would lead the discussion; and that will be the format, then we will all chime in. Of course, the Mayor will be apprising us on each issue again too. That gives us a chance. I sure hope that this is a year that we can get more things accomplished. With the pandemic you never know, the Mayor always says you have to be nimble and be able to respond to any kind of emergency or issue that comes up. We are planning, but we are mindful that we have to be flexible and be able to adjust if we are faced with something. It could be a national thing, it could be a statewide issue.

I think Mayor we are ready. We are past 12:00 p.m., so we are ready to maybe adjourn this meeting. Any other issues?

Councilperson Kapusta said I would just like to make a comment Dave. I would like to thank you for your leadership of this meeting. I think it was very productive, very organized. I loved the structure that you and the Mayor's office worked out for the way the meeting flowed; and I think it was probably one of the best. So, thank you.

Vice Mayor Grendel said you are welcome. A lot of it goes to the Mayor and Finance Director. They had the broad view, and it worked out good. Everybody had an opportunity to express their priorities and their areas of interest and everything. I think it did work out well. Mayor, I thank you for; I think ahkia, that meeting on Tuesday got us motivated to really organize and have a productive meeting.

Mayor Kurtz said I think the Communication Director did a great job with ahkia. Thank you Alla.

Vice Mayor Grendel said thank you Alla, and thank you everyone for your participation. Mark your calendars for April 27th 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. We will have a follow up there. Greg, I appreciate your being here for the three hours, and taking the time out this morning. We didn't have any legal questions, but it's good seeing you there. It's comforting to know that you are watching over us so that we don't go into uncharted territory.

Law Director O'Brien said it's the time when you miss it when you have the legal issues. Steve O'Bryan said a long time ago, the Law Director should be seen but not heard unless called upon.

Councilperson Trakas said just one quick thing speaking of Greg I was going to bring this up. I was just curious if Greg felt there was any legal challenges that we should be looking at that could be coming down the pike that we should be preparing for or anything like that? It doesn't have to take too long.

Law Director O'Brien said no, we are keeping an eye on that Buckeye case because that has tremendous ramifications to the City of Independence. That is the municipal income tax case, but nothing that I am aware of. If there's anything candidly I would probably put that in a confidential e-mail to you and the Mayor.

Councilperson Trakas said thank you.

Mayor Kurtz said I want to thank Dar for always helping me out.

Vice Mayor Grendel said we sometimes take for granted Dar and Debi and Alla and that, the work that they do behind the scenes for us; but rest assured that we really appreciate, everybody on Council I can speak for, they do appreciate your efforts and your professionalism in keeping us moving forward.

Councilperson Veverka said I just wanted to thank the Mayor for the prompt reporting by the Police Chief on that incident. I know that was very much appreciated by me and probably all my colleagues and looking forward to the effective reporting as we go into this new year helping us stay up to speed with what's going on in the community. So, thank you Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Kurtz said you are welcome.

Vice Mayor Grendel said I will entertain a motion to adjourn.

Moved by Veverka, seconded by Walchanowicz, to adjourn the Strategic Planning Committee meeting of January 23, 2021. Voice Vote: 7 yes/0 no; motion carried.

The Strategic Planning Committee meeting was then adjourned at 12:04 p.m.

Debra J. Beal, Clerk of Council
Minutes Unapproved at time of Release 01/26/21
