

**CITY OF INDEPENDENCE  
SPECIAL COUNCIL MEETING  
APRIL 19, 2022 4:00 PM  
COUNCIL CONFERENCE ROOM/VIRTUAL MEETING**

**MINUTES**

Mayor Kurtz called the Special Meeting of Council of April 19, 2022 to order at 4:12 p.m. Present were Council Members John DiGeronimo, Anthony Togliatti, Jim Trakas, Dale Veverka and Chris Walchanowicz. Vice Mayor David Grendel and Council Member Tom Narduzzi were not in attendance.

Also in attendance were Law Director Gregory J. O'Brien, Finance Director Vern Blaze, Recreation Director Tom Walchanowicz, Fire Chief Steve Rega, City Engineer Don Ramm, Community Services Director Emily Thomas, Finance Assistant Maggie Osysko and Kevin Westbrooks from GPD Group.

**PRESENT:** Councilperson Trakas, Councilperson Togliatti, Councilperson Veverka,  
Councilperson Walchanowicz, Councilperson DiGeronimo  
**ABSENT:** Vice Mayor Grendel, Councilperson Narduzzi

**FIRST READING**

**ORDINANCE NO. 2022-60** AN ORDINANCE AMENDING ORDINANCE 2022-52  
AUTHORIZING THE HIRING OF AMERICAN  
FIREWORKS COMPANY FOR PROFESSIONAL  
SERVICES FOR THE HOME DAYS AND TREE  
LIGHTING FIREWORKS DISPLAYS 2022 (**I: VICE  
MAYOR GRENDEL, COUNCILPERSON  
DIGERONIMO, COUNCILPERSON NARDUZZI**)

Mayor Kurtz said we have Ordinance 2022-60.

**Moved by Trakas, seconded by Veverka, to read by title only. Voice Vote: 5 yes/0 no; motion carried.**

**Moved by Trakas, seconded by Walchanowicz, to suspend the rules. Voice Vote: 5 yes/0 no; motion carried.**

Councilperson Veverka said I have a question.

Mayor Kurtz asked Councilperson Veverka do you want to speak or do you want the Fire Chief to speak first?

Councilperson Veverka said let the Fire Chief speak first.

Mayor Kurtz asked Chief do you want to explain what we did after the Council meeting in response to Council's request for more information?

Fire Chief Rega said yes, I contacted American Fireworks. I looked into the possibility for a fireworks display on July 4<sup>th</sup>. They informed me that they were completely booked up for July 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>, and they went on to indicate that the most of the display companies in our area are unavailable as well because there's a lot of pending contract requests out there for fireworks, and

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they are not even bidding on them. So, they looked at what they were available for. They were available for July 1<sup>st</sup>, and this was one of the original dates that we had tentatively put out there. The Rec Department and myself always kind of look ahead for this early in the year. So, with that date being available, we shifted our attention to what we could do with the current budget, and basically we concluded that if we were able to increase the budget by about \$6,500 we could tailor the shows to include this July 1<sup>st</sup> display along with the other two displays that we currently had planned for.

So, in doing so, we took the Tree Lighting event down to a \$10,000 show. It's going to be approximately 10 minutes long. The Home Days show would be approximately 15 minutes long, and cost \$15,000, and then July 1<sup>st</sup> would be about an \$18,000 show which would be around 18 minutes. I was told that the quality of the shows would maintain a similarity to what we have had in the past, just a reduction of time. Even though with less product, we are just reducing the time with the same effect.

So, that's the current proposal to increase the budget to add these shows.

Mayor Kurtz asked Councilperson Veverka do you still have a question?

Councilperson Veverka said well I just have a comment. I have always supported the Fourth of July fireworks in the past and would support it also. I guess my biggest question is we have moved the fireworks to the winter time so that we would save our deposit, and then we had Home Days fireworks because of the Covid. We didn't want to have the large situation, but I guess my question is now if we have the opportunity to do a first of July fireworks, is there really a need for one at Home Days? I thought the feedback, maybe the Community Services Director, is she on?

Fire Chief Rega said well I could probably comment on that.

Community Services Director Emily Thomas said yes, I'm on.

Mayor Kurtz said go ahead Chief.

Fire Chief Rega said researching the move from the center of town to the park area, there was a big concern on the part of the vendor that provides the rides, the ride company. It's their experience that when a venue is changed, that they see a specific drop off on attendance and eventually the event doesn't become solvent. So, they were a little bit concerned on that. The additional fireworks is another draw to that particular event, so we were looking to do two things, having more space in the park during the pandemic for people to spread out, and then the fireworks was a way to ensure that the event would be a good event and well attended.

Mayor Kurtz asked anything else you want to add Emily?

Community Services Director Thomas said the only thing I will add is just to build on the Chief's comment about a bigger draw. It allows the vendors that we have at Home Days, both our school partners and community partners to increase the opportunity for funds that they raise during that point, and so I know they appreciated that draw as well.

Mayor Kurtz said thank you. Councilperson Veverka is there anything else you wanted to add?

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Councilperson Veverka said well I know that there was a survey done by Community Services. Was the Home Days fireworks show in big favor compared to the one on the Fourth of July?

Mayor Kurtz said I don't think we asked the question relative to that Fourth of July.

Councilperson Veverka asked Emily was there not a question related to Home Days fireworks compared to the Fourth of July?

Community Services Director Thomas said the survey that was sent out for Home Days was sent out by our Communications Director, Alla Lora. There was a question about fireworks in that piece. A percentage just around 60% said that they would prefer fireworks at Fourth of July as opposed to Home Days, but it was less than 10% of the population that responded to that survey with only 250 households responding. So, based on the lack of response there, and our internal conversations about the overall benefits of the community by having that draw of fireworks for Home Days, the internal decision was to move forward and continue the fireworks at Home Days.

Fire Chief Rega said keep in mind, even before I became Chief, there was always a research of whether we could do fireworks in the center of town, and basically we couldn't do it there because of the proximity to homes and buildings and things like that. So, this is nothing new in terms of us wanting to provide them during Home Days. It's just that now we have that opportunity within the park with all the other amenities that are available for that event. That is how it transpired. It's unfortunate that last year we did have a little bit of rain and kind of interrupted that. So, we didn't get a true gauge on how well that would have played out. So, again we felt it was only the second year into the event being hosted in the park, it's a good idea to have those fireworks available.

Councilperson Veverka said thank you.

Mayor Kurtz said the shows are smaller than the one time traditional show, but everybody goes for the finale anyway. Any other questions?

Councilperson Togliatti said historically we have spent about \$20,000 a year on fireworks.

Fire Chief Rega said typically it was originally about \$15,000 when I took over, and it slowly went up to \$20,000, you are correct there. Then we added a show, that's where we increased the amount. There is a certain amount of cost needed for just bringing out the personnel to set up the show and the rental to transport the product and insurance. So, most of these shows have a \$3,500 to \$4,000 cost per show. That is some of the cost here with three different shows. That is what you are seeing some of that going towards.

Mayor Kurtz said keep in mind that during Covid the last couple of years, and even today, we are still adjusting to and trying to find out the next normal with respect to Covid. So, these are all part of the fabric of our community to attempt to engage the community, get people back involved with our community and get away from what we have had to deal with the last two years with Covid. So, we are not out of that umbrella yet either. So, it's a matter of priorities, trying to figure out how we are going to address the next normal. That's all. We listened to Council. We tried to respond. Steve, thank you for your information, and we will go from there.

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Fire Chief Rega said I will add that due to Covid, as you know, shipping costs have gone up and the availability of product has gone up; so not so much the product itself, but I was informed that their shipping costs have gone up tremendously because all of their product comes from China. So, the shipping containers have increased in cost in terms of that transport. That's what they explained to me about some of the costs going up. American is one of the bigger outfits in the State, so they bring in all their own product, and then they will sell that to other vendors that are doing displays, but they are positioned so that they would get the best costs on this type of product. That has impacted the overall cost of these shows.

Councilperson Togliatti said so I guess my takeaway that I have heard here is that our spending on fireworks has gone from about \$20,000 annually to now \$43,000 from one show to now three shows. It sounded like we have some justification for the Home Days festival. It will bring people in, it will provide a crowd for our non-profits and the community event. It sounds like the survey, 60% of the residents saying they want fireworks on the Fourth of July. I guess what I am lacking is the justification for fireworks at Christmas. It sounded like from what I heard we had fireworks at Christmas because we didn't want to lose the deposit, and now this is going to be an annual thing. So, in my opinion, the next piece of legislation we are increasing our spending by \$690,000 which is unexpected. I don't think we need to increase our budget on fireworks. Based on the discussion I heard, I would be in favor of a Fourth of July and a Home Days fireworks show.

Mayor Kurtz said anyway, the next thing we have to add on to the reason we did that was to address the Covid situation and get people back into the park, but what we discovered was when you shoot a show at 7:00 p.m. or 7:30 p.m., all the young children and their families are able to participate. The young kids aren't up at 10:00 p.m. at night when we shoot the normal fireworks off; so we discovered that there is an additional hidden benefit to the younger families who come to the park, who participate in the activities and enjoy Santa and enjoy the ability to see the fireworks. We found that to be a hidden gem in the discovery process.

You can find pros and cons in everything. We will take this opportunity to see how these shows, how they vet out this year, and we will be in a better position next year to determine what we want to do next year. Council will ask for more information. They asked for a July Independence show, and that's what we presented, and we can use this information as we go navigate forward to determine the future, how we want to do it.

Any other questions?

Councilperson Trakas said I just have a comment. I thank you for being so responsive and for the Chiefs and Emily for putting this together so rapidly. I thought it was really positive, and you were able to put together another show at a fairly minimal amount of money. I think the community really appreciates it. We have been responsive to their requests, and I can't say enough about everybody that's done a great job here. I fully support what we are trying to accomplish.

Mayor Kurtz said thank you. Anyone else?

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<b>RESULT:</b>	<b>APPROVED [4 TO 1]</b>
<b>MOVER:</b>	Jim Trakas, Councilperson
<b>SECONDER:</b>	Chris Walchanowicz, Councilperson
<b>AYES:</b>	Jim Trakas, Dale Veverka, Chris Walchanowicz, John DiGeronimo
<b>NAYS:</b>	Anthony Togliatti
<b>ABSENT:</b>	Dave Grendel, Tom Narduzzi

**RESOLUTION NO. 2022-18** A RESOLUTION AMENDING FINAL RESOLUTION 2022-17 FOR WIDENING AND RESURFACING THE I.R. 77 NORTHBOUND EXIT AND ENTRANCE RAMP AT THE ROCKSIDE ROAD INTERCHANGE AND WIDENING BRIDGE NO. CUY-77-0837E (SFN 1806289) LOCATED ON THE I.R. 77 ENTRANCE RAMP OVER ROCKSIDE ROAD (THE “CUY-77-8.37 NB RAMPS SAFETY PROJECT”) (**I: VICE MAYOR GRENDEL, COUNCILPERSON DIGERONIMO, COUNCILPERSON NARDUZZI**)

Mayor Kurtz said we have the next piece of legislation. We have Resolution 2022-18.

**Moved by Trakas, seconded by Veverka, to read by title only. Voice Vote: 5 yes/0 no; motion carried.**

**Moved by Veverka, seconded by Trakas, to suspend the rules. Voice Vote: 5 yes/0 no; motion carried.**

Mayor Kurtz asked City Engineer Ramm do you want to go through your analysis for Council’s benefit?

City Engineer Ramm replied sure.

We received notice that the bids were opened and received an email from ODOT last Thursday, April 14<sup>th</sup> that the bids had come in above the engineer’s estimate that was published at the time of the bid at \$3,667,000. The low bidder was Great Lakes Construction in the amount of \$4,142,903.94. They gave us an explanation as to where the additional requested \$620,000 had come from, and it’s made up of construction obviously, the overage in construction. There is also a component that we have always been responsible for which is construction engineering, that’s this CE. We have learned that they have been targeting 7% of the construction for construction engineering. ODOT will be responsible to administer construction of the improvement. So, that’s where you derive the \$619,000 from.

The next slide that I am going to show you will help you understand. Early on when we submitted the safety application back in March of 2020, the estimated cost of construction was about \$3,063,000, and then it had steadily increased over throughout the time between then and now. You can see with inflation spiking in the State and Country, initially their estimate was \$3,660,000. That was already near 20% over what the project had started out at per our application, but then the low bidder was even another 13% above their estimate. So, a total of (inaudible) from back in 2020 for our application, but I thought I would take a step back and help

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Council remember how we got here and try to briefly run through a slide that kind of shows that we have been working on improvements along the corridor, Rockside Road for a decade now since 2012 and 2013, and it's really some of the genesis from way back in the alternative study that URS performed in 2012 and 2013 was really the crux of the project that we are contemplating now for which we need the additional funding.

In that study in 2012, URS looked at a number of different items that would help solve some problems and improve operational efficiency and minimize congestion and delays. Right away in that study 10 years ago, they identified two major improvements at the interchange. One was the BP lane widening and southbound entrance ramp widening from one lane to two lanes, and they also identified this widening of the loop ramp. So, way back in 2012 and 2013 we started to identify and hone in on this improvement that we then carried forward from that point.

We did need to do an operational interchange modification study to prove and justify to ODOT to even allow us to use our 100% local funds to build that southbound entrance ramp widening project, and through that project URS derived this variable lane use strategy whereby at one peak hour of the day the lane that needs to be a thru lane would be so designated with a changeable sign, and then at the PM peak rush hour period when that lane needed to be a dual left, it would go to between 3:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m., it would go to a dual left turns. It really maximized the capacity of this intersection and the ramp.

So, that was approved by ODOT and then pursued construction. We designed it, and Anthony Allega constructed it in 2016. We then moved to an interchange operation study with GPD Group whereby they continued to study that entire corridor again to continue to make improvements for our business community, and they studied four specific areas in that study. One of them way out near the corp. line, and then the one focusing on the west side of the interchange, one on the eastside, and maybe further out towards Rockside Place and along near Rockside Woods Blvd.

So, there were four specific areas that they studied. One that they focused on that we were most interested in pursuing was the very project we are talking about now which was a major increase in capacity of the northbound exit ramp from I-77 to Rockside, doubling its capacity and storage length. Right now, it's one left lane, one right turn lane. This would double the capacity, the very project we are entertaining now.

There was a major traffic signal modification to account for the widening and the additional lanes, and then this loop ramp using an additional lane widening, two lanes that would merge to one by the time it was crossing this bridge, the old bridge, and then going back to one by the time it got back to a point just north of Rockside Road. That is the current project that we are contemplating now.

We also did some, based on GPD's work, we did some signal modification at Oak Tree Blvd. for the dual left, the same thing with the variable lane use with the Highway Safety Program grants. So, emanating out of the interchange operation study that GPD did, they moved right through to a safety funding application targeting a highway safety program funding source where ODOT collects a lot of crash data throughout their State inter-highway system, and they have priorities based on crashes. They have funds set aside to identify solutions and to solve those very safety

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problems throughout their system.

So, our study area that GPD focused on was this area east of the interchange on Rockside. Again, these were picking off some high priority areas in the State's network, and the application was well received. This is a photo of the congestion that backs up on the main line I-77 northbound, and as you can imagine when speeds are at 60 to 70 miles per hour on a State highway, there was an area of crashes that would occur because of the ramp not having enough capacity to evacuate the traffic on every cycle. It's a major problem. So, this was something that ODOT was really interested in solving this problem. It was packaged together with this loop ramp project.

So, we were notified that the application was due early in March 2020. We were notified at the end of March of 2020 that we had been selected. This was the funding breakdown, \$2,050,000 that has been fixed from the beginning. The Highway Safety Program has a lot of competing entities for the funds. Every dollar is earmarked to communities, and that amount was capped. It's a little bit of a misnomer this 90%. We initially thought that this program is eligible to fund up to 90% of a project for construction. That was not what our application was submitted. Our percent split was more like 60/40. So, it's a little bit of a misnomer here. You can see this split right here was always more like 70/30 or 60/40, never in the 90/10.

So, once we were notified of the selection, we quickly moved through to hire GPD as the design consultant to put together the engineering design and submit plans through ODOT which we then submitted throughout 2021, all of last year. There are various Stage 1, 2 and 3 submittals of detailed engineering design. They were prepared by GPD, reviewed by us internally and then submitted to ODOT.

Back in September of 2021, we had some preliminary legislation that went through Council. Ordinance 2021-120 was approved, and it really set the program, set the contract on the rails to file tracings and to move it to bidding and committed to the City and State to construct the improvements. As the bid was getting ready to be let, with the inflation spiking throughout the areas, ODOT recognized the need and had increased the estimate. They did ask us for a major additional commitment, and we did adopt Resolution 2022-17 at the March Council meeting whereby we increased our funding allocation to account for that inflation. A check in the amount of \$1,757,000 was delivered to ODOT on March 18<sup>th</sup> so that they could move to the bidding process. The job was advertised over the course of March. Bids were opened here on April 14<sup>th</sup>, and that gets us to where we are now.

This is a spreadsheet that tries to show you again from the beginning where the dollars are. Here's that construction engineering component for which we were always responsible. The Federal money has always been capped, so back in 2020 our portion between the construction and this construction engineering for the project was sitting around \$1,200,000, and then as we developed the plans and got more focused engineers estimates, you could see that number had increased, and then it has steadily been increasing, while this number has remained fixed.

So, this is the bid that was opened. This just tries to give you a snapshot of where the dollars are, and when you look at the percent split now in this column, if we're to approve this additional \$620,000, it's really more like the City is upwards of 60% funding the project, and this \$2,000,000 is more like 40%, but still a sizable amount of money and at this point, we have

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expended a lot of resources and engineering work and planning through NOACCA, so we are at the eleventh hour here now to commit to the additional funds to move this project to construction.

I did ask an ODOT representative today what our options were that if we chose not to commit the additional funding, how long this \$2,059,000 would sit in reserve for us, if there was an idea to wait until inflation settled down and came back down, whether we could resurrect the job and still have access to the funding or conversely if we chose to pony up the additional funds, 100% locally, knowing that many communities might not be able to come up with their local share because of the inflation gap, that in theory it should free up those very highway safety program dollars throughout the State. We asked if we could get in line and be eligible to follow up with some additional requests if those dollars became available to help offset the very money that we are looking to approve tonight. I have yet to receive answers to those questions. I think it's so new, and they are dealing with this on the fly, I think many communities will be asking those same questions. Just unfortunately right now I don't have the answers. We hope to get them tomorrow morning. They asked us to get back to them by 11:00 a.m. tomorrow, April 20<sup>th</sup> on our response, whether or not we were moving forward.

So, that's the summary Mayor.

Mayor Kurtz asked any questions by Council after Don's thorough analysis or explanation?

Councilperson Togliatti asked based on this additional expenditure, where is the money coming from for projects that we would forego in this calendar year to make this happen? Where do we sit financially? I know we haven't completed our Five-Year Capital Plan, so we haven't really talked about the major infrastructure projects yet, but maybe the Finance Director could opine on that.

Finance Director Blaze said in all the TIF funds combined, the 2022 Annual Appropriation Ordinance, we appropriated \$6,265,000. This will just have to come out of there just like everything else that has been approved between January 1 and today, and the remaining balance after that is what we have available to work with for all other infrastructure projects that would be funded out of the TIF funds that are currently being reviewed by Council at this time.

Councilperson Togliatti said so because we haven't finished finalizing and discussing the Five-Year Capital Plan, we don't know which streets we will be doing this year? We don't know what funds we have for the streets? I guess that's the position I feel Council is at right now.

Finance Director Blaze said I think the general statement applies that I mentioned a few times at the Capital budget hearings that the total requests for capital and infrastructure here in 2022 exceeds that \$12,875,000 that's been appropriated for departmental capital purchases and infrastructure projects. I have been very consistent, our office has been very consistent about that since day one. So, it's nothing new. This is just an additional project that look it's either the engineer said he's trying to get answers to questions about if additional funding is available. We are operating under the premise that if we don't pull the trigger on this by 11:00 a.m. tomorrow, we are in all likelihood going to lose this project, and in the Engineer's timeline you can see dating back to 2014/2015 when additional work was done, and then in 2018/2019 additional

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work was done, and then 2020 additional work was done, and then finally going out to bid and funding it and everything and it's culminating today. It's kind of like what choice do we have at this point? Either come up with the money or lose the project potentially unless ODOT responds and says that's not the case. You have other time, but Don correct me if I'm wrong, but that email from ODOT said you have to let us know by 11:00 a.m., Wednesday, April 20<sup>th</sup> whether you are in for the additional \$600,000, and left unsaid is what happens if we are not in but they will move on and start reallocating these funds to somebody else who is next in the queue.

City Engineer Ramm replied correct. That's the concern. They are unanswered questions. I think they are good and valid questions, but I think they truly control our destiny to deal in the certainty of adopting the ordinance and funding the additional gap from inflation and get the improvements constructed.

Mayor Kurtz said I'm just going to ask you a blunt question. How would you prioritize this request relative to other major capital improvements or areas that you are responsible for? Just give us the Reader's Digest version of how you prioritize this.

City Engineer Ramm said it ranks very high, primarily because of the grant source and the level and energy and time and resources that it took to get us to the point we are at. The safety benefit to the highway system as well as our emergency responders not having to react to the highway system. With these improvements, it should greatly improve safety and efficiency. I think it ranks very high. We do have the ability to control and offset and reprioritize most of our local projects with our local funding. We control that and can shift and adjust as needed. Here we are held to the Federal money, and the opportunity may not come around again, or if it does, it may be years from now. It's just uncertain. I think moving forward is the prudent course of action.

Mayor Kurtz said we do know that this will slim up a little bit of other opportunities this year, and you believe this is a priority?

City Engineer Ramm replied yes Mayor, and with the hope that some of that additional funding might become available, and as we have been hearing in the Biden Administration has been doling out grant opportunities for all kinds of infrastructure improvements. It seems like there's nothing more shovel ready than this project, and if this doesn't qualify for those funds, I don't know what would. So, I think there are some options available to us, and we have to try to tap into those.

Mayor Kurtz asked any other questions?

Councilperson DiGeronimo said I do. Thanks Don for the history and catching me up on how long this project has been going.

So, different than the other road projects we are looking at, when there's an ODOT project involved, this is going to be an ODOT road as far as repairs and maintenance is not going to be with the City?

City Engineer Ramm said Councilperson DiGeronimo, the ramp improvements, that would be an ODOT facility for any upgrades over time. Anything out on Rockside Road itself, including the traffic signals, would fall to the City just like what is the differentiation even now. That is the

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case right now.

Councilperson DiGeronimo said then in the ordinance it references an alternate. So, I guess are we talking about the whole project is kind of going? Or is it we have approved the base, and there's an alternate for \$600,000? Or is it all kind of lumped together?

City Engineer Ramm said the alternate was a minor dollar value, and it pertained to a specific type of camera, video detection device, proprietary that is consistent with our video detection up and down the corridor or at other locations in the City. It was a \$3,500 minor upgrade. ODOT doesn't fund proprietary or things that are a little bit higher than what they can achieve with some base model equipment. So, that's all that was. The \$620,000 is for the whole project, the delta, the gap for inflation, to cover the whole project including the \$3,500 alternate which is what we recommend.

Councilperson DiGeronimo asked then is there a timetable or timeline for the schedule of construction?

City Engineer Ramm said ODOT has this program, has always been marching along the April bidding, and they typically take a few weeks to award the contract and get contracts executed, and the contractor mobilized. So, I do believe it's a summer construction, and I believe it's a seven to nine month construction project; so it's definitely getting them to try to hit the sweet spot of the summer and fall construction into the early winter of this year.

Councilperson DiGeronimo said so me not knowing the whole history here, and typically I would say I wouldn't want to postpone a project that we are going to end up doing anyways, even with inflation, I don't see the prices coming down in the future, but three things that would have me have some concern of moving forward is (1) the study was done before the pandemic so the traffic study, I don't have any appreciation for how that southbound entrance to I-77 has affected this, whether those same conditions still exist. I know traffic is always moving, it's complex. (2) The I-480 bridge project is now a year away or closer, and that project will increase the capacity by about 50%. There used to be four lanes going in each direction, and there's going to be six now, so I think that would help our interchange to some level, and then (3) we have our Five-Year Capital Plan with more eyes on it to know what's out there. We know there are some big items. So, I don't have any appreciation for what the traffic study was in 2017, 2018, 2019 versus today. I think we all want to see Rockside Road as to where it was, but is it going to take some time? Or are we right back to where we were in 2019 and 2018 where this is still as much of a priority as it was then?

City Engineer Ramm said Councilperson I think those are valid questions. I don't know that there is any new baseline yet to answer that 100% with certainty. The hope is that of course there is a return to the office for employment, and traffic would start to drive back up. One thing to consider too is we do have some large tracts of undeveloped land west of I-77 in Seven Hills and as well as our Northwest quadrant. Any future development that does happen there will drive traffic, and it will certainly be a benefit to have these improvements in place rather than not to be able to account for and accommodate that future traffic. Again, these improvements increase the level of service out there on the corridor and on the interchanges. So, that benefits everybody, current and future traffic.

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Councilperson Walchanowicz said if it's alright Mayor I will chime in.

Mayor Kurtz said go ahead.

Councilperson Walchanowicz said I guess what I'm struggling with is the fact that we have, it's not a residential street, and we have several residential streets, whether it's Brookside, Kleber or Longano, that are in dire need of help, and we have already talked about pushing those streets back a couple of years. We are going to put more money into an exit ramp for 85% of people that do not live in our community. They just come in to go to work and go home. I struggle with that. If there is somebody that can maybe open my eyes a little bit better on why it is a major necessity for that, that would be great.

Finance Director Blaze said without those people that come in here and work, we don't have their 2% income tax, so we wouldn't have the money to do the residential streets or this project.

Councilperson Walchanowicz said I get that, but I'm one of seven Councilpersons that get a phone call why would you spend \$700,000 on an off ramp and my road is the way it is, and I have to travel it every day. So, hearing resident feedback in a negative manner.

Mayor Kurtz said I think if Don had the chance to educate everybody in the community, it would raise their comfort level for sure. I think we are in the position to understand more fully the responsibilities we have to maintain and upgrade infrastructure. I think Don mentioned that we still have an uncut diamond on the west side of I-77, and it's called vacant property, and that being the case, one of the challenges that we have always had was getting traffic eastbound on Rockside onto I-77 north. So, there is the ability or capacity to shift that traffic in that area more quickly as it used to bottleneck at the West Creek area.

Councilperson Veverka said just a comment related to that is we were able to relieve some of the northbound I-77 option when we put in Rockside Woods North, and I guess John's comment was the one that's probably the most appropriate is as we are dealing with it now, we probably have a volume that's down, but as we look at the future, there is a potential that there will be a need, and that's the tough part. The tough part is expending the money in advance when the need appears currently because of the pandemic to be as much as we thought it would. Obviously, Rockside Woods North takes care of the I-77 north traffic, but it doesn't account for the I-480 traffic. So, as Chris mentioned, it's really a tough one.

Finance Director Blaze said I could say this that the Flock cameras that the City has utilized now for a while, if you look at that camera data, it is indicating an upward trend in traffic in the Rockside Road business district. We haven't gotten any more granular than just looking at that aggregate data, so I guess on the positive it means more people are coming back and working. If that's not true, then it means that more people are passing through the City on Rockside Road, but we would like to think that the increased traffic numbers is resulting in more people working in Independence once again, and I think that is borne out by the recent income tax numbers that I shared with Council last week. So, take that for whatever it's worth in your decision-making process.

City Engineer Ramm said Mayor and Members of Council, I do have Kevin Westbrooks on the

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line. He is with GPD Group. He is a traffic engineer that might be able to speak to some of the questions relative to the traffic levels.

Kevin Westbrook said in terms of your discussing traffic and how it has clearly went down due to the pandemic. What we are seeing is they have gone back up, not to maybe 100% of where they were two years ago in March, but they are on their way back to that. As of a year ago, ODOT was having us, for a while we were adjusting any new traffic counts that we got, had to inflate them to try and replicate old volumes. They have asked us to stop doing that because they feel that the volumes have gotten close enough to the old volumes that this is kind of the new normal, but it is going to continue to ramp up. So, we may never see 100% of what we saw on Rockside, but we are going to get pretty darn close to it, and that's excluding all the vacant land. If that stuff starts developing, you are going to exceed where we were two years ago. I really think you have the need for it if there ever was a need for it, and it's still going to be there.

This is kind of the last piece of what can realistically be done to Rockside Road, and I'm sorry I had to jump off a little bit and missed what Don was saying, but he probably talked about how we have adjusted traffic signal timings, put that left turn arrow that's by time of day. The City put that right turn lane to get on the southbound ramp. The City has done pretty much everything you possibly could to that road short of adding an additional through lane in each direction which probably would not even help because it's traffic trying to get to and from the highway that's really causing the problems. This is pretty much the last reasonable thing that you could do, and it's one that we have talked about through the whole process that I have been working with Don over the years to look at Rockside Road. This was always kind of the key one, but we needed to do some of the smaller pieces that were more manageable and you could bite off and address. So, we have done all those other pieces, and we have left this last one, getting that two lanes onto the ramp to head north is going to totally change how the lanes are used on Rockside heading eastbound. Hopefully, the plan is to no longer have that line that's up against the curb stretch back all the way into Seven Hills. The vehicles will want to use the second lane, not everybody needs to be in that right lane to hit the freeway. We have always talked about that's the key thing to get the traffic to move on Rockside is to get people to use some of the other lanes instead of just blocking up that one.

Short of this project, Don and I are kind of stumped of what else you could possibly do out there to get the traffic to move better. This is probably the last piece, and one more thing I will say is in terms of the safety money. You have the \$2,000,000 in safety money that ODOT has given you. As soon as you guys got that money, ODOT realized that their safety program is kind of in trouble in terms of funding. They were giving it out relatively easily until that point, and then they realized they overspent a little bit, and they have clamped down considerably. You have to have, you pretty much need to have fatalities and a lot of serious injuries to get the kind of money that the City of Independence received in that grant. You don't necessarily have that crash problem. You have a lot of rear ends, you have a lot of congestion related crashes. So, I don't see you ever probably at least in the next ten years having an opportunity to get \$2,000,000 from ODOT to put towards Rockside Road. Granted a chunk of it is going to their ramp, but that ramp getting improved is going to help the operations of Rockside itself.

Don, I know you haven't heard back from ODOT yet, but ZI would expect the answer from them

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tomorrow, and I'm just speculating is they don't have any more money to throw at this. They don't have it in their safety program. They are already overextended. They would like to see this project happen, but if you said no, they would have that money committed to somebody else by next week easily. They would gladly find a place to throw the \$2,000,000. So, I don't see them having anything to throw at this, at least from the safety program.

If anybody has any other questions, I would love to answer them for you.

City Engineer Ramm said thank you Kevin.

Councilperson DiGeronimo said thanks Kevin, thanks Don. I guess the two lanes eastbound on Rockside to north I-77, that's the key part of the project, but those ramps coming off onto Rockside is probably the lesser of the two components if you thought about splitting the project up. You might say it's not going to have as much of an effect as giving you the extra lane going north on I-77.

Mr. Westbrook said I think getting traffic off of Rockside, the two lanes getting onto the ramp is going to help you. Getting traffic off onto the roadway, that's probably a bigger safety problem though too. There's more crashes I think on the ramp than anywhere else, so you would greatly improve the safety, but what it also does with that ramp having so much area to store up volumes that have them all ready to go. It's going to improve the efficiency of that traffic signal. So, that same amount of traffic is going to be on the ramp whether you have three lanes or four lanes, whether the storage is long, but when you have to get them off, you have to give them more time with the signal. So, now that there is going to be four lanes, the cars will be better queued up not the super long stop and go thing that they have. You can give less (inaudible) time to the ramp and more to Rockside Road. So, it's an additional benefit of just not making the ramp safer, it's going to help Rockside move better because the ramp won't need so much of the signal's priority. You can give more of that to Rockside Road.

Mayor Kurtz asked any other questions?

The Clerk said Councilperson Trakas has one.

Councilperson Trakas said I am losing power here, and I just would like to proceed to a vote if we can just because I may not be able to keep my phone going here. I am out of town, I am sorry.

Mayor Kurtz asked any other questions?

There being no other questions, we will call the roll.

Mayor Kurtz said thank you, and Kevin thanks for taking your time. Don, thanks for the efficient summary. This is all about investment in the future and customer service. Everybody that gets off of that ramp is a customer in one way, shape or form. So, thank you Council. Don, I think you have your marching orders.

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<b>RESULT:</b>	<b>APPROVED [UNANIMOUS]</b>
<b>MOVER:</b>	Dale Veverka, Councilperson
<b>SECONDER:</b>	Jim Trakas, Councilperson
<b>AYES:</b>	Trakas, Togliatti, Veverka, Walchanowicz, DiGeronimo
<b>ABSENT:</b>	Dave Grendel, Tom Narduzzi

**MISCELLANEOUS BUSINESS**

Mayor Kurtz said I want to thank Chief Rega, Chief Butler and Community Services Director Emily Thomas for your efficient response to City Council's suggestions and requests relative to Community Services, specifically the Independence Day fireworks.

I appreciate Council for your suggestions and your request for modification to the program. So, thank you very much.

**ADJOURNMENT**

**Moved by Trakas, seconded by Walchanowicz, to adjourn the Special Council Meeting of April 19, 2022. Voice Vote: 5 yes/0 no; motion carried.**

There being no further business, the Special Council Meeting of April 19, 2022 was adjourned at 5:07 p.m.

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Debra J. Beal, Clerk of Council  
**Minutes Unapproved at Time of Release April 20, 2022**

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