

**CITY OF INDEPENDENCE  
COUNCIL WORKSHOP MINUTES  
MAY 4, 2022 AT 4:00 P.M.  
COUNCIL CAUCUS ROOM & VIA ZOOM**

Vice Mayor Dave Grendel called the Council Workshop to order at 4:09 p.m. Present were Council Members John DiGeronimo, Tom Narduzzi, Anthony Togliatti, Jim Trakas, Dale Veverka and Chris Walchanowicz. Also in attendance were Mayor Gregory P. Kurtz, Finance Director Vern Blaze, Procurement Coordinator Dennis Zdolshek, City Engineer Don Ramm, and Finance Assistant Maggie Osysko.

Vice Mayor Grendel said that he didn't know if it was Council's fifth or sixth session they have had going over the Five-Year Capital Plan. He said that they have all been very good sessions and good discussions, and we will continue our discussion on the 2022-2026 Capital Improvement Plan. We have gone through the whole thing, and now is the time to look and we need to get down. How many millions of dollars do we need to take out of this Vern?

Finance Director Blaze said well round it to \$5,000,000, and that's for 2022 only.

Vice Mayor Grendel said we won't worry about 2023 because who knows what it's going to be like next year as far as the world goes with inflation and the Ukraine and everything else.

Councilperson Trakas said the economy contracted by 1.4% the last quarter.

Finance Director Blaze said and we are downplaying it because we are losing elections.

Vice Mayor Grendel said it's a crazy world. We can only really go month by month, and this year we want to make sure we are set, and we will see what the world looks like towards the end of the year and do it all over again.

Vice Mayor Grendel said welcome Anthony virtually, it's good to see you.

I guess what we need to do is, who wants to open the discussion with suggestions where we are going to look at reducing the \$5,000,000. So, Jim I know that you shared with us your ideas. I will let you start.

Councilperson Trakas said I was just going to say Mayor was there anything that you felt indifference to because you work with this every day. Were there some areas that you felt that might be more apt to be delayed or cut or eliminated than others? So, the only thing I did when I sent my ideas out there was simply if it wasn't an existing project that we were already working on, I kind of zeroed it out for this year. That may not be philosophically what we want to do, but at least it wouldn't impact anybody, and then some of the big ticket projects I just kind of cut them so that we can delay them more down the line but not completely eliminate them. That is

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what my thought was, but Mayor I was just wondering if you thought from a priority perspective there were some things that you really felt we needed to have and if that could help guide our discussions.

Mayor Kurtz said well I think from my perspective we have certain responsibilities that we have to continue down the path. We have certain opportunities that we have to at least look at, and then we have to look at some of these major projects and figure out. When you look at \$14,000,000 and then you look at \$26,000,000, unless somebody hits the lottery, it's not realistic, but our function today is really to, and I think I would just finish my comments initially by just saying, we need to manage our big ticket items this year and be able to be flexible because realistically this thing is so influx. So far, it's a good thing. I don't think we can sit back and pretend 2023 is not going to be here, and look it's May. So, I concur with your theory of pushing things. When you look at some of these major road projects, and you are talking \$5,000,000 here, \$5,000,000 there. It's a lot to bite off and so that's a challenge. I don't want to go through and say this line item. I think we need to reach a global understanding of how we are going to look at this in realistic terms, and then once we do that, it will be a lot easier to start pushing down the road in realistic terms, not just push everything in 2023 and expect 2023 to be magic.

Vice Mayor Grendel said I noticed Mayor we have the \$1,500,000 set aside and it says downtown properties.

Finance Director Blaze said correct. That's the amount in the appropriations for that at this point and time because it's in the 2022 column.

Vice Mayor Grendel said the one opportunity we discussed that you had somewhat approval, how much of that \$1,500,000 was that again? Refresh my memory.

Finance Director Blaze said a third of it.

Vice Mayor Grendel asked so we reduced this by \$1,000,000 because it doesn't look like any other opportunities that we would be going for this year. How important is that opportunity? Do we want to go forward with that?

Mayor Kurtz said I think the majority of Council has expected me to pursue that, and my latest conversation today refining some of the terms. They asked me to meet next week with them. So, I think that's a stake in the ground for the future. After my conversation today, and my meeting next week, that should, the terms will be framed up to where we can say okay let's reduce it, let's make sure we are on the same page.

Councilperson Trakas said so that will be about \$1,000,000.

Vice Mayor Grendel said so we can reduce \$1,000,000 from that.

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Finance Director Blaze said well you are talking about adjacent properties to the \$500,000 piece. We have some feelers out with some other properties in some other parts of town, just feelers, nothing eminent, but if an opportunity would pop, if we pull that \$1,000,000 out of there it leaves no ability to consummate a transaction.

Vice Mayor Grendel asked then with taking \$500,000 out would that leave us?

Mayor Kurtz said it would probably be a good starting point, but keep in mind all of us, there may be some of these yo-yo affect issues where all of a sudden this opportunity comes, and you have to be flexible.

Councilperson Trakas said it's budgeting so you find money elsewhere.

Mayor Kurtz said it's just a framework. So, \$500,000 would be realistic.

Vice Mayor Grendel said I just wanted to get a feeling on what would a starting point be.

Councilperson Trakas said we didn't talk about it at the last meeting, but there are additional revenues that come in or savings that we can incorporate from the General Revenue budget, can they be shifted over in the Capital Improvements budget, and I think the answer is yes for right situations. I don't think what we are trying to do precludes anything, but I think we go with a concrete number and then maybe we will be able to revise that a little bit later on depending on conditions.

Mayor Kurtz asked so if we want to reduce that \$500,000 understanding that if the opportunity presents itself there is a long-term strategy attached to it, then we are just.

Finance Director Blaze said before we get too far down that path because there's \$500,000, we just need nine more \$500,000 decisions like that, and we will solve our 2022 problem, and with the low hanging fruit we will get a little bit; but then the challenges are going to become harder and harder. So, Councilperson DiGeronimo said something after the last meeting just in passing, and I picked up on it and prepared something that I will present now if you want. I just labeled it Options for a Path Forward, just acknowledging that the 2022 year, the 2023 year, we have a lot more than what we reasonably can fund with internally generated cash. So, okay all these projects that Don has listed on here, we can kick them to the right, but they have to get done at some point. It's a question of when and how we are going to pay for it, and the further we keep kicking things to the right, the more I think we become a community just like everybody else. We just let our infrastructure get to grade C, grade D, grade F, and when it's failing then we will magically come up with the money to do it. Whereas, Independence we pride ourselves to be a premier community here that we won't let it get that bad, and we actually have a plan that is realistic.

Look, all the options before us, none of them are ideal, but Jim you are in the military, I read sometimes you have to make the best decision you can out of a bunch of poor choices. It's just life, and your comment earlier maybe revenue if it comes in a little bit higher, okay here's

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\$1,000,000 we can do an amended tax budget. The Auditor will approve us appropriating an additional \$1,000,000, and we allocate it all for infrastructure or something, but short of that I tried to think of how we can maintain the integrity of the things have already been completed in 2022, the things at the top of the page. The capital items in the departments that a lot of them are part of multi-year purchases. When you look at especially Fire and Service, big ticket multi-hundred thousand dollar trucks and vehicles that we are trying to set money over time to fund those purchases. So, I tried to maintain the integrity of that, and then like I mentioned a few minutes ago, Don's infrastructure projects, they are going to have to be done at some point. It's just a question of when and how long do we want to keep using the strategy of kicking to the right. We just punt it to next year. The next year we punt it to the next year, and so how we can do some things and avoid that? They are not pleasant options, but they are options; and so I did come up with just a front page, one sheet. Anthony, you are online. I asked Debi at like five minutes to 4:00 if anybody was participating online, and at that point we didn't think so. I will run one of these in Deb's office, and maybe she could scan it and get an email to you so you can see it too. I am sorry, you will be at a disadvantage for a couple of minutes until you receive that, but it's just a front and back of a column spreadsheet.

On the front, on Page 1 of the top, there are four very expensive projects that we have in the queue here. The Ash, Poplar, Willow project, the Brookside Road project Brecksville to Eastview, Longano Kleber Court project, and then that Hillside water main culvert project. We proposed to put almost \$2,500,000 aside for those projects here in 2022. Then I have some other columns to show what the total cost of those projects are, and we also put \$1,000,000 listed in the Capital Plan for the downtown streetscape. So, between those four projects, \$2,465,000 and another \$1,000,000 for the downtown streetscape, it's almost \$3,500,000 right there. I am not saying we cut them, just hold those in abeyance that we will do them, but they will have to be funded through a different source.

Then if we have a purchase order already from previous Capital Plans where we encumbered \$1,500,000 for the downtown streetscape, but if we acknowledge that the downtown streetscape project could be upwards of \$10,000,000 or more, and it will be just impossible for us to fund that out of internally generated cash, that we would have to do, if we were ever going to do downtown streetscape correctly, we would have to do it as part of a downtown redevelopment project for that former middle school would be developed with tens of millions of dollars of development, and would result in millions of dollars of TIF revenue for us over the time, and that would be the funding vehicle to do the downtown streetscape. If we acknowledge that, agree to that, we have \$3,500,000 from those projects, well \$2,500,000 from the four projects and \$1,000,000 for the downtown streetscape, \$1,500,000 if we close out the P.O. from previous years, allocated some capital budget, that's about \$5,000,000 roughly. Okay, if we reduce the funding, we have in the 2022 column for streetscape on I-77/Rockside, if you knock that down from \$500,000 to \$250,000, and we did the same thing on the Brecksville Road from Rockside to Sprague project, instead of tucking \$1,000,000 away this year, we tuck away \$750,000. There is another \$500,000. Then finally, Councilperson Trakas you mentioned about the Operating Budget. If we just found \$600,000 in the Operating Budget that we could reduce, it's less than 3% of the total Operating Budget. I think some of the departments thankfully might be over-appropriated because in discussions in the fourth quarter last year and the first month of this

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year, a bunch of Directors did mention about new hires, and Council by and large was on board with that; but fortunately for us we budgeted a lot of it, like all of those new hires would take place on January 1 of this year. Fortunately, from a budgetary standpoint, they haven't. So, every month that goes by, we are creating a little bit of room there that okay maybe we got a little breathing room. We find \$600,000 out of the Operating Budget, that totals about \$6,000,000 that we have freed up in theory. We only needed about \$5,000,000, so your immediate reaction is oh man we cut a little bit too much, now we have \$1,000,000 to work with, and we do; but recall that Engineer Ramm passed out that one sheet there that in conjunction underneath the Asphalt Maintenance Contract this year, we are budgeting for it. We have some money tucked aside, we are budgeting \$400,000, but there are more projects under there that need to be done and could be done. We could do a lot of streets this year under that project. Of that \$1,100,000 that we have available, if we add in about \$600,000, and Don we didn't have final numbers, I'm just throwing \$600,000 and maybe it's more and maybe it's less. It's a starting point for discussion there. We could dedicate \$600,000 to that.

Trails are getting important all over the country and northeast Ohio, and we have to get in the game here, put some initial funding away for trails, whether this is engineering, planning, actual construction, I don't know, that's to be determined. If we threw some money there, and Councilperson Trakas in that June or July Utility meeting in 2021 you did come up with that list of potential private property projects that could be done, and I think the mold was cast with that Pleasant Valley project that we did in 2021 where we agreed that the City could play a role in helping situations that are on private property, but they affect other properties and the public good. So, I think Greg O'Brien has ruled that we are very much within our right to go ahead and do projects like that. I think that one was 75% owner funded, and 25% City funded. If I tuck \$250,000 into that, we should start doing some of those. I would still at the bottom line keep that number above zero, but now Councilperson Walchanowicz is turning the page, okay how are you going to pay for all of this?

That's the question, and the top you see those four projects total in my estimation, and I might take a pencil to it and sharpen that number, but those four projects up there cost about \$15,000,000 to do. We do have about \$1,500,000 in encumbrances currently for those four projects. So, an option if you want to consider it is we are just going to have to borrow to do these projects. That's about \$13,500,000, but you know projects come in more than what is projected. Other projects will come to light, I just rounded it up and say this year or next year we were going to borrow \$15,000,000. What would that look like if we were going to pay it back in 15 years, 3%, 15 years 3.5%. That rate is going up daily. I can't predict where it will be later this year, but for purposes of discussion at this point, look if we would borrow \$15,000,000 with a 15 year payback at those rates, we are looking at \$1,200,000 or \$1,300,000 that we would then have to take out of our budget in the future years and allocate it for debt service. It would allow us to do upwards of \$15,000,000 of projects off of the CIP right now. That's Option 2 there, halfway down where I say options for the path forward, and I have five options listed there. That is borrowing internally. We go to market, and we borrow. We pay it back with revenue that we generate. We are not asking the voters for any money. That's just internal borrowing, and we just do it.

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Option 1 is we just, what we talked about earlier, we are not going to borrow, we are just going to keep moving these projects to the right. We will do them when we have the money. We don't have the money, we don't have the money. There's nothing we can do about it.

A third option is to go back to the voters and say okay we want to borrow \$15,000,000, take us \$1,200,000 or \$1,300,000, and let's round it up to \$1,500,000 for debt service. We need about 3 mils on property tax to pay back this \$1,500,000. Then property owners in Independence would be paying that money back. It wouldn't be the City, we would just be the conduit for it.

We could put a capital infrastructure levy on the ballot. The school districts have a PI levy. Theirs is not permanent, they have to come back and renew it every period, 5 or 10 years, however long it's for. The City could go to the voters and say hey look there's a lot of capital infrastructure that needs to be done, we just don't have the ability to fund it internally to the magnitude that it needs to be done, we need some assistance.

The fifth option is we go to the voters and say we don't want to do it by property tax, but we are still at 2% income tax. A number of communities in northeast Ohio are at 2.5%, 3%. I don't know if I have heard any at 3.5%.

Councilperson Trakas said Euclid.

Finance Director Blaze said Solon in their Charter and Akron either in the Charter or in ordinance, of the income tax that they collect it is stipulated that ¼ of their income tax collections has to go into capital and infrastructure. It can't go into the Operating Budget, and there is an option too. We can go to the voters and say hey look we are at 2% now, and we are proposing to take it to over 2%, and of that increase, here's how much of it, maybe 100% gets devoted to capital and infrastructure. None of these decisions are easy, none of them are palatable, but I guess the easiest one is Number 1. We are not going to go to the voters asking for money. We are not going to borrow internally. We are not going to ask the voters to approve a levy so that we can borrow. We are just going to do what we can internally and keep pushing projects to the right. That's probably the most palatable one, but if it's a question of how long can we keep pushing things to the right until you end up with a sub-par community that is so far behind on its infrastructure funding that it's like a war zone driving down the streets. It's why we get paid the big bucks to sit at this table to make the tough decisions that people represent us. They might not recognize the magnitude of the decisions we have to make, but collectively I think, if not today what I threw out here, all of these options. These are great options that we can't just decide in the next hour, let's go borrow or let's go do this. It's going to take a little bit of time, but the discussion has to be started of how we are going about funding capital infrastructure, not just now, but I think going forward permanently.

Councilperson Walchanowicz said I kind of oppose pushing stuff to the right any further than we have. I mean in my business and Tommy's business I am sure he sees it to, when I give an estimate. I tell everybody last year we had a 47% increase in equipment and everything like that, and maybe I should wait until the fall because prices might come down. Prices never come down. If I am paying for it now, like in his industry, lumber, people were buying lumber like

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crazy during Covid even at the high rates that they were selling it for. Why would they bring it down when people are still paying for it. I don't think there's any difference between concrete, asphalt, materials and that stuff, if cities and companies are going to continue to pay for that product, keep pushing it down to the right will just keep increasing the price of these projects.

I will just take for instance my street. You have proposed \$4,500,000. I mean two years down the road it could be \$5,500,000 or \$6,000,000.

Finance Director Blaze said it's a lot of money.

Councilperson Walchanowicz said my point is we keep pushing it to the right, and things are going to go down. It could be another \$1,000,000 a year and a half or two years down the road.

Vice Mayor Grendel said when we were on Council in 2000 or 2001 and we had the Rockside Road project, we had Dalebrook. I think we borrowed back then for those projects.

Mayor Kurtz said we had \$18,000,000 back in 1999 we borrowed. The total was \$19,000,000 or \$20,000,000.

Vice Mayor Grendel asked did we borrow for Dora? That was a big project.

Finance Director Blaze said carryover funds were used when it was borrowed in the late 1990's.

Vice Mayor Grendel said most of the original projects, the big projects we were doing was all borrowed.

Several people began speaking at once.

Mayor Kurtz said we were \$19,000,000 in 1999, and we had \$22,000,000 in cash. So, we borrowed.

Councilperson DiGeronimo asked you did not go to the voters?

Mayor Kurtz said no, we did that internally with Council's authority.

Finance Director Blaze said and when the Fieldhouse was built, the school district went to the voters so that the taxpayers would pay \$15,000,000, but then the City borrowed. It was the other way around, the school district went for \$18,000,000, and the City borrowed \$15,000,000 for the project that was paid back by internally generated funds. So, going to borrowing is not unheard of. We have reduced debt quite a bit in the last couple of years, so there is some borrowing capacity. I would love to be debt free, just pay cash. We will fund everything as we get cash, but if the desire is stronger to get things done before we have the money, there is not a lot of options out there.

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Councilperson Walchanowicz said we all know at some point the schools are going to put something to the voters. I don't think residents here would be happy if the schools are coming for \$40,000,000 or \$50,000,000 and all of a sudden a year later the City is going for \$15,000,000. At some point they are going to call it.

Finance Director Blaze said that's just for infrastructure. There's visions for a campus and other new safety center, and your head could spin with all kind of stuff that still may be in the pipeline, at least in our minds.

Mayor Kurtz said the infrastructure as the Finance Director eluded to, but also there is major facility capital projects that we have to seriously look at, a new Police station, Service garage as we all saw the report last year. That's in the worst condition, and of course, the Civic Center and City Hall falls into that somehow. So, those are all I consider major facility capital projects. The last one we did a vote of the people was the Civic Center. We just did it by Council's authority with City Hall. In all fairness with the Civic Center, we did a \$6,500,000 bond issue, and the project ended up being \$10,500,000. So, Council used its borrowing capacity to fund the rest of it.

Then we have to come up with an overall strategy of what we want to be, what the community wants to be when it grows up. We have to determine what we need to do here as leaders, and if some of those decisions may have to go to the people. Some of them this body can make a decision, and some of them can be done administratively. It's all going to be part of the processing strategy. Where do you want to go? Do you want to borrow money and get some things done faster? Or do you want to come up with an investment strategy and a resource strategy that deals with rezoning and repurposing and re-using. So, the model that worked for the past 30 years is not going to be a model that's going to work for the next 30 years. If we don't quickly adapt, and some of it may mean going to the voters, and I am okay with that because we are doing our job. I am not okay with just sitting back and doing nothing, being responsible, being able to respond and go to the people if they want to adopt a new strategy when it comes to housing, when it comes to voting. I think we need to measure things differently if we are going to take advantage or protect ourselves.

Councilperson DiGeronimo said at that Chamber of Commerce event at the beginning of the year, in some of the neighboring cities the Mayors talked about, I think there were some levies either just that the voters approved for some park improvements and a couple of snow plows. The fact that we have been able to do all of this internally, we are so blessed; but to look at all those major infrastructure projects that are out there, it's just a hard formula. We can deal with the bulk of it, but it is just a huge liability, some combination of going to the voters.

Vice Mayor Grendel asked what does the future look like for the northwest quadrant? Are we going to be able to have access? I don't know if that lawsuit is still pending and that, but like you had mentioned office buildings are not going to be the future of this community unfortunately, but maybe research centers. What is going to be the hot item in the 21<sup>st</sup> century that there will be a need for that we can be able to utilize? That's a big one. Like you mentioned, the Cloverleaf area due to a lesser extent. I think the future of attracting offices and

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businesses might be, and that's an opportunity. You can seclude that property into a development of its own.

Several people began speaking at once again.

Mayor Kurtz said the northwest quadrant, you mentioned Vice Mayor, that's an appropriate discussion to occur, so we have some infrastructure opportunities. There is a formula in place that incorporates our property which is an assessment. If we were to do some infrastructure to make that property shovel ready. It's not shovel ready because there's no road to get into the heart of it for development, and are we going to be rigid on our zoning. An office environment is not as lucrative. Are we going to do some research and development? Are we going to allow for light manufacturing? Are we going to try to blend things together because of our location and make it work. The infrastructure for that area, that's millions of dollars, but if it stimulates the opportunity then it's worth a good investment. That's just one of five uncut diamonds that we have in our portfolio.

Finance Director Blaze said if we were to do that, we would need to front that money to do that infrastructure.

Mayor Kurtz said we could front it for 15 years and people will be coming back our way through an assessment like we did West Creek and Rockside Woods North, the first portion of it. We have a precedent for that, and it has served us well.

Vice Mayor Grendel said with Council around 2000 is Rockside Road's failing. The road was getting in worst shape, and we widened it. That was the decision, you had to bite the bullet and borrow and invest that money to make Rockside Road attractive again and lucrative again. That opened up other things from there.

Councilperson Trakas asked Vern if there were borrowing this year, we have some big-ticket items next year, Dalebrook (inaudible), is there a way you can borrow money this year that you could put towards next year's projects? Is that legal to do?

Finance Director Blaze said we can look at that. If we go to Page 1 of 2 there, and the top there, I said for 2022 the four projects we were going to tuck away money, but for 2023 that's when these projects were really going to be funded at a huge amount, \$11,000,000. If we at some point agreed to find another funding source, and I will just use a generic term for these four projects, that also would go a long way toward kind of balancing our 2023 Capital Budget too because instead of that number being at \$24,000,000 and \$26,000,000, you pull \$12,000,000 out of it because we found another funding source, now whatever we have listed for Dalebrook that year can kind of be done under the internal generated part.

Councilperson Trakas asked do you happen to know, in terms of our borrowing capacity, obviously we have a capacity to borrow, what would be the max we could borrow before it affects our bond rating?

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Finance Director Blaze said that you would probably have to talk to Matt and see based on the latest Standard & Poor's rating qualification. I would have to take a look at it. In years past our debt was \$40,000,000 and a smaller revenue base. Where debt was up high, income tax was probably still in the \$20,000,000 range, so just as an off-the-cuff response, it was alright if we are in the \$20,000,000's now, and we borrowed another \$15,000,000 and we are back in the mid \$30,000,000's, one we would be less than we were years before, and two we would have more revenue, at least right now, to cover that. So, I would have to think a rating agency would, if they could handle \$40,000,000 of debt when their income tax was over \$20,000,000, well they could handle \$35,000,000 of debt if their income tax was \$34,000,000.

Mayor Kurtz said so we are refining this formula with suggestions as we talk, as we generate questions. We are kind of refining it. We can borrow internally with Council's authority. If you look at that \$15,000,000 number, now we have put that into a slot. Obviously, if we go to the public for approval, it's going to probably be a longer term, we did 20 years back with the Civic Center; and I would say we would do at least a 20. Now they are doing 35, 40 year issues.

Finance Director Blaze said I can't find anywhere on the Parma School District website in any of the articles because they are talking about a couple of hundred million dollar issue to just totally remake their schools. It is going down to one high school, and all they say is it's a blank number of mils, and it will cost the taxpayer "x" amount of dollars a year. Nowhere can I find how long it is, and so my guess, and it's just a guess, that it's 40 years because they don't want to come out and say.

Councilperson Walchanowicz said they want to spend all that money on that, but you can't drive on their streets without blowing a tire out.

Mayor Kurtz said I wouldn't be surprised if it's 50. It's getting to that. You talk to some of these other leaders, and you are finding out spread it out, push it down.

Councilperson Walchanowicz said I just kind of think outside the box a little bit when it comes to the infrastructure and borrowing. I can see what if a resident that lives on lower Brookside says why should I have to pay for streets that I don't live on. So, if we had to go to the people, I would rather see us going to the people for a Police station, a new Service Department, one of those big-ticket things. The infrastructure to me would make more sense to borrow internally for infrastructure and go to them like we did in the past.

Mayor Kurtz said I think they would rather spend money on a Civic Center upgrade rather than a street.

Finance Director Blaze said good point, can't say that I don't disagree.

Councilperson Trakas said these are options.

Councilperson Togliatti said I would like to chime in. I agree with what Councilperson Walchanowicz just said, and I think one of the fundamentals of Government, especially City

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municipal local Government is maintaining our infrastructure, roads, water lines, sewers, and if we cannot do that out of our General Fund, and we have to ask the residents to ante up for those services, I think we are way off track. I think we really need to take a good look at our wants versus our needs. I think the infrastructures are our needs. I think streetscape and landscaping on I-480 and Rockside is a want. I think property acquisition is a want. So, there are things that can be tailored back, and there are priorities that need to be set.

Councilperson DiGeronimo said I agree with this approach, and I think if we can't afford this out of the General Fund, we are going to borrow, then let's put these off to the side. I get that we would have to borrow less if you could encumber some dollars now, but take it over 15 years or whatever it is. It's an easier pill to swallow. There are still big projects not on, Brecksville Road was not on here as far as the \$10,000,000 potential project and Dalebrook.

Finance Director Blaze said Brecksville Road is listed.

Councilperson Trakas said we are taking Brecksville Road incrementally.

Councilperson DiGeronimo said and one we didn't talk about was Rockside. I think that road is okay.

Mayor Kurtz said it needs a little clean up.

Finance Director Blaze said fortunately we have \$100,000 a year on the plan, I think they just called it repairs and maintenance for Rockside just to make sure that we maintain that so that we can get the maximum use and life out of it.

Mayor Kurtz said we have been disciplined in that respect.

Councilperson DiGeronimo said that road is pretty good.

Councilperson Walchanowicz asked do you have, like the four projects that Vern has down. Basically like the three of them, Ash, Poplar, Willow, Brookside, Longano, minus the Hillside water main, how many years ago did we initially put these streets on the books that they have already been pushed down to the right?

City Engineer Ramm said I would have to revisit some of the old plans, it has been a number of years.

Councilperson Trakas said certainly three years for Longano and Kleber.

Mayor Kurtz said some of them made sense though because when you upgrade 21 in that area, it didn't make sense to upgrade those roads too far ahead of the Brecksville Road upgrade.

Councilperson Narduzzi said my wheels are spinning a little bit. If we did borrow, that helps us for 2022 and 2023, but what happens in 2024, 2025, 2026? Somehow we have to come up with a

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funding mechanism, otherwise in another four years we are right back to where we are again and have to borrow more money. So, unless we come up with a different way to fund these projects, it's just going to creep back up on us again because sooner or later, and it's just going to get worse actually.

Finance Director Blaze said that's probably the cycle that most communities find themselves in, borrow money this year, do a couple of projects. A couple of years comes out, oh gosh now all of these roads are bad. We don't have the money, we have to borrow money; so you pay back a little principle at that time, and they are in this endless cycle of debt.

Councilperson Narduzzi said but if it lasted for 15 years and then you are back to this point again, that's one thing, you are only a couple of years down the road, and you are back at it again; you are still sharing \$11,000,000 in debt, and now you are going to borrow another \$15,000,000, and now you are \$26,000,000 in debt. So, the overall picture is we have to create less spending on one side or we have to create more income on the other side. Where do we get that more income from?

Finance Director Blaze said a lot of these projects are pretty major reconstruction projects. Every one of these Ash, Poplar, Willow, Brookside, Brecksville to Eastview, Longano, Kleber, we are talking about, we are pulling the road out. We are doing the low grade surface infrastructure work. These are major projects. I am not saying I am advocating for this, but an option is, like we just can't do all of that so we are going to grind down a couple of inches, and we are going to put two inches of asphalt and we are going to buy ourselves some more time. I don't know, some people will say that's putting lipstick on a pig, but at least it keeps your roadways in decent shape. It's not attacking the real problem of what is happening underneath the surface with your storm sewer, sanitary sewers, water lines, etc., but I have to believe that there are communities out there that they just face reality. Look, I don't have "x" amount of dollars to do a complete rebuild, but I can come up with "y" dollars to throw asphalt down and make the road passable.

Vice Mayor Grendel said and that's what we did back in 2002, a new source of income was the TIF. John was a big advocate of TIF, and that's where our new source of funding came from, at least for Independence. I think we were one of the forerunners to go that route.

Finance Director Blaze said and that has helped, no doubt about it. That has been an excellent tool to help us fund infrastructure projects even at the \$2,500,000 that we received last year, and based on what we are receiving the first half, collections about the same this year. That is 10% of what we collect income tax wise, so every little bit helps, a couple hundred thousand here, a couple of million there; but it's still a very small portion of the big bucket which is income tax, and so far knock on wood, the bottom hasn't fallen out for us yet on that. We don't know what the future holds.

Mayor Kurtz said one of the things to keep in mind is we have \$4,500,000, and some decisions we had to make quickly. There was \$2,000,000 for the parking lot, \$1,500,000 for I-77. How many communities can make that quick adjustment? Not many I imagine could move

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\$3,500,000 around, and then to catch up with ODOT and take advantage of those situations. A lot of them would have said I don't have any more money. So, it's a moving target.

Councilperson Trakas said we haven't said no in a long time.

Vice Mayor Grendel said for the parking lot, that was triggered on this development that was going to produce another source of income. So, you have to think of the big picture. You have to spend money to bring more money in like we did there.

Mayor Kurtz said we are developing incrementally a strategic investment strategy. I consider that a strategic investment strategy, putting that money into that parking lot. It's going to pay back both the schools with an increased valuation, and TIF, the ability to capture some of that for the money we are putting into it. With I-77 our lifeline, I was so happy when I got off at Pleasant Valley today, and I saw all this traffic. I said I am happy because those people are coming from Pleasant Valley. When you get off at Rockside you see a lot more traffic. I am a happy camper.

Vice Mayor Grendel said just going on Pleasant Valley and seeing Roe Dental and Signature is adding on. It's good to see.

Councilperson Trakas said we can't grow ourselves out of \$15,000,000. It would be great to get growth, and I think we will get growth. There are some big-ticket projects that could bring growth to us. It isn't going to bring \$15,000,000 to \$20,000,000. So, to Tom's point, you have to have a long-term strategy. So, what we used to do is we would allocate things like the estate tax which wasn't a huge amount for Independence, and now it's not accessible to us. So, what we did in the past was we would allocate a percentage of something. That's another thing we can think about with our operating fund. If you want to say we dedicate "x" amount of the income tax and the property tax and sales tax, and then you have to look at the operation side. So, what are you sacrificing if you knew that?

Vice Mayor Grendel said I think Vern you mentioned raising income taxes to 2.5% or 2.75%, but earmarking it that it strictly has to go to infrastructure.

Finance Director Blaze said just throwing out options.

Mayor Kurtz said (inaudible) has a percentage of their income taxes earmarked for capital. It's a quarter or half percent, and so they committed to that. So, if we were to go for an income tax, we were asked to do that, I remember Bob Longano talking about going when we went from 1 ½% to 2%. We had a 2 mil operating levy expire in 1986. So, in 1987 we decided to go for another 1/2% income tax. To me that was one of the most important decisions the people ever made. They made it by six votes. Everything has tight votes around here. Six votes for that, and 30 votes for the Civic Center, but it works.

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Councilperson DiGeronimo said the other item with the income tax, and I don't think it's a material number, but we do offer a 100% credit for those. So, I used to work in Mayfield, and I didn't pay anything to the City, so I was getting a free ride.

Finance Director Blaze said I believe, but don't hold me to it, Brecksville does not have a 100% credit anymore, and they have tinkered with that .85%, .75%, somewhere. What Councilperson DiGeronimo was referring to is residents of Independence work outside of Independence, and they pay up to a 2% income tax rate in those cities, and Independence gives out a 100% credit to those residents, so they pay nothing to Independence. Other cities won't give them 100% credit, and say even though you pay where the city you work in, you live here, and you still have to pay us a little bit of that too. We have never done that, but I should throw that out there as a revenue raising option. It's not a great option, but it's an option. Sometimes we talk about having to make choices between a bunch of rather unpleasant options. If it was easy, we wouldn't be on our seventh meeting here. We would say just do it, no problem. It's not easy because the options are difficult, and the ramifications are big on us, the budget, residents and their budgets. If we are asking them and businesses, employees who work in the City, any time you do any of these options, they are huge.

Mayor Kurtz said for the seven people who have to ultimately make a decision in terms of allocation, sharing your philosophy and your ideas, I think it's incumbent to have a full robust discussion so that every voice is heard and every opportunity gets (inaudible). I just wonder John what the impact is going to be for people working. If you work in Cleveland, they are paying 2 ½%. Unfortunately, we don't have a great number of people. Fortunately, we are not a rural community, a township. So, I think it's more affecting those that are abutting townships.

Councilperson Trakas said the income tax issue alone in a township kill any abutting cities. Euclid proposed 3.5%.

Finance Director Blaze said I think Parma Heights is at 3%, and that's the highest.

Councilperson DiGeronimo asked what does a mil bring us?

Finance Director Blaze said the Mayor just rounded it to \$500,000, a little bit more; but for quick math use \$500,000, and it will get you in the game for a quick napkin calculation.

Councilperson Veverka said I want to circle back to what Dave mentioned initially is when we had conversations about whether it made sense to acquire properties. We are in a little different situation, and all of a sudden we need to come up with multiple hundreds of thousands of dollars to follow through. The ramp is an immediate need, it's an immediate opportunity that we could lose \$2,000,000 if we don't take the money there, but the question is should the money come from a place or a location that is way down the road. You know when you are talking about property acquisitions, in my mind's eye we have to focus on the needs for today and realize that even though we have aspirations for some bigger things and there are some opportunities out there related to land acquisition, but that puts us further behind on things that we need.

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We chose to purchase the facility on Old Brecksville Road, and that was \$300,000 plus or minus, plus the additional cost of upgrading it; but that didn't do us any good related to upgrading the current Service Department. So, that was kind of like a band aid, and I sit here and I think about how do we categorize what the needs are and get away from some of the things, it would be really nice if we could, but that is something that we want to do. So, in my house there are always lots of things you want to do, but it cuts down, we have to put food on the table. We had to make a mortgage payment when we were younger, and thank God that's over with. Those particular items, you have to have a car that runs. We don't have to go out and buy a new car, but we do have to put reasonable money into an existing car. So, to me it circles back to we have to reel ourselves in with some of these really nice ideas if we had an extra few whatever the money balance was that we had a number of years ago; but the reality is we don't. We don't have that kind of cash that we once had to be able to do certain things, and we just have to tighten the belts and tighten it in areas where boy it would be nice. Boy, that would be a nice want. Gee, I want to have something, but the reality is we really have to focus on the infrastructure. We really have to focus on the water lines. We have to focus on the sewer lines. We have to focus on the streets, and I understand what you are saying Vern. In some situations okay, maybe on Brookside or wherever, we have to go to a mill and fill instead of what we were thinking made sense, but we sure don't want to punt on the replacement of a water line because that's a key piece that later on determines what you can do with that road. So, you don't want to, as was approached to us once, we talked Lafayette. Remember a while back ago, on Lafayette there was a proposal why don't we spend the money and time and mill and fill Lafayette Road, and then we pull ourselves up short. We said wait a minute, that was not a good idea because we need to replace the water line first and then approach what we need to do with it afterward, right Tom?

So, that is what it boils down for me is what key pieces do we really need, and how do we focus on what we really need and step back and step away from some of those other items that boy it would be nice if. That's my thoughts.

Councilperson Narduzzi said I get where you are coming from, but I think there has to be a balancing act because you know we are lucky to be able to have some of these parcels for future development that create opportunities. If we don't go after those opportunities, at some point Independence becomes flat and stagnant, and it becomes a Brookpark. So, we have to be able to grasp an opportunity when we have the ability to do it. It's a balancing act. I know what you mean. You have to take care of certain things, that's a must; but don't forget there's always these other parts over here that make us what we are and give us an opportunity to do better.

Councilperson Veverka said of course, but we have done a number of those things when we had more of an opportunity; but now we are in a position where we don't have that situation. So, that's when you have to tighten your belt.

Councilperson Narduzzi said you make it sound like we are going to go bankrupt here.

Councilperson Veverka said no, don't use that word.

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Councilperson Narduzzi said it's like a bad timing for some of this stuff. I think Independence does okay.

Vice Mayor Grendel said it's frustrating because we have owned all that land downtown for decades, many decades, and that opportunity has never come. We thought we had one maybe last year, and we were so close we could taste it almost, and then it didn't materialize. That's the frustrating part, we purchased all this land, but even for the better part of our lifetime the City has owned it, but what do we have to show for it, a parking lot, some oil cleanup that we have to do. It really hasn't, even the middle school property we have had for 20 years, and nothing has happened there. So, it is frustrating you make those purchases, and it's all for good reasons. It makes sense. It seems like we haven't been able to get that one project to go in like for the downtown. I like the idea there are other land acquisitions to get alternative housing, small housing so we can keep a lot of our people to stay here and maybe trigger more development downtown because we have a bigger mass of people living in that area.

So, the motivation and the thought process is good. We just haven't been able to carry out the last, like the Browns they make all these moves, and you say they are close to a Super Bowl; but they have never been able to get close to a Super Bowl. That is how I feel about that. I am for it because I can see the future and kind of foresee what can go in there, but to get it down, and find the deep pockets of a developer that would do it is another story. That is what is so frustrating because we are a great community as it is. We have had a lot of land downtown and in other areas and really nothing to show for it downtown. It would be sure nice to see maybe what the church is planning, if they add on a little bit to the frontage there, and get development on that side. It would be nice to see some major investment in the downtown area. We thought we had a good deal there or at least a plan there.

Finance Director Blaze said hold that. There just may be something that surfaces.

Vice Mayor Grendel said to have the potential, but like you say, we have the potential, but in our lifetime we might not see that potential fulfilled.

Mayor Kurtz said it hasn't hurt our quality of life.

Vice Mayor Grendel said no not at all.

Mayor Kurtz said just remember, we are all responsible, myself and Council for the quality of life for all of our residents, and we have done a pretty good job by creating amenities such as the park. It took generations to create the park, the Civic Center, the quality of life that our residents are accustomed to. I can't find anyone who would say you shouldn't be proud of the fact that you have allocated enough monies for years now to do millions of dollars of infrastructure every year. Like the Finance Director said, it will never be enough, and philosophically this is why it's good to have the discussion. Look it, you think today, some people think tomorrow. Some people are thinking strategically for tomorrow. Some people are harnessing today and back and forth because you don't want to be caught empty-handed, but on the other hand you don't want to be over-extending yourself. I don't think we are over-extending ourselves. It's not the way I

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have operated, and it's not the way Council has embraced the last couple of years. So, I think there is some sweet spot to keep moving in. It's great to have these discussions. It is great when everyone talks about infrastructure being a priority. That's good, now we have checked that box. We have talked about refining some of the revenue potential and how are we going to do it, borrow money? We can go to the taxpayers. There are all kinds of different things, but we are also charged with maintaining and improving the quality of life for our residents. We do a lot of that through our Operating Budget because we offer these programs, and we do that by the millions of dollars of infrastructure that we do every year. There is also, you have to look, and the Chief mentioned about the Police station. He is not kidding. That's a quality of life issue itself.

When we look at the review that Dennis put together for our facilities, and the Service Department is shot, relatively speaking. So, we are doing the quick steps to make sure that we can stabilize ourselves and be more efficient for the next three or four years, but also we have to be planning. We have to borrow money and maybe go to the people because you are not going to be able to do millions of dollars at the Civic Center, multi-millions of dollars on the campus; but if there is an opportunity that looks us in the eye, we have to be in a position to make those tough decisions too.

Vice Mayor Grendel said when you mentioned about the Service Center too, that's a really nice Service Center. You are adding a lot of years onto your vehicles because they won't be housed, not all of them. We have quite a bit of money invested in those trucks and equipment and everything, and you want them to all be safe.

Mayor Kurtz said you think about what we spend every year in terms of, I call it internal capital, trucks, Fire Department, Police cars, it's millions of dollars.

Councilperson Veverka asked do we know we are at the optimum point related to our vehicles, whether it be the Police cars or the plow trucks are whatever? We are at a nice pattern. It goes so many years, and we replace them. I guess my question is if we keep them for eight years, does it make more sense to keep them for ten years? With the Police vehicles, are we at an optimum time for replacement? I mean everybody likes to drive a newer vehicle, but there is a break-even point, and sometimes when we look at the motor pool list of what we have, realizing it's not the mileage, it's often the hours. The question becomes when we have to buy a new tandem axle truck have we gotten to a good point related to how far it has depreciated? How much money do we have to dump into it? Then are we handing an extremely good usable truck to somebody at nickels and dimes? So to me, there is giant money in the motor pool section that we need to have somebody take a responsibility for.

Another area, and this isn't infrastructure, it is not that piece of the puzzle, but we have been very, we work really hard to add additional people in additional areas. So, we have salaries, we have benefits of a number of additional people that early on, a little over two years ago, we created four or five different new positions, and all of those five positions have been filled because there was a perceived need. The question becomes how carefully are we looking at the amount of people we have, and one of the things that I talked about ages ago, one of the nice

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things that Don is able to do, when he hires a consultant you pay “x” dollars, and when the project is done, we are done. So, do we have staff that then require benefits and salaries, but then is there an appropriate amount of work available for them?

I think that, and again, I am not the main manager that sits in the big chair, but having a really good handle on the amount of people that we hire, and do we have to take a look at that? Do we have to make sure that we keep where we are at as far as staff and other things? I know Don you may be unhappy, but in your department additional people would be nice, but the question becomes are we beyond a balance there? Are we beyond a balance in any other department? I know we have talked about a replacement for Debi, but the question becomes is there a better way from within that it could be handled? So, that’s another piece of this puzzle that we have to look. I kind of get discouraged when we are looking at the long-term projects, but there are so many other pieces that we have to look. I know we would say that it’s small money here or there, but there are other things I think we have to reflect on before we just chop away at a bunch of these things that we think are real needs.

Mayor Kurtz said you raise a very good point, but adding people as you eluded to in order to keep up with the level of services that residents expect. We have increased those levels of services, programming, and I am not sure, I see it because I am in the middle of it, but I am not sure; it’s difficult to grasp how busy the people who work here are. You could ask your daughter, she will be able to tell you how intense the job is. That’s one person. Ask Don, when you get these emails at 2:00 a.m. in the morning, I tell him don’t do that anymore. People are expecting a higher level of service, and what do we do Council and the Administration, we responded. So, I can’t expect the people I circle with like Don Ramm’s to continue the pace they work at. So, what we have done is we have come to Council, and you have given us more flexibility. Now it’s our responsibility to balance that, like you said between the cost of premium for an outside consultant, but that goes away. If you don’t see a long-term strategy that you are going to need that service, then that’s the best way to do it, but I can’t expect Don Ramm not to have support internally because the load is just, it’s a lot.

Councilperson Trakas said a couple of factors Mayor. Ultimately, I kind of think a hybrid approach of everything we are talking about is what we have to do. We do have to go back in the General Revenue Fund budget. I like the idea of trying to find at least \$600,000, maybe we can find more. Let’s try to have that exercise. We also have several hundred more people in this town, 600 more people living in town. We have several thousands of people working in town that we didn’t have the last time we had these types of discussions. All of those need support. If you are going to try to attract businesses to town, I wouldn’t touch our taxes. I think having a lower property tax and a 2% income tax is attractive. When Cleveland went to 2.5%, we had five new businesses, Anthony right? We had five new businesses in six months. It wasn’t the weather. Cleveland is the same weather as Independence, maybe a little different, but that income tax is an attraction. It’s like hey there’s a steady thing here. We have the lowest property taxes of any incorporated city in the county. We have great school district, we are doing some things right there, and I do think that an internal borrowing would be appropriate to take a look at; and if you are going to do it, do what you have to do to get infrastructure where people want to be because that increases our value to our houses. When sales are going through,

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and last year was ridiculous. It wasn't related to anything we did. I would like to take credit for it, but when I campaign I would somebody but it probably wouldn't be honest. In all reality, when people are coming to homes built in the 1950's, 1960's and 1970's, that street is falling apart or we just milled it and filled it, and that's previous obvious, there's a value there. I just see Diane Weseloh in the back of my head saying yes, you have to do something like that.

I think that all of those types of things are a combination that we should probably try to do. I agree with you on particularly the vehicle purchases, big ticket numbers and can you get another year out of them, and maybe that pushes things a little bit, but maybe it's appropriate to push them a little bit. I think if you do a combination of those types of things, I think Vern you are going in the right direction on it, I wouldn't want to face the voters on something like this if there are other things that would be perhaps needed to do, and we have to have tough conversations about that.

Vice Mayor Grendel said like Chris mentioned, you only go to the voters for campus type things, we need a new Police station, big-ticket items. They can see that, but as far as when it comes to other things, internal borrowing. It would be interested to see when we went from having the Engineering Department. Don Elewski was the City Engineer, but he was not a City employee, and then we saved a lot of money over the years that Don has been running the Engineering Department and the responses we have gotten. Remember all the problems we had with residents. John Veres was always fighting with Don Elewski on funding. We had to be referees. It was always an ongoing struggle with having to pay, and not to get an explanation. Well Maggie you were there, all the bills we would be getting. We would be getting bills and not having an explanation. What are we paying for? Then when Don wasn't here, the other fellow, the guy was talking to us like we were ignorant people. You don't talk to Council like we are all idiots and everything too. With Don there, it has brought professionalism. We have a good man, and hopefully he will be able to build a strong bench.

Several people began speaking at once again.

Vice Mayor Grendel said but Don has been so responsive to the residents, where before you had sometimes the Engineers would get into it, Don Elewski would get into it with the residents.

Councilperson Narduzzi said you either loved him or hated him. I got him on both sides.

Vice Mayor Grendel said it would be interesting to see over the years, I have to believe it was one of the best moves made to bring that in-house, and plus the handwriting is on the wall. Don Elewski was getting to that retirement age, and there was nobody after him at this point that could work for the City.

Mayor Kurtz said I think Vice Mayor you make a good point, Jim you did too, look why are we having this discussion? We didn't have it last year because of Covid, State law changes, and the bottom hasn't dropped off, but at least all of us are cognizant of potential issues. We are having that potential what-if discussion because if not, okay we could do that, we could this. Now we are saying we could do it, but maybe we shouldn't do it. Or is this the right time to do it? We

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don't have those discussions very often. Normally, it's here we are going to do it. I think you eluded to it earlier, we ramp up these numbers until you get the next two or three years are so high, and now we can't do that. So, I think this is important to have this discussion and to find that balance between what we need to get done, what we want to get done, and what the people expect us to get done. We have 600 new people in this town, and it doesn't sound like much, but it's 9%. So, that's moving up. A lot of houses got built, and a lot of opportunity, and a lot of expectation on our part. They expect us to continue to evolve with new programming, better programming, and so we are reeling from Covid. We are trying to figure out what the State is going to do to us next, and so all of those things are creating this dynamic and this discussion which I think is good.

I appreciate the Finance Director taking the time and using his experience and knowledge to offer a strategy or potential direction on this issue and a combination of a lot of things.

Finance Director Blaze said they are big decisions, so I don't think we are prepared to make any decision today, and Council we have a regular meeting next week. So, maybe you let this last hour and a half that we have had some great discussion, ideas, options, some things that are maybe off the table, and just let it gel in your head for another week or so. Next week is pretty full because I think we have Utilities, we have a meeting with Charter Review, the Regular Council meeting, maybe the week after that we regroup. Maybe we agree that we put the Five-Year Capital Plan on First Reading in May, obviously won't adopt it, but at least it's First Reading. We are making progress, and maybe that week after, maybe before Memorial Day week we get together again, and we say okay we have had some time to think about it, let's really make some decisions here where we are going to go.

Mayor Kurtz said I appreciate the fact that I haven't heard any Member of Council not appreciate the fact the dynamic of what the State of Ohio, Covid, and everything; so I appreciate the fact that everybody is at least looking at things in realistic terms so thank you very much.

Councilperson Walchanowicz said and to piggyback off of something that you had said earlier if that's okay, about the vehicles that we are purchasing and the Police cars and stuff like that. Like I remember back when I was a kid that officers shared Police cars. Officers never drove Police cars home, and now if we have 40 officers we have 40 Police cars. They drive them home. They are not personally paying for the gas in those vehicles to drive to and from work, like all of us have to pay for gas. So, what does that do to our fuel prices where fuel prices are now? Can we get longer longevity out of the Police cars if they are not being driven home every day? I don't know where at what point and time that we decided to start allowing that privilege, once we did that if that kind of made us need vehicles for them more often.

Mayor Kurtz said good point, but for the Chief, you take them home if you live here so it was always an incentive to have a Policeman live in the City.

Councilperson Veverka said parked in front of the house, if you would run up Brookside Road and see a Police car for instance.

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Mayor Kurtz said you go to Pleasant Valley, and they see that Police car. Your point is well taken, and I think it evolved because residents, we want people to live here, and the fact is, the other thing, you are the one driving that car, you are the only one driving that car, then you are responsible for that car. If there is a problem, you can't blame anyone else. I went through this years ago, and you had three shifts and had three different people driving the car, and one smoked, and one didn't. Then one would run it through the river, and everybody blames everybody else. Well it's hard to blame anybody else if you are the only one driving it. So, there are a lot of different dynamics that went into that evolution which we are dealing with.

I do agree with the fact, and at our next team meeting we will talk to them about, okay if we have to pull back and figure out how can you help me and Council with this.

Several people began speaking at once again.

Vice Mayor Grendel said they don't take the car home if they live in other communities.

Mayor Kurtz said no, if they live in the City, and the Chief.

Councilperson Trakas said and there also is the factor in an emergency you have to get here quick, and you might not want to go to City Hall and park your car and go. There are things going on. Two Mays ago when we had the riots, were the Police sitting around? No, they had to go out and get it done real quick to protect our community. That is a factor in that decision-making.

Councilperson Veverka said a few things, when I was picking up my monster copy from Don, he and I had a conversation and said we have been fortunate when Department Heads have come to us and say they need a little more for this or a little more for that, and that might be the other piece of the puzzle is to have the Department Heads take a look at what they have proposed and have a sharp pencil and come back to us with some thoughts as to where the reductions could be made.

We also, on a different topic, we have also made as a Council some good decisions. Some among them, Don how many more years do we typically get out of a concrete surface compared to asphalt?

City Engineer Ramm said double.

Councilperson Veverka said so when we did Brettin Drive, when we did upper Brookside, when we did upper upper Brookside, and when we have done other projects, we have been willing as a Council to kick in the extra upcharge which was \$50,000 to \$70,000, and we bought multiple years of life by doing that. Also, when we do a road like Rockside, we did it in concrete, and we are spending good money maintaining the level based on the 2017 road evaluation. We target money to those roads, so instead of having roads break down, we build them better, and then we are conscientious about maintaining that level so the road lasts longer so we have a lot less of these things to deal with.

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So, those are some of the good things we have been involved in based on Don's recommendations, but one of the other things that we have done over the past couple few years is we have gotten a little bit away from the Five-Year Plan. We have done a couple of things that are good things, but they weren't on the Five-Year Plan. When we did the two sidewalks, good things; it's nice to have that sidewalk. It's nice to have that connectivity, but that wasn't something that we had on a Five-Year Plan ahead of time if I am not mistaken right? I don't remember that being on there from about three or four years ago. That was one thing that was proposed, and we said yeah that's a good idea, and we did it. So, we spent that money, but that money wasn't money that we had earmarked in the Five-Year Plan as far as a priority ahead of time. So, because of that, because of the money we expended on some of those projects, which are good projects, and I don't know the amount Don for each of the Hillside pieces. Are we talking \$1,500,000 between the two?

Several people said it was more than that.

Councilperson Veverka said so over \$1,500,000 for one, and another chunk for the other, but there is \$2,000,000 that would have been going into one of these other projects, Kleber or Longano or Brookside or whatever, that went to another project which was nice for those residents, but pulled us away from the Five-Year Plan. It's important that we invest the time in the Five-Year Plan, but then we have to make sure we have the discipline to stick with it and follow with it so when a proposed project comes along that we have the wherewithal to say it's a great idea, let's put it in 2025 and put the money together for that project and not have to realize I think that money would have come out of cash on hand. Is that right Vern?

Finance Director Blaze said for Hillside we did.

Councilperson Veverka said correct, so in other words, that was a project that was added that wasn't part of the big picture that took money away from the big picture. We as a Council aren't keeping ourselves focused on the Five-Year Plan sometimes, and we get off on some of these tangents and that's part of the reason I think that now we are sitting here saying okay how do we get back to where we need to be? Is that illogical?

Mayor Kurtz said so the question is the last two years, the way people go to school, the way they work, everything has changed, the whole dynamic; and to create a safer environment for people because like they have eluded to, more people than ever are on trails, sidewalks. Council was able to adapt for safety reasons for those two sidewalks, and I think that flexibility is what makes Council unique in this respect compared to other cities, and so we have frameworks to everything, to your credit you adapt to prioritizing safety, change of life and everything that has been going on the last couple of years. Give yourself credit.

Councilperson Walchanowicz said I have to say that those two sidewalk projects, I look at it as we went off, but it was an investment for the residents because since I came on Streets & Sidewalks this year I have had more phone calls about how happy those people are that now, those big developments on Hillside, they can walk to the park and not think about driving to the

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park or coming from the schools. To me that is a resident investment. It's a walkabout investment.

Vice Mayor Grendel said that was what we did on upper Brookside, and it was started when you were Mayor Anthony, but the people who live in Lake Charles, they wanted safe walking down Brookside to Eastview and that. I think it brought a lot more safety because the people who walk on Hillside, that street is very dangerous.

Several people began speaking at once again.

Councilperson Veverka said that's my point, and you talk about the Brookside sidewalk, and just ask Don, from the initial request from the people at Lake Charles to the actual planning, and then we went to the sidewalks, and then we added the sewers and everything else that was related to that, what was that in time? Was that three years or four years?

City Engineer Ramm said it evolved over a number of years. We started talking about.

Vice Mayor Grendel said that one little stretch of Brookside between Lake Charles and Sprague, they said hey what about us? You are doing all this for everybody else, and we are going to be in between looking like hell. So, we decided and kind of placated them too, which they brought up a good point. Even though there weren't that many residents, but it made sense if you were going to do it.

Mayor Kurtz said it takes years of planning for some of these projects.

Councilperson Walchanowicz said it's something we all have to take into consideration like the sidewalks. You know, my cousin sold his house in Parma six months ago, and as fast as Justin takes in a new house, it's sold. He can't get a house in Independence. That is how fast Justin is selling them, and it's the young generation of people that are swooping these houses up. They are the ones that are walking the sidewalks, walking to the park. Sometimes you have to gear what we spend some of that money to with the new generation of people who are moving in. They are the ones that walk the sidewalks, walk the trails and stuff like that.

Finance Director Blaze said I don't think anybody disagrees with that, I think Councilperson Veverka's point is okay since we saw future phases of Chestnut Woods being built out towards Hillside, we knew that they had no way to get to Filip, to get to the campus, so maybe we could have had a little more foresight and plugged in that sidewalk a couple of years ago instead of just oh let's do a sidewalk, and we fund it and we pay for it, and it was never really planned for.

Councilperson DiGeronimo said I don't know if that's a separate exercise. We all maybe have some thoughts of what else is not on here. What is not on the Five-Year?

Several people began speaking at once again.

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Councilperson Togliatti said Stone Road is not on the Five-Year Capital Plan, and I have mentioned it about a handful of times, and it's in very bad shape. So, I think we do need to do that road.

Finance Director Blaze said Councilperson Togliatti you will be happy to know that on Page 1 or 2 about three-quarters of the way down in the \$600,000 line where it says additional funding needed to complete 2022 asphalt road projects noted on the neighborhood projects list, even though in that initial neighborhood projects list that Engineer Ramm came up with did not have Stone Road, that \$600,000 figure does plug in if Council would decide to include Stone Road on there, it would be done.

Vice Mayor Grendel said that makes sense now because the heavy trucks are off that road and everything. That's why we always had an excuse. Now that is not an issue anymore.

Councilperson Walchanowicz said Covid pushed a lot of that sidewalk project too because people were home, and they were out and about.

Councilperson Veverka said and the development as it continued to push out. I spoke with people multiple times when I campaigned down there, basically the road was not through. So, people needed to go a mile to get out to Chestnut, and down Chestnut to get to the park or to get to any of these opportunities. I mean if you think about what a crazy road Chestnut was at the time that every single car from that development dumped out there, plus Chestnut Creek, plus Poplar and Willow, all those other streets. There was no way out. The good news now, those people there at the end, like I said, it's not like the sidewalk didn't make sense, it's just that we didn't have the foresight to plan it ahead of time, and then we followed through with it, but at the detriment of some of the other items that we had.

Councilperson Walchanowicz said there were times that I would wait 10 minutes at the stop sign on my street before we opened that section up.

Vice Mayor Grendel said I think Mayor that was your project, on your campaign you heard some of the people, and what some of the needs were and everything and brought it to the forefront. That's when we first saw it when you came on board, and we all agreed that there was a need.

Councilperson Walchanowicz said I would propose to put Stone Road on here.

Finance Director Blaze said it's on indirectly, on some version of what I passed out today gets down. That asphalt road project has 8 or 12 roads in there already, and we did plug in a healthy figure for Stone Road if that's the consensus between Council and the Mayor.

Councilperson Trakas said the other issue that we really ought to talk about is public safety has been a major issue, and we have addressed it, and it costs money to do that. That's another thing, that's millions of dollars, and it's well worth it. I would extend it again and probably spend more, but those issues have cost us.

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Several people began speaking at once again.

Councilperson Trakas said why do we need more cars, we have more officers. That's one of the reasons we need more cars. That is what the public expects of us, and it has to be crucial to everything we do here.

Councilperson Walchanowicz said there's a reason why houses don't last one day on the market anymore in Independence, like it was back in the 1990's and the early 2000's. So, we are doing something right.

Mayor Kurtz asked do you want to talk about the concepts Councilperson DiGeronimo?

Councilperson DiGeronimo said nothing specific. We might know of that sidewalk or that intersection that could be improved, but how to do that in an exercise. We just all want to share some ideas. Again, I would want to know cost involved. Maybe there have been things that have been budgeted for, things that could get resurrected, and you talked about burying the utilities. It's not part of anything I think, but what would it cost and look like if it's four or five years from now?

Councilperson Trakas said that \$1,000,000 a mile has gone up.

Councilperson Veverka said we ran in the other direction when it came to \$1,000,000 a mile.

Councilperson Walchanowicz asked is that underground electrical, is that going to be part of streetscaping? So, maybe that should be a fund of its own if that is something that you want to do. Like streetscaping, I am thinking all those bricks on 21 are horrendous, the red brick. I mean so maybe we would open up a fund strictly for underground.

Councilperson Trakas said the other thing, if you want to protect your investment is those trees in the center. You have to kind of protect the trees a little bit more, which we really don't do because there's a cost to do it, but if you really want to do it right, you don't want to keep replacing trees, you should probably have a little bit of protection to make sure that the heat isn't all focused on the tree system.

Mayor Kurtz said this is good, a lot of information circulated, a lot of ideas being circulated, and each one helps define or further refine some of these challenges that we are faced with. Jim, thanks for taking the initiative initially. Vern, I think that's invaluable, a robust discussion. We are talking about what we are facing in our current situation. Some of us are looking into the future, so I think it's a good melting pot of ideas that only can make us better as a unit.

Councilperson Trakas said I kind of like the idea of coming back in the third week of the month and then having some internal discussions. That way, you will have some of your discussions, and we could put some real meat on the bones to see what we want to do.

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Finance Director Blaze said as you are just driving down the road, and your mind starts to wander, and something will jump out between now and then, it will give us a little more clarity. It's hard to be presented with some pretty in-depth, far-reaching options and make a decision right now, but sleep on it a little bit.

Several people began speaking at once again.

Mayor Kurtz said that's why when you talk about the employees and everything, get some emails from Don at 2:00 a.m., and you write back at 4:00 a.m., and he's coming back at 5:00 a.m. Then you have the Police Chief and Fire Chief.

Finance Director Blaze said we all work 10 or 12 hours a day, and then these two go home, and then they are emailing each other in the middle of the night.

Mayor Kurtz said the vast majority of employees you have working for the City of Independence go beyond what is required. So, it's a little tender when you hear from one of our constituents that somebody was not doing their job because sitting here you realize, you have such a committed workforce. Right now we are building benches because I can't expect Don Ramm to work the hours he works continuously. I want him to elevate himself so that he (inaudible). People can use their experience and their expertise to help others so that we are not completely dependent on such a small core group with the level of services we provide. It continues to grow. Every time we create a new program or new opportunity, we have to be able to service that opportunity. So, it's a tough balancing act.

Councilperson Walchanowicz said I think the Mayor hit it on the head with the way employees go above and beyond, and I am going to mention and not just because he's my uncle, but last week, he's Rec Director. Last week he was raking slag before they poured concrete. The day they poured concrete, he was on his knees pulling concrete and troweling concrete. He is the Rec Director. He is out there doing that manual stuff to get stuff done right.

Mayor Kurtz said with his team.

Councilperson Walchanowicz said and that's just one of our departments, these guys are going above and beyond.

Councilperson Veverka said when we get basements flooded, I know Don is wading in his boots down there like on Hillside when they had multiple problems when the culvert wouldn't take the water in. Don is there, he's splashing around in the water. That's it. We do go above and beyond.

Councilperson Walchanowicz said for me I just see it different, the way employees were back in the day, and the way they are now. How much more involved they get in their job than they used to. Like I don't know Don Elewski very well, but I don't know if I would have seen him sloshing around in water. I don't know if I would have seen Mr. Kostyack raking out concrete and all that stuff. It's just a different breed of employee I think.

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Councilperson Narduzzi said Don was a good engineer, he just never grew with the City.

Vice Mayor Grendel said he was an independent contractor.

Councilperson Narduzzi said he got stuck in his ways, and he didn't grow, and everybody else around him did.

Councilperson Veverka said it was a village.

Councilperson Trakas said he was truly a decent man.

A couple of thoughts I just wanted to put on the table. I think certainly we should have a bigger picture discussion kind of like what we have been talking about the Service Department, Police Department, what the vision is or what it could be and what it cost and what is the right time because I don't know. I know there should be something, but when it pans out with everything we are talking about.

Vice Mayor Grendel asked are we working on something like that?

Mayor Kurtz said Jim your point is well taken. At Public Buildings & Lands, the Chief and I talked and the Service Director talked. At the next Public Buildings & Lands, we would talk about in a more focused arena the potential for, the options because ultimately you have to, the seven people on Council, the majority of them at least, have to make a decision with land. We have to decide if we are going to build something somewhere. With money, you have to decide how you are going to appropriate the funds or borrow the funds. Ultimately, the majority of Council has to make that decision. I think we started with that process, taking the study. We have new Department Heads. They have a very passionate perspective on where they want to go. Each Member of Council and myself could help us define that in precise terms, and then we can be in a position where this body can make a decision, or the majority of them.

Councilperson Walchanowicz said and to his point, I think part of that big, big picture is how are we going to help out with the schools.

Mayor Kurtz said remember when we did the Shared Use Facility, and I think the Finance Director said \$18,000,000 was a ballot issue, \$15,000,000 the City borrowed. We borrowed every dollar of it initially. So, now we are in a situation where they are assessing their needs, and I think when we have a discussion, it's going to boil down to where is it going to be? What is it going to be? This campus that we have created here, and is the City going to participate? I am not sure how that rolls out right now based on the discussions we have had over the last couple of months. So, I know that the Vice Mayor, we have a meeting Tuesday.

Councilperson Trakas said I would just also strongly recommend that they took a real sharp pencil to what they want to accomplish. My view was the last time the voters thought it was too expensive and to come back for even more of an expense in an atmosphere like we are in, I don't

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think that's a strong exercise. If there are things that they can do differently like utilize some of the firm land they have, maybe if you are talking about land swaps, smaller footprints, renovations, just doing a little bit less, or less expensive. I try to listen to what our constituents say.

Several people began speaking at once again.

Councilperson Walchanowicz said like last night Councilperson DiGeronimo and I were at the Fieldhouse with the baseball team. What did I say when we walked out? How are they going to put a school over here? There were literally hundreds of kids. Every parking space in that Fieldhouse parking lot was packed. They were parked on the road. It was full.

Councilperson Trakas said to your point also about infrastructure, it's already rough getting up there, let alone adding.

Vice Mayor Grendel asked if we do decide to go with a new structure for the Police headquarters, how will we utilize what we have at City Hall? What department will go there?

Mayor Kurtz said Engineering.

Councilperson Narduzzi said Don, you make us cough up a lot of money.

Several people began speaking at once again.

Councilperson Trakas said we will see what we come up with.

Mayor Kurtz said there's a lot of discussion.

Councilperson Trakas said all these things cost money.

Finance Director Blaze said good point about the schools and not seeing that this is for Independence, but nobody in this room was at the State of the School address today, and I had to the two Superintendents, Cuyahoga Heights and Independence, and the Career Center and the ESC, and the school wasn't a big topic of discussion; but the Superintendent of Cuyahoga Heights, they asked him a question because it was the same format that they have been doing lately. They asked him a question, and Superintendent Evans from Cuyahoga Heights, I forget what question prompted his response, and he kind of leaned forward in the mic, and he goes I think I missed the Superintendent's class where they tell you just demo your current building and go to the voters and get a new building. We have an 80 year-old building in Cuyahoga Heights. It's a beautiful building, and we are going to keep that building, and we are going to keep putting money into it to keep it a good building. You won't see a new building here as long as I am here. I'm not saying it's for every district, but that's an interesting point.

Councilperson Walchanowicz said you have three communities in that school.

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Several people began speaking at once again.

Finance Director Blaze said symbolically, and I never realized it, he said there is four columns out in front on East 71<sup>st</sup>. There are three columns for the three villages, and one column for the school. He said I am never taking that down.

Councilperson Trakas said when I was at Hayes Hall at Ohio State built in 1871, and I learned pretty well. It worked out pretty good.

Mayor Kurtz said well it's funny, I think they should listen with respect to keeping the old high school and middle school, a portion of it. For me, it's historical significance. It's embedded in the fabric of so many people in this community.

Finance Director Blaze said it's an option to let us take over the gym and the auditorium, and they would build a completely new school.

Vice Mayor Grendel said that would be our headache.

Several people began speaking at once again.

Councilperson Trakas said another thing, not quite on topic, but I was with the Governor last week, and I have a hunch that Intel coming to central Ohio can do something for Independence in terms of chip manufacturing and research and development. We have some land, and I tell you the Governor, they have been putting a lot of stuff in central Ohio because they are shovel ready and all that stuff. Hey, we are pretty close to shovel ready on some of these properties. I had a conversation with them, and they are looking for training centers and research centers for the chips. They are making a \$20,000,000,000 investment in the State. They are going to need people in northeast Ohio. I would not discount something like that. They said they would be needing STEM kids, and we have plenty of kids in Independence schools that are STEM and ready to roll.

Vice Mayor Grendel asked should we set a date when we are going to have this next meeting? Are you talking Vern the week of the 16<sup>th</sup> or 23<sup>rd</sup>?

Finance Director Blaze asked the 23<sup>rd</sup> is that Memorial Day?

Several people said no.

Finance Director Blaze said maybe the 17<sup>th</sup> or 24<sup>th</sup>.

Vice Mayor Grendel asked what's everybody's schedule for the 24<sup>th</sup>?

Councilperson Togliatti said that should work for me.

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Councilperson Walchanowicz asked does the 17<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> work for Public Lands meeting for everybody?

Councilperson Togliatti said it won't work.

Councilperson Walchanowicz said I'm trying to keep it on a Tuesday or Thursday.

The Clerk said not the 19<sup>th</sup>, it's Zoning Board meeting.

Mayor Kurtz said I am out that week.

Councilperson Trakas said we have that Government Day on May 23<sup>rd</sup>, we can come back in the afternoon for something.

Councilperson Walchanowicz said that will work. Does the 23<sup>rd</sup> work Anthony?

Councilperson Togliatti replied yes.

Councilperson Walchanowicz said 3:00 p.m. Does that work for you Mayor?

Mayor Kurtz said yes.

Vice Mayor Grendel said May 24<sup>th</sup> at 4:00 p.m. is the Council Workshop.

Several people began speaking at once again.

Councilperson DiGeronimo said Economic Development will probably be May 31<sup>st</sup>.

Vice Mayor Grendel asked Debi we are on May 12<sup>th</sup> with the meeting for Charter Review.

The Clerk said 5:30 p.m.

Councilperson Togliatti said circling back to this Five-Year Plan, but one of the last questions was there anything to be added? I was just going through some of the older Five-Year Plans, and I noticed that Eastview had been programmed to be completed in 2020 for \$180,000. I know it was not completed, and I do not see it on this plan.

Finance Director Blaze said that might be one of them that are on the asphalt list on that \$600,000 line.

Councilperson Togliatti said talking Stone Road and Eastview, I think we are going to need more than \$600,000.

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Finance Director Blaze said there's \$400,000 being allocated this year in the asphalt, and there's a couple hundred thousand that still wasn't used from prior years. So, it adds up to over \$1,000,000 for all the roads that Don has, plus Eastview, plus Stone.

Councilperson Togliatti said okay.

Finance Director Blaze said Don maybe we will just have to revisit that and add Stone on there and Eastview and then get an updated cost on that.

Several people began speaking at once again.

Councilperson Walchanowicz said I believe there are five recommendations from Charter Review. The last two meetings I kind of told them that I have to play as Councilperson now. I put my two cents in, whether they took it or not. I didn't vote on anything on what they wanted to send over. I abstained from all voting. I didn't want to go one way at that meeting, and once we sit down together here, if I don't agree with something.

Councilperson Trakas said with respect to that, if we liked one of the considerations or several of them and wanted to modify them, is that something you can do?

Mayor Kurtz said it's Council's prerogative. If it's something they submit to you, you can accept, modify or reject any or all. You are ultimately the authority to put it on the ballot.

Councilperson Veverka said it's gone multiple ways in the past, turned them all down or not.

**Moved by Walchanowicz seconded by Veverka, to adjourn the Council Workshop of May 4, 2022. Voice Vote: 7 yes/0 no; motion carried.**

There being no further business, the Council Workshop of May 4, 2022 was adjourned at 6:02 p.m.