

**CITY OF INDEPENDENCE
FINANCE COMMITTEE MEETING
MINUTES DECEMBER 7, 2020
IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE COMMUNITY SERVICES
COMMITTEE MEETING AT 3:30 P.M.
VIRTUAL MEETING VIA ZOOM**

Present: Chairman Vice Mayor Dave Grendel
Councilperson Kenn Synek
Councilperson Dale Veverka

Also Present: Mayor Gregory P. Kurtz
Councilperson Kathleen Kapusta
Councilperson Tom Narduzzi
Councilperson Jim Trakas
Councilperson Chris Walchanowicz
Finance Director Vern Blaze
City Engineer Don Ramm

Chairman Vice Mayor Grendel called the Finance Committee meeting to order at 4:33 p.m.

Finance Director Blaze said that due to getting the information for this meeting out just a short time ago, I would ask that we postpone this meeting and reschedule it for another date.

Chairman Vice Mayor Grendel said we are going to push this meeting, is Thursday okay on your calendar? Kenn and the Mayor and myself, my calendar is free, and I think Vern you are good with Thursday.

Finance Director Blaze said that is correct.

Chairman Vice Mayor Grendel asked other members of Council?

Councilperson Narduzzi said I'm good for Thursday Dave.

Councilperson Trakas asked what time were you thinking Dave, about the same?

Vice Mayor Grendel said I'm available really the whole day, so whatever time the Committee members would like to start and the Mayor and everything. I am open to whatever suggestions are made.

Finance Director Blaze said there's a lot to discuss so if 3:00 p.m. was available, I think 3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. or 3:00 p.m. to 5:30 p.m., 3:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. max; I think we would all kind of lose it after that going through numbers for three hours. We do need some time.

Vice Mayor Grendel said usually with those projects and that we do need time to discuss. So, is 3:00 p.m. okay on everybody's schedule?

Councilperson Synek said it's not good for me. I have something from 2:00 p.m. until at least 3:00 p.m., maybe 3:30 p.m.

Mayor Kurtz said let's make it 3:30 p.m. then.

Councilperson Synek said I may be late, well start without me.

Chairman Vice Mayor Grendel said we will do 3:30 p.m., and Kenn I think you would not miss too much. So, 3:30 p.m. on Thursday, December 10th.

Finance Director Blaze said that will work. Thank you.

Chairman Vice Mayor Grendel said I did receive, I can share with everyone; I got a letter from the attorney for Gaucho Limited, the owner of that old hotel down there. I could read it to you if you would like. He would like to present to us, Greg have you heard anything?

Mayor Kurtz said I talked to him. Excuse me, I have not talked to him; Greg O'Brien. This is another reiteration of some of the previous discussions, the different advocates. Some of you observed that yourself over the last couple of years. They are trying to figure out a way to right a ship that's already going down; and I think the City, over the past several years, felt that rehabbing this facility is not in the best interest of the community with the challenges that we have had. So, we wouldn't be in this position if someone had taken a proactive step over the last couple of years. So, this isn't something that's new today. It may be new to these people, but it's not new to the City. You have been dealing with it over the last several years.

Chairman Vice Mayor Grendel said the attorney's name is David Horvath. I don't believe I know who he is, but his office is in Independence.

Mayor Kurtz said they are talking about a variety of different things, and until it is something of substance, we are on a path. If it is something that warrants additional debate, we can always stop, slow the process; but to slow the process for continuous debate on something that you have been dealing with the last couple of years, I think it's a futile effort, and we should at least keep moving. If something comes with some real substance, and that's the message; we will meet with him tomorrow and discuss it with him.

Chairman Vice Mayor Grendel said because he wanted to meet with Council, at least his e-mail said; and I don't know how Council feels about it.

Mayor Kurtz said he hasn't met with me yet.

Chairman Vice Mayor Grendel said that could be something where maybe depending on how things go, maybe we can meet him at maybe one of your meetings Kenn, Economic Development, just to see how serious he is.

Councilperson Synek asked are we definitely keeping that ordinance on First Reading? There's going to be a vote on it on Tuesday.

Mayor Kurtz said only First Reading, we are not going to take action on it.

Chairman Vice Mayor Grendel said he represents the people who own Cozumel Restaurant and everything, and they have been 16 years in the City; and like I said, we have been talking about economic development. I would like to give these people at least their time to talk to us as far as that goes. I don't know how Council feels. I don't want somebody to say we talked to the Mayor, and we are out on our ear. We might definitely be in your corner there too Mayor, but without being able to give them at least their time, their due process to talk to us.

Mayor Kurtz said keep in mind, this is just an extension of what I have observed over the last couple of years with the Planning Commission delays. They went around in circles the last couple of years from what I have read.

Chairman Vice Mayor Grendel said being a member of Planning Commission the last five years, you are right. We had a guy come from Buffalo, and they knew nothing and really wasted our time. These people are local people, and they would like to have their time. I will try to poll Council to see how they feel. Dale, I see your hand up.

Councilperson Veverka said Dave, I would tend to agree. I understand the frustration the Mayor may have with the fact that we have gone around and around over the past few years; but with a variety of people who expressed an interest in buying it, and they didn't buy it, and they didn't show. I have gone to those Planning Commission meetings, not as a member, but I get that. It would seem to me particularly in these times of economic development that we should really provide a good opportunity for a new owner, a reasonable amount of time where it be 90 or 120 days or whatever. You could use the City's ability to support and encourage this situation. That's the way I view it. It simply doesn't seem to be a fair situation for somebody who just acquired the property to end up being dealt with kind of abruptly.

Mayor Kurtz asked Councilperson Veverka, what's a fair situation? Define that for me, would you. Help me out.

Councilperson Veverka said I don't know, 90 or 120 days. They had not had that property very long.

Mayor Kurtz said we could remove it from the agenda. I don't have a fixed position. I just know that what would normally happen if someone doesn't push this thing, it will just stay in limbo forever.

Councilperson Synek said I would prefer to remove it from the agenda.

Chairman Vice Mayor Grendel said I can understand your feelings because that's been an eyesore for years; but given the fact that somebody did buy it out of foreclosure I believe. It's a local concern. I would like to hear them out and see if it passes the smell test or not; we might listen to them, and they might not have much more to offer than what the previous two or three people who went in front of Planning Commission.

Mayor Kurtz said let's remove it from the agenda then for tomorrow and give them some time.

Chairman Vice Mayor Grendel said then possibly, Kenn you are Chairman of the Economic Development Committee, possibly if they can approach and talk to the Mayor, talk to Jessica and maybe be put on our agenda and listen to see how sincere they are.

Mayor Kurtz asked can we get a motion to remove it from the agenda? I will just have it removed.

Chairman Trakas said point of order, is that something we can do at a Finance Committee meeting?

Moved by Synek, seconded by Kapusta, to remove Ordinance 2020-115 from the December 8th Regular Council Agenda.

Mayor Kurtz said as long as the majority of Council says to remove it, I can just remove it. I think I put it on so let's remove it.

Chairman Vice Mayor Grendel said we have a consensus to remove it and everything. Council, do you want just the Mayor to proceed on this or do you want to have a chance to listen to the folks?

Mayor Kurtz said I want Council to listen. I would like Council to weigh in. It's ultimately your choice anyway.

Chairman Vice Mayor Grendel said Jim you have been discussing this since your tenure on Council, and I know Chris and Kenn are new to this; but it's been an eyesore. These people here, they were different than the ones before. The ones before came from Buffalo, and they had no idea of what Independence was all about.

Councilperson Trakas said they didn't even own it.

Chairman Vice Mayor Grendel said it was a fishing expedition is what I called it. They wasted our time, but these people own it. I think to give them a feeling that hey we had our say, we talked to the Mayor, we have talked to his Administration, we talked to Council; and I think we can come to a consensus whether or not it's worth pursuing. I think to me economic development is supposed to be a team effort, a joint effort with us supporting the Mayor and the Administration; but if they don't have their hearing or time in front of Council, I think that they might feel slighted.

Mayor Kurtz said we will get them on the agenda for the next Economic Development Committee meeting, how's that? We will remove it from the agenda.

Chairman Vice Mayor Grendel asked is that agreeable with you Kenn?

Councilperson Synek said yes, that would be great.

Mayor Kurtz said Debi will set that up with Jessica.

Councilperson Trakas said Kathleen has a question.

Councilperson Kapusta said I think that we have a financial investment here. We have an investment from a different entity who has been a long term community partner; and I do believe that we owe them the responsibility to hear them out, and I support not having it our agenda tomorrow.

Mayor Kurtz said I would like to thank Council because that was the goal, to get everybody in the game. I thank you.

Chairman Vice Mayor Grendel said Mayor, not to be antagonistic, but this way we have your back.

Mayor Kurtz said we are accomplishing the goal. We are moving the ball, and that's all I wanted to do.

Councilperson Trakas asked do you think they got the message Mayor?

Mayor Kurtz said I appreciate Council's willingness to get engaged, I really do. I think it's great. Thank you.

Councilperson Synek said real economic development on that site though is to condemn the restaurant and not the hotel. If they could get ownership of that restaurant, you can really see something happen on that parcel, but they are struggling right now because they are a tenant in that building. They own the back part.

Mayor Kurtz said I thank you. This is great.

Chairman Vice Mayor Grendel said very good. So, we have our marching orders for that, and then Mayor I can reach out to talk to this gentleman and tell them from Council's standpoint, that he will be put on the agenda of an Economic Development meeting, hopefully in January.

Mayor Kurtz said that will be great. You will reach out to him. Greg O'Brien will reach out to him so he will make sure he doesn't miss the message.

Chairman Vice Mayor Grendel said this way, I will feel better that we addressed it and gave him an opportunity.

Mayor Kurtz said perfect.

Chairman Vice Mayor Grendel said then Vern for tomorrow then, we will still have the appropriations and the Five-Year Plan on for First Reading, but you really won't have much. We will do our discussion come Thursday. That will lighten our load for the Caucus tomorrow.

Finance Director Blaze said thank you.

Chairman Vice Mayor Grendel said I think just to reiterate, we are going to meet Thursday, the Finance Committee will meet at 3:30 p.m. Hopefully, Kenn will be able to join us as quickly as possible and everything. Be ready to go to 6:00 p.m. We want to get a good hearty discussion on that Five-Year Plan. Don will be, I see he's muted; I don't know if he's listening there or not, but hopefully Don will be part of that because usually in previous years we did the Five-Year Plan, Don's part was the one that took the longest for us to grapple with and also prioritize.

Mayor Kurtz said I'm sure he's about worn out after the meetings we have had recently. He survived.

City Engineer Ramm said I am here. I am listening.

Chairman Vice Mayor Grendel said so Christmas break will truly we will be celebrating, if anything not that we won't be having these virtual meetings for a while; but I have enjoyed them though. I felt that everybody has done a great job conducting them, and we have learned quite a bit from them. We shouldn't be from a standpoint that we haven't discussed these issues rather strongly.

Any other questions before we adjourn and look forward to tomorrow's Caucus. Now Mayor is Jessica going to be presenting to us in Executive Session tomorrow?

Mayor Kurtz said yes. One of us will be.

Chairman Vice Mayor Grendel said okay, very good. In my discussion with her, I thought that she will be part of it. So that everyone knows I think Debi we start at 5:00 p.m.?

The Clerk said 5:30 p.m.

Chairman Vice Mayor Grendel said and we will start with starting the Caucus and go right into Executive Session.

The Clerk said correct.

Chairman Vice Mayor Grendel said and then we will finish the Caucus and then go right into the meeting after that. Very good. Hopefully, everybody will have a great evening. Rest up tonight so that tomorrow won't seem to be so bad, and we had a very good meeting today too Kathleen.

Mayor, tremendous job on Saturday, that was a team effort by the Rec and the Service Department; they really did the City proud.

Mayor Kurtz said the employees were fantastic. The residents were fantastic. It was just, I think we came up with a new concept for the winter because it was heartwarming listening to the residents, but seeing the smiles on these kids' faces, how sincerely appreciative they were of the experience, and the fireworks. I can't thank Council enough for funding programs such as this because this is what it's all about. So, thank you.

Chairman Vice Mayor Grendel said thank you. I know my grandkids were excited. They had a good time. I think though that Santa sounded like a familiar voice to me from the past. He sounded like a ghost from Christmas past.

Mayor Kurtz said it took a couple of times to forget to call him Santa too.

One of the things we experienced was you know how young kids usually are afraid of fireworks, it seemed from parents who I have talked to that when they were in their cars their eyes were like glued to the fireworks. It was a different experience for them.

Chairman Vice Mayor Grendel said it was a beautiful program, yes indeed.

Mayor Kurtz said we were so blessed, really. Thank you again for all you do to help support the funding and the cooperation, the committee meetings. I know that the Department Heads and all the employees really appreciate the teamwork here, so thank you.

Chairman Vice Mayor Grendel said you are welcome, and on behalf of Council. Does anybody have any comments to make before we take a motion to adjourn?

Councilperson Veverka said I just wanted to touch base, I was really impressed with the appearance of Elmwood Park and thought to myself boy that is such a nice way to tour through; and that was a really nice way to run that program. It might even be a better way to do it in the future, than it is being packed in on the Square.

Mayor Kurtz said we are looking at a lot. We are going to have a recap meeting later this week and go over all the opportunities, challenges; but that's definitely in the mix because of the success of last Saturday night.

Councilperson Veverka said and it was like a little wonderland. Obviously, by having the snow there it helped; but the trees, the decorations, it was a really nice thing to drive through.

Mayor Kurtz said this is year one of this; imagine when these creative juices start flowing. You better hold onto your purse strings Council.

Councilperson Walchanowicz said there's so much more to decorate in the park that it could be an amazing winter wonderland in there.

Mayor Kurtz said hold onto your purse strings Council.

Councilperson Kapusta said I think Don wants to give up some of his money for this event, right Don?

Councilperson Trakas said I heard Carl Asseff wanted to pay for the whole damn thing Mayor so give him a call.

Mayor Kurtz said I will reach out to him and see if it's true; but you know rumors Jim, you can't believe that stuff.

Councilperson Trakas said you can't believe that stuff. Those Navy guys, you never know.

Chairman Vice Mayor Grendel said tell him it's being sponsored by Youth for Christ.

Several people began speaking at once again.

Chairman Vice Mayor Grendel said everybody have a good evening, and I look forward to getting some work done tomorrow and Thursday. We will see everybody at 5:30 p.m. tomorrow.

Finance Director Blaze said thanks everybody.

Councilperson Walchanowicz said if anybody hasn't talked to Jess about the branding and wayfinding, her and I had a really, really good conversation, and I brought up some valid points. It would be a good just a couple of minute conversation with her to make everybody feel a little bit more at ease about the situation with that.

Chairman Vice Mayor Grendel said I talked to her for about a half hour or 40 minutes; almost missed by lunch there on Friday. We had a real good discussion. I said Jessica I have to cut it short; but she really explained it. Again, I was impressed by the wayfinding gal, she really seemed to know her stuff. We have such a big investment on Rockside that we really should, it's our moneymaker, we should use some of that money.

Councilperson Walchanowicz said one of my big points was that she should put some type, and I talked to Mayor about it, about putting some verbiage together for the residents so the residents realize why that is something that we need to do to keep their programs.

Chairman Vice Mayor Grendel said we may have to evolve with the economy going to be changing and everything, but that area still is our moneymaking investment, and we have to be very, very proactive there in making sure it stays top notch with some of the other leading areas in northeast Ohio.

Mayor Kurtz said this is what it's all about, trying to sort this out and quickly hit the ground running and be able to be effectively ahead of the game rather than behind the eight ball.

Chairman Vice Mayor Grendel said very good, and Jim you sent us an e-mail today about one of the company's in Independence. Does that affect us as far the money going in?

Councilperson Trakas said it could positively affect us. It's from the State. I don't know if the City was involved or not, but this was from the Governor's office. What I sent was some good news that the State of Ohio is putting into Air Gas; they are going to create 42 full-time positions, \$1,800,000 in new payroll and \$17,300,000 in existing payroll will stay here as part of a job creation tax credit that the State of Ohio offers.

Mayor Kurtz said and I shared that with Don and Vern and Maggie as we were discussing some of the capital, and that little extension of Heritage Way is another one of those areas that would affect this company as well as those right in that immediate area.

Chairman Vice Mayor Grendel said we still have all the plans for that right Don, the engineering plans and everything? I know we paid for that.

City Engineer Ramm said we were just talking about it where that has sat on the shelf for a while because of the Topgolf project; but we definitely want to get back into it.

Chairman Vice Mayor Grendel said that will probably be our discussion on Thursday, but it's exciting. You just have to keep that excitement going for Council and that's what we plan to do. I guess we do need a motion to adjourn, either Dale or Kenn.

Moved by Synek, seconded by Veverka, to adjourn the Finance Committee meeting of December 7, 2020. Committee Polled: 3 yes/0 no; motion carried.

The Finance Committee meeting of December 7, 2020 was then adjourned at 4:55 p.m.