

**CITY OF INDEPENDENCE  
ECONOMIC GROWTH & DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE MEETING  
MINUTES  
JUNE 21, 2022 AT 3:00 P.M.  
COUNCIL CAUCUS & VIA ZOOM**

Present: Chairman John DiGeronimo  
Councilperson Tom Narduzzi (arrived at 3:07 p.m.)  
Councilperson Jim Trakas

Also Present: Mayor Gregory P. Kurtz (left at 3:50 p.m., Returned 4:27 p.m.)

Councilperson Anthony Togliatti  
Councilperson Jim Trakas  
Councilperson Chris Walchanowicz  
Finance Director Vern Blaze  
Economic Development Director Jessica Hyser  
Communications Director Alla Lora  
City Planner Annie Lynch  
Economic Development Specialist Irene Kalal  
Cathy Fromet, Guide Studio

Chairman John DiGeronimo called the Economic Growth & Development Committee meeting to order at 3:06 p.m.

Chairman DiGeronimo said this is the first meeting of the year, some recurring topic though, and our guest is going to be Cathy from Guide Studio. The last presentation to Council was in December of 2021. So, Jess if you want to give us an update.

Economic Development Director Hyser said as you know, City Council approved us to move forward with the rebranding campaign. This initiative was passed a little bit ago. The purpose of the rebranding initiative is to help us present and communicate what we already know about the City of Independence, that we are a great place to live, work and raise a family.

The process started out a little bumpy, but we were able to engage Guide Studio, and they were helping us with the wayfinding component which Cathy will touch on a little bit today. They are a local firm that specializes in community branding, communications and wayfinding. They have been able to guide us through this process. At the end of last year we shared with Council one of the hallmarks of that which is the identity mark which you see up on the screen here today. That is one small part, but yet very important piece of the rebranding initiative.

During the last several months, we have been working with Guide Studio on several other components of the rebranding. This process did not happen in a vacuum. John was able to help us at some of those community meetings with some of the stakeholders that we had. I do believe

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that Guide Studio has a really good understanding of the community, and really understands us really well. I think that you guys will be impressed with what Cathy has to present here today.

One of the things that you will hear from Guide Studio and Cathy is a little bit more of a detailed understanding of our brand analysis, and that brand analysis will explain to you a little bit more of what she has really understood from these meetings about who we really are. Then the second thing is recommendations on how we will present to roll out this brand publicly.

Before I turn it over to Cathy, I know that Alla would like to add a few points as well.

Communications Director Alla Lora said I just wanted to number one thank you for last week when you voted on the first (inaudible) on the two magazines, but we are going to try to move forward, we are going to say we have it, and then not implement it in a thoughtful. You will see the biggest rollout after the publications. Emily and her team are going to be making Home Days, the theme is tied to the new branding.

Economic Development Director Hyser said so again, this is Cathy Fromet from Guide Studio, and Cathy the floor is yours.

Cathy Fromet said thank you everyone for letting me join you this afternoon and being kind enough to join virtually. What I am here to do today is to give you an overview of what we have been working on over the course of the last six months.

So, when we last spoke, we did present as Jessica indicated, we did present the visual brand, but from that point, and there was a reason in our minds. We started a little bit backwards, but we got the visual brand in place. Brand is more than just that logo, and so what we have been working on over the course of the last six months is jumping back in to the signage and wayfinding program now that we have the visual identity to work with to ensure that there's a consistency that is brought into the physical environment of your city. We worked with stakeholders and steering committee members to help understand how you communicate about the City of Independence to your audiences. So, that's what we call our brand strategy, so that is a bit of that assessment and analysis that Jessica was talking about. Then also from there, we also came back, and we worked with steering committee members as well as members from different departments within the City to really talk about how Independence can implement this brand and also just an understanding of how many things brands can actually help the City do when it comes to communication and presenting a consistent image and reputation management. So, that was a really great exercise with that group, and we came back with some recommendations and things that we would like to see the City moving forward.

I am here to kind of give you an update to all those pieces and get some of your reaction to, especially the storytelling pieces that we have been working on with the team. So, always a reminder are the objectives of your brand, and this was sort of built up over the course of the time working on this, but we wanted to create a brand that conveys a refreshed, grown-up, modern perspective that acknowledges and furthers City pride, giving something for people to rally around that it differentiates Independence from surrounding communities and aligns you with the services and strengths to remind your audiences of everything that the City offers.

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I am going to go through this quickly because you have seen this part. This is just a reminder of the journey we have been on. So, the brand identity piece, so your logo is one component of your brand and obviously it's that one piece that you want people to see and like clearly recognize that something that is happening in the community is part of the City of Independence, that is supported by the City, that is being put on by the City. So, your identity is a really important piece, but part of what we have been working on with Jessica and Alla is also setting up guidelines for how this brand can be used moving forward. So, Jessica and Alla have already been using these pieces as they are ramping up different types of communications, but this is a pretty important component of your brand and how it can be represented in all aspects visually.

As I stated, your brand is a lot more than just your logo. It's truly that symbolic embodiment of all of the information connected to your City, and this serves to create associations and expectations around it. So, it's important, and we always come to cities saying this is not our job, we are not here to create a brand for you. We are here to uncover your brand and help you articulate it whether it's in a visual way or it's in the words and way that you describe yourself to people, and so that information is already there with you. It's just our job to kind of pull it out and make sure that it can be crafted in a way that are useful tools for those who are responsible for communicating important information to the public.

So, that is where your brand strategy comes into play, and for us, the first thing that we do when addressing brand strategy is to try to get a deeper understanding of your core audience groups, and for the City of Independence we identified four groups. So, I am going to caveat this because I know for cities, but we are for all people, and yes that's true, but the makeup of your community is wholly unique to you. So, it's really important that we understand who makes up your community because every single one of those sort of core groups are going to see if they want different types of information, and they are going to receive information in a different way. You can't talk to businesses the same way that you talk to your residents, and you can't talk to brand new residents the same way that you are going to talk to residents who have been there for a long time. It's not to say that messages for all of these different groups aren't going to resonate with all of them, but it's important for us to understand. So, we did this exercise with the steering committee and stakeholder groups to help us and give us a general understanding of your resident groups.

So, I am going to go over these quickly. I will probably read through some of the descriptions, but returning residents, what we heard a lot from the steering committee groups are there are a lot of people who grow up in Independence, and they might move elsewhere but there's a huge opportunity for people to come back, and they are often coming back. So, what do you want them to know and understand about the community they grew up with and how you have evolved, but most importantly, how do you understand what they need to know from you and what type of expectations they have from your City. So, for returning residents, the description was these are people who are motivated by enjoying being home. After they have lived elsewhere, this is the place they want to be. They appreciate affordability and low taxes and community services. They are really proud of the excellent schools, the safe neighborhoods, the high quality parks and recreation; and they desire to elevate diversity and progress a bit. So, this is a little bit more of a progressive group that come back. These residents they wish to be dwellers of Independence. There is no place like home for them. Unlike towns that could be

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filled with transplants, and there are several that are surrounding Independence. Your City holds a grip on people, really pulling them back in because they seek that comfort of home, family, and friends. They are enchanted by the community's curbside charm and small town vibe, and they also appreciate top-notch schools and the quality of life amenities that you offer. They do see opportunities for progress, especially in the areas of diversity inclusion, this group is probably going to be more open to those things; but they also realize that they have to be part of the change too. So, a little bit of a younger demographic, families with children. It's just important for us to understand this group, where they are, so that the City knows how to communicate with them, and that the City knows what this group might expect from them.

We also have retirees and senior citizens. So, they are accustomed to low taxes, safety and access to amenities. They depend on robust but low-cost services and transportation and maintenance. They prefer to pass down their family homes to the next generations, so they are capturing all those returns to Independence, and they are also protective of their community's heritage and traditions. So, this group they really recognize that they have everything they need in Independence. They love being here, that's why they never left. They have access to so many wonderful services, why would they leave. They do depend on these services. This is really important to them that they receive these things. It does help with their quality of life. They are going to be a little bit more change adverse. They are going to be a little bit more protective of the tradition and heritage of their community because they really do cherish it and love it. So, again, important for the City to know how this group is going to receive information from your organization.

Then we have two related to the business community. So, that was the really interesting, we have always know that, I am a Clevelander, so my familiarity with Independence was honestly Rockside Road, and when we sat down with the steering committee members and the stakeholders, it was so eye-opening and amazing the level of pride and love people have for your community from a residential standpoint; but it's almost like a Tale of Two Cities, you have this really bustling business community who also sort of has that same level of pride for the City where their businesses are located.

So, these groups are attracted to low taxes, business incentives and convenience. They enjoy the proximity to downtown Cleveland, surrounding suburbs. It's right off the highway. They prefer space near lots of amenities and restaurants, which you certainly have on Rockside Road, and this is really for their employees and customers. Really their motivation is they are focused on work, business growth and continuities. These are the things that are always going to be weighing on them when they have any type of communication from the City. A thriving business community is linked to Independence's success. Like your business community allows the quality of life that your residents are receiving. Their investment in the City perpetuates lower taxes, access to strong services and amenities enjoyed by residents. Companies of all sizes and industries land here because the City's business-friendly government policy. Even better, the proximity to the highway, downtown and surrounding areas helps attract and retain a talented workforce. While office space along Rockside Road may have always been occupied, post-pandemic attitudes regarding work from home benefits may shift vacancy rates. So, close collaboration between government, developers and business owners will be vital to continued growth.

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So, again, the reason why we are creating these definitions around these audiences is just to keep these things top of mind. Jessica knows these things and is dealing with these all the time, but it's really important that the entire organization understands what you are driving to and what some of your audiences are going to desire.

Then last but not least, in these four focused areas is really the commuting professionals because if any of you have worked outside of where you lived, you spend an incredible amount of time at the place that you call home from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., and so commuting professionals are an important voice, especially if businesses are looking to lure them back to the office and not having them work strictly from home. So, the motivations for commuting professionals are they love a short, easy commute to the office or easy access. They want proximity to diverse restaurants. The National Park is actually a really great opportunity. I know it's not in Independence, but it's adjacent to and very close. Coffee shops, dry cleaning, all of those things that they might want to have access to during their days to make their lives easier. They like the idea of living here, so I am sure there's probably a lot of people who would love to live in Independence, and it's hard to get in. So, they do end up residing elsewhere, but they are probably living in semi-close proximity because this is where they work.

They might perceive a lack of diversity, but aren't necessarily involved in any specific issues or recreation. So, these are people coming from different communities, so their mindsets and their belief and values may be a little different.

So, from Monday to Friday Independence is brimming with commuters who value their home away from home, working at an office that's right off the highway and located near plenty of other businesses, contributes to their comfortable lifestyle. After work they can stick around hitting the towpath for a bike ride, or grabbing a drink with a fellow colleague. While this audience contributes to some of the congestion on Rockside Road, they are crucial to the economic vitality. How a community represents itself to them is a critical component of your brand platform.

Before we start and do any deep dive in anything, understanding your audience is first and foremost. Brand is about communication, and you need to know who they are and how they are receiving information. Later on I will talk a little bit about what that looks like to implement a brand and some of the things that we are thinking about and considering in reaching these specific audiences.

Next step, the other exercise that we do in the brand strategy piece is to highlight the components of your community that are highly cherished by the people in your community, and again all of these were uncovered during those discovery sessions with the stakeholders and the steering committee members.

So, for Independence we came up with five, and I tell you that typically it's three or four, so there was a lot that Independence offers and that people sort of hold close to the chest, the things that they love. I will talk about these a little bit for you.

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Curbside charm, you know a tour of Independence, especially on the residential side, offers visitors a glimpse into a serene small-town America. The hustle and bustle of the City business districts are balanced by green landscapes, gardens and flower beds, quiet neighborhoods overlooking pristine parks and trails, providing a sense of calm, giving people so many reasons to come back and stay home. So, that was like, for us who if you are to interface with Independence happens to be Rockside Road all the time, but when you actually venture in it's quite surprising and actually quite charming to see the residential side of your community.

Dependable services, this came up a lot in our conversation. Everyday needs never go overlooked. Top-rated public schools are foundational to youth development. A responsive Service Department preserves the City's polished aesthetic, and Safety services deliver invaluable security and peace of mind. Quality facilities, social events, senior citizen programs and more are just icing on the cake.

So, again one of the reasons that we call these things out, that these are things that people love already, and so these are also incredibly important areas that the City should always focus on to uphold.

Collective collaboration is another one, so partnerships form between the public and private sectors are foundational to our close-knit community. City leaders work hand-in-hand with the business community. Together they foster continued economic development and investment which in turn fuels our reputation as a great place to live, work, and play.

Neighborly harmony, Indy Pride gives ride to a unique atmosphere. Residents genuinely care, always looking out for one another while schools and faith-based organizations inspire camaraderie and civic responsibility. Younger generations may see their Independence upbringing as traditional or conventional, but those who leave only to come back later, realize this special place is anything but ordinary.

Last but not least is comfortable convenience. Accessible right off the highway, Independence allows for pain-free trips to and from the City. While commuting professionals and residents can find everything they need right here, restaurants, shopping, entertainment, etc., our centrally located community sits a short drive from downtown Cleveland and other popular destinations.

So, these were the things that came up the most in our conversations, and this is what we used to build what we call your positioning statement. Before I get into this, I want to emphasize that a positioning statement is really foundational to your communications, but it is an internal statement. So, this is really for the organization, for Council to rally around and be on the same page regarding who you are. This is the foundation for which your stories are to be built, but also positioning statements are an important tool to help you make decisions about things that you are bringing into your community because if they don't feel like they are in alignment with your positioning, they might not be a right fit for the City. So, positioning has a lot of different tools.

I am going to read this for you, and I am going to call out some of the things that tie back to your audiences and your distinct advantages. Independence is a vibrant community that carefully balances quiet, charming neighborhoods with bustling business districts. The City's collaborative

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and superior location attracts and maintains a robust business community which in turn provides the foundation for safe, harmonious living with an abundance of high-quality services and amenities for its residents. Whether it's your home, headquarters or place of work, Independence works hard to instill an experience that never leaves you.

So, when we do this we kind of diagnose these sentences a little bit to highlight pieces of your distinct advantages and information related to what residents and businesses your key audiences are attracted to. So, in the first sentence we lead with the benefits, that's you really do have a vibrant community on both ends of the spectrum, on your business side and residential side. So, that is where that careful balance, the quiet charming neighborhoods and the bustling business districts. From what we have heard, the City really does have a collaborative nature with the organizations within your City making it who it is. So, acknowledging that the way that you foster the relationship with the businesses in your City are really supporting the quality of life that residents enjoy. You are centrally located which is one of the distinct advantages that we called out. You provide safe, harmonious living with an abundance of high-quality services and amenities, again distinct advantages that you called out. The guiding principle, the thing that we kind of really began to understand is how hard the City works for its citizens within the City of Independence, and when I say citizens I am referring to both the residents and business community. So, this Independence works hard is something you do, and is a guiding principle. It's just something to kind of always keep in mind that it is who you are and what you do.

So, before I move on to the next piece of this, this was a lot to go over, but as we said, this is an important component to helping you tell your story in a more succinct way throughout a variety of communications. How do you feel about all these pieces that I just shared?

Chairman DiGeronimo said I see some nods Cathy. I have seen this before Cathy, and maybe one question. How different do you think this positioning statement is from other communities that you worked with? Could you apply this or have you seen a lot of things very differently on positioning statements?

Ms. Fromet said so every city, so this is always a challenge for us. Every city has some things that are similar. A lot of cities can talk about high-quality education or parks and trails and things like that, but what is truly different and unique about Independence is really that balance, just the really interesting balance between this quiet charming neighborhood, this really charming residential community and the support of the bustling business. Oftentimes, there are cities that like one leads over the other and are not very well-balanced, and they are probably not supporting each other as well as they could. Sometimes it's why they go through a branding exercise to figure out how that can happen; but I think that is really kind of unique about the City of Independence. Also, like helping everybody. Everybody understands like how it's everybody here is important here to the quality of life that you offer the community. Yes, the businesses are here, and they allow the City to do the things that they do for the residents. The residents enjoy the quality of life, but because those residents enjoy quality of life, they are also bringing to the table the way that they care and they take care of the City in their own neighborhoods. So, it's really kind of cyclical; so while there are little components here that you might hear in other positioning statements, this one is pretty different than what we have seen. I can always show you some other ones, but this is a different one.

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Councilperson Trakas said thank you Cathy. It looks good because it doesn't have a lot of platitudes and actually has meaningful words which I always like, although I am prone to platitudes. Who is it intended to, and then once we adopt this, what happens after that? I presume there are action items.

Ms. Fromet said like any strategy, this is sort of like an internal thing for you guys to use. In a lot of our cities they do use it for, like I said before, it's an internal statement where if a certain business was coming to your community, sometimes you can kind of just get a feeling of whether they are going to be a good fit or not; but sometimes a positioning statement can help secure whether they are going to be a good fit, if they are going to fit within what you are offering your community. The other piece of this, along with the audiences and the distinctive advantages and this statement, we begin working with your communication team to craft key messaging, and then also understand how you take this key messaging and what audiences will receive certain types of key messaging. What key messages resonate with your residents versus the businesses, and then what are the channels and mediums and ways that you use it. Even going into a little bit of a deep dive on character and tone and how it would be written and copied.

So, this is foundational. Again, this is strategy. It's giving you sort of that, it's pulling all those pieces together to make sure that we have all the components that are necessary to truly tell your story, but there is more that has to happen, and I will talk about that in a minute.

Councilperson Trakas said I think it's really good because you did something we generally don't do, and it's try to get all the audiences into one statement that is accurate. Usually we segregate. We have little buckets here and there. This I think is specific yet general enough that it applies to everybody.

Chairman DiGeronimo said if you went out to Yelp and read that.

Councilperson Trakas said I can work in this place, live in this place and drive through it.

Ms. Fromet asked any other comments?

So, the next part of this, it's great to have a logo and an identity, and it's great to have a brand strategy, but a lot of times, now you have a communications team, and you have Economic Development Department. Alla and Jessica, they are smart, and they are savvy and they know how to take this information and begin to run with it; but it's also good for us to kind of say, okay we have given you these pieces, but it's important for you to know that your brand touches far more things than you probably even realize, and again when I say brand, it's not just that logo, but it's the story and how people receive it and how it sets up the experience of your place and how you deliver communications to certain people. So, it's important for us to kind of step back and think about what were your objectives for developing your brand in the first place and what are some other pieces that you want to make sure you address to make sure your brand is working for you? We like to section these in four objective buckets.

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So, the first one is around your identity. The most important thing related to identity for any city is being consistent with its use, and that's not just the logo, but it is all those elements. When we are identifying a color palette and type faces and styles, it's really important that it is demonstrated consistently across all of your communication platforms, and I know that's something that Jessica and Alla and their teams have been evaluating and working on. So, some of our recommendations to make sure that you take this opportunity to clean up your communications clutter. If you are doing this now, it's a really great time to say do we have redundancy in things? Do we have to print everything out? Can we some things in a digital way or where do we need to print because it's going to be more relevant to those audiences? This is a time to educate and train everybody within the organization on when it's their job and their time to use the brand, that they are doing it in the right way. So, some of the things that we call out is working through some departmental identity treatments, and I know those are things that we have been discussing with Alla and Jessica.

Thinking about things like different methods of communication like forms, reports and templates. Those are, I think it's kind of taken for granted because those are just produced. They have to be produced, but what does it mean to make sure that it looks like it comes from the City of Independence, and it's put together in a really clear way and is aesthetically pleasing and consistent. That's oftentimes something that has to really be looked at. It's sort of like that forgotten thing, and when you pull it up and look at something that was done in the old way, and you are like oh we really should make this look like everything else.

Anything related to newsletter and social media posts, so when communications are going out to the external world, it's important that they carry this visual identity so people know it comes from you. So, making sure that those templates are designed in a way, and I know that it's something Alla has been working on.

We also often, an effort like this, cities typically don't go through this like every couple of years. This should last a while, and historically most cities did not have a brand. They may have had a seal, and that is what they called their brand, but they typically haven't had this. So, one of the other recommendations we often make is understanding what your internal brand asset management and process looks like. So, it's important that all these components that we are recommending be used in the proper way because if they don't, then it begins to dilute the quality and character and that consistency that we talked about. So, making sure that you understand, we always say who is going to be the brand police. So, whenever anything new is done, who is reviewing that and making sure that it's in alignment.

How can we train staff to use components of the brand so it doesn't have to be reviewed all the time by somebody, but they understand like this is my job, and this is how I use it, and I have all the right tools that I need to do that. So, when it comes to identity, these are like housekeeping pieces of the brand that needs to be done.

Councilperson Trakas said just a quick question. I like where you are going with this to make sure there is a consistency across everybody which obviously is pretty inconsistent. What about photographs? I will just give you an example. I met my wife who was my girlfriend, and I showed her my house and she realized I had a lot of pictures, and they were all of buildings or

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battlefields; and I didn't have a single human being inside my house. So, she made a comment about that. I don't know if that shows you something about my dark personality or not, but I noticed that you have pictures of generic buildings, and perhaps some humans in those buildings, you might get a little bit more of that vibe. It's just some words of thought as we are talking about this branding, I would like to see us change out the pictures and have some people in action doing things.

Vice Mayor Grendel said I think the City has made an impact because every month, whether it be the Post or, you see a lot of different people. That's one of the things you want to do, you want to look at the photos and say whose in it. I think that's exciting. It really brings the community to life if you are not just looking at a bunch of pictures with no people. You are seeing residents, people that we know.

Ms. Fromet said in our brand guidelines we often present what we call photo styles like things to make sure you consider, photos that are going to align with your brand. So, that's one part of it. I didn't make this recommendation in here, but this is actually a draft in progress anyway, but often for a lot of our cities, depending on how much external communication and the ways they are doing that, we often recommend that they establish as part of that guide a photo library so that they are really consciously capturing photos of the things that you want. So, if you want more people like making sure that when those community events are happening, you are being very conscious about going out and taking photos of people enjoying the community events or being part of different things that are happening in the community.

Sometimes a few cities, to help make their photo library a little bit more robust, it will be almost a community share where people who are taking photographs of things that are happening, they can hashtag it and it gets collected in one place, or they could ask them to share it to specific online resources that the City could utilize it for some of their communications as well. So, there is a way to make it even more engaging for the people within your community to build your library.

Councilperson Trakas said I subscribe to Story Box, so I can tell who the Storyblocks people are versus real people at times. They look pretty generic. It's interesting because if you have that video, and you have a still picture library, you can swap it out and put it in all kinds of things. A newsletter might have a different interaction every time. When you are talking about the community reports, from the Police you have a Policeman happily talking to people in our business community. So, I think that's a really terrific idea, and you don't have it as a generic thing.

Economic Development Director Hyser said and if you look at our style guide, Cathy did make recommendations for the photography style. So, that's something that she did take into consideration. In developing the guidelines.

Ms. Fromet said so the second piece, and I think this feeds into what we have been talking about, while it is part of your identity and image, it does fit into the story because it's important to recognize the story is not just written word or how it is spoken, or spoken word, it's also the story that you present visually. That is in the photography and pictures, but story can be really

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powerful and useful if you take the opportunity to truly cultivate the stories that you want people to know the most. It can be really helpful for a variety of things, specifically thinking about the work that Jessica does in Economic Development, story can be really important in how you are attracting and retaining certain businesses. Story can be really important when you are trying to attract residents to the community. So, you guys really don't have trouble retaining, but what I am saying, story has a lot of ways that it can be used.

Some of the things that we are recommending you consider using, one of them is brand voice guidance. So, just like we do a style guide for the visual identity, that style guide can be added on with something that we call brand voice, and that is understanding how across the board because there is a variety of people, Council Members, Administration, different departments who are generating communications for the City. It is important that you talk in an appropriate and singular voice that is representative of your brand. So, this is a different kind of guidelines where the other guidelines are telling you what kind of colors and type face you need to use, this is telling you how your voice should sound, the tone you should use, the flair and character you want to have. I actually literally just came back from one of our clients in Colorado where we just did a brand voice workshop because they have various departments and wanted everybody to be on the same page in terms of how they are communicating.

The other thing that we recommend is developing key stories. Key messaging is great, and it's great for like how you present key messages about your community on your website or in a newsletter or in social media posts; but key stories go deeper, and they can be used in a variety of different ways. So, when we say key stories, if you want to talk about those things that are really unique to Independence, it's diving into some of those distinct advantages and finding out what is the story behind this, and can we go to people within the community and have them kind of confirm those things and tell their story about why they are how, or how long have they lived here, or did they leave and come back? If we are going to highlight one piece of what attracts audiences to Independence, and what's great about those key stories is that they can be written in full format, and they can be used in written format. They can be cut up into little pieces to be delivered via social media. They can be turned into video stories, but they can be used in a variety of different ways and you have them at the ready. So, when you meet somebody or Jessica you are entertaining a business who is considering coming to Independence or maybe you have heard they are considering some place else, you have those tools to come back to them and tell them why it's important that they stay.

The other thing that we recommended, we call it nurturing brand champion. So, while we talk a lot about the communications that the City is responsible for and should be doing with their residents and their businesses and making sure you do it in the right way so that people are receiving it in the right way, it's also important that other people in your community support the City by delivering those messages too. We call these your influencers. I think everybody is familiar with that term, and on social media there are so many people who, that is their job now to influence people to action or to buy something. The reality is that a lot of people, I do think you have a pretty loyal following, and people listen to the things that the City of Independence says, but you also have a lot of brand champions within your community. If they are telling you something, if your neighbor for example is telling a new person who is just moved into the neighborhood about something really wonderful that the City does, they are actually going to

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believe that neighbor before they are going to believe it just being written on the website of the City. It's really important that there are people in organizations within your community who understand the story of Independence and are sharing that story as well.

Another piece, for those objectives that we think about from an implementation perspective, is really the experience. So, how are people experiencing your City. We are already working on a signage, a wayfinding program, and the implementation of that is important. So, I think Jessica said something earlier when she was introducing this. The idea is that these things don't sit on a shelf. Time and effort has gone into this, and it's important that you see it through. We have been working Jessica, not only on the design of what this type of program is and what it can do for the City, and I will share that in a little bit, but also how that gets implemented because it is not something that's going to happen all at once. So, the implementation plan for the signage and wayfinding project is also important, so that you are not divesting a ton of resources all at once; but you are being really strategic and thoughtful about the things that you are implementing over time that is going to make the most sense and get you further faster.

We also recommended because of the amount of businesses and helping them feel connected to the City of Independence. I am sure you may have seen this in other cities, but really creating sort of this Independence own initiative. I think Jessica you had mentioned that you had been working on something like this anyway, but just really a way for the businesses to feel that they are a part of the City of Independence and to also show recognition to residents about how valued these different businesses are within the City. So, that maybe they are approaching it and there is a sticker on the window that says this is an Independence business or there's a special way that the City is communicating to each of those businesses to make them feel welcome, to make them feel part of the community.

Another recommendation for experience is to think about any of the key community events that you put on. A lot of the cities that we work with, after they go through the visual brand initiative and they have a new logo, oftentimes they are asking us, I would say more often than not, they are coming to us and saying we have a Farmers' Market or we have Home Days, or we have a concert series, you create a sub-logo or sub-brand for those events so that people know we as the City are putting this on so that people know that the City is delivering this really great thing for you so that is also part of the experience piece.

Then another tool and tactic that we recommend is creating an Economic Development pitch kit, and this is something that just in conversations with Jessica, just to make sure she has all the tools that she needs at the ready when she is focused on retaining and bringing businesses into Independence.

Then last but not least, your communications. So, I said in the beginning, brand is communication. So, it's a really important time to when you are doing anything new, it's really a great time to update your process, tools and tactics to strengthen your communication channel and not just put everything out to every channel but really think about what channels you are using for specific audiences. So, some of those recommendations are building a social media policy and guideline that are followed across the board for any department who may be running any type of social media account for the City.

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We also recommend at this time, we are not recommending any complete redesign, but what we are seeing from a lot of the cities that we are working with is there is a shift in how your website is being used. So, I think the expectation that a lot of cities have is that people come to our website for information all the time. Well that is changing because of social media, because of the phone in everybody's hand all the time, and they rely really heavily on social media and immediate interaction to get information about their communities. So, it's really important to do, really it's a digital audit, not just a website, but really a digital audit to understand where people expect to get information about their community and to make sure that all of these things are set up appropriately, easy for you to manage and user-friendly for your audiences.

Also, because I think that relationship that you have with the business community is so critical, developing a business focus communication toolkit to ensure, and you have some of these components; it's just now that you have a new visual brand, making sure that those pieces are in alignment and it's always a good time to re-evaluate and re-assess and just tighten up anything that you are doing. If you have business focus communication, just making sure that it's in alignment with how we have tightened up the brand from both the visual perspective and the strategy perspective.

Then the consideration of transitioning a lot of your communications to digital platforms. Now this is always an iffy topic, especially with a community who may have a lot more people who are expecting communications from the City, and they are expected in an analog way, on a piece of paper, printed newsletter. They are not necessarily comfortable with social media or going to the website, but we had a lot of really great conversations during our implementation discussion about ways that we can still, in the interim, offer printed materials for people who want them and also to give them opportunity and training to learn how to get things quickly and easily on digital platforms if they are able because the reality is there will be a time where these things are probably going to go the way of digital no matter what, just making sure the City is ready for that.

Any thoughts or questions over these areas? There is a much larger report where we go into detail about all of these things, but it's a lot of writing. So, that's in draft form, and once we have that updated, I am sure Jessica would be happy to share that with all of you.

Councilperson Trakas said I just had a couple of quick questions. If you could elaborate on the digital presence and what you are thinking about. For example, do we do SCO for people searching for office space. Is there a value to that?

Ms. Fromet said that's the thing, and I will tell you that things are shifting, and this is the way of digital. Things are shifting very quickly in the digital world, and even SCO is becoming a little more challenging. For things like that, where they are specifically looking for those types of opportunities, yes, but we feel that the audit, the digital audit is really critical. I think it's an unfair expectation to make a recommendation to say oh yeah redo your website. You have to create apps or you have to do all your newsletters digitally. It needs to be looked at with more detail, and it also needs to be looked at from the audience perspective and what their needs are and what their expectation is. So, from the business community side, you have plenty of people that we can talk to understand what would be easier for them. If they were on the hunt for

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property or new opportunities. What are their expectations? So, that's why we are making it this sort of content use and user need audit and analysis of the areas you want to focus on.

Councilperson Trakas said another question along those lines. So, given we had relationships with real estate people and finders, people like that. I would determine who is coming to our media and perhaps what purpose they are coming for. Is that accurate?

Ms. Fromet said absolutely. We can understand, we have had our run with a few city websites, and city websites they tend to have a lot of stuff on there. Oftentimes it's coming from the perspective of the city saying we need to have all these things up here. Oftentimes when we really analyze, and we have to go deeper than just analyzing your pages and seeing where people are going. That's why we have to ask the questions of those audiences too because sometimes they might not be going to certain places because the experience isn't great and they can't find it. Other times it's probably not necessary to have it there or have it archived somewhere it can be retrieved when desired, and there is an easy way to find that. That's why it's important when we do that audit, it's not just looking at where people are coming and looking at your site, but actually asking some questions about how to use it.

Anything else?

I am going to move on from here. Before I get into this, I am going to stop and share another document. So, just to set this up. We were brought on sort of simultaneously when the brand work began a while ago. I think it was early 2021.

Economic Development Director Hyser said late 2020, early 2021.

Ms. Fromet said we were brought on to consider signage and wayfinding for the City of Independence. We did, and I will stop my share and share another document. We did something that we call a wayfinding analysis, and this is really just to help us understand what a community needs. I will tell you a lot of times a city will say we need wayfinding, and sometimes it simply means they need their image to be really consistent across signage within their city. So, maybe their city facilities, maybe their signs are old and they don't look like the quality of that city at that time. Or, they never had a brand, they really don't have any character to what they are doing, or they have just been done over time. Other times wayfinding is important, and there are people who are looking for specific things, and they are struggling with navigating in a community. Every community is different, so it's important that we analyze to make sure.

Economic Development Director Hyser said I just want to add to this, this was also about the experience from a business community perspective. So, when you are getting off of I-77 at Rockside, and you are going to a place of business. It's being able to have that good experience of being able to get there quickly. We heard some comments from some folks that their customers were finding it a challenge to get to their location. There's Rockside, there's Rockside Woods, and it can be confusing. You drive down Rockside Road, and where Wesleyan is, I think because we limited the left-hand turn element, it could be challenging because those people have to figure out where to turn in to access those points. So, that's why as we look at this to be a differentiator, we want that experience to always be high when you are in the City of

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Independence. I thought it was important to bring Cathy and her team in to help us figure out how best to get people in Independence and to the locations where they need to be and back out into the community. It's also on our community campus, and Cathy will touch on that.

Ms. Fromet said and we know that there is also a sensitivity, is it necessary to have a ton of wayfinding on the residential side? Probably not, but there are areas within the residential side where it could be beneficial. So, it's not like one thing fits all, so it's important that we do the analysis. Part of what we do as wayfinders is we think about it in terms of how we improve experience. So, we call that the engagement loop. There is perceptions and there's expectations that people have before they come to your community, and that is where the brand piece is important that you are setting up the right expectation. Then whatever you are promising them in that branding work, like what they are thinking about, how they are finding ways to get here, how they are figuring out what there is to offer here. Whatever you are telling them before, you need to deliver that during. So, if this is a really robust business district, and there are a lot of businesses, and you are telling them there's a lot of things you can do too. There is a quality of life piece, what is that experience like when they are actually here? Can they find everything that they need? Is it comfortable? Can they walk back and forth across the street? There is a lot of variables to what you are thinking about from experience, and you can support experience. What's important is that if you are making a promise in the beginning, and you are delivering on it during their visit, they are going to have a great experience. What happens is that they either continue coming back, they tell other people, they decide to move here, they decide to build a business here too. There are a lot of really great things that happen when you think about the experience that people have and how that ties into your brand and image.

So, we do a lot of wayfinding, and we understand all the variety of sign types and the different parts of experience that people have from what they are seeing on the highway to when they feel welcome, to how you trailblaze them to certain destinations and whether they need directions. How do we get them to a place where they can park their car and get out of their car? So, there's a lot of different criteria that is sort of baked into understanding how to use and implement signage and wayfinding. So, this page is just a reminder to our client that it's not a one-size-fits-all, and there are rules we have to follow. There is guidance that people are used to, but for every community we do just a bit of a discovery summary thinking about the challenges that we see. What is the experience on major roadways? What are your business districts, and also what are the major destinations that we are dealing with. That helps us diagnose your City. This helps us analyze what the situation is. So, we come from this study for a variety of ways, it always starts with defining the study area, and then we are thinking about those major roadways and how people are moving through those areas. Then we are looking at where is it that they are coming in. Where is that place that we are welcoming them into your City or your community where those gateways are happening. You are seeing a method to our madness here.

We overlay all of these things so that we think about where are the places where people need to make a decision to get to one of those destinations that were listed. The reason why we do all these overlays is because we have no desire to put new signage everywhere. We want to put signage in the places that people need it with the appropriate information that time and experience.

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We had to for Independence look at some very specific areas because different things were happening in those areas. So, Rockside Road was one of them. As Jessica has mentioned, there has been a lot of discussion about some challenges. There are always challenges when you have a lot of vehicles and a lot of things in an area, and how do you define that in a way that's going to make it easier for people to navigate that area?

Another area that we actually focused on was what we started calling your community campus, and that's where City Hall is. That is where a lot of your parks, your library, your community center, there's lots of things going on, the schools. This is a really central piece of your community, and while it is for your community, there are a lot of people from other communities who come here too, whether it's for sporting events, or for events that are happening at the library, or happening in your community center or your schools, this is an important destination in your City, and it's important you provide a great experience.

So, this is, when we do this analysis, it's just an initial overview of the things that we are thinking about and recommending for you. We do talk about budgets. So, even before we design, we give the team sort of an overview of low to high range of what things cost. I will caveat this for all of you, and I think you probably feel this in your personal life. The cost of things has risen a lot. So with that said, it has happened in the signage industry too. So, Jessica just for your knowledge, this is probably an area, some of the budgets that we have given you, we might have to take another look at just because of what we have been hearing with other projects that we are implementing. We always give sort of a budget range. What do we mean by low? Low does not necessarily mean lack of quality or lack of design. Medium just might mean you are adding a few more elements. There might be some cost exponentials in there, put that in that middle range, but still it shouldn't sacrifice quality or design. Then high, just so you understand, what are those pieces, they are probably going to cost more within those elements. If you are doing digital boards, or doing a lot of masonry, so we talk that through with the team. We also talk about some other things to think about and consider. Rockside Road for example, there is a lot of traffic, and it's a long road, and barring a recommendation to say do a whole traffic study and all things. Is there a way to make pedestrian crossings more comfortable, enhance the experience for people who might be during the day get to a restaurant or shop on one side when their office is on the other side. So, think through some pieces like that.

Thinking through district branding and standards. Is that a business district, and should there be a consistent way in which it is being presented, especially from a signage perspective?

After we did that analysis, we got a better handle on how we thought we might address signage within your community and what we would recommend. We also now had a visual identity that we could start thinking about and applying to that sign program.

So, I am going to call this part community-wide, city-wide wayfinding. So, this is really going to be touching all aspects of the City, but probably is going to fit and relate more to the residential side. So, thinking about gateway. What does gateway look like in your community? This was a discussion that we had even at the wayfinding steering committee, and actually a belltower was one of the things that was discussed pretty often. We worked through what would that mean, what would that look like for the City of Independence?

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The first time that I came to City Hall, the first thing I recognized was when I was on Brecksville Road you would never know that City Hall is behind there, and there is a whole campus of things behind there. So, one of our recommendations is it would be really great if you could identify on that main road that this was there. That if you turned down that road, that your community campus was there, and you could access the library and City Hall and the parks and the schools and all these really cool things about your community in that place. There is nothing on Brecksville Road that is going to tell you about those things back there.

Economic Development Director Hyser said if you put into your GPS 6800 Brecksville Road, it puts you to the front of City Hall, and parking is around back.

Ms. Fromet said it's very confusing, and I drove around for a while and finally figured it out. Now I know, but then again wayfinding is always for people who are unfamiliar, and like I said, there are unfamiliar people who actually come to these amenities. So, if you could present a really great experience for them, they are going to come back with great feelings about the City of Independence, and you want that. You want people to have that feeling about your community. We are showing a larger sign, and the reason we are doing that is because of the context. Brecksville Road is a big, wide road. You have almost a retaining wall, a stone retaining wall there. It needs and will deserve a sign that is of the appropriate size so that people can see it. So, when you see things, and we are making recommendations of things that look incredibly large, there is a reason for that, and it's really to fit the context of space.

We also looked at different ways and different options in which you could bring consistency to the look and feel of your City's facility side. So, again this is a touchstone of your brand to make sure that it is in alignment. So, you are seeing things, we are making a recommendation of using brick. We are using the same type of brick on everything. It's part of that consistent presentation. We show a different option because we don't want you to have to put brick up all the time. It could be costly.

We think about your park system, so is there a design and system that is going to help people understand and recognize that this is one of your parks when they are driving by?

There is a need for some wayfinding, not all over, but just in some critical places. So, while you are on Rockside, you may not need a directional to direct you to these places if you had a big sign that said the Community Campus, but if you didn't do a big sign like that, we might want to put a directional sign on Brecksville to direct people down that street to know that you could get to these specific amenities.

When you are on campus, you do have signage in your campus now. It's just the way that it's set up, it still can be confusing. The way that it's placed can be confusing, so just thinking about how it's placed, the size and scale and how it relates to your brand are all important factors to why you would want to change this up. Again, I will emphasize, we are really in schematic design for these, so it's presenting different ideas and options for you, and also thinking about different areas where the gateway is happening. You don't have to have clocktowers everywhere, it might be just one place, one special placed that you would want to make that statement, but there are other areas where people are coming into the City, and what does that look like? What

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does that experience look like? Some are different content, so that's why we have a variety of design. If you are coming into the City of Independence, and it feels far more residential, you don't want a big black masonry sign there. You are going to want something that is scaled appropriately to your residential community. I think that's probably one of the issues that we recognized with the sign program that we see there now is the way that it was scaled, it was not appropriate. It's not that they were poorly designed. It just wasn't scaled appropriately for the size of the street and what you would want to do. So, our recommendation even for those current signs is that can we repurpose them in other ways? Can we use them in your parks? Can we use them to set up entry to your trails? Are there ways that we can reuse the signs that you have in place?

Then when we get to Rockside Road, Rockside is the conundrum. Rockside has a lot of challenges. We talked about there's Rockside Woods. The way that you can turn into places is pretty challenging. So, whenever we get to places that have that level of complexity, our job is to make sense of that. It's to help us understand like how we can make it more digestible for people and also to educate those businesses that are in those areas that they can set people up for success when they need to be found.

So, one of our recommendations for Rockside Road business district is really setting it up east/west, and breaking it down into those quadrants. So, the northeast quadrant, and an easy way to do that so we are not putting big words like northeast quadrant, is to consider color coding. So, some of the signage on Rockside Road should feel like it fits within the family, but it doesn't have to look like the residential side either because the business side is different. It has a different personality, and it has a different character. Also considering that there are a lot of things that we are looking at on Rockside Road, but it's important to consider scale, how people oversee and visual information, but really starting to set them up. We are going to try to make sense of these different signs, like these different quadrants, begin setting that up when people approach that area. So, that means the businesses in that area will have to be educated, and we actually did this with a business park, office park down in Kentucky where they were far more confusing than Rockside Road. We had sort of a perspective and educational program for those businesses to ensure how they communicated about how people would navigate the area and how they could use the signage that was put in place to make life easier for them. That is something we would recommend for Independence as well.

This is the overview, there is a lot more that has gone into these documents, but I didn't want to go through every single document with all of you. I did want to get you caught up to where things are and where we were with this. Any questions you have regarding the signage?

Councilperson Trakas asked did you find that one color scheme from a business perspective was more pleasing with regard to what other communities have done?

Ms. Fromet said we follow a lot, it is not just what is more pleasing, but we do have to follow a lot of parameters on what is readable and clear. So, there are some parameters that we are stuck with in terms of colors here. I will tell you for the Rockside Road stuff, I think we are still doing color study, is that correct Jessica?

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Economic Development Director Hyser said you were still working on picking the colors, but it does reflect the color palette and the brand. So again, it's still reinforcing our brand initiative.

Councilperson Trakas asked and the type of signs, obviously are they practical as well? Can you see them in the snow and rain and at night?

Ms. Fromet said yes, and a lot of how these are constructed, anything that is vehicular oriented, if we are not eliminating them, which I don't recommend because the cost is like crazy to manage; they are always created with reflective materials. So, the entire sign face is reflective, especially at night or in darker environments. When headlights are on, it's going to highlight. You see a black background here, that entire face would be reflective.

Vice Mayor Grendel said definitely you touched upon both. I think the campus and the school needs some kind of signage because many of times I give people directions, even going by my house on different buildings to get to, where is City Hall, where is the Civic Center, the Fieldhouse and that. I think that is definitely needed is to have both at the entrance of Brecksville Road and maybe some of the other streets. Rockside the same way too. I have seen other communities that have like Parma Heights, they have the wayfinding. I really like them as far as I am old school, with GPS and On Star, sometimes On Star gets to you a place that you don't even know.

Ms. Fromet said that's the question we get all the time. Is signage necessary when you have GPS? Our answer is absolutely because you still need that confidence marker. Whatever it's telling you in the car that you should turn at this street, or you are arriving at that destination, but what if you arrived at that destination and there is not a single thing there that says the name of the destination that you are supposed to be at? You can't find an address or you can't find the street name. So, signage is still important, but part of how we evaluate this too is to look at and consider well how is GPS around this area. So, that whatever we are providing is supplemental to what GPS is doing, and it's actually creating just an extra level of experience to help people experience your community.

Economic Development Director Hyser said one of the considerations we may want to make is GPS often will take people through Valley Woods instead of down Pleasant Valley and down Brecksville Road to get to the high school campus. So, that might be something that we take into consideration. We know that, but people because they are relying on their GPS and Waze, would take them to an alternate route, and I am sure that the folks in that neighborhood would appreciate some directional signage to steer people in a more direct route.

Ms. Fromet said you can petition Google to do that.

Vice Mayor Grendel said besides Rockside, I think Pleasant Valley, to have some kind of signage for the Pleasant Valley business district. Something like this would be a little bit better for that.

Ms. Fromet said Rockside just has a very critical wayfinding challenge, and how do you make sense of that, but even design-wise, anything that we do for the business districts are something

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you can consider for the other ones. They just might not need the color coding that we are presenting for Rockside. They would be something that would fit a little more solidly with the colors that we are using in the city-wide program, but still bringing recognition to those other districts because you have several.

Vice Mayor Grendel said I think Rockside, we developed the northeast with Topgolf and Embassy Suites and now the new office building that's going in there. So, that is developed, and the northwest hopefully will get something in the future that we can build upon besides the hotel there and restaurants but hope to build in the back. I think the southwest is pretty robust with Oaktree and south. I think the southeast is probably the most, even though they do have Quarry Lane and that. I kind of like the idea because even our TIF districts, we have the northwest. So, Council is very familiar with that because that is where we locate our TIF districts. I like the idea there. I think you are on the right track there. We don't have to have the fanciest signs. Maybe for our campus here, our civic campus, it would be nice where that makeshift sign is there now, to have something that we could be proud of and everything, but I think you are on the right track here with what you are working on. We just have to budget accordingly because many times people can't find the actual building they are going to on Rockside because there is no sign on top of the building or that.

Councilperson Trakas said another question about this, how about informational signs that are topical. So, I get on I-77 and Pleasant Valley going north, and it says accident ahead consider taking I-480 or that type of thing. Is that anything that came up through the course of these discussions? Would that assist at all the business community or any of our guests coming in?

Ms. Fromet said not necessarily because the biggest question is that who is managing that? Is that something that the City and the traffic engineering department is managing? ODOT manages that certainly on that side, but it didn't come up. It was more like how can we create something that's a little more permanent in structure to help people know where they are. I do understand what you are talking about. Traffic patterns change or there are issues because it's busy, and how do you communicate that. It wasn't something that came up, but it is certainly something that we can study a little bit and see how that fits into the recommendation.

Councilperson Trakas said if there's a value to it, obviously is the reason. There are enough things happening where congestion ahead or that kind of thing, but you are right, who manages that? That would be problematic because you have to keep that pretty topical with the budget of ODOT.

Chairman DiGeronimo said Cathy as we are looking at this Rockside picture, I like the idea of the quadrant. I think it gives you a shot if you are trying to direct somebody there a little better than you do now. Have you ever seen or thought about all the generic office buildings on Rockside, the ones that have a name. Some have a name, some do not, but the Crown Centre I think has a brand, and many people would be associated with that. Many other buildings are just the address with multiple tenants in there. It would seem like it would be beneficial from a City standpoint to develop some brand. The Leader building downtown is going to be the Leader building no matter what, it's going to stay. Could there be anything that a city could encourage to say we can invest in some branding, here are some ideas.

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Councilperson Trakas said even some directional, 6700 or 7500 this way.

Economic Development Director Hyser said one of the things that we had talked about with the sign concept is when you get off at I-480, and you are at the I-480 and I-77 exit ramp, that the Rockside Road business district would be east and west, so that would help people when they are getting off at least to make that first decision, and then from there it would be the additional signage and wayfinding to at least help them get through that. As Cathy kind of showed in some of those renderings and photos, there would be additional color signs above the street names to help direct people for those office buildings. I think that would help clarify. There are a lot of buildings that do have names. There's the Spectrum building, but do they put that on top of the building to make it easier to find? Not necessarily.

Ms. Fromet said there are some other recommendations, but when I say recommendations, these are like long-term recommendations. For example, when you go into, if you have ever been to Chagrin Highlands, you will notice that all the signs for all of the individual buildings have the brick or the stone base is specified and all of them use the same stone base. Or they are all using the green as the top of it. When worked with Thomas Moore Office Park in Kentucky. That one was really complex, and that one it was a similar thing. They all had different things going on. The problems they had was their addressing system was like horrific; so people were trying to find a place based on the address, and they expect something to be numerical, it did not happen in that campus. I don't know what happened when they gave out addresses, but it was pretty bad. We ended up creating a numbering system for their buildings.

There are a variety of ways you can kind of create sort of a system of identity. I wouldn't call it a brand necessarily, but a system of identity just to make it easier, especially when you have some buildings that quite obviously have a brand and then there are those that don't. You guys have already gone through the right kind of light poles, and they are all painted the same. So, you are doing things that feel right and make the experience of Rockside better; but you could go deeper, and you could specify how the buildings are called out. Maybe go through the zoning codes again and take a look at are the addresses all visible? Are they the right size? There are some other things that are outside of the realm of signage, of wayfinding, outside of the realm of City branding that the City could control and try to get the businesses on Rockside on board to making some of these changes to make it easier for people to find them.

Councilperson Trakas said I would explore what we talked about a little bit more. I do think people say maybe it's not what our address is, but we do say we are in the whatever building.

Chairman DiGeronimo said more from an employee retention.

Councilperson Trakas said I worked in the Leader building. It was 526 Superior, but it looked like it was on East Sixth, so if you didn't know the address, you thought it was the library or the mall. The Leader building meant something.

Ms. Fromet asked any other questions?

Economic Development Director Hyser said you guys are oddly silent, this is good.

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Vice Mayor Grendel said there's a lot to think about.

Ms. Fromet said it was a lot to go through. There's been a lot going on in the last six months.

Vice Mayor Grendel said this is the first time we have seen any wayfinding ideas. So, now it gives us something to think about.

Economic Development Director Hyser said there are still concepts, and we are going to tweak them, but at least it gives you guys an idea of where we are at for the project, and again kind of the concept of what we are working on.

Vice Mayor Grendel said I like the wayfinding and everything, I think it's important for Rockside, Pleasant Valley and the city campus. It's important, especially the campus. We get a lot of people invited here to go to events and everything. This will help them where they can locate certain important buildings. Like I say, like the northwest quadrant has so much potential, not that we need something specific now, but that's down the road we might have something. Right now I think we can use it for the city campus and Pleasant Valley and the northeast quadrant. I am impressed with a city that has a set signage. You say you are in a certain community by the way they direct you.

Councilperson Trakas said I would just complement what you are saying by saying I think the northern gateway by the Cloverleaf would be something we would want to do, not that it is confusing, but it needs an identity. So, you have to start doing something there to make it look like you are there, and not people knowing they are in Independence other than a sign that the liberty bell fell off of several years ago and was never replaced. I am still bitching about it by the way.

Vice Mayor Grendel said with the CBIZ building going in, and you have Topgolf there. If you are going down Brecksville Road, you see Rockside Woods the entranceway, but you don't know what's there besides AAA and that.

Councilperson Trakas said actually the Cloverleaf district, it's starting to get a name. We call it that, but does anyone that works there call it that? I don't think so.

Economic Development Director Hyser said so one of the next steps as we have been talking with Cathy about helping us kind of develop that implementation of the wayfinding, and so if that's something you guys are comfortable with, we can continue to explore that and bring that back to Council to continue this work.

Ms. Fromet said and that's really the recommendation of how you roll this out, and it can even explore ways of how this is funded too. So, a lot of communities we work with, these are not all funded by the City itself. There's a lot of different grant opportunities that are out there. The ability to gain grant funding is often dictated by how well you have thought this through and planned for it too. So, if you could come to the table with a good plan, it might be an opportunity to look at other funding opportunities, but that implementation plan is really looking at what makes sense to roll out, what makes sense to wait. You know the realization that you don't have

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to roll out, so if we are doing something on Rockside, you are absolutely correct, it doesn't have to go in every area if a place is not completely built out, but the beauty is that you have a plan in place so when it does get built out you can still bring in consistent signage that is going to make sense for the rest of the stuff.

Vice Mayor Grendel said I guess that's the next thing to have a plan to roll out, and budgeting, we will need to set aside a budget and decide which is top priority, and little by little roll it out, not all at one time.

Councilperson Trakas said one way to do this is to say over the course of "x" amount of years we are going to allocate a percentage of the hotel tax to signage. So, you know there is a dedicated revenue stream, every year you do something, you are going to upgrade some part of it and that you know that you are going to do it because if we don't do something like that then, it's oh you don't want to do that or you want to paint my neighbor's street. I do think it's important enough that we do have a rollout on a regular basis. I don't think we can do everything at one time, if you dedicated some revenue stream to it, then you kind of get into that mood where you could be possibly upgrading it.

Vice Mayor Grendel said John if your committee could kind of develop that with your guidance and everything, develop what we need to do to have a program like that.

Chairman DiGeronimo said sure, now there are tools in place. We don't have to reinvent, we have a lot to fall back on, and it should be easier.

Vice Mayor Grendel said we have had money in the budget. We had that company out of Columbus that never really got traction. It almost felt like we wasted money on that because we have a plan. We need to stick to it, and it's something we can be proud of. I like the logos that we have. I think it's smart. I like the blue and gold myself because of the high school being blue and gold. It kind of gives you a sense of community. You can always tell when you go to these places, and the young families will tell you, if they are in Mentor, they know the red and gray and the different ones depending on where you are at. We had the blue and gold for Independence high school, but for the City we had red, white, and blue and it wasn't really cohesive for the community. I like the idea.

Economic Development Director Hyser said while it is blue and gold, it's not the same as the high school.

Vice Mayor Grendel said it's still blue and gold. I think we have a set plan. It might make it available for some kind of grant because the City has a plan, and they are going to implement it in so many years, continue to have it. I like the idea that we finally have some kind of organization to this.

Councilperson Trakas said those Economic Development kits that you talked about, could you elaborate a little bit on what the kit might look like and what you would do with that.

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Economic Development Director Hyser said it would be helpful to have more consistency, the information on our website to be consistent and updated information. Again, something that if you are sitting down with a broker, you would be able to print that out before going out to have a BRE, business retention expansion call, to have that information look consistent so it does reflect our brand. Right now we don't have that, and so that's something we would like to move towards in the future.

Councilperson Trakas asked do we do the Economic Development newsletter as we had done with YourIndependence on a quarterly basis?

Economic Development Director Hyser said we are doing it every other month, and that's something that we want to update that template so it does reflect that new brand. Again, it's something that will still be sent out in an html constant contact format, but updated to reflect that brand.

Vice Mayor Grendel asked for Home Days are we rolling out the new logo, like we talked about getting shirts or is that going to be down the road?

Communications Director Lora said that's for Home Days. That is the plan. They are doing everything with that palette. In addition to the stacked and horizontal, we have some of the other icons that you saw in the presentation. It will be rolling out that way. I have seen some of the shirts, and it's really a very fresh impact.

Vice Mayor Grendel said we have Home Days and Fall Fest and winter.

Chairman DiGeronimo asked do you think at Home Days there would be the opportunity for merchandise for the residents? Water bottles, stickers?

Communications Director Lora said there will be a t-shirt they will be selling. They did a great job on it. So, it's consistent with the brand. We are looking at ordering some of those. We just have to determine what is sellable at Home Days. Is it water bottles?

Several people began speaking at once.

Chairman DiGeronimo said you see it a lot of times on the road on the highway, the Brecksville Bee on the bumper stickers.

Ms. Fromet said people love stickers.

Councilperson Trakas said we could just print them and mail them out to everybody in town for a couple of grand. It's not like a big deal, or Independence Proud or Support Your Independence Police, whatever. I think we can do that and even with the business community too.

Chairman DiGeronimo said the stickers are all over the kids schools. Everybody has these, the water bottles, and stickers are on them.

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Communications Director Lora said the stickers on the cars are actually plastic so you aren't really sticking it.

Ms. Fromet said they are usually magnets.

Mayor Kurtz said I think there's a lot of potential. I think what Alla said to Council is we are going to go step-by-step on this. It's a multi-year process to be engaged. Based on what I am hearing from Council today, you are as excited as we are.

Vice Mayor Grendel said my brother was in town, and he looked at the shirt on me and said I wouldn't mind having some kind of Independence shirt. Even people that used to live here, and they still have pride in their hometown and everything.

Mayor Kurtz said I was at a wake and a resident came up to me and marched in line and said I just had a friend in from California and took him around the City, and he said he never saw anything like this. It's manicured, nice and clean. You haven't seen anything yet.

Vice Mayor Grendel said with Pete at the Alumni, and he talked about too when he was being interviewed by George Bush for that. They said oh so you are from Cleveland, and he said no I am from Independence. That's the kind of pride you want people to have, and even if there here for a short time. He said the same thing to Donald Trump and everything too. You know Cleveland, but Independence not so much.

Chairman DiGeronimo asked Councilperson Narduzzi any questions or comments?

Councilperson Narduzzi said so I am really here, I am not just sleeping with my computer on. I listened to the whole thing. First of all, if we are going to start with the signage, I think we should start with the Independence campus first and roll it out there. That clock tower, Dale Lytkowski talked about that clock tower and a waterfall on that corner for the last 20 years, and I think that would be a huge staple for the City is having that clock tower on the corner of Selig and 21. I think the pictures look awesome. That would be great.

My son plays travel baseball and travels to all these colleges, and it's funny, we were out in Hudson the other day, and we couldn't find the baseball field; but yet you go to these colleges in Oberlin and stuff, and you get off the highway and you can get there exactly just by looking at these little signs that say this building over there, fieldhouse over here, athletic complex over here. It's one, two, three, and you are there. Others that don't have any directional signs give you an address for the front of the college, but you have to find your way. It's frustrating for someone like me who, my wife has the GPS in her hand on her phone, but I am driving and trying to get there. It's a little frustrating.

I understand, and at first when we rolled it out I didn't think we needed anything for the City of Independence, but we have a lot more visitors than we do hometown people going to events. So, I think it would be a great starting point to start it on our campus.

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Councilperson Trakas said I can still remember Cleveland Stadium Longines official time. You can get a nice spot like that, not some generic thing, something with some pizzaz to it. People remember that.

Finance Director Blaze said Jess or Cathy, back to signs for one second. Through this whole process, was the subject of signage on the interstate brought up at all? I know ODOT in Ohio controls that, but when I drive somewhere it's very helpful when you are on the interstate in Ohio and other interstates as you are coming up on an exit, fuel this exit, lodging this exit, food this exit; and then if a business is willing to pay, their emblem is on there. It's nice to know before you get to the exit if you want to get off at that exit, and I get it that we are a suburb and not a rural area, so I don't know if that's entirely applicable on I-77 to feature some of the business establishments on Rockside Road. I just ask it since we have been talking about signs and businesses.

Economic Development Director Hyser said that's something we didn't talk about because, as you mentioned, that is handled by ODOT. They have partnered with another company to sell the signage rights. It's a money maker for ODOT.

Ms. Fromet said it's called the logo program that they have, but we still analyze how people are coming up the highway and what they are looking at. If we see that there is anything, while it's not from the amenity perspective, it's just from getting you to a particular community. If we see any issue with that, then we definitely bring it up with ODOT, but through this process Jessica this is going to require a conversation with them anyway just in terms of what we are looking to do.

Economic Development Director Hyser replied yes, and our City Engineer Don Ramm has been brought into the conversation as well, so this isn't happening in a vacuum without his knowledge.

Ms. Fromet agreed.

Councilperson Trakas said I know there are Federal laws about what you can do and can't do on your highways, what about on the City owned property, the areas off of the highway when you first get off. I presume there are rules about that. Can you access that property?

Ms. Fromet said there are right-of-way rules, and I think there is also ensuring who owns what. So sometimes we will locate a sign, and it's not city property; but it's like the ideal place for a sign. So, sometimes that entertaining a conversation with the owner of that land to see if there could be an allowance for that.

Chairman DiGeronimo asked anybody else with questions in the room, comments?

**Moved by DiGerinomo, seconded by Trakas, to adjourn the Economic Growth & Development Committee meeting of June 21, 2022. Voice Vote: 3 yes/0 no; motion carried.**

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The Economic Growth & Development Committee meeting of June 21, 2022 was then adjourned at 4:49 p.m.

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Debra J. Beal, Clerk of Council  
**Minutes Unapproved at Time of Release 06/23/22**

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