

**CITY OF INDEPENDENCE
ECONOMIC GROWTH & DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE MEETING
MINUTES
OCTOBER 27, 2020 4:30 P.M.
VIRTUAL MEETING VIA ZOOM**

Present: Chairman Kenn Synek
Vice Mayor Dave Grendel
Councilperson Kathleen Kapusta

Also Present: Mayor Gregory P. Kurtz
Councilperson Tom Narduzzi
Councilperson Jim Trakas
Councilperson Dale Veverka
Councilperson Chris Walchanowicz
Finance Director Vern Blaze
Economic Development Director Jessica Hyser
Communications Director Alla Lora

Chairman Kenn Synek called the Economic Growth & Development Committee meeting to order at 4:32 p.m.

Chairman Synek said welcome everyone to the Economic Growth & Development meeting. I believe our first agenda item is branding; and Jessica are you going to talk about that?

Economic Development Director Hyser said yes, give me one second. We are having a little technical difficulty.

Communications Director Lora said they can't see me.

Mayor Kurtz said Alla should mute maybe.

Economic Development Director Hyser said I am going to pull up a presentation. Good evening everyone. Thank you for making time today. As you will see from the agenda, we have two big topics that we would like to talk about this evening. The first is the wayfinding, and the second is branding. Actually, the first is branding, and the second is wayfinding. These two topics you might think are completely unrelated; but they are actually very closely related and closely related to economic development.

So what is economic development? Economic development is about the creation of wealth. As the City Administration and its elected body, we are given a big responsibility to create wealth, to provide the services to our residents have come to enjoy and demand. We have been fortunate to be able to underwrite many services to our residents, including low cost recreational activities, popular senior programs, including our \$3.00 lunches, exceptional street maintenance services,

just to name of few. That's closely related to economic development because those are funded largely by income tax.

Economic development is often measured by the number of employees, total payroll and the impact on tax revenue. During Covid-19 it makes this even more important. Our bread and butter of course as you all know is income tax, and those working in our community are the ones who are responsible for paying that. We have spent a number of years carefully crafting our development strategy around attracting and retaining high wage earners to our community; however, because of Covid and the overnight switch of corporations being forced to allow their employees to work from home, we are forced to consider making significant changes to compete in this new world.

So, growing our community's bottom line is a little like growing any business's bottom line. Tonight we are going to talk about a couple of tools that we can utilize to help attract, retain and grow our customer base.

On the economic development side, when companies, site locators, their consultants are looking at relocation and expansion projects, there are three things that help separate locations – speed, risk, money, by how quickly can a project move or how many hurdles can it overcome and what are the risks perceived and real and the cost. Time is money. Our brand and its reputation help site selectors when determining which properties to keep or eliminate.

We feel that the crisis of Covid-19 is an opportunity. We are in the midst of dealing with a new threat like none of us has ever seen before. There is no playbook that exists. Covid-19 can't diminish us. We must seize the opportunity to redefine our brand, align our messaging and invest in our future. Moving forward now will put us in a stronger, competitive position the next four to five, possibly even ten years.

Given the current pandemic and uncertainty how income tax may be collected and distributed, Independence needs to be concerned. We know that according to the Census Bureau that approximately 26,000 come into the City of Independence every day to work, and about 3,300 of our residents leave the City of Independence each day to work, while another 500 residents both live and work in the City of Independence. So I think when you look at those numbers, that's pretty significant.

Yesterday's branding message will produce yesterday's results. The world has changed, and we need to change with it. A commercial broker recently told me about Independence. We know what we are going to get in Independence, and that's not bad. It's just kind of blasé and boring. There's nothing wrong with it, but it's unexciting and not very inspiring. We want to raise the expectations so that when someone says we know what we are going to get in Independence, it sounds exciting. We must take aggressive action now to emerge from the pandemic as a premiere community that is responsive to providing boutique services and support our stakeholders. I think that's one thing that sets Independence aside from other communities is that we are very much so a boutique community.

Independence brand marketing must be holistic and tell people that we are pro-active and a pro-business community. We want to attract those who want to lead, build, grow and succeed.

Economic Development Director Hyser said we also need to make sure that we rank competitive with our neighboring communities. As new projects come in line, such as the projects in Valor Acres in Brecksville, the developments around Crocker Park and Westlake; there are opportunities in Strongsville as well as in Beachwood along the I-271/Harvard interchange. Our message must convey that we understand that the pandemic is permanently changing how we live and work. No one knows how long this workplace disruption will likely last, but what we do know is more than 60% of workers in the U.S. economy cannot work remotely. So, remote work is here to stay but not for everyone or for everyone every day. We are having those conversations with companies currently. There are a number of companies that we talked to that have said that they are changing how they are working and allowing some workers to come in for part of the time and switching out workers as needed.

We have also in the midst of making some major investments of our own, particularly in the downtown and the northwest quadrant areas; but other development opportunities exist in and around the area. We have been talking for a long time about East Pleasant Valley Road and the change in that area as well as the Cloverleaf presenting great opportunities for redevelopment.

Economic Development Director Hyser said I think Alla is going to take over this section.

Communications Director Lora said we will start with branding and marketing. Branding and marketing are inter-related but different. Branding is all about identity. It's all about providing a framework that organizes and tells people what differentiates one from another. It's a little bit tougher for a community, but we have to be competitive; and our brand will make us more competitive. We want to be known as the premiere community in which live, work, visit, raise a family. So, branding is not about illusion, it has to be based and grounded in truth and reality.

Marketing then allows you to take that branding and get your message out. So, you are in a consistent tone of voice to deliver the information. It talks about the City's core values, competitive market advantages, the quality of life, the quality of work experience; and that's for both the business community as well as the residents.

Branding is more of a long term and strategic action. Marketing is how you build the awareness about the branding; and marketing cannot build the City's brand if you don't identify the brand, be it with a logo, color palette, etc. The marketing is what delivers that out.

Right now the City has a lot of different images that are part of its brand; and while people may identify each of them as that's Independence, having different brands only dilutes the impact that we are trying to deliver. So part of the thing with branding is you have to have a consistent tone of voice, you have to have consistent images; and right now the City has a lot that has just survived through the years or were used in different ways. So, you see there are three seals. The one that is furthest on the right is the seal that is on some City vehicles. We have the City of Independence with the stars. That's used on some things, but not everything. It's used on our recycle trash bins, but then we just sent out new Welcome to Independence packets and that

reflects more of the image we have on our home page. Right now we are not using any of these with consistency. You will see here I just pulled together a lot of the different letterheads that we have for memos. We are on Outlook, so it's in e-mail; but we have different looks, so depending on who you are getting mail from, it doesn't have a consistent look that this is coming from an official within the City of Independence. The consistency also conveys the sense of stability and strength and sustainability. You will see here that we put mastheads for the Post and for the Spotlight. It's not that everything has to be matchy matchy. There has to be a commonality and consistency in color, style in our voice. I am going to hand it back to Jessica.

Economic Development Director Hyser said as you will see, we also developed in 2013 a separate economic development brand. The celebrate, find, discover, explore brand was developed yourIndependence. So, you will see this along Rockside Road; but to me it relates something more if you are resident of Independence, not to our business community. So, it creates another layer of confusion.

What we did here is take a grab of some of our social media presence. You will see how we look on the website as well as the various social media channels. They all have a different look. They have a different voice. In fact one of these, the City of Independence, Ohio looks like it would be an official Facebook page from the City of Independence, but it's actually something that's owned by Cleveland.com. So, it creates another level of confusion.

We also went around the City to kind of look to see how we present on our signs. As you will see, there's a different style and appearance through all those different signs. This image over here is when you come into Independence off of I-77 south at Brecksville Road. Obviously, I think everyone knows that this is the sign over at Rockside and 21; and then you will see some other signage around the City Hall campus.

We will talk a little bit more about this in our wayfinding and branding. This is something that you don't really notice until someone points it out to you; but our signage is all different. So, you see that at Selig and Brecksville Road you have white signs with black lettering. At Sprague and 21, they are green signs with white lettering. The mast arms are different colors, and again it's just the inconsistency. One thing that I have noticed that I have learned from some of my other Economic Development colleagues; if you go to the City of Dublin outside of Columbus, they kind of joke that everything is painted Dublin brown. Again, once you enter the city, you notice that all of the arms and street posts are painted Dublin brown, and it creates that sense of continuity and consistency. Everyone knows Dublin.

Again, here's a look at some of our street signs. This is how we present ourselves, trying to find ways around the City. There are two different Service Department signs as well as some other signage around the City that is a little confusing. Again, we are presenting this now, but it also relates to the wayfinding discussion that we will have in a little bit. Again, lamp posts that are different.

You see how we compare with the City of Seven Hills, and not that their sign is anything special. There's this sign over here on Pleasant Valley Road that we did as a brand to help brand Pleasant Valley. It looks really great except for the fact that when you are driving down Pleasant Valley,

the scale isn't appropriate so you almost miss it many times when you drive past it. Here's Hemlock. There is different stone work throughout the City along the Hemlock Cemetery across from City Hall; and it's different than what City Hall is. Then you can see what our friends in Valley View are doing with their stone street signs, along with their gold and black street names.

One thing we wanted to talk about is how do people recognize brands; 75% of people say they recognize the brand by its logo. Another 60% recognize the brand by its visual style. So, that's referring to how it presents itself, along with 45% brand color, and 25% with your unique voice.

So, we wanted to talk about how we got here. In 2013 the City embarked on developing an economic development strategic plan, and one recommendation derived from the plan was an emphasis on our economic development brand. So, in 2014 the City engaged with Fahlgren Mortine to assist the City in developing its economic development brand, and they recommended creating a separate brand identity, which again was your Independence to market the community. Well it's been seven years, and all brands have a shelf life; and we think that the Independence brand has reached that shelf life. As we said before, it's kind of confusing. It's forgettable, it's not unique.

So, what have we done so far? A branding and marketing firm would help research our audience and understand the complex and diverse interests of different demographics and segments that's residents, businesses and our commuters. This would alert us to unknown pain points and opportunities and ultimately update some of our assumptions that we have already made. Different audiences have different needs; so our business community's needs are separate from our residents' needs and our branding could help with that. What we have been doing so far is in August we sent out an RFP to ask for input and proposals from local communications firms, including our current partner agency. We received responses back from seven highly qualified firms. We interviewed those firms and narrowed it down to two highly qualified firms that we felt could help develop a brand and help us develop a strategic marketing plan to complement that brand, to help us differentiate ourselves from our competition.

We believe akhia communications which is a full service strategic communications firm will be able to take Independence to the next level, and they will do that by developing a new brand design standards. What comes with that is new collateral, think business cards, e-mail templates, letterhead, e-mail signatures, Power Point templates, to all bring that cohesive look that we are looking for. We would tweak our website to reflect the new brand but emphasize the economic development pages because they reach beyond just the City of Independence. It would help us develop some talking points for economic development, as well as develop an economic development toolkit, a digital toolkit. We are now in 2020, and everything is virtual; so I think that's really key.

As we talked about our social media before being a little disjointed. They would help us develop a social media strategy and manual so the team could manage our social media platforms and channels. It would also help us develop a strategic marketing plan and budget for Phase II. You might be asking why not stay with our current firm; and there are studies out there that say that the average life expectancy working with a firm is five years. I think we have exceeded that.

While Fahlgren has been a great partner for the City, we feel it's time to get a fresh set of ideas and work with a firm that's a little bit smaller and a little bit more nimble just like us.

We thought that akhia had a really fresh look of the City of Independence, and when they put together the presentation, they really kind of nailed us with their first impression. They looked at it as us being new and an interesting client. As you will see, this is just a couple of screenshots from their presentation. They got the Independence, and they were really trying to be a little creative this in Independence. Now granted this isn't going to be the final branding or marketing, but it's just giving you a snapshot of how they think about the City of Independence.

So, the process would kind of begin with brand discovery. We are actually kind of a month off of this. We had hoped to have this presentation a month ago; but this is where we are today. So, imagine moving all of these kind of a month down the road. We would start with brand discovery in November, kind of a brand creation that would start in December, work through some talking points and key messaging probably in the month of January. We would expect to see website collateral refreshing and refreshing those materials for the residents in February and March and then development of a Phase II marketing beginning in that March timeline as well.

Of course, then there comes the budget. The investment is a substantial budget, but we believe that they are bringing a lot of skills to the table. So, this first phase which would include all the things we previously talked about, the investment is approximately \$60,000 to \$76,000. Then again this is kind of going over the Phase II, which would be the developing of a marketing plan which we anticipate to happen, and that's in that February, March timeline which we believe that they will help us be a little bit more nimble and creative with our marketing approaches that would help set us apart from our neighboring communities.

We just kind of wanted to share with you a couple of re-branding exercises. These aren't necessarily ones that akhia has done, but there are some great examples of how a community can come out of a re-branding. So, you see University Heights has done a re-branding recently. The Burton D. Morgan Foundation, you will see their old logo up here. They are actually a tech organization, and you don't really get that from their old logo. When you see the new logo, you kind of see the technology, the globe spinning which kind of brings a different aspect. Then we also presented West Chester and Reynoldsburg as two other communities in the central Ohio area that have done re-branding exercises and how they kind of have a more modern, refreshed look to them.

Economic Development Director Hyser said I'm going to ask you the question, are you in? Are you in with us? Our plan here is to bring legislation before City Council at the November meeting to kind of have this initiative move forward. This is again as we mentioned earlier, the re-branding kind of goes really hand-in-hand with the wayfinding discussion that we are going to have in a couple of seconds, but we kind of want to have this discussion now with you to see if there's any questions that you might have before we go on.

Chairman Synek asked questions or comments?

Councilperson Walchanowicz asked what is something like this going to cost?

Economic Development Director Hyser said well the first phase is again the \$60,000 to \$76,000 investment. We understand that those are big numbers, but it's in line with what the industry charges for such work.

Councilperson Kapusta asked what would come after that Jessica, after the first phase? What would we anticipate, two more phases, three?

Economic Development Director Hyser said I would imagine a second phase, and then kind of more of an intense marketing phase; and then probably some ongoing maintenance. We want to be able to partner with an agency that is able to be nimble and to be forward thinking than what we are doing. So, for example, late summer there was an association of property owners that had an event here on Rockside at Crowne Centre. Something that we would hope an agency would do, and this would be a suggestion is to be able to geocode that area since you have a group of brokers and developers coming into your City. You can geocode that area and be able to target market them with saying hey this is why you want to bring your clients to invest in Independence. We want somebody to be able to think like that and think other ways of how we can respond to the business community's needs in this Covid environment. So, we are trying to be pro-active, think creatively. The days of putting an ad in a magazine just aren't how things are done anymore. So, we are trying to figure out how we can be nimble and aggressive too going forward.

Councilperson Veverka said question. We recently have hired a Communications person, shouldn't a large portion of what we are looking at here be covered with a Communications person?

Economic Development Director Hyser said no, developing a brand is completely separate from what a Communications person can do. You have to have special skills set; it's just not developing a logo. It's developing guide standards. It's developing strategic communication around those being able to set the brand standard. It's colors, it's fonts, it's so much more than what one individual in a City. Alla's going to hop in here.

Communications Director Lora said communications is a huge important function for any organization. As Communications Director, communications has never been more important right now because of the Covid which is going to continue in some format; but also because we are an on demand society. People do not want to necessarily wait to get a newsletter or something in the mail. They want to know today, right now. They want it on social media. They want a text. They want a phone call. So, there's that whole level of communication and communicating what we stand for in 2021 and beyond. First that has to be defined, and it has to be defined I think obviously, I would be working along with Jessica with this agency because they need to do research. We can't base it on assumptions. Well we think it's this and that. The world has changed. People's opinions may have changed, and so that's why we need someone to come in to professionally look at this and give us guidance on how we move forward branding so that we are doing this now during kind of not a lull, but while Covid is kind of overshadowed so much of this. That way when a vaccine or when we start to emerge from this, we are at the front of the line; we are not saying oh this is where we are now. Now let's figure out who we are to

the business community, who we are to residents. This is our prime time to be prepared for that coming out one lap ahead.

Councilperson Trakas said I had a couple of points if you don't mind. One thing is, so what is our objective? If it's just having new logos, I mean I am not sure what the value of that is. What is the actual objective? What do we get for \$70,000 that brings more jobs, more revenue into the City, keep and retains people? What is the objective of this campaign from an economic development perspective?

Communications Director Lora said well I wanted to start with the logo. The logo is not separate from all of that. The logo has to say, it is a signal to whoever sees it, business community, residents. This is the experience you will have when you come to Independence. This is kind of a new definition. It's the u.x., the user experience. When people come here to work, people come here to live, when they see the signs they are going to say oh I am in Independence. One logo on a bunch of things is not going to do that. That's why it's a much more comprehensive approach to getting that message out. How do you get it to the different portions of the demographic? How do you keep a consistent voice, and how do you deliver on the promises you make? I am going to hand it back to Jessica.

Economic Development Director Hyser said it's how we present ourselves as a progressive community. It's not just the logo as Alla said, it's about the tone of voice that we use. It's about the consistent messages that come out of the Mayor's office and anyone from the City. It shows that Independence is the premiere community to live, work and play.

Councilperson Trakas said a second follow up to that. I would like to work with you a little bit on that. The second point is so again our objective I think should be to retain and to bring jobs to the community, to complement what Jessica and Alla do on a daily basis. If that's what we are going to attempt to do, I understand that.

Economic Development Director Hyser said that is the objective. I mean we are trying to put that professional face so that everyone when they see the Independence logo and brand, they know that they are going to get a top-notch community. They are going to want to be here. They are going to want to invest here. We know how to specifically talk to them.

Councilperson Trakas said copy, okay. The second part of that is so you mentioned some things that I think we should kind of hone in on. How do we help the 500 of us who work and live in Independence? What do we do there? What do we do to grow that number? If we have people who are working out of their homes now, and we continue to think that we are going to be working out of our homes, how does a community that has had a lifeblood of office buildings since the late 1960's, what do we do to attract either new ones or whatever it is that we are trying to do? I think that has to be incorporated and part of this thing because if it isn't, I remember I was talking to a constituent in Solon years ago when I was in the legislature, and he says what do you do for people like me who work out of my house? I am thinking we can be creative. Can we provide wi fi incentives and broadband incentives? Can we create tax credits for people who buy desks? I am just thinking out loud, but I think as a broader part of this conversation, if this is the new world order. You know the world changed after the September 11th terrorist attacks with

respect to travel and vacations like we have now. So, being pro-active about that, can this firm help us to come up with economic development strategies or is this public relations wise?

Economic Development Director Hyser said no, no, part of this in that Phase II which is the marketing plan; so one of the things that we talked to them about is developing a toolkit. So, it's not just focused on the 500 people who live and work here, which definitely they are a key. It's also making sure that we have opportunities and space for people who have to be here. So, Kichler Lighting, you can't make a light fixture in your home; so you physically have to come here. We have done a lot of building over the years about the high wage earners and making sure they are in office buildings; but we are not kind of coming to a point where maybe we develop tech space. So, as we are thinking about the northwest quadrant, that's going to be something that's front of mind for us. We want to make sure that if you are an engineering firm again a great opportunity, career; and they are high wage earners. They have to physically be in their office space. So, let's have the type of office space, which they typically enjoy flex space for them to move into. As we go forward, we need to make sure that we are creating those opportunities; but again the brand helps us to establish that Independence is the place that you want to be.

Councilperson Trakas said last two points here; I do think as I talked about before with the sign ordinance. I do think we should incorporate the Chamber of Commerce that we have. It's a regional chamber, but try to get some of their approaches to this too by asking our business community, not just the people who we have given grants to and everything else. Let's try to see what the concerns are and what the expectations are of those who do this for a living.

Economic Development Director Hyser said absolutely. So, when we do the brand research, it's not just going to be Alla and me as part of that. We will need community engagement, and we will make sure that the Chamber is one of those that we reach out to.

Councilperson Trakas said I do think that our old logo was kind of generic. I would see those banners that said Celebrate, and I was like what does this do for me?

Lastly, I am going to send you something called AR25-59 office symbols. Anyone who has been in the military knows what it is, and I would advise that maybe you put new office symbols together so that everybody's e-mail and everybody's letterhead is the same so everyone knows what the standards are.

Economic Development Director Hyser said that is a top priority for us, both of us.

Councilperson Trakas said thank you.

Communications Director Lora said I just wanted to jump in with one other thing that Councilperson Trakas had mentioned. All the research that I am reading, the stories are that yes a lot of people will not return to an office, but companies are also finding that there is not the same type of creativity collaboration and there's exhaustion. If you have people who are at home who are also tutoring their children that companies have to figure out how to give those employees a way to work with their colleagues which is more productive in some cases. So, I

think everyone is thinking about that now; so is it where you have a school that's closer, or daycares that are closer to an office complex? I think everyone is trying to figure that out still, and I think we do have opportunities to say to people. Jessica and I were just at the Garland offices that opened up on Rockside Road, and they talked about how they have space for people who come once a month, who come other times because they see the value of that. So, I think you are going to see more companies, both for the benefit of the company and also for the employee who would like to have a couple of days or a week where they have some type of boundary between their personal life and their professional life.

Chairman Synek asked Councilperson Walchanowicz did you have a comment? We have about 20 minutes left, and I just wanted to make sure you have enough time to get through what you want to get through.

Councilperson Walchanowicz said I will make this quick. So, part of the toolkit, we want to enhance our business community, we want to entice people to come back to work on Rockside and Pleasant Valley; and I get the re-branding and all that. What are we going to do to make these people feel comfortable coming back to work on Rockside knowing what's going on down on Rockside currently?

Economic Development Director Hyser said I think those are two different issues. What happens on Rockside after 10:00 p.m. is different than what happens on Rockside at 8:00 a.m.

Councilperson Walchanowicz said I get that Jess, but my concern is residents seeing us spending all this money on re-branding; and all this for the business community when they are all heavily, heavily concerned with what is going on down on Rockside.

Economic Development Director Hyser said and that we get. We understand, but I think it's muddying the waters with two different issues.

Mayor Kurtz said Mr. Chairman if I could address this. I think that your point is well taken Councilperson Walchanowicz, but I think you have to keep in mind that these are all parallel paths that need to be simultaneously managed. You can't isolate yourself to one or the other. Safety is obviously a major component, but it's one silo that needs to be addressed as a cohesive understanding. So, I think Jess is correct; it's something that we are addressing, but it needs to be addressed in concert with these other opportunities.

Chairman Synek said very good, and just let me comment Jessica before I turn it back over to you. My take on all of this is essentially branding clearly what we have has evolved over 20 years. It kind of look likes it was built by committee. Your presentation clearly demonstrates a need to kind of tighten that up and make it more consistent. I am perfectly fine with that; and of course, economic development as the Mayor and Councilperson Walchanowicz mentioned, there are many aspects to that. Certainly branding is a big one, but not far behind and certainly in concert with that are safety and security and infrastructure. All of those things that make people, that endear people to a community. Certainly branding is something that needs freshening up. It's a key component of it, and it certainly seems like we are on the right path to something here. I look forward to hearing more about it as it develops.

Economic Development Director Hyser said thank you.

Councilperson Narduzzi said Chairman if I may step in for one second.

Chairman Synek said Councilperson Narduzzi please.

Councilperson Narduzzi said just a quick thing. I understand where Chris is coming from, and I agree with him. I agree with the Mayor also that we can't do this, it's a big package deal. I have been through the branding the first time, and I understand how it works and why it works. It actually did work for us, but I wrote down four things here that if I was a company wanting to come to Independence I would want safety number one. I could care less about what kind of branding is on your e-mail that you send out. Two, I want lower taxes. Three, I want amenities; and four, ease of getting in and out of work or to get out to get back home. I think we have accomplished that, and we are still working on that with the new ramp to northbound I-77. Lower taxes, I think we keep a good handle on that. Amenities, I don't know how much more we can offer the people on Rockside Road. I mean we have hotels, we have restaurants. We try to keep the appearance of Rockside Road up with flowers and banners and stuff. So, I think our amenities, we can't give them all the amenities that we as taxpayers who live in Independence can have; but I think safety has to be the number one issue. As long as the Mayor is going to do this side by side with safety, and I want to hear some kind of what we are going to do about safety and this branding thing at the same time; I am all in. If we are going to do one step at a time, I don't think this is the first step we should take. I think it should be that safety aspect.

Mayor Kurtz said Mr. Chairman. I think you voiced a number of issues that are consistent with what the Chairman said about infrastructure and safety and getting the people to this area. These are all amenities that are dear to people, and how we deal with amenities whether it be downtown or the northwest quadrant or northeast quadrant now. It's all going to tie together, and safety is going to play a major role in that. So, it's something that we have attach ourselves to a number of silos that we can put together at one time. Thank you.

What you are also going to do is go right into, it's a perfect segway into wayfinding and placemaking with comments about the amenities and infrastructure.

Economic Development Director Hyser said absolutely. I think it was a great segway; so the second part of our presentation is about wayfinding and placemaking which you may not think that they were related to branding, but they are very much interconnected. Both kind of help with the reflection of how you feel about place, so when you go there; it touches on how someone feels when they are physically located in your community. So, what does wayfinding include? It would include ODOT highway signage, gateway signs. So, when you are arriving in a community, as well as directional signage, id signs, parking signs; so that when you are heading to a destination, you are able to find your way there. It reinforces our brand. It provides clarity and consistency and indicates support by the City and will help us attract businesses. It's a reminder of who our identity is.

It also helps with the user experience. It would include texts and graphics that are legible. It's the driver of aesthetics and makes sure they are appropriately to scale. It's maintainable so that they are clean. It will be repaired, updated or replaced, vandal and tamper resistant as well as how they are oriented to make sure that it doesn't impact visibility.

Wayfinding helps develop a wayfinding system. It can help enhance our community and the surrounding landscape. It can support the understanding of what Independence is. Provide information to increase comfort and safety, elevate the perception of a place, increase visitation and encourage healthy living through pedestrian and bike traffic.

As we shared earlier, we currently have a variety of sign styles that often are wooden, and they don't really comply with our current City zoning. Some of them are metal and brick. Most are difficult to read. As we discussed earlier, that sign on Pleasant Valley, it's almost unnoticeable when you drive down the road.

So what I wanted to talk about when I go to a place; I am going to a new place that I haven't been before, I often Google the address. I find out what's there. Try to find out the landmarks, and of course heavily rely on GPS. So, one of the things that I think is tricky here is getting to office buildings on Rockside. We did a great job of enhancing Rockside to make the traffic easier to get in and off of Rockside Road; but if you don't necessarily know where you are going, it can be a little tricky.

For example, Indiana Wesleyan, I know where the building is. You drive down Rockside Road, but do you necessarily know that you need to turn down Oak Tree to access Indiana Wesleyan. There's a tiny, tiny white sign over on the left-hand side that's easily missed. In fact, I missed it. So, I drove past Indiana Wesleyan and turned back to go home.

There's also a challenge navigating around our campus. I grew up here, I know where the Building Department is. I drive there to drop off my permit for my shed. I get there. I walk to the back door because that's where the parking lot is; that's an employee entrance. So, where's the front door?

Navigating to get around even our school campus is challenging. The address to the high school is Archwood, but you really don't get into there from Archwood. I had a resident ask me once, or somebody, it wasn't a resident, it was somebody who was driving as I was walking my dog in the park, how to get to the t-ball fields. I didn't know we had a separate t-ball field. Again, I am somebody who grew up here; I should know these things.

There's results that can happen from wayfinding, and it's pretty remarkable; 75% of consumers stated that they told other people about a business solely based on its signage. There are 50% of consumers say that poor signage deters them from going into a business; 60% indicated that a lack of signage does the same. It says that 61% of American consumers fail to find a business because the sign was too small or unclear; and I think that happens around here quite a bit.

So, what are other people saying about wayfinding and signage? Refresh the way people think about our cause. We need to let people know where we are, where to park, where they are and

what they can do. We wanted to improve tourism and the image of downtown. We needed a new bold brand. In a competitive environment, we need to make sure that our district comes to mind and has a positive image of marketplace.

We wanted to share with you a couple of examples of what our neighboring communities are doing in terms of wayfinding. So, University Circle, growing up I could never find my way around. If you have been down to University Circle in the recent past, you know that it's much easier to navigate and obviously here is some enhanced signage. These are a look at some of the Ohio City signs. Shaker Square has gone through a re-branding process as well. Our friends in North Olmsted, you will see that they have stone mounted signs for their City Hall as well as new Welcome signs. Bedford, there was actually an article in the paper this summer about Bedford and their new signage package. You will see these two examples here of what they have done. Downtown Lakewood, again updated signage. City of Sandusky, and this is the City of Delaware; again another small community. The interesting thing about Delaware is they were able to brand some of their districts with separate branding for those districts, and that's something I think we would like to bring here, to be able to brand Rockside, downtown, Brecksville Road, the Cloverleaf area with separate branding but still fit in with the consistency of our overall brand. Here's an example from the Columbus area again, Worthington. They have a beautiful sign, and again there are street signs.

Of course again, this kind of comes with a cost. The wayfinding analysis which just kind of helps locate some of those pain points in our City as well as kind of what some of the signage might look like. That analysis, again it's going identify where we lack appropriate signage. I just had a business customer come in to meet us here at City Hall and of course typed in 6800 Brecksville Road; and I failed to tell them that actually parking is behind the building. Again, GPS made them think they arrived at the front doorstep. So, the rate for the wayfinding analysis, which would include some concepts, would be \$10,000; and then to develop a full sign program that would develop the construction, specs is additional cost. The total for both initiatives would be about \$32,000.

So, I know we have talked a lot about some projects and some costs; but I think if you look at the City. When we did the street signs in the late 1980's Mayor, I remember thinking as a kid that those were a great example and kind of set us apart from our neighboring communities. Well those signs have aged. I am still young; but it's time to seriously put some resources in updating how you find your way around Independence and that welcome feel of the City, being a whole, complete comprehensive sign package.

Again, this is something that we had hoped to bring up to Council at the November meeting. Questions, comments?

Councilperson Narduzzi asked any idea on the cost of re-signing the City, the physical part of it?

Economic Development Director Hyser said that they can't tell us because it depends on materials. So, one thing that we did discuss with them is that they would give us kind of the good, better, best option; but one thing to take into consideration is right now our street signs are wooden. They said they would never make that recommendation again. If we wanted them to

look wooden for a certain character, they would want to find a material that's durable and could stand up to the test of time. If you notice around some of the street signs, maybe I notice this because my dog likes to pee on them; they have gotten smaller at the bottom. So, those people that maintain them, they are hitting them with weed whackers. They are seeing a little bit of wear and tear.

The answer is we don't know cost, but we will have some options; and obviously we would want to make sure that we are a little bit constrained in that.

Councilperson Narduzzi said I guess I would want to know some kind of cost before we spend \$32,000 and then figure out that we don't have the money to do this anyway.

Economic Development Director Hyser said so part of what they will do is in their plan is develop how do we roll this out? What is the strategic process of rolling out. So, it wouldn't just be alright this week we are replacing all of the signs, and here's the cost. There is a process and a plan, and it would be strategic to roll it out. Again, there's a process to everything, and we can't do all of the signage until the branding is done. So, some of this has to happen in concert with one another; so it's very, very interrelated. We don't want to start developing a sign wayfinding package, and then change our entire City brand.

Mayor Kurtz said I think that the way to look at it is like the soft costs of a construction project. You don't really know until you design and prepare yourself.

Economic Development Director Hyser said it will help us to identify what we need.

Mayor Kurtz said identify yourself, exactly.

Chairman Synek said Councilperson Trakas.

Councilperson Trakas said thank you Mr. Chairman. A couple of points on this one, when you keep saying they, are you referring to this organization we were talking about earlier, akhia, is that who you were talking about?

Economic Development Director Hyser said I am sorry, I guess I wasn't very clear. There's a separate firm that we really liked, and their name is Guide Studio. They specialize in wayfinding, and that's what they do. They do it for major universities. They are the ones that did all of those sign examples that you saw in the presentation. So, Guide Studio is a local company. They are out of Shaker Heights. They have done a lot of work in northeast Ohio and throughout Ohio along with nationally. One of the communities that they were working with was out of Wisconsin right before Covid hit, and they have been able to keep on step with that project.

Councilperson Trakas said okay. A couple of points; so first of all, I think that we actually started this trend with Mayor Wisnieski and Mayor Kurtz where we had uniform signage across the City that was unique. So, you had those wooden signs. You had wooden signs at every entrance. You had every street. It took years to get that done, and my advice would be let's keep what we have in the residential part of the community because I think you have character

and charm. I don't think we need to throw that out. I would understand trying to do wayfinding in the commercial districts that would be similar to that, and I think you are right, the Pleasant Valley branding I don't think turned out the way we had hoped that it would. That's where people need to be direct, and I don't need to know where Meadowbrook is, I know where that is right.

The second part about that is that I don't like to see generic stuff. I saw some of the things that you have seen; and they are all kind of generic. Let's have something with some charm and some character that says Independence. We want to stand out. Those wooden signs that we put up in the 1970's and 1980's they stood out. They were different than everybody else. It wasn't a metal sign that had the name of the street on it. It was something very unique, something to be very proud of. Other communities copied what Independence did. If we go this route, I would just encourage us not to have these, I saw some of the ones like the West Side market and some of the other ones; and I have seen all those signs. I have been to Delaware, and those seem very generic to me. I would rather incorporate like our historic symbols in Independence into that wayfinding if you were going to do it to make it historic Independence. This is a community that stands for something, that means something. If it just looks like the West Side market or Lakewood, I don't think we are getting too far there.

Economic Development Director Hyser said we don't want to replicate what another community does, but there's also a couple of things that we need to take into consideration. So, street signs have to be of a certain scale in order to be readable. Again, that kind of goes back to the Pleasant Valley sign; you know you drive by it and you don't even know that it's there.

Even your street signs that are above your head, and they have to meet ODOT codes. So, Guide Studio is equipped to be able to make those recommendations and make sure that they meet the Federal Transportation standards. So, that's one thing that we would have to take into consideration. The street signs that we have today wouldn't pass that muster.

Chairman Synek said Jessica, my comment is essentially this; so I kind of feel like we are at the point with signage where it's like sign pollution. My case in point being a walk down Hemlock Trail, you can't walk ten feet on Hemlock Trail without seeing a sign every ten feet practically. In some respects, there's just way too many signs; but by the same token, we need to stay true to our motto of being the premiere place to live work visit, we have to make our community more accessible when it comes to visiting. To me that's more of a technology issue, Google search, and that's for key word searching; and that's sort of marking that it is physical signage throughout the City. While we were sitting here, I just did a quick Google search, Independence, Ohio things to do; and the top things that come up are the Cuyahoga Valley National Park, the Canal Exploration Center, Ohio & Erie Canal towpath trail. Nothing specific to Independence, not Elmwood Park, not Hemlock Trail, not Topgolf, not the Cloverleaf Bowling Alley, those sort of entertainment things that if you are visitor to our community, you are looking for things to do. I would hope that you would consider in this wayfinding process to focus on a visitor to our community. Often people are visiting the school to attend sporting events so how do we make the path easily findable for people who want to go to City Hall or the school or Topgolf or any of our parks? I am more interested in again serving the visitor, that sort of focus on this. Much of it kind of sounds like sign pollution.

Economic Development Director Hyser said it's not really sign pollution, but I think it gets to your point of being able to provide for visitors. So, when you get here what's your experience like? You are not going to have a positive experience in Independence if you can't find where you are going. So, if you get here, and you are trying to find to get into the high school; it becomes difficult because the address is Archwood, but that's not really how you access it. Unfortunately, it's not really sign pollution, but it's strategic about what signs and where you put them so that people can find where they want to go. Even if you are staying at a hotel on Rockside, how do you find where you want to go next, especially the way we have the roads set up with cross-access easements. So, you are right, it is about visitor experience.

Chairman Synek said and I would further state as perhaps an objective or goal for you Jessica. So, my wife and I were looking for a place to go this fall, a little getaway. So, you can't fly anywhere; so we drove to Frankenmuth, Michigan where the Bronner's Christmas store is, and it's quite a tourist destination even in the Covid world. To try to search things to do in Frankenmuth on Trip Advisor or Google, there's really nothing. There's nothing except for the local parks or walking trails, and you would think a significant tourist destination like Frankenmuth would have more accessible for visitors like my wife and I. We just kind of showed up there, and can the City use its resources to help partner with the people at the bowling alley or Topgolf? How do we partner with our business community to help get them on the map? I think we as a community could do a great service for our business community by being that sort of connector. I just encourage you to think about that how you and your department could.

Economic Development Director Hyser said one of the things, it's obviously not related to wayfinding, but you will see in the next couple of weeks, we have been doing a video series. Well it will kind of launch as a video series, to promote our restaurants. We had a contractor, a videographer to do some videos, and they are phenomenal about the restaurants. We will be putting those out on social media, but again it's our way of promoting what we have here, reminding residents of the business community. This is the most important time where we can really be thinking about shopping local and supporting our local businesses. So, the restaurants are the first piece. I would imagine going forward there would be additional pieces to that.

Chairman Synek said we are a few minutes over. Does anybody have any dire comments we need to pass along before we go? I don't want to step on the Streets & Sidewalks Committee's time too much here.

Councilperson Kapusta said if I could Chairman Synek, echo your remarks. I think that we are very much in the technological world. We talked about that even with some of the signage, and I think that we do not do the best job that we can as a community in connecting our people that way; and unless we get them connected by the technology, they will never make it to Independence to see our signs.

Economic Development Director Hyser said absolutely. We are getting there.

Mayor Kurtz said but we need Council's help. So, Mr. Chairman thank you for indulging us. We will move this ball forward. There's a lot of energy here. We will use the feedback we took

from your committee and incorporate that into our summary, and we will present in some form or fashion to Council legislatively at a future meeting.

Chairman Synek said fantastic.

Mayor Kurtz said Jess, Alla thank you.

Economic Development Director Hyser said thank you. Sorry for the technical glitches.

Chairman Synek said no worries. Is there a motion to adjourn or any further business before the committee? If not, I will entertain a motion to adjourn.

Moved by Kapusta, seconded by Grendel, to adjourn the Economic Growth & Development Committee meeting of October 27, 2020. Voice Vote: 3 yes/0 no; motion carried.

The Economic Growth & Development Committee meeting of October 27, 2020 was then adjourned at 5:36 p.m.

Debra J. Beal, Clerk of Council
Minutes Unapproved at Time of Release 10/28/20
