

**CITY OF INDEPENDENCE
COUNCIL WORKSHOP MINUTES
APRIL 27, 2021 AT 4:00 P.M.
VIA ZOOM**

Vice Mayor Dave Grendel called the Council Workshop to order at 4:02 p.m. Present were Council Members Kathleen Kapusta, Tom Narduzzi (left at 6:01 p.m.), Kenn Synek, Jim Trakas, Dale Veverka and Chris Walchanowicz. Also in attendance were Mayor Gregory P. Kurtz, Finance Director Vern Blaze (left at 4:45 p.m.), Economic Development Director Jessica Hyser, Building Official Michael Gero, City Engineer Don Ramm and Fire Chief Steve Rega.

Vice Mayor Grendel said I want to welcome everyone to the Council Workshop of April 27th.

Vice Mayor Grendel said I think we had a request, I think Vern you requested we could move the finance issues up first so this way you could get off to the track meet.

Finance Director Blaze said I just wanted to leave early. We have the Independence invitational. It's a good day for it. All the runners probably have been complaining all spring about it's been too cold to run, and today is the opposite excuse, it's too hot to run.

Vice Mayor Grendel asked is this the one that used to be named after Dan Potopsky?

Finance Director Blaze said I suspect yes.

Vice Mayor Grendel said well we will get the finance issues which are on the agenda and are Number 5, 6 and 8. So, Vern I will let you get started here with Number 5, the long term debt options and strategy.

Councilperson Kapusta said before we proceed, excuse me for my interruption, one clarification. You said 4:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. My calendar shows 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. Did we change that?

Vice Mayor Grendel said I saw something on the website. I didn't really have any stop time.

Councilperson Kapusta said Debi said 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. too. I just wanted to make sure. Sorry Vern, go on.

Finance Director Blaze said now I can talk longer.

Councilperson Kapusta said no it's really 4:00 p.m. to 4:15 p.m. Vern, I am sorry.

Finance Director Blaze said thank you for the courtesy to move these agenda items up in the order, and we don't have to get too deep in the weeds on any of them, make any decisions today. I thought when this was a Strategic Planning session or workshop session, that this would be a

good opportunity just to put a couple of these issues on the table, plant the seeds, a thought; and over the next couple of months meet either in committee or as a whole and decide what way we are going to go on a couple of these issues.

Agenda item 5 is labeled that long term debt options and strategy, and a couple of months ago I had put in one of my weekend updates that we did that \$15,250,000 re-finance last year so that debt is set really well for 15 years. We have some debt that was originally issued in 2011; and now there is about \$3,600,000 or \$3,700,000 of principle that is due on that. The due date is December 1 of this year, and because it's the tenth year, the original loan documents were drafted that there was it couldn't be re-financed or refunded in that first 10 year window; but now that the 10 year window is up this year, this debt is eligible to be, I will use the word re-financed, it's more easily understood. It's carrying an overall average rate of all the tranches of 3.65%, 3.7%. It's a little bit under 4%, but definitely a higher interest rate than the 1.59% rounded to 1.6% that we did with the 15 year re-finance last year and definitely much higher than the .2%, .3%, .4% that we are seeing on some of these short term one year issuances. So, I just want to throw that out that again that the option is there later this year, and I don't think just leaving the debt there for another 8 years or 7 years until 2028 when it will be paid off is the best option given that (a) we could re-finance and lower the interest rate by either going into short term notes or slightly longer term for a couple of years or (b) using cash on hand and paying off either part or all of that debt, \$3,600,000 or \$3,700,000 in principle. Our financial advisor, Matt Stuczynski, and I did talk to Councilperson Veverka on the phone today, he asked about it. A public entity can't just undertake a re-finance just for the heck of it if it doesn't save the public entity money; then the public entity has to prove that there is a cost-savings to it; otherwise it could be deemed that somebody is just trying to create work for the attorneys and the bond counsel and financial advisors and all that. The calculation based on preliminary interest rates that existed back in February when Matt did that, it indicated that the savings were a net positive, so that it would have passed GFOA muster as far as being a legitimate re-finance. It's only the end of April, the earliest we could start doing the paperwork is probably September or October, 90 days before that December 1 due date.

So, we are looking at a fall transaction date no matter what we do; so we have a good start here, but I just wanted to plant the seed, throw it out if anybody wanted to ask any questions, if they have any thoughts or opinions, just to start discussion today.

Vice Mayor Grendel asked what is your feeling on this Vern? Are we better off just paying it off and having it off the books or should we re-finance and still use some of that cash for other projects?

Finance Director Blaze said it's always that balancing act, and the strict financial persons in us would make it just a strict financial calculation; but I think it's also good to take a step back and just look at it holistically and say okay look if I have money sitting at Independence Bank getting our highest yields right now at .6%; and I have other money at Fifth Third at the State's whole plan getting interest rates, .2%, .3%, .4% or less, and we are paying 3.7% on this debt, the immediate knee jerk is look we do have some cash available. It's certainly a very viable alternative option to just pay the debt off, and save ourselves. This year the interest payment,

3.7% on \$3,600,000 principle is roughly \$125,000 to \$130,000. So, it won't be that much for the next 8 years, but that interest rate and the amount of interest will go down as more principle is paid off; but say it's \$100,000 in interest average for the next 8 years. That's \$800,000 in interest that we would save and having \$3,600,000 in the bank at .2%, we would have to keep it in the bank for decades to earn a commensurate amount of interest on that money.

So, my knee jerk is that it isn't a worry for us which compared to many municipalities we are in a very good cash position. The knee jerk is to just to use cash and pay it off; but if Council and the Mayor say you know what though we would like to maybe get more aggressive with our capital and infrastructure program, and we don't want to pay it all off. Maybe we only want to pay part of it and devote some of that cash to additional infrastructure capital; I don't think we can make a bad decision as long as we don't just do nothing. By doing nothing and leaving it in the 3.7% interest rate for the next 8 years, I think we could obviously save money by exercising any one of the other options available to us.

Vice Mayor Grendel said so I agree. We have to probably as a Council decide if there's any projects, whether it be road or infrastructure, sewer work, that needs our attention, and if not we pay these bonds off. If we have something in mind that we can use it for; so that will be a decision definitely. To pay 3.7% for the next 8 years makes no sense at all during these times and that. So, that's something for Council to think about. See like Jim with your committee if there's something that the money could be used for if we could use part of it. The same thing Dale if there are road projects or that which could possibly we can use that, we will have to consider that. We definitely don't want to do nothing like Vern said and continue on paying that high rate of interest. Who would have thought that 3.7% would be considered high, but in these times it is.

Finance Director Blaze said right.

Vice Mayor Grendel asked any questions for Vern or any comments from Council?

Councilperson Trakas said I would just say Mr. Vice Mayor, we are having a committee meeting on Thursday; and we are going to go through projects, but I don't anticipate anything more than what we have discussed the last couple of years. So, I would be pretty much inclined to pay that off unless Don comes up with something we weren't aware of; but there was nothing that was pressing that we weren't able to put within our five year timeline.

Vice Mayor Grendel said thank you Jim.

Councilperson Synek asked Vern does this debt relate to any particular capital project form years ago? What was the original borrowing for?

Finance Director Blaze said I could dig into the weeds on that. I suspect it was originally in 2011. It could have been some of the Rockside Road improvement project because that was in that. Mayor, you have a better memory for some of that in like 2003 to 2005 range, and maybe this was a re-finance of that original debt. I am not sure.

Mayor Kurtz said 2003 would have been the park, Elmwood Park projects.

Vice Mayor Grendel asked oh the renovation of the park?

Mayor Kurtz said the renovation of the park.

Vice Mayor Grendel said I see. Well that gives us a good thing to think about Council, and Mayor also, if you want to weigh in on that too, whether we want to just pay that off and be done with it like Jim suggests and Vern suggested. Or do we have some use, some project that we can do.

Councilperson Veverka asked Vern the \$14,000,000 cash on hand, approximately how much of that is already totally earmarked? How big is our potential fudge factor? Is it around the \$3,000,000 or is it closer to \$7,000,000?

Finance Director Blaze said if you look at a big picture basis, that \$14,000,000 was just the investment portfolio, above and beyond the money that we have with Independence Bank. So, total cash at the end of March was approximately \$41,000,000, approximately of which \$21,000,000 was encumbered with purchase orders; so let's say if all of that remaining \$20,000,000 we could just reach into our pocket and write a check for \$20,000,000 right now for something if we wanted to; it could be done with a lot of transfers and so forth. I will say this, Councilperson Synek, I think a lot of the debt, I just pulled this sheet out here that Maggie handed me. A lot of that debt that we are talking about today comes back to Rockside Road projects, and some of it is TIF projects; but somebody could say well why would we pay TIF debt off if we are getting TIF revenue for that? Well, we could eliminate the interest rate or lower it, but we could advance ourselves the cash to pay the debt off and then instead of paying Mellon Bank and Huntington who has the servicing on this over the next 8 years, we could just pay ourselves back at a 0% interest rate.

So, it still make sense to maybe retire this debt if cash is an option because again we could advance it to ourselves and not lose the advantage of collecting the TIF revenue and be able to pay ourselves back over the next 8 years instead of paying somebody else.

Councilperson Kapusta said Vern you said some of it was TIF, some of it was Rockside Road, and Mayor said some of it was the park. When you are saying Rockside Road, was it TIF money from the Rockside Road or was there other expenditures that were outside of the TIF also?

Finance Director Blaze said the debt is just listed generically in the northwest quadrant, southwest quadrant and southeast quadrant TIF's. Back there in 2011 I wasn't the Finance Director so I don't know specifically what each one of those look for. I could converse with Matt because I think he was involved with helping John even back then unless it was that previous financial advisor; but we could find that out. Since it's northwest, southwest and northeast quadrants, I suspect it's all the infrastructure projects that have been completed down in the area for the last number of years.

Mayor Kurtz said I think it's probably Rockside Road upgrade.

Finance Director Blaze said that was a huge project.

Councilperson Veverka said Vern the second question before I even ask if that was related to, do we have a way of financially working so we don't lose the TIF; and as you said we can borrow from ourselves and pay ourselves back with the TIF money, is that what I heard?

Finance Director Blaze said that's the way to do it.

Councilperson Veverka said that makes a lot of sense to me.

Finance Director Blaze said right, and I will take any other questions; but Vice Mayor you mentioned, and a couple of you, about unless we have some other projects that we need to do, it's a good transition into that agenda item Number 8, and again we can stay on Number 6, we could keep going back to 5; but for the 8, keep in mind we are going to get that \$1,400,000 from this American Rescue Plan, \$700,000 this year, and \$700,000 next year. If we allocate that, and just an if, I am just throwing it out since we are talking about infrastructure; if that was allocated to infrastructure, that would kind of take off \$1,400,000 of burden off of coming out of our pocket directly. So, instead of having \$3,600,000, it's kind of a net \$2,200,000 of money that we are paying out to pay off this \$3,600,000 because we are going to get \$1,400,000 here that we weren't really budgeting for when we did the 2021 budget because this plan wasn't in the works in December or January.

Vice Mayor Grendel said at least in my mind from hearing the dialogue here, it seems to make more sense just to pay that debt off, especially with the fact that we are getting \$1,400,000 in the next 2 years, it makes sense to wipe out that high interest debt that we have. There are limitations on what we can use the American Rescue Plan money for. We could use it for certain items Vern.

Finance Director Blaze said correct. In my weekly update that went out Friday I cited the 4 general areas that we are being told in that email from yesterday. They kind of expanded on some of the 4, and I still think you could boil it down to 4 essential areas. That's why I am kind of surprised that Akron was as far ahead as they were; and again, but they acknowledge that this is all subject to the final guidance issue from the U.S. Treasury. So, we are all in that position.

I am starting to just get a general idea of okay we are going to get this money, what are we going to do with it? How are we going to reinvest it in our community to best serve the community, all of it going to one use, some of it going to multiple uses? That's to be determined, and that's up to you 8 collectively; but yes one of the big categories is investments in water, sewer and broadband, generally the infrastructure as we know it.

There's the other ones about helping businesses or homeowners, and I am kind of waiting for the more specific guidance to come down from the U.S. Treasury to the Ohio Office of Management and Budget, OBM; and then they bring it down to us. It's not too early to begin the discussion of

okay how do we want to use that \$700,000 this year? How do we want to use that \$700,000 next year?

Vice Mayor Grendel said and looking at the 4 areas there, to me the one that makes the most sense for our City would be Number 3, to make the necessary investments in water, sewer and broadband. The others ones seem to be more set for bigger cities that provide more social services and that; and really we have done a pretty good job with our Civic Center with the service that we do provide for our seniors and others that are adversely affected by Covid and that. I think Mayor it would be a nice discussion to see if there's something we can do infrastructure wise in the area of sewers that would benefit the City that we might be putting off and we could maybe use that money towards that thing that normally wouldn't have been available.

Mayor Kurtz said we will have plenty of options to use the money once we sink our teeth into it.

Regarding the financing, just to move off that one, I think it's safe to assume then that we are either going to re-finance or just pay it off. We are not going to leave it status quo. Is that fair to assume that?

Vice Mayor Grendel replied yes.

Mayor Kurtz asked does anybody object to that?

Councilperson Veverka said no.

Mayor Kurtz said hey Vern there's your marching orders. As we get closer to August, September, then we can try to make a recommendation or at least put us on the right path.

Vice Mayor Grendel said some things may happen between now and then that would dictate us to maybe just re-finance it and not pay it off; but that does seem to be a viable option to pay it off.

Councilperson Trakas said along the lines of discussion, it's one thing we really haven't talked a lot about, but do we have broadband needs in town? I mean, are there areas where it's not effective? That's just a topic, I am on the Utilities Committee, and it just hasn't come up.

Mayor Kurtz said well I think we should bring it up Thursday.

Councilperson Trakas said I was just saying do you want me to put it on the agenda?

Mayor Kurtz said let's put it on the agenda for Thursday, and we can have a more broad discussion about it.

Councilperson Trakas said okay. Maybe we will invite Jessica who might be able to work with us on the business community to spearhead that as well.

Finance Director Blaze said and Ryan.

Vice Mayor Grendel asked weren't we upgrading the fiber that we had there in the campus area? I believe we had some legislation in that regard recently if I'm not mistaken.

Mayor Kurtz said we have several different branches of upgrades. We did the Rockside and 21 project. We added conduit to our campus, and so we will have Ryan update us in terms of what the status is and if there are opportunities to invest further for our business community, or even our residents. With 5G it's changing to a different dynamic, everything is changing too.

Vice Mayor Grendel asked any other questions for Vern on these 2 areas, well we put the long term debt options to rest; but the American Rescue Plan Act funding?

Mayor Kurtz said we can talk about that once we have a little more direction on the issue. We can always find a way to spend the \$1,400,000.

Vice Mayor Grendel said so it's half this year and half next year. Well I guess Vern the last area then you wanted was the local municipal income tax future strategies.

Finance Director Blaze said correct, thank you. Like the other 2, we don't have to get too far in the weeds; but this is a very important issue that collectively we need to all keep on our radar screen because of potential ramifications. There are so many different forces out there in play right now from remote work to refunds being requested. I am surprised that Columbus acquiesced. I haven't been able to find out yet why they agreed to settle the suit and issue refunds to the plaintiff that sued them because I think that opens the door to everybody else in Columbus' jurisdiction to do the same thing. Now you see the Buckeye Institute filed the same lawsuit against the City of Cleveland, and then are all of these going to be settled by some court saying that Ohio's rule this past year, the law of the last year plus was unconstitutional; and we all have to give refunds back if requested. That's just looking back. There's also the issue of going forward too. What is going to pass legislatively in Columbus? The Mayor might have some updates through his working with the Mayors and Managers Association on that topic; but also what's going to pass constitutional muster and if remote work is here, at least even partially, even 10% or 20% of the total workforce that used to work out of Independence's borders now work somewhere else. If we are not allowed to tax those people then what are we going to do?

Again, that decision doesn't have to be made today. Those actions aren't going to be settled today, but I indicated in that communication last week then if we are looking out for the future where we are not only planning for the positive; but you also have to make those contingency what if plans. What if some of these tax laws don't go our way? What if more people stay remotely permanently? If some of the what if's come about, and our continued historic growth in income tax at least at the rate of inflation stops, then what if? What do we do? Again, we don't have to decide now, but I just tried to lead the discussion that by fixing our debt service payments are kind of locked in, we will have some clarity on what we are going to do with that final \$3,600,000 later this year. That will be settled, and so our debt will be very settled for quite a while; and it really boils down to that if our revenue, our main revenue source were to flat line

or even decline, how would we react? Would we just say look for a while we would just cut back on capital and infrastructure projects for a while and kind of take that attitude, kind of see how things sort out? Or would we make some changes operationally on the operational budget side? Would we do a combination of both or would we maybe stay super positive and say you know what, we are not going to cut back on any infrastructure or capital. We are not going to cut back any operations. We think this is going to straighten itself out over the next couple of years. We have been very prudent over the number of decades. We have accumulated a nice cash balance, a nice reserve fund; and we are just going to use that cash for a couple of years and see if this isn't just a short term thing, and then it corrects itself and we are firing on all cylinders. Nobody has the crystal ball. Nobody knows what is going to happen, but I think just a little bit of collectively the people involved in this call just even taking one workshop to just play what if. Like okay what if the worst happens? This little back pocket plan, just so we have it, we know it, and we hope we never have to pull it out of our pocket and use it.

Vice Mayor Grendel said one thing on that issue is that if these taxpayers are successful, and say that their companies and they are working at home; but how about the people who live in Independence that pay taxes to Cleveland and others. How is the community going to collect from their residents if they are getting a rebate or refund back from these other municipalities? They owe the municipal tax to somebody; so are they going to have to redo? That's a nightmare. They would have to do this I think going forward than going backward, otherwise, that money we refund it; but it should be going to either the home community, but it doesn't go in their pockets. They have to pay tax to someone.

Just like in the middle of this tax year, they decided by passing that bill that we don't tax the first \$10,200 in unemployment compensation. Well you have half the people who were early birds who were angry because they paid tax on that, and they have to wait a whole year to get their money back. The IRS is saying we aren't taking any amended returns. I mean I hope when they decide they really think this out because it's going to cause a number of nightmares that might take years to fix because that local tax has to go somewhere. There has to be reconciliation.

Finance Director Blaze said that's the Mayors and Managers' point that the Mayor can speak to about the complexity of if some of these things, these issues would be decided against local municipalities like Independence, the complexity of implementing what would come down the pike would be enormous on us.

Vice Mayor Grendel said yes.

Councilperson Kapusta said and I noticed that these 2, although there are only 2 listed here, were brought by plaintiffs. So, would we assume then that the law has not, am I correct in asking this, the law has not yet changed? It's just that these people have requested this, and individual decisions are made on one for sure in Columbus and it looks like Cleveland is still fighting that one.

Finance Director Blaze said yes. The Cleveland is much more recent, so that's got to work its way through. The Columbus one was filed I believe in late 2020; so that one they had some time

to work through; but Columbus, even though the law in the State has not changed, and it says basically that we cities like Independence can continue to collect taxes through their employers of people who aren't physically working in the community until 30 days after the Governor's emergency order is lifted. Columbus didn't even wait to see if that law is going to pass constitutional muster; they just agreed to settle with the plaintiff that requested refund. So, on the face of it, just looking at that case alone, that's not good news for us because Columbus has a lot of legal. They are big. They have a lot of legal resources, and they are in the State capital; and for some reason they thought it was in their best interest to settle rather than to keep fighting. Hopefully, that doesn't set the tone for what other communities are going to be asked to do the same thing pretty soon.

Councilperson Kapusta said and Vern to ask you another question, have we got any update lately as to when the Governor is saying his state of emergency will be ended?

Finance Director Blaze said I personally have not watched one of his afternoon press conferences in quite a while, but I don't think he could legitimately answer that until he knows we are a lot closer to the end. Today he loosened up mask restrictions outside. Every week, every month he's trying to loosen things up, but I personally, unless somebody else has heard, I have not heard of any projected dates by the Governor, the Governor's office as to when that might be Councilperson Kapusta.

Councilperson Kapusta said thank you.

Vice Mayor Grendel asked Debi did you send us something that indicated that these virtual meetings might be extended and be allowed until the end of the year?

The Clerk replied to the end of the year. That is in HB 110, the budget bill.

Vice Mayor Grendel said I see. So that might be some indication there that maybe not until the end of this year. I still think with this municipal tax, it would be such a nightmare trying to figure where the money is going because each community is going to say well if we don't get the money from who works in their home, how about our residents. They are going to be going looking at the residents to say did you get refunded from working in Cleveland, and if you did, we want 2% of what you earned. To me whatever decision has to be made should be done wisely and done looking at the future and not trying to take from the past because so many communities have planned for their income; and to mess this up would really be a nightmare for almost every community and for every family too because then all of a sudden you are excited. You are getting money back from say your company works in Cleveland, and then all of a sudden you get a letter from the City of Independence Finance Department stating what did you earn last year, and they want 2% to be paid to RITA or that. It's a complex issue, and it's not going to be easily decided. So, I think we should dig in until all the issues are decided on that.

Councilperson Synek said my work experience and career keep me in the background of this issue that I want to tell you that I'm not staying awake at night worrying about this, and here's why. Basically, you work in Independence, and as an employee you pay 2% to the City of

Independence. Wherever you live, you have to file an individual income tax with the city where you live; and your resident city gives you credit for taxes that were withheld in your work city. Some communities give you 100% credit like Independence does, others you don't get 100% credit, you give a little percentage to your resident city; but you still have to pay tax to your local city generally speaking. So, some of this may just move the tax from Independence to the person's resident city maybe; and maybe they have a slight rate savings like because if you live in Cleveland you get taxed at 2 1/2%, but Independence is only 2% so maybe there's a slight rate gain there. The people in this who really stand to gain are people who live in a township. Townships don't levy income taxes. So, if you live and work in a township, you save 2%. That's a fairly small segment of the population, and given the credits, you are looking at maybe a half percent savings. On a \$100,000 salary, that's \$500. On a \$200,000 salary, it's \$1,000. You have to get accountants to help you amend your tax returns. So, the individual taxpayer, there's a lot of hurdles for them to get through to want to do this. These cases of it being settled, I am fairly certain involved high paid employees who live and work in a non-taxing township where it's a difference for them paying 2%, to Columbus paying zero. So, they have a strong incentive to say hey I'm never going to beat this. Those situations are few and far between.

The other thing that eventually if this all settles out, the legislature at the State level have to get involved because it would be a huge burden on employers to have to withhold and report taxes to every municipality in the State. It would just be such a burden in Ohio's business friendly environment to let that go on for very long. These are unusual times, and it will settle out. We will probably end up paying a little bit of refunds, but there's not going to be a run on the banks so to speak that is going to cause Independence to fall into financial peril; but there will probably be some. Again, it's those people who live in townships and have a zero city tax rate who are going to be trying to look to do this, but most people the money involved isn't enough to go through the bother.

Vice Mayor Grendel said I agree with you Kenn.

Councilperson Synek said I would also point out we can see our monthly municipal income tax collections that we are not seeing a big decrease there. Working on Rockside there's clearly less cars here than there used to be, but the money is still coming in; so it seems to be the bulk of the employers are still just continuing to withhold 2% taxes for Independence and the employees aren't having an uprising to stop it just from what we see in the numbers.

Finance Director Blaze said they legally have to now.

Mayor Kurtz said (inaudible) change the rules, they have to do that. We are made whole more or less.

Councilperson Trakas said just as way of background on this, I don't disagree with Kenn at all in terms of on the big picture except for this, the Chairman of the House Committee on Ways and Means where these bills go is Representative Derek Merrin from Monclova Township in Lucas County. The Senate Ways and Means Chairman is Senator Lou Blessing from Colerain Township in Hamilton County. Colerain Township and Green Township where the Senate

Majority and House Majority Leader live have 70,000 residents. They function as a city, and Hamilton County subsidizes them for Police services while they are paying less income tax. So, don't underestimate the power of the townships to want to change this. It's very real. They have a lot of political clout, and they have people positioned in all the right committees to try to make something happen. Many of the legislators are more rural legislators who represent counties like Medina County which has 21 townships and a handful of cities. So, a little bit of a cautionary note.

Mayor Kurtz said last week there was a call to arms by the Mayors group, I am on a committee who manage, help, look and navigate this issue. We testified before the House Subcommittee, House Bill 157; and 157 at least as of last week was not voted out of committee yet. Jim might know more, but as of, I had breakfast with one of our State Senators, and he has assured me that the thing is not going to get a lot of traction right now. When he lifts the emergency order, and it goes to court, there's a successful challenge; and it could have a tremendous impact. There are some ifs in that equation; but we are circling the wagons with all of our representatives to at least convince them or at least they know where we all stand. It could be a very challenging situation, but as of right now, Councilperson Synek is correct, the impact is negligible today. Again, he has to lift the emergency order.

One of the pillars that the Mayors Association is trying to land the foundation is let this thing go for a year or 2, and they will understand the real effects of Covid. To try and make a quick decision today introducing bills and changing laws today, we can't navigate next month let alone next year. It's really disingenuous; and it's small ball thinking, but selfish thinking too to some extent. We are going to continue to monitor the situation, and we will go from there. I have gotten assurances from some of the people I have talked to that it may come out of committee, it may get some traction there; but I don't know if the Senate is really going to give it anything. We have asked the Senate people we have talked to just stay the course. RITA is supporting it. There's not real big opposition from the Mayors to leave it the way it is because we are a big loser; but until it gets to that threshold we have to keep plugging away. It does take a lot of time, and you have to keep looking over your shoulder because you are getting calls from your colleagues, the Mayors, you are getting strategy sessions and meetings. These are all just, you are trying to hold on. They are more of a holding pattern, let's put a lock on that rather than letting people just go off the reservation. You are right Jim, the power is switching back and forth, it could be an interesting dynamic. To be continued. It's good to have this discussion, that's for sure.

Vice Mayor Grendel asked anything further on this Vern?

Finance Director Blaze said good, thank you.

Vice Mayor Grendel said I believe that takes care of the 3 issues Vern that we had you involved with and everything. I think we can move on and maybe go back to Number 1 on the agenda; and Kathleen this is one that you had suggested. It's the Community Services Department, that status of the unfilled, opened positions. I guess there are a number of them in that department. Kathleen, would you like to comment?

Councilperson Kapusta said thank you Vice Mayor. This has come up several times over our last few Community Services Committee meetings so we just thought perhaps it was a good idea to bring it to this forum. We realize that as Council we don't have the administrative authority to make decisions about these positions, but we just kind of wanted to get an update on it. I know that the other Council Members of our committee were interested as well as some other Councilpersons. I don't know if my understanding is correct, but I tried to clarify. It looks to me like there were 4 potential positions, and I don't know if you moved towards either eradicating or filling any of these yet Mayor. The first was July 19th, the social worker position when Jenny left. The second was September 2020 with Marilyn. We were just curious to whether there was a new position for Director. I know at one point in time you said you were looking probably back in 2020 after Marilyn's passing, you said you were looking at some possible reorganization of the area; so we were curious about that. The third position would have been December of 2019 when Mary Walsh retired. It was our understanding as a committee that Marcia Abbidini assumed that position over in the after-school program; but that her 28 hour position with Youth Programming still remained opened. The last was of course very recent, and that was with the exit of Gabby Schultz from the front desk.

So, just basically some understanding about what your thoughts are on them because it appears to us as we have the meetings, and please other Councilpersons who have attended those meetings, chime in. It appears to us that this is of interest to the staff, and they are feeling in sense of flux; and I think it would be helpful for them too if there were some more definition here whether it was a yay or nay on them, at least they would know how to go forward.

Mayor Kurtz said I do appreciate the inquiry, and I will deal with the high level positions first because they have the greatest impact. So, let me begin by talking about the status. Community Services Department and the staff, I met with them recently, I am talking about the leadership just for clarification; and look, first of all, they have done an exceptional job this past year. I think everyone will agree that adapting to the pandemic has been not only challenging, but it has given us the opportunity to open up, peel back the onion so to speak and adapting to the pandemic and my broader vision for the future. I want to emerge from this as a stronger Community Services Department, and the ability to service our customers more effectively and more efficiently.

The pandemic, as you all know, has affected our programs and the interaction with our community. Unfortunately, we had to limit some of our services and redeploy some of our existing staff. We have tried to evaluate all of our operations; and we closed the Civic Center for a while as most of you know that. Most of our full-time staff worked from home for months.

In September, Marilyn as you identified Councilperson, she passed away in September, but 2 weeks before she died, she insisted that she was coming back to work. When I talked to her, I truly believed that she believed that; and so out of respect we didn't really, and our team was so supportive. She did a good job of grooming and putting people in place to be able to continue; and so when she passed away, they were able to continue this limited exposure because of the current conditions of the pandemic.

At the end of last year, and the early part of this year, we have been evaluating our enterprise asset management systems, and thanks to Council's support we began to move to Tyler Technologies. So, that will begin with Engineering, Service and Tech Service; but keep in mind as we have talked about, this is going to be something that's going to evolve over time, similar to what we started with in the Building Department.

So, taking all of that in its current context, we have had a tremendous review and support from our Community Services Rec survey. I hope each of you have taken the time to fill that out. If you haven't, you still have until the end of the week; but to give you a flavor of the numbers. We have 325 residents that have completed the survey, and so that's pretty substantial. What it does is it pretty much tells you that people have more time on their hands; but they are engaged. We intend to bring to you, hopefully in the next 30 days, a comprehensive strategy, a community campus strategy that will involve and incorporate a number of the different recommendations and suggestions after we have had a chance to synthesize that information and organize it; but suffice to say that the results have been fantastic. We are excited about it. We can't wait to again put all that information together so that we can then make a more comprehensive presentation to Council.

So, today we posted 2 positions, redefined positions, the Community Services Director position, and the Community Outreach Coordinator, the Social Worker position. Both positions were posted on the website, and the Community Outreach Coordinator is reimaged, the Social Worker position. As many of you know, Councilperson Kapusta served the residents for many years in that capacity; and so what we are doing is we are taking it and looking at the social services, the advocacy and other counseling and support among our residents. In talking with the team's leadership recently, it became extremely apparent that over the past year that we need this more than one dimensional; and actually it's more than one age group. It is comprehensive. It's going to be much more engaging than in the past.

The City supports its Prevention Specialist Alexa with the Independence Schools. We are working with the 25 and Alive meeting, and there's a number of students that have been involved. They continue to grow and also a number of families. So, what we are saying is that the job that we originally defined has taken different legs, and we are hopeful to get a number of resumes back where people will be able to see the benefits of not only working for the City, but will also see the opportunity to serve our community and our population, both young and old.

So, we do have some internal candidates, and I have encouraged everyone to dust off their ideas and make a pitch like in the past; so that's where we are headed as of today with those 2 most important positions. I'm looking for someone who is qualified, who is an innovative thinker and a collaborator to lead the department and also support the department in this needs in being able to service our community and those of all ages.

Now going one step further, the reality check; you mentioned about Gabby Schultz for example. You know what, there's a lot of poaching going on right now. We have lost several people in the community to different Government entities; and so these are people that got paid bonuses last year and got pay raises. So, it's like really, you get a bonus or you get a pay raise, and then you

move on; but we are finding out that this next generation, the younger generation, is much more fluid, much more flexible, much more excited; and they don't have that stability or that single focus. They are more of a scattered shot rather than a bullet. So, we are recognizing that, and the other challenge we are experiencing today is the fact that it's tough to get people to come back to work. There's a certain segment of the population that either is getting some additional support, monetary support, or they put themselves in a position where they don't need to work the hours and make the commitment. So, wages, when you are dealing with McDonald's at \$11.00 an hour, and you are dealing with Twinsburg paying its lifeguards \$13.00 an hour; and Green's summer camp is \$10.00 to \$14.00 an hour, and we are under \$10.00 an hour. So, we are going to make that adjustment because we need to pull back, be magnetic in terms of pulling back those high school and college former employees who are looking for a job. We want to make sure we can incentivize them to come to work.

One of the biggest challenges we have had is transport, and I say this because it's not just having somebody to transport; but there's still a segment of the population that's uncomfortable with social settings, with the public exposure. So, we are trying to navigate through a number of different obstacles, whether it be wages, whether it be Covid and continued Covid questions. So, at the end of the day, we are trying to figure out the next normal, and we are going to raise our pay. We are going to provide the best environment for them to come to work, making sure it's safe, making sure that it's collaborative. We are hoping that we can continue to provide these ancillary services until we become fully engaged again, such as the 55 drive up lunches. That's been a huge success story. Thank you for your funding. The special events that we have, it's been well received by over 300 people, our youth came to see Santa for the holidays.

We are trying to really find the next normal and to see how we can navigate that. So, that should give you a little more what we are on in perspective as we go through this search. Obviously, we will keep you up to speed. We will call a Community Services meeting once we know we have some potential positions to be filled, but right now we are excited about this opportunity.

We are looking for a Project Manager to deal with Tyler so that we don't have to bounce around. We have a single person responsible, but throughout the entire public and private sector, it's becoming more challenging to keep good people, find good people and find those who really want to work. Hopefully, that at least gives you the broad stroke where we are going with Community Services. Again, we are still in the restart phase. We are not open for business 100% yet; but we do believe that between Rec and Community Services, we are going to gear up for more activity this summer.

Vice Mayor Grendel said thank you Mayor. Any questions for the Mayor on this issue?

Councilperson Kapusta said I just have one comment because I can't go without saying it. Having served in that position for the years that I did Mayor, just so you understood, even though we called it a Senior Services Coordinator, my scope was never just with seniors. I worked with after school program. At that time we had no social workers in the schools even; so I worked with them. I worked with parents on child issues, behavioral issues. We worked with spousal abuse. Even though that title was such, the scope was whatever resident; and it started

because at that time, when the position started, to Mayor Ramos. I said to him tell me am I free to work with any residents, and he said absolutely. So, please just know that it was never just seniors. It was just that's where the bulk of my work ended up being because those were the people who were visible and active in the Civic Center. So, I am glad to hear that you continue to see it as being important for all levels of our resident population. So, thank you for that.

Mayor Kurtz said yes Councilperson Kapusta, absolutely; and this was meant really to help give more flavor to your colleagues. You have lived it, you know exactly what I was talking about; but that was for the benefit of everyone else that doesn't have intimate knowledge to what the full scope of what your responsibility, what you did, and what I tried to explained, where we are going with this.

Councilperson Kapusta said thank you.

Vice Mayor Grendel said Mayor and Kathleen, I see a number of people, especially now during tax season, but during the course of the year, a lot of them are elderly; and they really appreciated the work that Kathleen had provided and the work that the City had provided over the years. They came, they had a trust factor there that was comforting to see; they know that there were people in their hometown in the Government that could help them, even just steer them in the right direction when it comes to Medicare and Social Security or that. So, it's good to have somebody that the community can trust. So, I am glad to see that again you are working to get kind of restart for that department.

Mayor Kurtz said trust is a major component, and I think that Kathleen in her efforts set the bar pretty high.

Vice Mayor Grendel asked any other questions of the Mayor or Kathleen in this area?

Councilperson Trakas said the committee has been talking about this, thanks Mayor for that. Just out of curiosity, when you talk about this reimagined position, can you compare, contrast what we are advertising for now versus what we had, and obviously we kind of knew what Kathleen and Jenny were doing; but out of curiosity, is there a major difference? Do you have different expectations? Did you write a new job description? Can you define that please?

Mayor Kurtz said I think what we did was we just tried to be more comprehensive in our ask because we know what it entails. We know what the job entails, we know the responsibility that's elevated; but when you put it in writing, it does give you a different perspective on it. So, we are excited because we spent the time to really try to pull as many components together. It's going to be exciting to see what type of response we get from the population that's willing to take on this tremendous responsibility.

Councilperson Kapusta said I looked really quickly Mayor if I might add to Councilperson Trakas' question; I looked quickly. I brought up the job description, and I think I'm understanding that you are putting it now back to a full-time position?

Mayor Kurtz said that's correct.

Councilperson Kapusta said and I personally applaud that because I think there's some candidates out there that may be very attractive to the City and attracted to the City, but are probably professionals who are looking for a full-time commitment. So, thank you for doing that.

Mayor Kurtz said again it's a result of everyone's effort trying to figure out what the best long term strategy is, and when it came down to it, it has to go full-time. There is just too much. We have to take the steps to make sure that we minimize anybody falling through the cracks. So, that's the only way it really works, and that level of professionalism.

Vice Mayor Grendel said very good. Any other comments before we move on to topic number 2, and topic number 2 I believe Chris originally you brought that to the forefront, and I think Jim did also. It's the creation of the position of an Assistant Clerk of Council to be hired and trained by the current Clerk of Council. I know Debi you weighed in. I think you sent us an email regarding this topic too. It is important. We just need to cover our bases in case, heaven forbid, something unforeseen would happen that either Debi yourself health wise. I saw that it could quickly happen in my family. One day you are healthy, and the next day you are laying in bed with major surgery and that. The City needs to have someone trained and to be able to alleviate a lot of the pressures that you have. You said when you were gone last week, but really you were still really kept active by a number of us on different forefronts too. So, what we need to do is to move probably sooner than later on this topic here and hopefully post the position that we could train somebody, and Debi it would be ideally your ultimate replacement when you are ready to retire; but we need somebody that can step in if something should happen health wise to either you or your husband or loved one or that so that you don't feel the pressure with what are you going to do with work.

I can go back myself, and my father was legal counsel for a Polish fraternal, and at that it was a pretty big fraternal. Fortunately, I had sat in on, and he informed me when he was on vacation; so that when he died suddenly of a heart attack, they weren't thrown without a person who could handle their mortgage work and all the other work I did for them. So, I know personally first-hand that you need to have somebody that has some knowledge of what the work entails.

As the City, and specifically Council can be really at a crossroads, and I saw first-hand and Greg I think you were on Council maybe, I don't know Tom if you were when we had our Clerk of Council had those health issues with cancer and everything. We had temporary help in that position, and we were really struggling as a Council. We weren't getting minutes for months and everything. It was not a pretty situation. So, I will open the discussion up. I don't know Chris if you want to start or Jim in this issue.

Mayor Kurtz said if I just may before, look it, it didn't fall on deaf ears. We have a lot of things going on right now, but what we are looking at is to try to work creatively with Council and the Council Clerk and some of our City Hall Administration operations. We are trying to see if there's an opportunity to blend, do some little cross-training, do something that's going to be

good long term like virtual meetings, less paper, direct community access. There are a number of different ideas or concepts out there using technology. Obviously, we all agree that Debi is very valuable, her integrity and work ethic. We also recognize that things change, and so one of the things we are looking at is using technology to help us through this transition, knowing that there is technology out there that allows us to be more efficient. It's just a matter of putting it all together. So, we have asked Ryan and Jess, we are going to do a partnership to see if we can investigate a best strategy going forward.

Vice Mayor Grendel said I know Debi you are not going to be here for the July meeting, is that correct?

The Clerk replied that is correct. I will be in Columbus for a conference; so we need to make some type of decision because it's just a couple of months away now.

Vice Mayor Grendel said and unfortunately I won't be able to attend that meeting either. With after this happening to my wife, my kids got us a week get-away for our anniversary to get away from the stress and everything. Unbeknownst to me, they didn't realize the Council meeting being on the second Tuesday. So, we have a week's trip at the most critical week, but that happens to be our anniversary.

Mayor Kurtz said everybody just leave.

Vice Mayor Grendel said I just wanted to give you warning Debi I wouldn't be able to be there either. I guess when you get to this point in life, and you see things happen to some of your friends and that, you know that tomorrow's not guaranteed to anybody. Maybe to the younger folks it is, but you value your family and other things too. So, I just wanted to forewarn you too, we don't have to change the date; but I know that I wouldn't be able to be here to run the Caucus and that too.

We do need really to get somebody to, and Mayor whether it's to just back up Debi and our Clerk's office or to do other things in City Hall; but Debi is unique too because besides Clerk of Council, she is also the Secretary for every board that the City has. So, we need to find somebody that's nearly as talented as Debi as far as taking Minutes and being productive there. I hate to see, like I said, we went through that already when the City was kind of working with temps, and that was no solution at all.

Mayor Kurtz said we will work through some of these things. Gayle will help out or Dar or somebody. We won't be sitting there naked. We are going to have some backup somehow. It won't be as effective, it won't be as efficient; but Ryan is going to make sure we have technology available so we don't lose anything. Then we will figure out how to navigate in the future.

Councilperson Trakas said I take a little bit of a different approach to it with due respect to the conversation we just had. So, I look at Debi, and I think she has been talking about this for 5 years; and we haven't really been paying close enough attention. We keep talking about how to

help her, but she needs help. So, I think we go ahead and authorize an Assistant Clerk position to be advertised. We let the Administration work with Debi and the Vice Mayor to figure out what the position entails. It would be a part-time type position. Maybe somebody internally can fill that. Maybe we hire externally. Maybe we have another Clerk from another community who wants to be a part-time Clerk; but I think what Debi is telling us is that we need a transition plan. It's nice to have backup, but the backup tends to be she comes back from vacation and has 4 months' worth of Minutes to do; and that has been consistent throughout the 4 years that I have been around. I think that there's a lot of good intentions to try to do other things, but that's in reality what seems to happen all the time with her.

So, I think if you have somebody identified, and you advertise for a position, maybe we will find out that there's somebody that can do this; but my wife does this for a living, it's not easy and it's not intuitive. People don't really appreciate all that is involved with this, and we get spoiled because we get Minutes the next day or 2 days later from these meetings. I think we ought to hear what Debi is saying, she can't do it. We have been paying her for vacation days that she hasn't been able to take that she has earned for 4 years, longer than that I think probably. I think it's kind of time to make a permanent decision to help her and to put together that transition plan. It may well be exactly what we just identified that there are internal candidates who do all these things, but there has to be an individual responsible when Debi is not here; and that's why I think we should create this position and advertise for it and start that process.

Mayor Kurtz asked is it 4 hours, 10 hours, 32 hours a week? There's a full range, and I think Debi has at least articulated to me the framework of her timetable and her commitment; so we should reduce that to writing, get it to Council and at least you can weigh in on it and maybe we can help you facilitate that. How is that?

Councilperson Trakas said beautiful.

Vice Mayor Grendel asked does it sound good to you Debi because I would like to have her as part of the process too because it would be important that you train and have input into that. What we have had so far, we have been spoiled. It has been working very well, and we need to find somebody else of your caliber Debi, it might be finding that needle in the haystack. The dedication that you have provided us has been unmatched in my 18 years on Council and everything. Mayor, maybe what we will do is we will get things started.

Councilperson Kapusta said if I could just add something. I noted that Debi was given Carrie's position for Civil Service. I am hoping that it's just a short term as an interim until we can get somebody else to cover that because it seemed kind of unusual to me. I understand from one perspective why Debi would have been selected for that because she obviously would be one of the best or the top candidate to do that, but on the other hand, if she is already, and we are concurring that her workload is such that she can just about keep her head above water, then I hope that it's not meant to be a long term addition to her schedule because that's far too much in my opinion.

The other comment I just had, when it was introduced for the possibility of a part-time person who would then work with Debi and take over; I agree if I understood what the Mayor was saying, and I agree more that a concept of having somebody who will be full-time on staff already doing some other things in City Hall and learning from Debi because I think if we went out and recruited, and this is just my opinion, for a part-time person with the thought that in one year, two years, five years, however long Debi's horizon is here, that they would be coming on full-time, I don't know who would jump for that. To me, if I'm saying hey I see this as being a great position, it would be excited, interesting, and I wanted to be invested; but I will take it for "x" number of years part-time until it opens up to full-time. Do you see what I am saying? I think having somebody who has some other responsibilities here, and then learns in the part-time of their work, half time or whatever, that's more viable that we are going to find a person who could keep it on as an ongoing career.

Vice Mayor Grendel said thank you Kathleen. Any other comments from Council?

It's definitely one, we will work on maybe Mayor together getting a plan there that could ultimately fill that position and not just give lip service because we have kicked the can down the road many of times; so we will make that a reality sooner rather than later then.

Mayor Kurtz said okay.

Vice Mayor Grendel said let's move on to Item 3, and Mike has been here. We have had over the last maybe half year or so, we have had 3 properties declared as public nuisances under Chapter 1369.01, and I just wanted to see what the next steps would be. It's the hotel behind Cozumel's, the Todt farm, that property there at 6030 Brecksville Road, and then the Grunt property at 9114 Bramley Drive. Mike, I think you have talked with the Law Director about this issue.

Building Official Gero said we have, and as far as the 5555 Brecksville Road, I think I'm going to ask Jessica if she could just give some update as far as what is going on with that one. She has been in conversation with the owners on that property.

Economic Development Hyser said so just so we all kind of remember, that property, there was legislation that was put on the December agenda, and then it was talked about again in January which no action was taken. It was tabled and pulled off the agenda. So, we never declared that property a nuisance.

We have had some conversations with the owners of the property, Gaucho, who as you know own the Cozumel restaurant next door. So, those folks have some desire to renovate that space. Their first proposal, I think you guys were made aware was multi-family housing for Kent State University. We all felt that it was not the appropriate direction for that property; so they have been back at the drawing board. Their second proposal that we had talked to them about, they were talking about using the first floor as restaurant space and then the remaining floors as storage units, which there were concerns about that fitting within the zoning classification for that property.

So, I reached back out to them, they are at a point right now where they are struggling to find an architect to do some work. They think they have narrowed it down, and we will be having some additional follow up phone calls and meetings with them. That is where we stand right now.

Vice Mayor Grendel asked so there is a chance maybe with the current owners to work something out for a viable use for that property then?

Economic Development Director Hyser said we would hope to either see it reused or honestly I think here's the challenge. So, the Gaucho folks own Cozumel's, the restaurant, the operation but do not own the building; and when that property, as many of you all know, so when that property was developed, the back portion where the hotel is and the front portion were all part of the same ownership. It was a Howard Johnson's. So, the hotel operated both the restaurant space and the hotel space. At some point in time that was sub-divided into 2 properties, and Pak Lui who is the owner of the former Pak Lok restaurant, and the hotel continued to operate. What has happened there over time, and I think we all see it when we drive by, there is a clear parking shortage; and so that really is the challenge for the Gaucho folks. They also don't own the building. They put a lot of money into the building that they are currently in. They don't have the parking that they need at that facility. So, they have some things to work through from a business standpoint. They obviously bought the hotel piece for a significant sum of money, at least you know for most people. It wasn't just a couple of dollars. So, they are trying to figure out how to make a business to make everything work; but what we do know exists is there is a structure that in its current state is not safe. They are in the process of cleaning out that building. They have asked us whether or not they could bring some dumpsters in and clean out the rooms. We do know that there is some black mold in that facility, and we do understand that there is a parking shortage for the restaurant. So, there are a number of issues that we are still trying to work through.

Councilperson Trakas said that was a great report. Has it declined or stayed the same? Are they upkeeping it?

Economic Development Director Hyser said I would say it's probably more on a level playing field. There was some roof decay issues that there's a hatch on the roof that was left open, and that has been closed. Our Fire folks, the last time they were in there, and some other folks that I know that were in the building, do not feel comfortable traveling very far in the building. They have secured the premises, not with security fences, but blocking the entrances; and that seems to be working for the time being. I don't think that's a long term solution.

Councilperson Trakas said thanks.

Mayor Kurtz said the building needs to come down realistically. There's no future adaptive reuse that's beneficial to that area. We just either have to face it or fold, one of the two. That's why we presented it, and that's why Council has to give us some direction on the issue. We have exhausted, I thank you Jess for your thorough report. You can tell that we are no further ahead other than passing along information than we were months ago.

Councilperson Walchanowicz said I have a question about the Todt farm.

Mayor Kurtz asked can we finish this one before we go to that one please?

Vice Mayor Grendel asked how many years has that hotel been inoperable or that? Has it been a decade yet? It's been a long time since.

Councilperson Trakas said they left 3 years ago didn't they.

Vice Mayor Grendel said it seems longer than that.

Mayor Kurtz said it has been a steady decline, and then it just closed.

Vice Mayor Grendel said it would take too much money to try to rehab that facility. There's really no future the way it's built now, and that area too that makes any sense, at least not to me either. Any other comments before we move on to the farm?

Councilperson Narduzzi asked would the City let the hotel space separate that land to give a parking lot basically to the operator of the restaurant now? So, he owned that little parcel, and I know he doesn't own the restaurant; but if he owned that little parcel of land, that would accommodate his overflow parking, and then the City would take.

Mayor Kurtz said we are just going to raze the building and then find some way to recover our money. We are not looking to, if we can't make it work, if nothing else, he would get rid of the building; and then he would still have more parking if he elects to do that.

Building Official Gero said I think the City isn't looking to acquire the property, just to abate the nuisance of the building.

Mayor Kurtz said we are not looking to acquire the property. We want to abate the nuisance.

Building Official Gero said that holds true with all 3 properties right.

Mayor Kurtz said that will clean it up.

Councilperson Veverka said the only unfortunate piece of that puzzle is that he just not that long ago acquired the property. I guess if I was in a position and just purchased the property, and I am making reasonable effort to try to figure something out; I am still not comfortable with moving along toward razing the building so he has a parking lot and costs against it. So in other words, he made a substantial investment in what he felt was a usable building. I would hate to be the ones who are responsible for trying to put a giant rush. If this was the previous owner, and as it sat in its state for a long time, I get it; but I am not really comfortable in letting him exhaust some possibilities. When was the purchase?

Mayor Kurtz said well he bought it at a Sheriff's auction, so you stop and think, you buy at your own risk; and no one has had a chance to go and explore. You buy it exploratory, you don't buy

it like you buy a home where you do inspections and everything else. So, that's one strike against him. Your issue of time, I absolutely concur with time; but my question to you would be how much time and at some point if it's deteriorated to the point where it becomes a nuisance to the point where it's dangerous, and he shows no effort to raze the building, is it our responsibility?

Councilperson Veverka said well that was one of my questions. You specifically mentioned the Sheriff's sale, when did that take place?

Economic Development Director Hyser said he took title of the property in August of 2020. I will say there was, when I was looking at kind of the history of this property, the City was looking at acquiring this property in 2019 to mitigate this issue.

Councilperson Veverka replied yes.

Mayor Kurtz said he had an issue, I was called on the property years ago between the hotel owner and the restaurant owner of which he didn't own either one at the time. He was caught between a rock and a hard place because he had a great business; but he had limited parking. So, he, although he doesn't own the building he's in, he has a great business. So, he made a decision, a conscious decision, to acquire that property; and he has mitigated his parking problem, but it doesn't mitigate the fact that there's a potential liability and dangerous situation there.

Councilperson Kapusta asked have we given him anything in writing Mayor from the City reflecting just what you said about the potential things?

Mayor Kurtz said we met with him in person and shared with him our concerns, and I even tried to build a bridge between him and Pak Lui to see if there was any chance of, explore every possibility.

Councilperson Kapusta said I remember we met with him, but I am trying to follow up with what Councilperson Veverka is saying here relative to giving him opportunities. So, is there a better course of action before we just go and mitigate it? I agree that we don't want it there, I totally agree with that; but because August of 2020, especially in the life of a pandemic wasn't all that long ago, I am wondering if there's a formula we could follow. I don't know, but could we give him something in writing? Could we put in there some dates that we expect a viable option by, if he doesn't provide it by that date, then here's the date that we as a City will go and mitigate it? That would seem to be more fair.

Mayor Kurtz said I guess I'm asking Council how long you want to do it? What do you want to do because you are the authority here. We are just the implementer. We brought the facts to the table the best we knew them, our safety forces and everyone else. We introduced legislation, and I will take my marching orders.

Councilperson Trakas said if there's nobody in the building, then it doesn't represent a safety hazard, and they are preventing people from coming into the building, it seems like they are

trying to take some type of approach to make this a functional building. We may or may not like that, but at least they are making efforts. For 2 years it was sitting, and they couldn't sell it. That would have been the time where the City could have come in if we felt it was such a terrible structure, and we didn't. This guy put \$500,000 or something like that into the building, and I don't know what the timeframe is; but it's not insignificant. They were asking \$600,000 for it when the City was talking about it; but again if they are making progress, they are trying to come up with something that works, let's work with them to figure out what works for them. I don't think there's any rush. It's a building that's been unoccupied for 3 years, and there's nobody in it so to me there doesn't appear to be any type of a safety factor. If there were people in the building, I would say of course there's a safety factor, but there aren't.

Mayor Kurtz said if any Member of Council wants this to be converted into apartments or dormitory, raise your hand because I will back off; but if that's not your flavor, then you need to really face this as a situation, it's uncomfortable but it's real. The suggested uses, I am not comfortable with; but if you are, it's your decision, not mine.

Councilperson Narduzzi said I know he's been dealing with this issue for a year, but we as a Council have been talking about this piece of property for many years and decided many years ago that we wanted to eliminate it and decided many years ago we didn't want it to be another hotel and to deal with what was coming in and out of there. Although it's unfortunate, somebody has to take action and do something with it, or we are going to be in a lawsuit about having another hotel go in there or apartments for a college or dormitories or something. It's coming. I think we have to be proactive and not worry about feelings and do what we think is right as a Council.

Councilperson Kapusta said I agree, we need to be proactive, and I wasn't implying we just sit back and do nothing in my remarks. What I was saying is we should be proactive, and I am not even basing it on feelings; I am basing it on the reality that a man, and again I preface my remarks by saying I don't think there's a viable option for what that building could do, but having said that, a man in August of 2020 in the midst of a pandemic put down if I am understanding correctly \$500,000 for a property. I think that what we need to do as a City is to put something in writing to him to say we need a plan from you presented to the Mayor's office and our legal counsel or whatever that needs to be presented by "x" date, whatever date we determine. With the understanding that if it's something that we feel we could forward with and go through the appropriate channels in the City, he will be afforded that opportunity. If not, then the City's plan would be to, if you want to put down, take the building down or whatever. So, I don't think that's not doing anything; I think it's being very fair to the man, not based on feelings, but based on facts because he put in money, he put in time, and I think we owe it to him.

Mayor Kurtz said again, I will go back to the suggestions he made to us when we met with him; he was talking with his attorney, it was apartment or dormitory; so any Member of Council support that, either ones of those?

Vice Mayor Grendel said either one of those would never pass a vote of the people for sure.

Councilperson Trakas said Jessica just said that he's doing something else, and we haven't talked about that.

Mayor Kurtz said well those are the 2 issues that he presented to us publicly.

Councilperson Kapusta said and our letter to him could state the 2 previous issues you presented have no agreement or support by Council or this Administration. I would totally support that.

Councilperson Walchanowicz asked could we just date that August 1st? That gives him 20 days less than a year to come up with an idea that's not some type of housing. At that point, he doesn't, then we move forward with our ordinance on it.

Mayor Kurtz said we need to confer with Greg O'Brien and figure out how to structure at least a letter and see if we could find some common ground.

Councilperson Walchanowicz said maybe that would cover us from any further action from them.

Vice Mayor Grendel said we need to move on this quickly because of the things going on in society. Like I say, I wouldn't put anything past a lawsuit saying that you know what we have in our Charter is unconstitutional. The longer that thing stands, the more potential that it could be a problem for us. I do believe that we should give him a deadline, and hopefully have dialogue with him if he has some alternative that maybe we haven't thought of. It might be a positive to give him the opportunity, but anything regarding multi-family housing or making a potential site for low cost housing with the guy, it's really not a good thing for the City. Mayor, I think we should get together with Greg O'Brien and give him a deadline.

Mayor Kurtz said I heard August 1st.

Councilperson Kapusta said I support that, it is a year.

Councilperson Trakas said that seems like a good enough time to come up with a solid plan and approach the City.

Vice Mayor Grendel said if he has something working and something that seems interesting, we could always extend that if he is showing some movement, a positive movement on that; so I believe August 1st is a good date.

Economic Development Director Hyser said we will work with Greg to get that done.

Mayor Kurtz said we don't want that location to be transitioned into something that's off the charts, that's for sure.

Vice Mayor Grendel said very good. Thank you Mayor. Anything further on that property? We will move on to the old Todt farm.

Councilperson Walchanowicz said I will let Jess talk about it first, and then I will ask her when she's done.

Building Official Gero said well the Todt farm, we notified the Executor of the estate in November that we had condemned the property and the property needed to be demolished. In December it came on the agenda for Council to do something with it. It stayed on First Reading. In January it was removed from the agenda, and then I was approached by Kenneth Finley who is the Executor of the estate saying that he wanted to fix up the property, but it was tied up in an estate transaction.

Vice Mayor Grendel asked Michael is that an estate or a trust?

Building Official Gero said the property is actually in the title of a corporation, this property; but there were 3 properties. There's a property, this property, there's a property on Greenwood, and there's a property on Hemoga that were all owned by, those 2 properties, the 2 houses on Hemoga and Greenwood were in the title of Esther Finley who had passed away a few years ago. This property at 6030 Brecksville was in the title of 6030 Properties. William Finley was the main principal in that, and Kenneth Finley is the Executor and in charge of the properties now.

I advised him when I spoke to him to give me a plan as far as what they intended to do as far as fixing up the status of the property, and a week later he supplied me with a letter stating that their plan was to evaluate the status, to have the structures evaluated, to address issues with landscaping, to conduct repairs and keep me updated. I have heard nothing from them since, and I put this letter together. I informed the Mayor of it, and basically my opinion is that his response is just an attempt to kick the can down the road as he has in past property maintenance issues. So, that's where we stand with this property. It's Council's pleasure as far as putting it on Second Reading and making a determination. I have received a couple of phone calls, people being inquisitive about the property, and I supplied Mr. Finley's contact information. I have not heard anything as far as anything developing of those contacts.

Vice Mayor Grendel said thank you Mike.

Mayor Kurtz asked would you say the property is in disrepair?

Building Official Gero said yes. The eave boards on the house have been torn off or rotted away, so heaven only knows what's on the inside. In the 9 ½ years that I have been with the City that property has never been lived in that I am aware of. I have never seen anybody at the property doing anything. By the one barn there's some old abandoned vehicles, and I want to say there's an abandoned tractor trailer back there that we could never get anything done with.

Vice Mayor Grendel said Mayor there's a number of houses that I can go down and people haven't lived in the house for 5 or 10 years; but at least they maintain the outside of it. To me, that's dangerous. If I was the next door neighbor, and there is one property on Oakwood that nobody has been in the house for 5 years, that thing could explode. Who knows what can happen inside there, and if you are the next door neighbor, there's really not much. This is an issue too.

This has been an eyesore for a decade. How long do we keep it going? It's next to Vista Springs, across the street from the Cavaliers, and then you have this. Who knows, there could be drug work going on. Who knows what's going on in the property there unless somebody keeps an eye on it 24/7. I just don't think it's a benefit, this or the Grunt property.

Mayor Kurtz said as most of you know, we have exhausted every opportunity for years with respect to Grunt, and now like you have mentioned Vice Mayor, 9 ½ years of Todt, and there are houses that if you bring it to my attention, we will review, research, try to see if we could find some common ground with people.

We have Nestor on Brecksville Road. We are looking at the one next door here now. When people bring it to our attention that it's beyond my ability to, we have to engage them into a process and determine if there's going to be some type of remediation. Like I said, we have changed our procedures. We physically talk to them, or attempt to the best of our ability. Once we get to an impasse, we offer City services, dumpsters and stuff to support people in need; but at some point, when we bring them to you, it's not because, we are just to the point where we are not getting any support in terms of courts. We are not going to let people turn a blind eye, we need to take action; and there will be more by the way, just so you know, there will be more. If we can't mitigate the situation, I have to come to Council.

Vice Mayor Grendel said and that's just not healthy for a community to have vacant houses, even if they are taken care of. To me, it would seem an open opportunity for vandals or things to happen that aren't good for neighborhoods.

Mayor Kurtz said well they aren't even just abandoned, some houses people are just disrespectful to the neighborhood, their neighbors. Look at, if they have a situation where they are not competent or capable, we are absolutely going to try to help them. There's not a person in the Zoom that wouldn't feel the same way; but there are people who are belligerent or who are against our code. They see it so differently than we do, and those are the people, the gray area that need to be maybe (inaudible) a little stronger because it just doesn't work. I will speak frankly, the house at Kingscote, we have been as accommodating as we could be, but even our team gets to the point where it's like look we are done.

Grunt, years and years; I was here last time when we assessed that situation, took it to court, and the courts did nothing to support us. So, finally we are taking steps to deal with the situation.

This Todt, sure no one really pays attention to it, but if you live next to you and call; we have to pay attention to it.

The one at Kingscote, it's so frustrating. It's extremely frustrating, and there's more and more; but when we bring them to you it's because we have exhausted our abilities to manage it within our prevue. Look, you give us good feedback. You give us ideas, and we go back and we will test those waters; but here's where we are at with this one.

Building Official Gero said Vice Mayor I appreciate your comment that you know of many vacant homes or homes that no one has lived in for quite a long time; however, those homes are typically maintained, and they present the presence of someone living there.

Last year the Service Department had to go out to this property on Brecksville Road 2 or 3 times to mow the lawn because it wasn't being addressed. So, these type of things, when it gets to you, it's the last resort.

Councilperson Kapusta said so if understood Mr. Gero he said that we have had it on First Reading in December. I would like to support bringing it back to Council for our agenda because it was the end of last year, can we take it on to Second Reading or do we have to bring it back to First Reading now?

Mayor Kurtz said you can leave it on Second Reading.

Councilperson Kapusta said okay I would like to suggest we do leave it on Second Reading and put it on our current agenda so we can take action, 9 ½ years seems like more than adequate time.

Mayor Kurtz said it takes 3 Councilpersons.

Vice Mayor Grendel said I think both the Grunt property and the Todt property.

Councilperson Walchanowicz asked may I comment first before we?

Vice Mayor Grendel said yes Chris.

Councilperson Walchanowicz said so Kenneth has had a big change of heart since Mike passed away a month ago. He's been selling stuff off the property. He sold the big John Deere front end loader, backhoe, buckets; and he's in serious conversations with a lifelong resident right now that they are in the works of coming up with a price on purchasing the property. The resident that wants to purchase the property, they will take the house down. His questions were does the barn have to come down because he wants to have the Amish rebuild the barn.

Mayor Kurtz said we are not taking the property, we are just cleaning it up.

Councilperson Walchanowicz said he wants to be able to purchase the property before everything is knocked down, and he would assume the costs of knocking down what needs to be knocked down.

Mayor Kurtz said well let's put it this way, if you authorize us to take action, they will have an opportunity; but it will be a short window. If you don't take action, we will be sitting here talking about this months from now.

Councilperson Walchanowicz said I am looking for information so I can pass on to this resident.

Mayor Kurtz said tell him that we are going to put it on the agenda in May, and if it passes, that we are going to start moving forward. If he can convince us that there's a viable solution that makes sense, and it's not just give us more time, then great. I would be happy. All this is saying, we now can follow up; but I will stop the train anytime we can to get something that's going to be fruitful for that area. It's not just productive right now, and talk is cheap anymore at this level. They don't cut the grass even. So, if you can't do that, then I am done.

Building Official Gero said Chris if I could just add, that property is zoned residential; so if he takes the house down, his only use would be to build another home on it.

Councilperson Walchanowicz said I think he intends to for his daughter.

Building Official Gero said and he can't just take the house down and leave the barn I guess is what I am saying. If he rebuilds the barn and keeps it in good condition, good maintenance, good repair, I don't think that there's any issue with that being there since it's an existing structure. The rest of the property as far as the junk and the things that aren't dilapidated, of course I would think that he would be.

Councilperson Walchanowicz said he was just concerned about building a new home and being able to restore the barn that's currently there.

Councilperson Veverka asked Chris that's a neighbor?

Councilperson Walchanowicz said it's a resident in Independence. They have been lifelong family friends, and the Finley parents are like a second set of parents to him.

Councilperson Veverka asked so it's not the one neighbor that expressed an interest? If it happened to be the adjoining property, then potentially the properties could be combined.

Mayor Kurtz said we don't pick winners or losers by the way. We just need to make sure that people understand that if you are going to be here, own property here, you have to manage it properly.

Councilperson Veverka said understood.

Mayor Kurtz asked so what's Council's pleasure?

Vice Mayor Grendel said I think we should move forward; and again, it opens the door if somebody wants to step in and resolve the issue, I am sure the City would be more than happy to work with that individual. Like Mike said, it's residential, if they want to build a home and restore the barn, I don't think there's anything, to make that property look respectable, I think everybody would be for that.

How about the Grunt property though? Will we treat it the same way and bring that back?

Several people said we passed that.

Mayor Kurtz said we are in the process with that one.

Building Official Gero said the Grunt property was passed, and that passed successfully in February; and we are in the process of working with the Law Department to make sure we have all of our i's dotted, t's crossed and finally reaching out to contractors to get cost estimates as far as taking down the home and cleaning up the property.

Vice Mayor Grendel said very good, thank you Mike.

Councilperson Synek said for what it's worth. Chris, if you could encourage the person you know who's interested in that property to talk to the Mayor and get on the radar and get involved. You know, the Constitution envues strong private property rights on every citizen. It's in the Constitution. That's why the court is so loathed to enforce these rights because the very Constitution grants people rights to private property. They can keep it neat, they can leave it a mess, but it's theirs; and it's their choice. We may not like it, it's bad for the City, it looks terrible; but people have a right to maintain or not maintain their property. It doesn't take much for a judge to agree with the property owner that says this is mine, I have a plan, or I'm going to do something next week or next year so don't let the City come in and just clear cut the whole place. Lawyers will get involved, and everything will just stop. So, any sort of resolution that's a friendly one, a negotiated one, is a thousand percent better than going to court and having the heavy hand of government come in there and try. Let's keep talking to these people, and the heavy hand of government just gets expensive for everybody.

Councilperson Walchanowicz said and this resident, his daughter lives in Virginia Beach. Her husband is retiring out of the Navy, and they want to move back home.

Councilperson Trakas said Mr. Finley has lost his brother too, I mean I think we should have a little bit of respect for that. Maybe the brothers have had some disagreements, but that's not the case anymore. He's the Executor. He's actively working on this. I would not bring this action in May. I would let them know they should talk to the Mayor and try to get this thing squared away; but out of respect to the family who just lost somebody, I think those people had some disagreements, now that those disagreements are no longer there, there's action that is being contemplated, let's let them work on this.

Councilperson Veverka said I would agree.

Mayor Kurtz said action deferred.

Councilperson Walchanowicz asked what about until June, give them a month?

Vice Mayor Grendel said and then Chris if that is a viable option, they should contact the Mayor and see how serious that they are.

Councilperson Walchanowicz said I will call them when our meeting is over and then reach out to the Mayor.

Mayor Kurtz asked so then are we saying June agenda if we can't make it work? Good, I hope it does. It's so much easier if everyone works something out. That's fine, that's great.

Vice Mayor Grendel said at least by June because then this way maybe that will force some action.

Mayor Kurtz said that's great. Chris, I don't know who you are talking about, but that's great. If you tell them that they have a window, and that's all people can ask for is a chance to get through it. If we can work it out, that would be great.

Councilperson Walchanowicz said it's just a week from today that our Council is here; so I don't know if they can get everything together in a week's time.

Mayor Kurtz said Council is in 2 weeks isn't it.

Vice Mayor Grendel said 2 weeks, yep. Next week is Planning Commission.

Mayor Kurtz said okay, that's great. Chris, if you could handle that, it would be another one we could take off our hit list.

Vice Mayor Grendel said very good, and you say Grunt is a different matter altogether.

Mayor Kurtz said that's already in play.

Vice Mayor Grendel said that has been going on for more than 10 years hasn't it.

Mayor Kurtz said absolutely. We exhausted, meetings and meetings and court and decisions by the court. We had truckloads and truckloads of clean out, and it just finds its way to replenish itself.

Vice Mayor Grendel said he's using it as a dump isn't he.

Mayor Kurtz said I don't remember how many 40 yard containers, City containers, that we hauled to the dump. I would go over there, and it's like we never did a thing. So, I don't know where all this stuff comes from, but it's not from inside the house.

Councilperson Trakas said Cleveland, all the other houses.

Mayor Kurtz said that's where he lives, so what the heck.

Vice Mayor Grendel said I think they tore that property down, one of his properties in Cleveland. Even Cleveland wouldn't put up with it.

Mayor Kurtz said he's a nice man too. It's really difficult when you know the person for decades, communicate, you think you are making progress, and then it's like nobody heard a thing.

Vice Mayor Grendel said if you wait long enough, you will be going through his estate and have to deal with his Executor.

Mayor Kurtz said that will be your issue.

Vice Mayor Grendel said probably my estate will come before his.

Building Official Gero said the unfortunate part in both of these cases is that we are not dealing with someone who is actually residing in the property as opposed to some of the other cases we are going to be coming up with.

Vice Mayor Grendel said that's the difference. If the person is living there, then you give them every benefit of the doubt; but it's been vacant and kind of a dump or eyesore year after year and decade after decade; you have to do something.

Mayor Kurtz said okay, that sounds good. That's great. Chris, I hope that there's an amicable solution, clean it up, that would be great. I'm not 100% optimistic.

Councilperson Walchanowicz said I understand. I just want to give them a chance.

Mayor Kurtz said I support that 100%.

Councilperson Kapusta said I just wanted to comment on that while I respect Councilperson Synek's remarks about the importance of private property ownership; I think that we have a line that we sometimes have to walk between when do we as a municipality need to look at the greater good for all of our residents. I think if we didn't believe that we have some role in that, that we would then have no building ordinances. We would have no zoning ordinances because we would just let people kind of run amuck and do what they want. So, I do think that sometimes we need to intervene. I certainly support this decision. If we could intervene amicably, that is great; but that leads me to the point I wanted to make which is, and maybe it's because of where I live in the City, I have had probably a half dozen residents of late ask me how long people, and they are referencing properties actually on Chestnut, how long people are able to be in a home improvement/building mode so that it continues to look unfinished. Is there any, do we have any ability to encourage people to complete a project within a reasonable amount of time? Or is there nothing like that?

Building Official Gero said when someone obtains a permit, the permit is valid for a year. So, depending on the project; I know one house on Chestnut that is being remodeled, and he's doing it in stages. It has probably been a little over a year. I know another house that you have spoken

to me about a few times, and I actually had some conversation about that property recently; so I am hoping that is going to get resolved soon.

Mayor Kurtz said I think that the challenge that we have is that it's one thing if you are working inside your house, it's another thing when you are parking equipment, leaving equipment on the outside of your house for a long amount of time. So, those are the things that we are going to start drilling down on and trying to get some progress. It's not easy. I wouldn't want Mike's job.

Building Official Gero said thanks.

Mayor Kurtz said he's going to want my job.

Vice Mayor Grendel said there are only 2 things left on the agenda, and of course we are near the 6:00 p.m. The one, and maybe Jim this could be a subject, of course it's your ordinance that we have, 2021-56. That's something that I would like to see move forward because it did seem to be a success when that project last year on Pleasant Valley; and Mayor that would be a nice thing that we could look into to see if we can study this and see if we can offer that as a possibility. I think it really helped them because they would have a problem on their property there. So, I do want to keep the dialogue going on that ordinance. I don't know if you have time in your meeting Thursday.

Councilperson Trakas said we can refer it to another time. It's probably more than 5 minutes' worth of conversation.

Mayor Kurtz said and Councilperson Trakas and Vice Mayor, let me talk to Don Ramm and let's put together the list of some of the potential opportunities to use this. That may be a starting point.

Vice Mayor Grendel said of course the resident would have to agree too; like in this case here; but it is definitely nice to have a partnership there because this one here not only helped the resident but also the whole area there too downstream even I think. So, I think it's a good piece of legislation. I would like to see it sooner rather than later because we are coming up on another summer season and everything too.

Councilperson Trakas said we will put it on the agenda for a May meeting or something Mayor if that's okay with you. For example, just look at Braewood Estates, you have 5 properties there all affected by water. It's all private property, but there is tremendous erosion. You have trees, plants, flowers, property and bridges that have now fallen down; and Don put together a plan that 2 years ago it was \$120,000. If you had something like this, and they put it on their tax bill it would be over \$20,000 for the individuals, and then they could afford it. Individually none of them wanted to do that; so that I think would be the type of project that this type of thing could really work.

Vice Mayor Grendel said that was the subject of one of your meetings Jim, it was a very good in depth look at that. That's an area, that's like a potential project that could be done on this kind of action.

Councilperson Trakas said well we will work together to try to figure this out for May. Maybe we will try to have it ready for you in June or something like that.

Vice Mayor Grendel said very good, and then the other thing Mayor that I put on the agenda, just maybe for you to introduce that Council should be thinking about, the potential down the road a joint meeting with the School Board and maybe getting on the same page with them on what their views are. I know you have been meeting with the Superintendent and with the Board, and just so that we don't hear it from social media or through word of mouth, that we are part of the process too to assist them in any way that we can.

Mayor Kurtz said absolutely. We have had correspondence going back and forth relative to operations and synergy, some of the programs we have for the summer, some of the expanded programs and opportunities that they have for the summer; and so we are trying to tie those together because of our experience. They are very open to using some of their resources towards some of our expanded programs.

We also talked about a strategy relative to their facilities, working together; and the Covid situation further highlighted the opportunity of creating some of these more joint ventures with our people actually going to the primary school and working out of the primary school.

So, we do have a lot of ideas we have been bouncing back and forth. I think we will have one more session, and then I think it's time to bring Council into the fold and get your input, your feedback as we develop a long term strategy.

Vice Mayor Grendel said very good. Thank you Mayor.

Councilperson Kapusta said I had a few points of interest. I recently had become aware that the Department of Agriculture will be apparently through the next upcoming school year be funding lunches again for students. So, they began that during the pandemic, and that's apparently going to continue. I think we have movement with the School Board towards renewing their PI levy this November if I am correct. That's what I have been led to believe too, and just as a point of information, I was told, we are doing our son's scholarship, and we got the applicants in; and we were told that this year we are anticipating to graduate 68 seniors.

Vice Mayor Grendel said very good. Any other issues? I noticed Kathleen you brought it to our attention about I guess a citation at the Holiday Inn for a Covid violation over the weekend.

Councilperson Kapusta said yes. That was what I got in the, it was on Channel 8 I think initially; and I think that might have been the one that went to some further publication also. I know that we have a lot of activity, things we are trying to do positively down there; and I think it's important for us to be aware when situations like this arise.

Vice Mayor Grendel agreed. Mayor, I imagine, I anticipate that there would be some activity at our hotels with the NFL draft coming to town on Thursday. There probably should be a number of people who will be staying at our hotels I would believe.

Mayor Kurtz said you will see, there's going to be an influx of people. We met with for the first time, the first communication, we met with Lutheran Ministries today, and the Police Department and the Fire Department was very concerned. I just told them they disrespected us in terms of not communicating with us. So, we are following up on that to make sure we are monitoring. We have been in contact with some of the local businesses. We are keeping a very close pulse on this and watching how it goes forward. So, hopefully the meeting this morning will at least let people walk away with knowing that you can't just cannibalize a situation and expect the City to just sit back when they are put in the situation; so, to be continued on that one.

Vice Mayor Grendel said now Mayor Michael's letter to us said that the Ramada Inn has not sold the hotel. Is it the same owner that has been there for a number of years?

Mayor Kurtz said no, that gentleman sold it to the recent owner, the current owner; and we have very little communication. We are reviewing all of our options, but we are satisfied. At least our safety forces are paying close attention. There are a number of different avenues we have to look at to insure that anyone that comes into our community can feel safe or is being protected within our parameters that we can engage. So, that's what we are going to do; we are going to make sure that we have rules, we have laws, we have zoning codes by the way; and when people misrepresent or don't understand, that's not an excuse. You always have these distractions.

Councilperson Trakas said so Mayor, you are bored is what you are telling us right?

Mayor Kurtz said that probably wouldn't be the word I would choose or I would use. Between some of these Covid related events and changes in venue and the income tax situation it's like really. I thought I had seen a lot of things, but this is exciting that I get to see these new things every day. It's an exciting time, but at the same time we are going to be meeting in the near future. We talk about strategic planning, and I appreciate the change in venue for today because this was appropriate for today; but after we connect a few more dots, it's going to be very appropriate to have a strategic planning session, something that we can all participate in, we can all drive the bus into the future for the benefit of future generations.

Vice Mayor Grendel said and Mayor I think we talked about getting together in the next few weeks and setting the steps to get that reality here, sometime in later May or maybe even June to have the strategic planning meeting.

Mayor Kurtz said the schools are going to go for their PI renewal, we should all support that. That is the first step of a multiple domino effect that's going to; hopefully we can get unanimous support for some of our future initiatives, but it's up to the Administration and the leadership of both the schools and City to convince those that have to make the tough decisions, the Council and School Board to embrace a very exciting strategy for the future. That's all I can say about that. I get too excited thinking about it. We cannot get too far down on the road without Council

being in the same car, the same vehicle and all driving forward because it's too exciting to and too important. I think the operative word would be too important for this community is if we navigate for future generations, take on the responsibility of preparing for future generations.

Vice Mayor Grendel said thank you Mayor.

Councilperson Kapusta said I only wish I had known to ask Mayor when he was on his campaign trail how he would run the City in the midst of a pandemic, and when we had a homeless shelter move in; but I am sorry I didn't think of that.

One thing that I think is important also with the homeless shelter, and I am sure that our safety forces are addressing this already, is in my experience in using homeless shelters with clients I have worked with over the years, typically they have some very good rules to keep things in order there; and one of them is typically a curfew time when their participants need to be back into the premises. Well unfortunately typically the people that I worked with did not really want to abide by these curfews; so consequently, they were sometimes locked out of the shelters. If that's in fact the same case, then of course that may present yet another issue for our safety forces as that hour of lockdown comes, people then are going to be potentially wandering the streets and looking for someplace to spend time and shelter. So, that's always another issue.

Mayor Kurtz said you know what, it is so raw because we weren't engaged, we weren't even aware of; and it was so lopsided the approach. So, when you disenfranchise, like I told them this morning, you disrespected us, our laws, our codes, any potential relationships, our ability to navigate through these things. It's really tough to now to say let's start over, and the fact that it's really tough to see the use of the facility when there's a Ramada Inn sign on it. You can't go and rent a room right now. It's another, it's called compounded confusion. So, we try to deal with every little component of this, but our safety forces do a great job. You would be very proud of our leadership teams, both departments, as they have been respectful but deliberate in their approach to managing a situation that we didn't ask for. They didn't even ask to at least talk about it. That's what we are doing.

I have one more thing Vice Mayor if I may quickly. Is Chief Rega on the phone? Steve, do you want to talk about the fireworks.

Fire Chief Rega said I'm here Mayor. Our fireworks this year, we had such good support and praise about the fireworks in December that we want to continue that this year; but that coupled with our summer event leaves the budget a little bit low for fireworks when we try to do 2 shows. So, there's that issue there, and then there's a thought process of possibly having fireworks for Home Days instead of the Fourth of July. So, I didn't know if Council wanted to discuss that and see how they might want to proceed.

Mayor Kurtz said these wouldn't be full blown shows, they are going to be more like the modified show that you saw at Christmas, correct Steve?

Fire Chief Rega said correct. Our Fourth of July show is typically 22 minutes in length. It would probably end up being more like 16 minutes to 18 minutes; and then our December show I believe it was about an 8 minute show. It would be somewhere around that range.

Mayor Kurtz asked so what are you asking Council to do?

Fire Chief Rega said specifically our budget right now is \$21,000 we are under contract with American Fireworks. This is the last year of our contract. I think in order to pull this off, we probably need to be in the, one version would be in about the \$26,500 range or if we want to beef it up a little bit, the \$29,000 range.

Mayor Kurtz said so you are talking \$5,000 or \$8,000.

Fire Chief Rega said correct, and typically what we are thinking is that if we push the fireworks to our Home Days event, it would probably make that a little more successful as we are moving it to the park and attracting people to that new venue. Instead of having 2 large events so close together, we probably would be saving in manpower to kind of offset that change in cost.

Mayor Kurtz said Council, Steve is looking for some direction. I think that everyone would agree that the experiment in December was really effective last year, the 8 minute show. Look, we put a Fourth of July show on, but it is so big though, we attract so many people; and the fact that we are going to move the Home Days to the park for a variety of reasons, we have more room, it spreads people out. I don't have a crystal ball, I just don't think that everything is going to be normal. I think some people will be more comfortable. We are not going to have a parade because you can't throw candy out in the first place. So, between Rec and Community Services, the Administration team, they do a phenomenal job of coming up with ideas; and so I went along and said look let's do it. Let's try it, and hopefully Council can embrace that. If you are willing to throw a little more money at these two venues, then I think it's exciting.

Councilperson Walchanowicz said I am all for adding the funds for fireworks. It was an amazing event. We were there. The kids and residents, to me \$6,000 or \$8,000 for 2 beautiful nights is a great idea. I would support that.

Councilperson Veverka said just one caveat, and this is related to moving the fireworks from Fourth of July to Home Days. You know typically Home Days is more of a mainly Independence focus event whereas the fireworks is more of a, it's out there; and lots and lots of people from surrounding areas come in. I would just wonder about the combination of the Home Days more local thing, and this giant event that the Fourth of July is, whether that might be counter-productive. I am just throwing my two cents worth in on that one.

Mayor Kurtz said that's a fair question to ask. I mean I don't think anyone disagrees the Fourth of July fireworks is not something we really want to entertain with the lockdown, correct?

Vice Mayor Grendel said I'm thinking just the Home Days because of what Steve said too about 2 different events and having all the extra manpower; and this being a Covid year, I don't know if we still want to have just an event for the fireworks.

Mayor Kurtz said I'm sorry I missed that.

Vice Mayor Grendel said to have it as part of our Home Days' celebration.

Mayor Kurtz said okay. Your point is well taken Councilperson Veverka that how do we, we have structured it around the holidays because it was for our kids, and we had over 300 people sign up that drove through the park; and we had that park-type setting. We didn't have any major onslaught of people. So, I would have to ask my Chiefs, how do we manage this? I don't want to be bombarded with, I agree with that. That's the only challenge between having it at Home Days compared to Fourth of the July. On the Fourth of July everybody bombarded us. It was a single event. Home Days is going to be stretched out over 2 days. I am not sure we have to make it a big affair rather than just integrating into our Saturday night events.

Councilperson Veverka said it's not like fireworks is something you keep secret per se, but on the other hand, how much do you want to broadcast information out there and then collect massive amounts of people. If the Home Days' goal is to spread out and keep people as safe as possible, is the fireworks going to be counter-productive to that goal?

Mayor Kurtz said that's why we are talking about it because we don't have the answer and everybody has a good opinion.

Councilperson Kapusta said it's not best to put on and have a separate Fourth of July, I concur with that. I don't think we want to bring masses of people here on the Fourth of July.

Mayor Kurtz said I think we all agree on that decision. Now the question is what is your thought on Home Days?

Vice Mayor Grendel said Jim first and then Chris.

Councilperson Trakas said just so I'm clear, we are not having an Independence Day celebration; and the question before us is what do we do for Home Days and then we also need funds for a Christmas show and a potential Home Days show? Is that kind of what the debate is here then?

Fire Chief Rega said what we are asking for here, because we are going with 2 independent shows, there are additional costs in terms of manpower for putting those shows together. Last year we only had one show; so there are increased costs on the vendor side. So, in order to facilitate both of these shows and have them be up to what we consider a good quality show, we have to increase our budget for the shows.

Councilperson Trakas said that makes sense. So, I would say that I would be in favor of authorizing up to \$30,000 for fireworks; however we choose to split that up. It seems like that's what we need.

On the other end of it, Seven Hills does it all both on Friday and Saturday night. Brecksville does it both nights in their celebration; so those are a little bit limited. So, maybe you are talking about maybe 10 minutes' worth of fireworks. I am for a larger show if we could put it off. I think for Home Days if we got everybody there, it would be nice to be able to have a full type of show that we would generally do for Independence Day just for our own residents. I don't have a problem with that.

Councilperson Walchanowicz said my question was if there's people that are concerned with attracting more people for fireworks on Saturday night, what if we had the fireworks show on Sunday night? This way Home Days is over, but there's still a fireworks show the following day. This way the park is cleared out. That was just a question.

Mayor Kurtz said our safety forces are still going to be in force for 3 days instead of 2.

Councilperson Veverka said and the other question I guess Steve is where they set up the fireworks as it relates to the park and how they have planned out where they are going to spread the activities in the park. Do we have a good place for launching and stay far enough away and all the other logistics in planning that with all those things that we have set up in the park?

Mayor Kurtz said those are all good questions. They are real.

Councilperson Veverka said and my reality is I don't think I have attended a fireworks since the accident a while ago. I don't have most current knowledge that some other folks may have.

Mayor Kurtz said 1997. I was there.

Councilperson Veverka said I was there too.

Mayor Kurtz said some things live with you forever.

Councilperson Trakas asked do we want to make a motion to authorize since we are in a workshop setting to authorize to spend up to \$30,000 on the fireworks and work on the details later?

Mayor Kurtz said I don't know if we can take any action, but if you can suggest that we are going to put it on the agenda for May.

Councilperson Trakas said I would do that.

Mayor Kurtz said as long as we know we have the 5 of you, we will just do it that way. Meanwhile, we will try to get some of those answers because you have peaked my curiosity; and we can do that. Is it the intention of Council to be able to vote on this at the May meeting?

Several people said yes.

Mayor Kurtz said we can do it in the form of a motion in Caucus or something. We will get some more answers. Chief let's look into those questions because they are all relevant and relative to making sure we have a safe event.

Vice Mayor Grendel said and if I understand then correctly Mayor, we are looking at having fireworks at Home Days and then at the holiday celebration.

Mayor Kurtz said the Christmas for sure. We may even stretch that a few more minutes and shorten the other one because people got something unique out of that because they were able to stay at their homes all across the community and see them. So, we may want to spread them out Steve a little more evenly.

This is great, and I do appreciate all of your questions and concerns; and we will put all that together. Then we will talk about it a little bit more in May.

Vice Mayor Grendel said very good. Thank you Mayor. Any other comments before we bring this workshop to a conclusion? Do I have a motion to adjourn the workshop?

Moved by Walchanowicz, seconded by Veverka, to adjourn the Council Workshop of April 27, 2021. Voice Vote: 7 yes/0 no; motion carried.

There being no further business, the Council Workshop of April 27, 2021 was adjourned at 6:19 p.m.

Debra J. Beal, Clerk of Council
Minutes Unapproved at Time of Release 04/29/21
