

**CITY OF INDEPENDENCE
COUNCIL WORKSHOP MINUTES
DECEMBER 9, 2021 AT 3:00 P.M.
COUNCIL CAUCUS ROOM & VIA ZOOM**

Vice Mayor Dave Grendel called the Council Workshop to order at 3:03 p.m. Present were Council Members Kathleen Kapusta, Tom Narduzzi, Jim Trakas, Dale Veverka and Chris Walchanowicz and Councilperson-Elect John DiGeronimo. Councilperson-Elect Togliatti arrived on Zoom at 3:05 p.m. Councilperson Synek was not in attendance. Also in attendance were Mayor Gregory P. Kurtz, Finance Director Vern Blaze, Economic Development Director Jessica Hyser, Building Official Michael Gero, City Engineer Don Ramm, Clerk of Court Angie Zidanic, Procurement Coordinator Dennis Zdolshek, and Finance Assistant Maggie Osysko.

Vice Mayor Grendel said welcome everyone to the Thursday, December 9th Council Workshop. This is a continuation of the budget review from Tuesday. We made great progress on Tuesday, and we got a couple bonus areas taken care of, Council and Finance office. So, we are ready, it looks like 7 more areas to cover today before we are done.

I was going to ask you Vern, when we do the Five-Year, is it going to be a similar type of setup that we will review with the Department Heads because this worked so well. The Department Heads get their input.

Finance Director Blaze said whatever Council and the Mayor's pleasure is. The Finance Department just facilitates.

Vice Mayor Grendel said I would suggest, if Council agrees with me, to have that kind of setup too. Definitely, this way we can, again with the work of our Directors and everything, it gives us a greater appreciation too.

Without further ado we are going to pick up where we left off, and the first item I guess is IT.

Finance Director Blaze said correct, Page 14 on that little document that we had passed out on Tuesday. We don't have IT represented here, but it's not too complicated to present. It was pretty much a 2 person department, both people were on staff when it was most recently staffed at full capacity. It was Kyle Collins, and I wasn't around. Then in 2020 it was mostly wages, and then this year the model was flipped, and the City through Council legislation retained Jim Gibbs to basically outsource a running of the IT Department to Jim's firm. So instead of having most of their budget budgeted out of wages, it is now under that Professional Miscellaneous line as a 1099 contract firm. We pay Jim's firm, and Jim pays himself and Dawn out of the \$105,000 that is budgeted this year. So, other than that, their big line is the Computer Software Maintenance. If you are in business or you know from your own personal software contracts, annual maintenance fees are how they get in the software costs one thing up front; and then you always need to pay the maintenance fees and agreements to get the updated software and all the

software support. We have many, many computer software programs spread throughout all the departments. So, there is a lot of money, and that's why that \$200,000 is there. Other than that, actually the proposed budget that Jim looked over and put his eyes to it and said that we can do it for a lot less this year.

Vice Mayor Grendel said I noticed Vern \$48,000 for medical insurance.

Finance Director Blaze said that's for this year. When we had two full-timers that both were on the family plan, we were budgeting about \$24,000 a year. Now it's proposed to go down to \$12,000 because Matt Kurkul is the only employee that is budgeted partly out of this department, and he is on the City's medical plan; but he is a single individual, so he has the single plan.

Vice Mayor Grendel said I see.

Councilperson Walchanowicz asked he's the \$35,000 in wages?

Finance Director Blaze said yes. Is he all here?

Finance Assistant Osysko said yes.

Vice Mayor Grendel asked how has that worked out Mayor with having Jim and his company?

Mayor Kurtz said Dawn and Matt, any department that has used them, they are energized and prompt when responding to their needs. They are attentive to every department, and the two of them work in tandem to find out the issue. They articulate a solution, and then they implement that solution. If it is something that is looking into the future, then they engage Jim. So, if we are looking at protecting ourselves, Jim obviously is engaged. If we have a more complex problem, Jim is engaged; but I don't know of anybody on the Administrative side that has nothing but good things to say about their attitude, their competency.

Councilperson Walchanowicz asked she's here every day?

Finance Assistant Osysko said yes. Finance has immediate bills and things like that, and we kind of keep Jim informed of what they are. He has looked at some of them and has come up with some other ideas as far as a different company that would save us some money and things like that. So, we engage with him quite a bit.

Vice Mayor Grendel asked so we are benefitting from his experience with other cities?

Mayor Kurtz said his knowledge of our culture. You will see with the Capital, his plans for 2022 down the road when we have that discussion. You are spot on. It has been seamless, and he helps us at the 30,000 feet; and with those 2 drilling down. You saw the other day how fast they responded to our situation right here. That's a good example.

Vice Mayor Grendel said it seemed like we were the training ground for so many IT people. They got their beginnings here and then moved on to other municipalities. Now with the set up and everything.

Mayor Kurtz said if anybody on Council has any concerns, or they heard something that I am not aware of, the Administrative team, they have been very responsive.

Vice Mayor Grendel said I think it's comforting to know that Jim is overseeing things and everything too because early on, I think back when I first got on Council, he was one of our earliest IT people; and he was always responsive and very good then.

Finance Director Blaze said it wasn't like we didn't know him either where we had to feel him out and hoping we were making the right decision. We already had the two-way relationship from the past, so we kind of all knew what we were getting on both sides.

Vice Mayor Grendel replied excellent. Any questions for Vern or Maggie from our virtual audience.

Councilperson-Elect DiGeronimo asked back to the Software Maintenance line item, is there software (inaudible) in 2021? The last 5 years I know it was \$100,000, has that gone up because of any one thing in particular?

Finance Director Blaze said Dennis or Maggie could correct me, but my understanding is that the City might have been, should I delicately phrase it, underpaying on some of its software maintenance requirements; and if audited by the software vendors could have been socked with some pretty hefty back charges and stuff. So, rather than ask for forgiveness after the fact, I think we started paying more of what we owed.

Finance Assistant Osysko said Jim has a list of all the fees and things that we have. He's working on that, and then it would be like a general approval by Council.

Councilperson Trakas said every year we have that.

Finance Director Blaze said we might try to lump them all in one ordinance instead of coming back to you multiple times through the year.

Vice Mayor Grendel asked is Jim's fees in that category too?

Finance Assistant Osysko replied yes.

Vice Mayor Grendel said he came on board in the middle of the year, late summer. That's probably the reason too that it jumped up so much.

Finance Assistant Osysko said I think Ryan left at the end of June or something.

Councilperson Walchanowicz asked that \$200,000 for next year, would that be part of the software and all the stuff that needs to be for those monitors that we are putting in the big room?

Mayor Kurtz said that's going to be part of the capital.

Finance Director Blaze said this is mostly support, Microsoft and those licenses.

Several people began speaking at once.

Councilperson Trakas asked do we maintain our own servers? Do we use a server farm? Where do we have our servers?

IT Director Jim Gibbs joined the meeting, and said I can answer that. I was running a couple of minutes behind; but as far as the servers, a majority of our server structure is housed on site. We do have some cloud infrastructure that we use, and that is all rolled in with the maintenance agreements with the various software vendors like Sportsman or with Tyler coming on being in the Building Department. All of that infrastructure is housed within their data centers, and they roll that all in with their software maintenance subscriptions. There is a still a large contingency of hardware still on site that we have split between the Annex and the Police Department.

Councilperson Trakas asked then there's backup servers?

IT Director Gibbs said so there is built in redundancy in multiple stages of the game here. So, we have physical infrastructure backing itself up. We have backups of that happening on a nightly basis to other devices that are separate from both of those 2 previous locations that I just mentioned.

Then as part of my capital for 2022, we are going to be establishing a backup internet connection and backup firewall that I felt was prudent since we are now relying so much on cloud boosted software so that we can avoid any sort of outages outside of our walls and up at the ISB level.

Councilperson Trakas said you have to do that. Thanks.

Vice Mayor Grendel asked any questions for Jim?

Mayor Kurtz asked John did he answer your question?

Councilperson-Elect DiGeronimo said I think so. That's a good number, and a good number going forward.

Vice Mayor Grendel asked and Jim when did you start with the City this year? Was it in late summer or early fall?

IT Director Jim Gibbs said the contract signing date I believe was within either the last week of June or first week of July.

Vice Mayor Grendel said thank you.

Finance Director Blaze said it's 3:16 p.m., cutting into Mike Gero's time.

Vice Mayor Grendel said Jim thank you very much. I look forward to working with you and your company in the coming year.

IT Director Gibbs said thank you.

Vice Mayor Grendel said that means we move on to Building, and Michael is here.

Finance Director Blaze said on Page 15, there are some of the highlights, and I don't think you have any material changes, mostly just cost of living. You want to talk about some of the training and certification that you are asking a little bit more than in the past.

Building Official Gero said the majority of our increases is based on wages and medical insurance. There are a few of these items that are on here such as the 3% assessment and 1% assessment and the plan review and inspection fees; those items are basically pass-through items. So, those expenses are retrieved from contractors or owners on the various projects. I have increased the Training and Travel and Dues and Subscriptions since we have an additional inspector; and I am bringing the department back up to full capacity. Hopefully, we will be able to participate in some of the various training events throughout the State that are held throughout the year. Hopefully, they will be held throughout the year. They have been cancelled the last couple of years due to Covid and things like that. So, we will have some additional expense with that. Any questions?

Councilperson Trakas said you were doing some good legwork on the rental properties. We haven't talked about it in about a year or so; but you did a really good job of soliciting 2 years ago. How did you find during the pandemic the same response, and how many rental properties that we have that you are keeping track of now?

Building Official Gero said I don't have a number to actually give you off the top of my head, but the ones that are in the program, I just received one the other day from a tenant change. They submitted that.

Councilperson Trakas said when you have a chance, if you wouldn't mind letting us know, nothing urgent, but it would be good to know that.

Vice Mayor Grendel said I noticed Mike the amount spent on Plan Review and Inspection Fees the last 2 years, about a third or a half of what it was in prior years. The pandemic really took a toll on the number of those.

Building Official Gero said that's all predicated on the number of projects we have. If you go back to 2016, we were going through a couple of hotels being built, and there were some big projects in that. You can see it was \$20,000, and it jumped to \$29,000 and then back down to

\$11,000. Those are all funds that are recovered, the expenses we have to pay the Plans Examiner, then we recover those expenses from the contractors.

Vice Mayor Grendel asked the wages represent how many employees, the \$260,000?

Building Official Gero said we have me, my Office Coordinator Lori, Administrative Assistant Michelle, part-time Inspector Jack Wygonski and full-time Inspector Dan Perno.

Councilperson Trakas said your inspection policy has been extremely helpful. It sent the message to other people who have not been inspected that they could be inspected, and they don't necessarily want to be inspected. You have done a superb job on that. It's not an easy thing to do as we all know; but you and Jim Riley and your whole team should be congratulated. You have done an excellent job on that.

Building Official Gero said Jim helps us out a lot with the special circumstance types of situations. He has the ability to spend some extra time as opposed to being out there doing construction inspections interrupting his schedule and that type of thing.

Vice Mayor Grendel asked what department does Jim's wages come out of?

Building Official Gero said Engineering.

Finance Director Blaze said you think about it, if we would take the time it would probably be allocated amongst a number of departments. For simplicity sake, it comes out of Don's department.

Mayor Kurtz said he could be Service, he could be Engineering, he could be Building. There is so much overlap in those 3 departments in terms of one specific need, a resident. There's always that overlap.

Vice Mayor Grendel said I call him an Ombudsman.

Mayor Kurtz said he absolutely is.

Vice Mayor Grendel said hopefully Mike there will be more expenses next year with these 2 projects that got approved at the Planning Commission and hopefully a number of other companies will either be expanding or you will have the big project there, well 2 projects on Rockside Woods North.

Building Official Gero said we are anticipating those. We are staying steady as far as commercial construction. There are quite a few tenant build outs that are being done. We will have a large tenant build out probably when CBIZ vacates their space there, so we will have that also.

Vice Mayor Grendel said Pulte is just about built out. That will probably be going down as far as residential.

Building Official Gero said residential has started to taper off since Pulte hasn't been submitting anything else. Everything has been approved and processed, but with this pandemic there's been a whole lot of people who have looked at their houses and started to put additions on or remodel or that type of thing.

Mayor Kurtz said going back to earlier about inspections, we have been very fortunate. We have instituted a new strategy of communicating verbally with everybody. Every time we get a complaint, if Council calls in or somebody calls in with a complaint, more residential than commercial, we send somebody out; whether it be one of our Inspectors or Riley or someone to verbally communicate face-to-face with the party rather than sending a letter out. Wouldn't you say that's been productive?

Building Official Gero said yes. It has helped a great deal, and then when we get no response, we send a letter as a step after that. It is working well for the situations, and a lot of those situations are time-consuming situations such as the Grunt property that we had and a couple of the other properties that we had, the Nestor property. A couple of those other properties that we have had where there's been a lot of time spent on it.

Mayor Kurtz said when we do the legislation, it's amazing how it makes us much more effective just knowing that we have our sword on our shield rather than hitting somewhere because the ultimate authority you grant us, we rarely have to exercise it. I'm talking about the Todt farm, going to some of these other houses, and you will see that once that they know it's very legitimate, then they respond. Grunt was the only one I believe that we had to date that we have actually had to go on.

Vice Mayor Grendel said it looks like they were working on the Todt farm.

Councilperson Trakas said so Grunt moved to Hinckley Township. I got a call from a Hinckley Township Trustee. He said I saw your name on some legislation about that situation. I guess he has a bunch of junk in his yard in Hinckley Township. So, townships are different. They can get away with that. He's a very smart guy.

Mayor Kurtz said if you don't mind, I will interject some of these things, the interactiveness between Council and the Administration and how we have changed policy to address some of your issues that you have brought to us as well as making sure that everyone knows that this is the policy moving forward. There's direct communication, and we found that it has become a very effective tool.

Vice Mayor Grendel said I know that Jim has diffused a couple of situations too, and they would not been effective just using letters or phone calls and that. That's personal touch, he has that experience to work with people and everything.

Mayor Kurtz said then he draws me in and makes me go out with him.

Vice Mayor Grendel said the main thing is you want to keep residents civil with each other so it doesn't escalate to something more intense. Again, any virtual questions here for Mike, Tom or Kathleen?

Councilperson Narduzzi said no I am good Dave.

Vice Mayor Grendel said thank you Mike.

Finance Director Blaze said Mr. Ramm. You should be easy, whatever I said last year applies this year, you're asking for the same amount.

Vice Mayor Grendel said well welcome Don, the floor is all yours for your presentation.

City Engineer Ramm said Finance Director Blaze mentioned ours should be pretty simple. I want to emphasize how much money we saved everybody last year.

Vice Mayor Grendel said I noticed that you are way below budget.

City Engineer Ramm said due to our great efficiency and cost-effectiveness.

Several people began speaking at once again.

City Engineer Ramm said last year we came in well under budget for what was projected, and there were good reasons for that. We had loaded up the Operating Budget for some new people that ultimately it took us a while to get some interviews. We did bring on one Engineering Tech. We had planned for 2, so we did get one out of the 2. He didn't come on board until September. So, even the majority of his salary wasn't needed, and another thing we didn't anticipate was we had lost Coral early in March; so we only had her salary for 3 months and then freed that money up. Between the people we didn't hire, we lost, and even the people we hired late in the season, it all kind of added up to why we came in so far under.

Vice Mayor Grendel said the budget stayed the same, so you are projecting new hires this year.

City Engineer Ramm said yes. As a matter of fact, I had one guy interview, and we might bring him on early out of the gate in January if we can facilitate it.

Vice Mayor Grendel asked an engineer?

City Engineer Ramm said another Engineering Tech, and then advertise some positions. We are going to lose Janine this coming year. She is going to be retiring. That would be just a replacement of a Coordinator position for her salary.

Vice Mayor Grendel said Janine has been with us for how many years.

City Engineer Ramm said as long as I have been here for 13 years, and I think she was with the City long before I showed up.

Vice Mayor Grendel said this \$355,000 projection for 2021, how many employees is that taking into consideration?

City Engineer Ramm said well we have myself, we have Civil Engineer Clark Merdes. Joe Potoma is an Engineering Technician, and then we have Milt.

Finance Director Blaze said he might be in the part-time.

City Engineer Ramm said he's definitely part-time. Jacob Dean is the new Engineering Tech that was hired in September, so he's on here.

Vice Mayor Grendel asked how old is he?

City Engineer Ramm said he's 86.

Vice Mayor Grendel said not Milt.

City Engineer Ramm said he's 22, right out of college.

Councilperson Kapusta said Don you keep referring to Engineering Tech. Could you tell me like the qualifications or the educational level of those individuals in general.

City Engineer Ramm said so the job description is kind of somewhat open because in our field; engineers right out of college with a Bachelor of Science degree in Civil Engineering qualify as an Engineering Tech, as well as a seasoned experienced inspector type of individual who has a lot of good on-the-job training but might be light in formal degrees. So, it runs the gambit. We have a wide range, and that position the salary range can accommodate. We are trying to do both. We hired a graduate out of college, and the new guy that we want to bring on or somebody like him early in January, he would be more of a seasoned inspector type individual.

Councilperson Kapusta said thank you.

Vice Mayor Grendel asked when we award contracts to inspection firms, engineering firms and that, does that come out of General Government for professional fees?

Finance Director Blaze said a lot of those get charged to the 410 and the Capital, and the 420. This is just basic Engineering Department costs, but a lot of those other contracts that Council approved are approved out of various infrastructure funds.

Vice Mayor Grendel said I see. That comes as part of the Five-Year Plan, it comes out of those.

Finance Director Blaze replied correct.

City Engineer Ramm said Councilperson Kapusta, so the Civil Engineer position is somebody who generally has a professional engineering degree which you have to be able to obtain after the minimum of four years of experience with your EIT type certificate. So, it is somebody who is more experienced, and is a licensed professional in most instances for the Civil Engineer position. Myself and Clark fall into that. Clark is a Civil Engineer.

Vice Mayor Grendel said the inspection fees, the budget has doubled for that. What does that represent?

City Engineer Ramm said it was staying the same for the prior year, \$22,500, although projected for 2021 is \$10,000. I was talking to Becky about that just before I came over, and that's kind of a unique one in that when we hire consultants, be it surveyors or engineering firms to do some small quick little task type work; and it's not a reimbursable type where we would be outlaying some money but then getting reimbursed from say a utility company or a contractor. This is the non-reimbursable component of those things that would be on the City's interest. So, for instance we do a small little survey for Tom Walchanowicz for the bocce ball court; so that wouldn't be reimbursable by anybody because it was a City endeavor. That could be a couple thousand dollars for a survey. It could be a small little study or something. So, not a lot of money, but something that's non-reimbursable.

Vice Mayor Grendel said I noticed the budget is like \$1,200,000, and this year we will probably be under \$600,000. So it all depends I guess on your hirings, whether we get closer. I know that you had suggested, I know that last year it was talked about restructuring between Service and Engineering and that. We said we wanted to take a step back.

Mayor Kurtz said be methodical about it rather than jumping it, and I think Don is correct in giving us that flexibility for this year. It would be appropriate.

City Engineer Ramm said the budget does, it was the last line on the sheet, we are looking to promote, with the Mayor's approval, we are looking to promote some guys, change titles, increase responsibilities and duties. Guys like Clark and Joe who have been here a while, and we would like to make some promotions, particularly as we are bringing new people into the department and have to delegate some authority and oversight and supervision of those duties to my guys.

Vice Mayor Grendel said that goes with the Mayor's philosophy.

City Engineer Ramm said that's the concept there.

Vice Mayor Grendel asked any questions from Council?

Councilperson-Elect DiGeronimo said I just have a question on the personnel Don. Between you, Clark and Joe as Civil Engineers, is there any particular or different disciplines that you guys are looking for in the next engineer. Does a Civil Engineer do the same kinds of things or something separate like a Transportation Engineer or Environmental Engineer?

City Engineer Ramm said Civil is kind of a broad title, but definitely in that Civil category versus mechanical, electrical. Because we had such a wide broad range of a lot of those different flavors of those, we don't get too specialized because we like to use the consultants for that because that's what their expertise is, and we might only have a small little portion of work for them all year in that expertise level. So, we try to have guys that have a wide range of general, the basic things like utilities, the things that we deal with day in and day out versus the specialized stuff.

Vice Mayor Grendel said Don we have been doing a pretty good job with north and the different road projects. Of course a couple of years ago we had like 4 of them going on at the same time. We still have this coming year, we have Brookside by Dale's house there, and Kleber and Longano. I think the bigger one will be Dalebrook. That was 21 years ago, and now we are back. I think don't we shoot for like 30 years to get out of a road.

Mayor Kurtz said the other thing we may try to do, we may have to earmark some money. With all the stimulus money that's coming down the pike, I think projects that are shovel ready, projects that are in the queue, whether they be state funded or they are going to be locally funded. One of the things we are going to try to prepare for in 2022 is pull off the shelf all of these projects and see where we are at. If we need to come to Council and get some approval for different engineering that will help us so that we have projects in the queue or ready to go; so that if there's money available, we can easily apply that and get something built that we would have had to wait 3, 4 or 5 years for. It is just a strategy at this point, but in my conversations with other mayors and what is coming down in Columbus, it's full of money right now. We are going to think about, let's spend some money on engineering. Let's spend some money on some disciplines and water line replacement or road replacement or some of these such as the ramp onto I-77, some of these specialized projects. If we have plans for any of it, maybe put us in a different position to get approval, rather than getting approval and then planning. Sooner or later we will do those projects. So, if the money is available, use some of it.

Councilperson Veverka said well the other piece that goes along with that, some of it is out of our control as far as like the water line for Brookside. It can be designed, but it relies on the Cleveland Water Department to actually follow through and get it down; and that should happen before the road project. Both of those pieces have to fit hand in glove, and you and I have talked about that before. Hopefully, the person who lives on that street Mr. Walchanowicz.

Councilperson Walchanowicz said hey my street has gotten put off 4 times already.

Vice Mayor Grendel said I think that's in the works too.

Mayor Kurtz said utility management and utility relocation is time-consuming, expensive, but if you are not planning it now. I know projects in other communities, they are still waiting for utility relocation. They can't get the projects done. Everybody is in the same boat in terms of constriction, in terms of trying to get things facilitated. Utilities are one of the major challenges right now. So, again we might not build projects in 2022, but we may be able to build them in 2023 because of this. So, that's one of the strategies that we are putting together to spend some

money on engineering for these projects in 2022 and utility relocation. We may not build them until 2023 or beyond.

Councilperson Veverka said and the other piece of that puzzle is you have the gas company which is totally out of our ability to control. So, they are putting in this section of gas line, and fortunately they have been able to bore most of that between Eastview and Lake Charles; but there are definitely a bunch of open pits there where they have had to tear out some sidewalks but how do you know.

City Engineer Ramm said right now the stretch that they are working on Brookside from Eastview to 21, right now I am trying to lobby them to put their gas service crossover connections to the houses much deeper because when we reconstruct that road, we have cuts of 2 to 3 feet to go down and sub-grade and build back up. We would be tearing out all the gas services, brand new ones that they are going to be starting to put in here in the next weeks. We are trying to coordinate ahead of time for them to push them down, and it's costing them a little bit more money now, but it will save time and aggravation to both Dominion and us with contract delays and duplications of work on brand new stuff that's only been in there a year or two. We are trying to be prudent now with better planning and coordination.

Vice Mayor Grendel asked they will be going on Kingscote too?

City Engineer Ramm said right now they are chasing up Eastview and go to Serio and Kingscote.

Vice Mayor Grendel asked when do they expect to be done with the project?

City Engineer Ramm said they are still going to be into January. They had high hopes to get it done in November and December. They got a late start like everybody did with whatever the good reason was at the time.

Vice Mayor Grendel said they will be done by springtime then.

City Engineer Ramm said they should be.

Mayor Kurtz said it will be summer before they are totally complete.

Vice Mayor Grendel asked there will be minimal impact on all that work that we did on Brookside going to Lake Charles there.

City Engineer Ramm said but for some couple areas with some tree lawn restorations and a couple few slabs of sidewalk.

Vice Mayor Grendel asked any other questions for Don?

Councilperson-Elect DiGeronimo said one more, not a question; but I know Don was a guest speaker at the Co-op pre-school a month ago to talk about construction. He brought hard hats for the kids; so hopefully that was in the budget, so thank you.

City Engineer Ramm said actually that was during my Covid hiatus so Jim Riley actually had to stand in for me.

Mayor Kurtz asked did we pick up any interns?

Several people began speaking at once again.

Councilperson Trakas said just a quick one Don. We changed our philosophy on inspection about 5 or 6 years ago. Now that we have had a lot of projects, and we have had a lot of inspectors; and we have also spent a lot of money on it. So, these are all professional good organizations. They do a great job. Have you thought about budgeting to have anybody that would be more of an employee type person that could be qualified for training as opposed to having so many contracts out there or is that not something you want to do?

Vice Mayor Grendel said we had that before. Didn't we have that one fellow who was being overworked. I forget how many years ago that was.

Councilperson Trakas said we don't want to get back in that situation.

Mayor Kurtz said we knew the boundaries. That has been our goal to try to shrink that, but it's all predicated on the volume of work you are doing.

Councilperson Walchanowicz said Harry Zaruba was doing that.

Vice Mayor Grendel said Harry Zaruba was another fellow we had. I forgot about him. He was being spread awfully thin too before we started the practice.

Councilperson Trakas said we need to take some time to look at that because we do have a lot of contracts out there, and each one of them is \$50,000 or something.

Vice Mayor Grendel said I think Don there are specialty ones that are better at inspecting certain kind of sewer work, and you try to fit them in with their expertise.

City Engineer Ramm said we definitely try to make the best fit, people with good experience and whatever to what the project is going to be. So, but to your point Councilperson Trakas, one of the persons that we were looking at hiring or somebody like that individual, with a lot of good experience in inspection work, certifications so that we could do a lot more in-house with that person and/or that same person could manage other firms who are doing inspections to keep better control over that.

Councilperson Trakas said it's all been good. There have been zero complaints which has been terrific. We also spent a lot of money.

Councilperson Veverka said but the other side of that though is if you have a full-time employee and have the benefits added, if you don't have the work, that is nothing the biggest plus as if you have another company. We had 3 companies that we met with and approved, and you have added one other company.

City Engineer Ramm said there were quite a few.

Councilperson Veverka said we had some discussion about getting back and to getting information on an additional inspector that we had just so we had a handle and knew what the strengths of those particular companies were. That was great when you did that.

Mayor Kurtz said sometimes we don't know how qualified they are. It's a trial. Once you get them in the field with the first job, you will know. If he doesn't come back with the recommendation for another job, he didn't cut it. If he comes back more than once, then you know we are getting the best value out of it. A lot of these companies are starting up now because they are branching out in different areas; so if we could test them, and find out if they are really good. Don knows who is responsive and who is protecting us, and we are getting value added. It's a dynamic that we are continually trying out. Council will approve, we will test, and if it's good we will be back. If not, we will move in another direction. They have to be competitive too.

City Engineer Ramm said a lot of it is right down to the personnel who are actually on the job. You can well-qualified consulting firms, and depending on the individuals in the field, it can make or break and really be a difference. Even though companies overall are well-qualified.

Mayor Kurtz said they could sit there and convince all of us that they are good, but it's the person in the field that is the one we rely on to provide the right data, the right information, make sure they are doing it right and to get a quality project out of it. It's been memorialized, so that when we have an issue, we can go back and see exactly what we did and where we did it.

Vice Mayor Grendel said very good. Any other questions for Don? Kathleen or Tom, any questions?

Councilperson Narduzzi replied no.

Vice Mayor Grendel said thank you Don.

Several people began speaking at once again.

Vice Mayor Grendel said we will move on to Economic Development, and Jessica is here. I noticed that this has been a growing department and everything with a lot more responsibilities.

That's why we have you here Jessica to give us rundown on how your department is progressing because it has grown.

Economic Development Director Hyser said it has grown. So, last year we budgeted for 2 individuals in the Economic Development Department, and we ended up this year with 3 individuals. The 3 individuals are myself, we have an Economic Development Specialist and an Economic Development Coordinator. The idea here is to bring some different skillsets into the mix, and I think you guys have seen a demonstration of those skills. So, Anne Lynch is the Economic Development Specialist, and she brings a little bit of a planning background, which if you attended the Public Lands & Buildings meeting you saw a demonstration of her skillset.

We also brought on Ryan Wancata as our Economic Development Coordinator. He focuses on business outreach which given the current state of the pandemic and the unknown certainties of when it might end, he has given us the opportunity to make sure that we are out visiting all of our businesses and giving that personal touch. We are really trying to focus on enhancing the customer experience. When you locate your business here in Independence, or you are building a project, you have a really good experience as well as carrying that experience on after they relocate here.

Vice Mayor Grendel said what is exciting is they are young and energetic. Now, will Anne pretty much will she be going to take over for Jeff Markley's position?

Mayor Kurtz said that's one of the strategies we talked about because she is right here. She has a pulse. She is aligned with our economic development strategy. We are watching to see how she develops, but so far she has done a really nice job as you identified with the cemetery presentation.

Vice Mayor Grendel said and at the last Planning Commission too.

Economic Development Director Hyser said she has a degree in planning so she completely has the skillset to do that work.

Mayor Kurtz said so we are stretching, and it could be a possibility.

Vice Mayor Grendel asked and she was previously with Geauga County?

Economic Development Director Hyser said the Geauga Park District, correct.

Vice Mayor Grendel said their attitudes have been great, it has been noticed too.

Economic Development Director Hyser replied absolutely. So, that's why you see the increase in the wages. Obviously, the corollary to that is medical and OPERS contributions.

The other big jump in our budget for 2022 is training and travel. With having 3 staff members and trying to continue to increase that skillset, we have dedicated some additional resources to training and travel.

Several people began speaking at once again.

Economic Development Director Hyser said there's a lot of stuff that's in the Promotion budget. So, in there we are trying to figure out whether or not we do geofencing and increasing our social media presence. A lot of marketing is built into there. There's also some money for some consultant work. Obviously, if we engage the consultants for developing marketing plans or other physical planning plans, that would come out of that budget as well.

Vice Mayor Grendel said we had those 2 companies, the branding. Was the one let go?

Economic Development Director Hyser said we did move away from akhia, and we have aligned with Guide Studio. We will have a presentation next Thursday so that you guys can be brought up to speed about that branding, and I think that what you see, you guys will be impressed with.

Vice Mayor Grendel said because even in different communities, you see some of the branding that they have, and it's impressive, especially if you are not familiar with the community.

Economic Development Director Hyser said if you are not familiar, and also even if you are familiar, it brings that extra level of professionalism. It brings that premiere community level that we have been talking about, and that is what we are trying to go for.

Councilperson Trakas said actually this budget could be bigger. It's impressive, and we have to do a lot more I think. Just out of curiosity, Ryan is going out to the extent that he can, from what you are gathering, what are people looking for?

Economic Development Director Hyser said you know it's interesting. What we have noticed is there are still a lot of people either hybrid or working completely remotely which really kind of gives me a lot of angst. We are trying to determine, and we are going to spend a lot of time in the first quarter of next year really getting a handle of the top 100 businesses and to find out, really dive down to what their specific plans are. Then we can develop a strategy from there.

I had some interesting conversations yesterday. I talked to 2 brokers and an Economic Development Consultant, and it's interesting to see their take on things. They are still seeing a lot of fluidity in the market, meaning people are still investing in office space. There's a lot of concern about what happens first quarter, and the concern is if the market tanks at some point, they would see that the resources that the companies decide to pull back on are their office space. So, given that concern, it's something that we are going to keep a very close pulse on; but the good thing is right now companies are still making an investment in their office space. That gives me a feeling that they are want to have butts in seats. The concern is how do they come back to the office? I think what we are seeing is definitely that hybrid model is what's going to continue into 2022 and beyond.

Mayor Kurtz said to complement what Jess is saying. They always talk about traffic management, and they are always talking about safety as a priority. In looking to the future, we are talking about mobility, walkability, that is a big one which I think the trails and paths should be focused on.

Economic Development Director Hyser said and sidewalk connectivity. The folks on Rockside Woods want to make sure there's connectivity from Rockside Woods over to the Rockside Corners shopping center. The folks that are on Rockside Woods South also want that same connectivity. So, how do we make the area so that their employees have the ability to leave their work space on foot versus in car. So, that's a big challenge.

Mayor Kurtz said then to complement that is amenities. They want portability, they want quick. They also want an environment that doesn't look sterile where there is landscaping, where there are amenities that when you drive through other communities that give you a home feeling, it's not all concrete. It is actually a well-thought out theme, and that's why we are talking about the branding and wayfinding as another vehicle to show them that we are of a different level. We appreciate Council's support and funding because you can't be sterile or stale anymore, you have to be out there coming up with new vehicles to do traction and retention.

Economic Development Director Hyser said and what sets us apart from other communities is one of the things that we have been considering, and that will be part of one of the questions we drill down on during the first quarter is what can we do to enhance your employees' experience? What will drive them back to the office? Is it having a Food Truck Thursday or whatever that might be to make them want to come back and have that social interaction? How can we mold and facilitate something like that?

Vice Mayor Grendel said I think putting that sidewalk out on Oaktree South was a good idea. Whenever I go down there, I always see a number of people walking in either direction.

Mayor Kurtz said Vice Mayor as we grow the Rockside Woods North, we are going to have to continue to create that dynamic, that walkability factor.

Councilperson Trakas said well think about what's there, and you really have to do it.

Economic Development Director Hyser said it's creating a special place, a special place where people want to come back to work.

Councilperson Trakas said maybe we can consider a little mini park down there or something for people.

Mayor Kurtz said they aren't called mini parks, they are called pocket parks.

Councilperson Trakas said so that's a thing.

Finance Director Blaze said there's a bench at the corner of Rockside and Brecksville Roads.

Councilperson Trakas said that's our start.

Several people began speaking at once again.

Councilperson Trakas said I think that would be kind of cool to do that, maybe have a couple of those little things.

Economic Development Director Hyser said it breaks up the monotony of Rockside. You have a lot of office buildings and asphalt, and it doesn't really create that natural environment. I think people have seen in 2021 and 2020, since the start of the pandemic to really appreciate that natural space which was what really makes the Hemlock Trail really attractive to those folks that work in the Independence Technology Center.

Vice Mayor Grendel said I noticed in 2016 when the convention was here and everything, they were working at the hotels, each of the people that volunteered, and that's the one thing that those people there want to know where they can go for a good jog or for different walkability type things. At that time we didn't have the Hemlock Trail, but they were happy to go down to the towpath and things of that nature.

Councilperson Trakas said I would be very interested to hear what you find out from those top 100.

Economic Development Director Hyser said we will pull together what we hear from them and report back because I think it would be interesting.

Vice Mayor Grendel said that is our second residential area. They are our corporate residents.

Economic Development Director Hyser said they are our bread and butter. They are really important. It allows us to do everything else that we do for our residents.

Finance Director Blaze said it's Granger, it's Old Rockside, it's Pleasant Valley, and there are some major taxpayers on all of the business districts.

Economic Development Director Hyser said the good news is that one of the consultants that I did talk to yesterday, they were calling because they have a grant with us that they just entered into last year. The baseline for their grant was \$4,000,000, and they are exceeding it. They are already at \$6,000,000. So, there are some good news stories out there.

Vice Mayor Grendel asked who was that?

Economic Development Director Hyser said it was Garland.

Vice Mayor Grendel said Roe Dental, we just approved them.

Mayor Kurtz said I was talking to a private sector engineering firm, one of the larger engineering firms in Cleveland, and they found that they found that they are 15% less productive with this hybrid model, so they are going to seriously look at bringing the people back. They lose the connectivity, the productivity, and it's taking a toll on their efficiency.

Vice Mayor Grendel said that's why I wish the information coming out of this pandemic would be more solid. It just seems like it changes day by day. The media plays it up and scares people. With this new omicron. I think only 2 or 3 people were diagnosed with it, and right away everybody is panicking.

Mayor Kurtz said I had a board meeting yesterday, and they said zero so far.

Vice Mayor Grendel said it's mild so far.

Several people began speaking at once again.

Councilperson Trakas said I would only add that I think this is a budget that I would continue to come to us because this is an ever-changing environment. You are going to pick up new ideas, and if we have extra dollars, this is where I would be putting it.

Economic Development Director Hyser said I really appreciate the confidence and will continue to work on building on the program. Again, the big message is we are really trying to enhance that customer experience.

Vice Mayor Grendel said I'm glad you cut the cord on that one company. They weren't cutting the mustard. The one we had out of Columbus.

Councilperson Trakas said I think we should have cut the cord on that.

Vice Mayor Grendel said they were so far away, and the productive thing we got out of that were the red and blue signs. When I think of them, I think of that.

Councilperson Trakas said I think they charged us \$2,500 for a news release.

Economic Development Director Hyser said next week you will see a presentation from Guide Studios about the branding, and I think that you guys will be really impressed. They focused on communities, and they really understand how communities work and understand the tools that we need and the messaging. I think that you will really be impressed with the presentation they put together and how they understand us as a community.

Vice Mayor Grendel said because we are investing quite a bit of money, and you want to see some results after all these years.

Economic Development Director Hyser replied absolutely.

Vice Mayor Grendel said we have to showcase Rockside. That's like our model area that we are trying to enhance and entice people to relocate here and everything. You have to make it look good.

Councilperson Trakas said and geofencing, it's really a value. We were talking about this the other day. I really believe in those types of tech things. I think that's what some of the companies that we are trying to attract, some of the new CEO types and CFO types are into that too.

Economic Development Director Hyser said it's balancing too what happens. If there is an event on Rockside where they are bringing in a bunch of brokers, you know Team NEO has several events here every year. That should be geofenced and capitalize on having that event here and marketing our City as that premiere community for that event.

Vice Mayor Grendel asked any questions for Jessica from our virtual audience, Kathleen or Tom?

Councilperson Narduzzi said no. Just to say I feel more and more confident with Jess every time we meet. She is on the right path. I think you have brought this Economic Development club together and really pushed the City forward. You have done an awesome job since you have been here Jess, so just keep up the good work.

Economic Development Director Hyser said thank you, I appreciate the confidence.

Councilperson Kapusta said I would just say too Jess, I know you mentioned to us, even in a previous memo about not working with ahkia anymore; so is your plan then just to have us move forward totally with the branding company then?

Economic Development Director Hyser said that is our approach right now. We had a really good meeting with them this week talking about the implementation and what we can do, what are our next steps. After seeing the presentation on Thursday, I think you guys will really be impressed and kind of align with us on that and really want to allow their expertise to help us take it to the next level.

Vice Mayor Grendel asked any other questions?

Economic Development Director Hyser asked Councilperson-Elect DiGeronimo if he was going to be on the Economic Development Committee.

Councilperson-Elect DiGeronimo replied yes.

Economic Development Director Hyser replied fantastic.

Vice Mayor Grendel said Jeremy was excellent and everything, but it seems like the information you provide us, we are more involved as a Council and more informed than we were before. I know a lot of stuff has to be done discreetly, but still we have some idea.

Economic Development Director Hyser said I'm happy to share information any time. My phone is always available, so feel free, the door is always open.

Vice Mayor Grendel said John will be the Chairman of your committee, and you have Chris and Tom.

Economic Development Director Hyser said John and I seem to sit next to one another at church on Sunday.

Several people began speaking at once again.

Vice Mayor Grendel said thank you Jessica.

Now we have Angie in the hot seat.

Vice Mayor Grendel asked what page number do we have here?

Councilperson Narduzzi said Page 25.

Finance Director Blaze said sorry for the little jump, but the booklet you have goes in order how our accounts are set up, but we didn't do the Day 2 itinerary exactly how accounts are set up in our operating system.

Vice Mayor Grendel said well Angie we will let you, I noticed that your proposed budget is for \$263,200 which is at least less. The way the Court has operated has changed because of the pandemic.

Clerk of Court Zidanic said yes, it absolutely has. So, currently the Court office is staffed by one full-time employee, and that's me. Since Cindy went to the Fire Department, she took the opportunity to replace Debbie Casentini when she retired; but I have budgeted in 2022 for a part-time employee should the Court volume warrant it. Right now I am handling everything, but I foresee maybe in 2022 things would pick up, and I would need somebody else.

Finance Director Blaze said they are speechless.

Vice Mayor Grendel said I've never seen a budget go down.

Clerk of Court Zidanic said it all balances out.

Councilperson Trakas said you had talked about Angie maybe a year or two ago about re-branding 25 & Alive, and I was just wondering what the status of that was. Obviously,

everybody has been on hold with the pandemic, but I was just curious what you were thinking about there.

Clerk of Court Zidanic said so everybody has been on hold with the pandemic, but with the whole City looking at re-branding, we are kind of waiting to really ride with them and to see what the City is going to do and then maybe jump on board with that as well. That is still in the plan.

Councilperson Trakas said we never had more overdoses, worst addiction now than we have had in the past 25 years, so you have your work cut out for you.

Clerk of Court Zidanic said well I did budget for some additional monies for 25 & Alive for those purposes. That is our prevention arm. I have always looked at that as a prevention arm of the Court. Our goal has always been to keep kids out of the Mayor's Court or the Juvenile Diversion Program; so we have worked hard with the schools to bring programs and bring awareness to the parents.

Councilperson Trakas asked do you feel that's enough, that budget part?

Clerk of Court Zidanic said nothing is ever enough. I looked at last year. So, we had asked for, I don't think we spent that. We spent a couple of thousand dollars last year because we partnered with the schools for the Angst movie, but we are seeing more of that.

Councilperson Trakas said if you went up to \$25,000, I don't think anyone would have an objection. Dream big, we have a major need here, it's citywide.

Councilperson Walchanowicz said I think it's more than just drug abuse and overdoses. I have a seventh grader, and I know stories of bullying and what is going on there. We need to expand past just drugs and alcohol. We need to somehow have major programs for this other stuff that's going on with these kids.

Clerk of Court Zidanic said when new players come in, 25 & Alive has been around since 1999; and I think there have been 3 or 4 Superintendents, a number of Middle School Principals, and High School Principals. So, each time those people change, you have to bring them on board. We had almost all the pastors in our community change at one time; so it takes some time. Back in 2005, we did a community-wide anti-bullying program where it was the primary school, middle school, high school, St. Michael, and not only was it the teachers, it was every student, it was bus drivers, it was cafeteria workers, anybody that had any contact with, given the same training. Relatively speaking, the kids had their own training, and the adults had theirs. So, we have touched, if you look at our Mission Statement which is to provide social support for all issues facing parents and young people; but I am glad you brought that up because if you feel that it's a need, that's something I will take to the planning table in January.

Councilperson Walchanowicz said I'm really good friends with Jamie Vanek, our Middle School Principal, and I was speaking with him the other day; and between him and T.J. and our High

School Principal which I don't know really well, they are so overwhelmed with contact tracing and Covid and making sure with that, a lot of the stuff like this is kind of put to the wayside because they are more concerned with the whole Covid outbreak at schools and stuff. I don't know where that is on their level of importance. At least for me, that's important because I saw kids being bullied, and I see how they are as adults and how it changed their life completely from a high school student to an adult because of how they were treated. So, if we could put a program together for that which will help these kids, I think that's huge.

Vice Mayor Grendel said look at the fellow who drove his car through the parade and everything. He had a lot of stuff on social media. If you had enough eyes on that, it could be preventative.

Councilperson Walchanowicz said I don't know if I ever mentioned it, maybe 4 or 5 weeks ago, I won't mention the student's name, but there was a seventh grade student that my daughter has gone to school with since kindergarten who has always had issues. Like one day somebody said something to him, and he lost it. He went after Jamie with scissors. He hit the teacher and was beating up students. This is a 13 year-old.

Vice Mayor Grendel said looked what happened (inaudible). The signs were there. The schools could have done something prior to that if they did see the signs.

Councilperson Trakas said look for some programs like Chris was talking about. I agree, online citizenship. One of the people who used to work here, Trisha, it was on her Facebook page yesterday, kids if they don't get a response to Instagram within a certain amount of time, it creates angst, and they get angry. Maybe some other programming to lighten up people.

Councilperson Walchanowicz said one of my daughter's friends got suspended, and it was all bullying through her phone. Nasty text messages, and luckily her suspension was nullified because they were able to go and get printouts from the provider and show the Principal hey my daughter didn't say anything, this girl was doing everything. It's just not face-to-face bullying, it's the phone and it's everything.

Clerk of Court Zidanic said so the building Principals worked together to put together a technology policy, and I believe it should be online by now; but one of the things that they were doing was providing support for the parents for apps that their children use, Tik Tok, Snapchat, Facebook, Instagram, telling them, giving them the ins and outs of how to look at those apps, know what their children are doing online. They are very proud of that document. So, take a look and see if it's up there.

Councilperson Walchanowicz said we use Life 360, and that's awesome. So, we know where she is at every moment of the day. We don't have that app where we can kind of see what is she saying or who is saying what to her.

Clerk of Court Zidanic said I'm going to take a look for that technology policy, and one of the nice things about how we work together as a community is like I said in 2005 we had that

community wide anti-bullying training. The woman that did it was social worker with the Summit County Domestic Relations Court, she developed this program on her own; and she went around to all of the schools. When she met with the City of Independence, she was shocked that we already had the entire community represented sitting at the table, the City, the schools, the churches, the students, the parents, for that first initial meeting. She said this is usually the hard part for me is pulling the community together, but you guys have already got that. So, it is the beauty of that, and we have done that program before. We do work well together. It's something that we can likely bring back in and maybe take the burden off of the schools to do it because it's been done and perhaps we can help them.

Councilperson Walchanowicz said I just think they have a lot on their plates right now with Covid. So, if you are going to put something together, and you need to come to us for more funds for that, I have no problem supporting more funds for a program like that.

Vice Mayor Grendel said and if we can do something to promote, they are an age of kids that are still at home from 18 to 21, that's where you get your drug situation. You have to be vigilant and encourage parents if they see any kind of change in behavior and that, to try to get it before it gets too bad.

I had a client in my office the other day, and she had 3 sons, and 2 of them died from fentanyl overdose. The third one she is praying and hoping that so far his friends have been okay. She said she lost the 2 sons, and her husband was an alcoholic and died.

Clerk of Court Zidanic said addiction does run in the family.

Councilperson Walchanowicz said it's such a different world. When any of us were kids, you got in trouble, you got home and got your rear end beat by your old man. Me and Johnny know, you can't hit your kid anymore. They act up, and you can't hit them. You can't discipline them like we were disciplined. Your discipline now is I will take your phone away, but something needs to wake some of these kids up.

Vice Mayor Grendel said nationwide it has gotten worse and worse, the pandemic.

Finance Director Blaze said you say that the Principals are overwhelmed with Covid, and hopefully all the adult staff in all the buildings are still very much in tune to serving their student body population just because you detect certain changes and the little tip offs. I am only with seventh through twelfth graders 3 months, August, September and October at about 2 hours a day, I have little snippets compared to what the Administrators and Instructors who are with these kids longer. I ought repeat that coaching, and it probably applies in the teaching side too, yeah your coaching skills of your particular sport are important, but that is almost secondary now compared to the time you have to spend getting dialed in to these student athletes; in my case that I am with 5 or 6 days a week for the 3 months. Even then, one of the individuals you mentioned earlier was a runner for this past fall, and those issues bleed into the sports time and the home time. It is just such a different world than just hey this is a sports team, and we are going to do sports. It's a life team, and they bring all that baggage with them to whatever event.

Councilperson Walchanowicz said now like Addison, this is a week of tryouts for 7th grade basketball, and they have already thrown 2 girls off the team because of the attitude that they give to the adult coaches. The coaches are in their 60's, and these kids have no respect for adults. You would see it as a coach, and I see it from coaching softball.

Vice Mayor Grendel said my son's team that he coaches out in Painesville at Riverside, he starts with the fifth graders. He has gone down now for 6 years, and he meets with the parents from each grade level, expectation and attitude wise. He spends actually more time non-sports related. He works with the parents too. He said not all of your kids are going to be playing and starting all the time. He said you should be encouraging your kids and the other kids instead of focusing on who is playing and everything and wins and losses. He has had a good fortune. He spends as much time, he is with these kids 11 months out of the year, in the summer and everything too. The coaches all spend a lot of time talking with the kids on the phone or texting or that to show them from a mental standpoint that they are cared for, and you should care for your teammates like your brothers and everything. It takes time.

At least when I see the basketball coach here in Independence, he seems to take that approach too. I see his Twitter and everything; he's very supportive of the kids. That's what you need to be. Wins and losses are great and everything, but developing the mindset. The parents are just as important as the kids too, but you need to have with respect. That's the trouble now, you watch TV and there's no respect in Washington, D.C. between our leaders; so how can you expect, and of course the media feeds right in there too. It's the culture that we are in. This fighting doesn't help anything as far as that goes. You build people up, you don't tear people down.

Finance Director Blaze said see Angie you propose a budget decrease, and they are talking for a half an hour.

Several people began speaking at once again.

Clerk of Court Zidanic said I would like to go back to the possibility of increasing, and the reason, if you are willing; and I don't know how that happens, or if it happens down the road. I know the website is probably going to develop for the City. I would like to develop the website for 25 & Alive, and that's not going to be cheap. I think about programs and partnering with the schools.

As Finance Director Blaze said, sometimes you have to listen to what kids are not saying and have to be attuned to that.

Councilperson Trakas said make it a functioning interactive website that users can have positive experiences. Put \$10,000 into something like that.

Councilperson Walchanowicz said our children are our future, so we need to give them every opportunity and every option available for whatever type of help they need.

Clerk of Court Zidanic said and to engage the parents.

Councilperson Trakas said and some of these educational funds. They don't know what to do. They can't spend the money that came in from the State. Hey, they don't even know what to do with them.

Finance Director Blaze said instead of knee-jerking a number now, why don't you just dial into some things you might want to take to the next level in 2022 seeing we are getting close and pushing to that \$15,000. You are kind of hearing it today. All we have to do at the next Council meeting is to bring a budget amendment, and it sounds like they are amenable to it.

Councilperson Trakas said but work on the types of things, work on programmatic content that can take care of some of these concerns as well if you don't mind and bring that to us through Community Services, or however you want to do it. We want this community to be healthy spiritually and mentally.

Councilperson Walchanowicz said I'm still on the Board, and John is on the Board, and Anthony is there. I am sure we will all support you as much as possible with that.

Clerk of Court Zidanic said thank you.

Councilperson Kapusta said I would just like to say what I didn't hear in all of this conversation, and I think it's critically important is I see Angie as being in a role that she would be the spoke at the middle of wheel because she goes between the schools and between what the city has to offer. I would like to re-emphasize too that we have 2 social workers on board. We have a social worker in the schools, and we have our City social worker that Mayor Kurtz said will be extending out even more to our youth. So, while all the programs are good and very important too, what we can't overlook is those are critical pieces to this as well. Angie can work as kind of linking all those pieces together because I have had the good fortune of being able to serve on Community Services, and I am also on Angie's advisory board; and I see that so many things are going on. My only concern always, and I have shared this with Angie in the past, she knows that. I want to make sure all the pieces parts are communicating, our SRO officers in the schools, and of course all the Administrators that we have spoken about before too because there is so much good effort going on, but if we fail, and I am not saying we are, if we fail to communicate between all the pieces parts, we are going to be missing things, and we are going to be duplicating efforts when it's not necessary.

Vice Mayor Grendel said I think you are right Kathleen. I think it's making sure our residents know that these services are available and we have people in place that are available to help. Really, tell them not to be shy about seeking help, not to be self-conscious. They should seek whatever help they can get for loved ones or their children or that.

The big thing is, you are right Kathleen, its promoting that making sure people are aware that help is available.

Clerk of Court Zidanic replied absolutely, understood Councilperson Kapusta.

Vice Mayor Grendel said that's why Kathleen, even though you are coming off Council, any advice that you can give to us from afar or from here, you keep us informed because you have always come up, and that has been your lifelong endeavor to help people. Anything we can get from you would be a plus because you have been fantastic these last 8 years.

Councilperson Kapusta said thanks Dave, I certainly would. Thank you.

Vice Mayor Grendel said more than 8 years. Tom, any questions for Angie?

Councilperson Narduzzi said no, I like the conversation. I am just listening.

Vice Mayor Grendel said very good. Any questions Dale or Jim?

Both replied no.

Vice Mayor Grendel said you keep us posted. You have ideas that you think that are fruitful and everything, don't be a stranger to Council, let us know.

Clerk of Court Zidanic said thank you, I appreciate it very much.

Vice Mayor Grendel said we have 2 left that I can see, Legal and Mayor's office. Should we save the Legal for last Mayor?

Mayor Kurtz replied yes.

Several people began speaking at once again.

Mayor Kurtz said if we don't have the resources available, there is no way we can continue to grow our capacity to communicate with our residents. You eluded to it several times during this roundtable discussion. Website, Webmaster, communication, engaging people of all ages, residents of all ages. You can't do it with our existing staff. I said the other day when we were here, you can only stretch the rubber band so much, and our team works really hard. You have given us the opportunity over the last 2 years to give you a comfort level of having people that address communication. I hope that you recognize and appreciate the feedback we have gotten from you, the things we have implemented from Council, that they wanted improved communication. So, if you feel that we have met your goals to this point and have been responsive to your concerns or your questions throughout the past 2 years, we need to continue that because we can't do it at the level we are doing it today because getting the website to where it's fully interactive. The next generation, they want to get on the website, and they want to sign up, they want to know what's going on in a moment's notice, and they want to respond. The website has been a challenge. When I came back, it was a challenge when I left; and it's a challenge when I came back. I am not casting dispersions on anyone, it's the nature of the beast.

Like we are doing with Tyler, increase communications and accountability, you can't do anything unless we have the right people and the people to help because this small staff we have

is stretched. This is a 24/7 service, and remember that just because they are not here or not. If you come here at night, you see the lights on. We don't leave them on to fool everybody when they are driving by. We actually, between the Finance Department and my office, the lights are on.

Councilperson Walchanowicz said when your truck is parked out there, I always thought you just drop it off.

Mayor Kurtz said well I walk. I don't have to be here because I have this, my phone. It's very interactive. That tool has changed the dynamic of how we communicate. Several of you have indicated throughout the past 2 years that we have to continue to raise the bar, and if we don't put money towards it; hire people to do these things, then it's going to limit our capacity and our ability to communicate. People expect it.

Vice Mayor Grendel said Mayor like you said with social media. So much misinformation has gone out on social media that either on your Friday calls have been able to counteract, but I think that does a lot of harm to a community too. It scares a lot of people needlessly too. There is some information that comes out of it, but a lot of it is false.

Mayor Kurtz said you let us know as an organization, and we try to respond to it. The Administrative team is trying to find new tools to create these protective layers of communication so that the real information gets to Council as quickly as possible so that you can at least digest what we are hearing on a real time, or close to real time basis.

The problem with some of these issues is that they are evolving continuously; and so we might give you information, but it's stale by the time somebody else has because they are standing there with their phone, if it's a Police or legal situation.

Councilperson Walchanowicz said I like that app idea that the Chief mentioned to us yesterday.

Mayor Kurtz said there are challenges with that because of a level of scrutiny. You have to be very careful with some of these things.

Councilperson Trakas said you could have a City app that does a lot of things if it's engineered properly. That takes money.

Councilperson Walchanowicz said you know how if you go on the City website, it will bounce that app when you are on it. I have clicked on that so many times, and I can't download it to my phone.

Councilperson Trakas said I couldn't go to the thing on Saturday because it said I was age-restricted. I must have done the wrong form or something.

Mayor Kurtz asked what age did you have to be?

Councilperson Trakas said I don't know, I thought 56 was okay to go to it.

Vice Mayor Grendel said I see Mayor the projection is if we are going to have wages up \$303,625 this year, and the proposal is for \$400,000; how many employees does that include that you have this year?

Finance Director Blaze said Dar, Chrissy, and I want to say HR.

Councilperson Walchanowicz asked is Alla under this?

Finance Assistant Osysko said Alla is under General Government.

Vice Mayor Grendel asked so HR is under this too?

Mayor Kurtz said just to clarify, if there was a misinterpretation or I spoke, we are interviewing and looking at HR. I think I may have misrepresented unintentionally that we are not leaving it empty.

Councilperson Trakas said thank you.

Mayor Kurtz said I tried to give a backstop theory that we are working with Department Heads on an interim basis and Finance to help bridge this until we settle on the right formula going forward. That's for clarification purposes. That was the intent. This is an interim. We are trying to figure out the best strategy going forward, and we are letting the Department Heads help discuss that issue so that they are part of the decision how we go forward because they are the ones that have interaction all the time. Obviously, a lot of the items go to Finance anyways.

Councilperson Trakas said and Mayor as you are going through that process, several of your team mentioned professional development. That's where HR could and should be doing on their behalf, finding the right professional development for each employee and maybe put together a plan for them so that everybody has the training that they can get promotions and raises and that type of thing. I think that would really be helpful.

Mayor Kurtz said it's funny because what we were discovering with some of these new Departments Heads, they obviously embrace training because we have asked to increase our training budgets; but they also through their networking, create the opportunity. Like in the Police for example, Chief Butler has introduced through his team several different programs that are going to be housed out of our City. We are opening our doors so that we get free seats for training for several of our officers. We are taking advantage of networking, using our resources. If the facility is available, if the Civic Center is available, we can have a 50 person cap; and we get free seats, and it also brings more communication, more capacity to our community as a hub for all these different vendors. Every Department Head has introduced different ideas of training to their teams. So, that's what I am trying to build off of by letting them participate in this.

Councilperson Trakas said if you look at how some of these big organizations, I just looked at the Public Safety in the State, they have that whole training website basically with online training and that type of thing. If we could someday build out our training the Independence way. You know there are ways other people want to do it in other communities, but it has to reflect your values and your philosophies on things. If you did something like that, the next person that comes on, you don't have to hire some guy at whatever amount of money to come; you have the person there to do that. I think that's really helpful to do that. I am glad we are going in that direction because I know the employees would be happy about that too.

Mayor Kurtz said again just to conclude, our people have stretched, they stretch a lot, our core people; and these special events really stretch our team. The people really appreciate what we are doing for them. The feedback is phenomenal. It's going to raise the bar, using technology so everything is right here for the younger generation, anyone who wants to participate. Like you said, you have to push one button, and it's going to solve your problem. So, we need those resources, technology and people, just like Jim Gibbs does for our IT. It's pretty seamless how he comes in, tells you what we are going to do, how we are going to do. I feel very comfortable, our firewalls are in place, and that our servers that we are using in the cloud, we are going to be advanced, and the people we have interacting are very flexible in terms of their communication skills, technical skills.

The same concept here, the front office, the Mayor's office cannot continue, the bridge that we have to build. We have to continually quit stretching and start creating backups with the understanding always that if in fact this (inaudible) we aren't going to have to deal with in terms of our revenues. If the bottom falls out, we can bring the reigns in pretty quickly.

On the other hand, if we don't let the reigns go, then we are going to miss opportunities. We all found out this year how timeliness is critical to communicating with our residents and our business community. I didn't mean to get off the reservation, but I get excited about these things.

Vice Mayor Grendel said I noticed that there's \$100,000 set aside more for wages. Do you plan on bringing another employee or two in?

Mayor Kurtz said look it, people have accrued vacation. They have different things where they are at, so we need to have people, like we found out with our inspections, face-to-face, you have to have good communication with people. There are only so many hours in the day to solve problems or create opportunities. So, my goal is to, both in the public and private sector, to have people in place to create a foundation to work off of where your top people can focus on 30,000 foot issues rather than have to be in the trenches all the time because they lose their edge in terms of their vision, in terms of their strategic planning, which we will be talking about that because we as a community going to be talking about capital. We are going to be looking at different opportunities that need to be addressed. Whether it be the Police Department, whether it be the Service garage, or an upgrade to the Civic Center, etc. That's not for today.

Vice Mayor Grendel said I'm looking, are you planning on bringing on somebody that will help Dar with her job and everything. That's what Council has the same issue with Debi.

Mayor Kurtz said we are trying to see how we can blend a few things together. I don't have a complete script or I would give it to you, but it's a strategy to see how we can bring people in backfill, and then we have some longevity and sustainable, but it's also some cross-training.

Vice Mayor Grendel said because we need, both Council and the Mayor's office, we need somebody to eventually step in because we have two fantastic employees in there right now, and just like Maggie too. You have to think ahead.

Mayor Kurtz said Maggie is going to be beyond all of us.

Vice Mayor Grendel said Vern let us know how important Maggie is to him. So, we have 3 people that we have to think about bringing somebody in before it's too late. You don't want to wait too long. The City is going to be in a world of hurt. I know there were times when we had revolving clerks. I don't remember if anybody remembers when we had a temporary working there. There's was no information coming out of Council's office.

Finance Director Blaze said I date back to the Ellie Hackett days.

Several people began speaking at once again.

Councilperson Trakas said I think she passed away like 2 years or something.

Mayor Kurtz said there is opportunity embedded in this, and again I don't have a clear plan to share.

Vice Mayor Grendel said we have to have a succession plan here.

Councilperson Trakas said we really would like to bring in somebody as soon as we can because obviously from Debi's perspective, it fortunately worked out this year in a sense, how many years were we just paying her for a vacation she couldn't take? So, I really do think it's something we have to concentrate on if we want a joint person or whoever. We need to start interviewing or posting to get this individual in, and it may not be the right person.

Vice Mayor Grendel said that's why you need to do that because if the person doesn't work out, you have to get in the next person up and everything.

Councilperson Walchanowicz said there aren't many people knocking on the door to be Clerk of Council. We may go through 1 or 2 or 3 people before we find someone who actually enjoys what Debi does.

Vice Mayor Grendel said not only Council, we have Planning Commission. We have BZA and all that.

Mayor Kurtz said Jim has some ideas to help with technology on some of those things, but to have someone like Debi or Dar or Maggie.

Vice Mayor Grendel said if you call the Mayor's office and talk to Dar, you feel energized. It's critical having the right person there, with the right personality.

Mayor Kurtz said there are people with longevity, they are just solid, but it's not sustainable the way it is. That's my whole point. It is not sustainable at the level of service we expect or have come to expect.

Vice Mayor Grendel asked any questions virtually Kathleen or Tom for the Mayor's office?

Councilperson Narduzzi said no, I understand where the Mayor wants to go. I truly back him up. You know the Mayor's office is the hub for communication. It's just like Dar and Debi, that's the first person that people talk to when they call in with a question or an emergency. So, if they are not available, or they are busy doing something else, like Debi is doing 10 things every time I call; that translates to the person who is trying to get some type of answer. I'm not getting what I want right now, and in this day and age people want stuff done. My wife's a travel agent, and it's funny, people call; and they want to book a trip, and she's on the phone with somebody else. Those people don't call back because they call somebody, but they want answers like right now. It's crazy. That's the society we live in today. So, I understand where the Mayor wants to go with helping out Dar, and I know Council has been talking about helping out Debi.

Councilperson Trakas said I think the other part about it is as we are talking through this whole thing, timing and efficiency and effectiveness of what we are doing. I see the Assistant Clerk not just doing what we are doing, being supplemental to other needs that we have around here. I think that's important, but the other thing is uploading documents, making sure that we are running smoothly. Any place you go outside of Government, you are going to have a much easier user experience. So, you are going to need people at first, but ultimately some of this technology is going to be needed. If I am a contractor, there isn't anywhere that I would go that I would get a stamp, and we have to start thinking about this stuff and be a business friendly community. How do we do that? How do we use that technology? First of all access it, and then what do our customers expect? If I am building a multi-million dollar building, I don't want to pay a \$20.00 fee for some baloney; that is nickel and dime stuff. Maybe we need to be thinking about that too. How do we become more business friendly from that respect and use technology and the people resource that we have to assist with that type of thing. It's just some thoughts.

Mayor Kurtz said I appreciate them. We are making notes because I think what you eluded to earlier using technology to be able to streamline and make it more efficient, being able to communicate. Take Human Resource plus technology, and it equals good communication.

Councilperson Trakas said when I was at the State Board of Cosmetology, we had 130,000 licensed cosmetologists. We used to make them drive to Columbus to drop off a certificate or mail a certificate. If the mail didn't get there by "x" day and "x" time, they were late; and they

got fined. They just said why don't you just have it uploaded from the internet? How hard is that? It was a novel concept, and 120,000 of them did it. Some of the old-schoolers drove it to Columbus, that's what they wanted to do; but it saved everybody time, effort and money. It saved the Board \$40,000 in one day.

Mayor Kurtz said we are going to incorporate a lot of your thoughts into this.

Councilperson Narduzzi said I told Jim, you should call the Board of Elections and explain how easy it would be to do stuff online.

Councilperson Trakas said good point.

Councilperson Walchanowicz said yeah I wasn't having fun down there today.

Councilperson Kapusta said I think it's called job security for them Tom.

Councilperson Narduzzi said yeah I am sure it is.

Councilperson Walchanowicz said I took my stuff down, and you walk into the first floor and they time-stamp it. How do I know if it's correct? If it's not, they will be in touch. You can't even go upstairs anymore.

Vice Mayor Grendel asked any other questions for Greg?

Several people began speaking at once again.

Vice Mayor Grendel said a first impression that a resident has or a perspective company.

Councilperson Walchanowicz said it's up to the Mayor totally, but if we are going to hire somebody as an Assistant or to help with Debi, maybe Debi should be part of that process.

Councilperson Trakas said I think the other thing is when you call City Hall you talk to a human being. I get into voicemail hell of 7 minutes talking to some computer that can't listen. I swear a lot on these things, and they don't understand swearing, or they don't like swearing. It's horrible. You call City Hall, and you get Monica or someone else. It's just so much better.

Councilperson Veverka said both Dar and Debi are basically the face and voice of the City. So, we would be negligent not to really push the follow through on both of these.

Councilperson Trakas said even Monica. She does a great job when I call. She is engaging, and she cares when you call.

Vice Mayor Grendel said Vern that leaves us to the last topic. We are doing pretty good time wise here. This is the Legal Department. I know Mayor you had some ideas on that to share

with Council on that. Right now Legal Service, the projection was \$423,325. In 2021, the budget was \$485,000, and we are proposing a budget of \$500,000.

Finance Director Blaze said we just don't know because you can see on that last thing on matters that require legal services in 2021 included, and the IRG issue; we don't know how long that will drag on. The Project Visibility thing should wind down. Downtown development depends on what happens. That has kind of been on a hiatus right now. The condemnation, that was at least the Grunt property. I know he has been involved with some other ones that haven't reached the stage that the Grunt one did. That Mandamus legal action, that was the suit that was filed by the resident on Chestnut, you are aware of that one. That was about a public records request a couple of years ago. That has believe it or not taken some time up. So, it adds up. Attorneys don't work for nothing.

Councilperson Trakas said when a big lawsuit gets rolling, once you start getting more discovery going and that, that's going to ramp up in costs. You have multiple lawyers working on that one for us.

Finance Director Blaze said most of that has been expensed out of the Self-Insurance Fund; but that's not only our side, it's multiple attorneys representing multiple defendants in that one.

Vice Mayor Grendel said I know the philosophy is in Engineering, Don tries to pick the company that is most suited for different projects; and law firms are the same way. You do have your, like we have Taft, and they have multiple departments with multiple areas and everything; but sometimes some of the areas are not their strong suit. You might find a different law firm that is stronger in real estate. I think the philosophy to use the same plan as they use in Engineering, if the experts line up that are best suited for us, I think that is what you were thinking of.

Mayor Kurtz said exactly. I would like Council to consider consist with Ordinance 2020-82, which was the appointment of Law Director and Taft as the primary legal services; but it also gave flexibility to hire outside of Taft. We used Mansour Gavin, they have a branch in Independence. Diane Beckett who was the Law Director in Green, Beachwood and now in Mayfield Village, on specialty items. I think that same concept, and I talked to Greg O'Brien about flexibility, and it's our prerogative. We have been with them a long time. They have been good to the community, but I think giving us some flexibility is important.

In talking with Greg, knowing we raised the fees I thought considerably the first of 2020, hourly fees.

Finance Assistant Osysko said I would have to check.

Councilperson Trakas said I thought we did that in 2019.

Mayor Kurtz said the ordinance that we are working under, 2020-4, and the extension of that. Two things, in 2020-82, they were assigned as the primary legal service provider. That was my

understanding with Greg. The fees for the Law Director were \$260 an hour, attorney fees are \$250, and paralegal is \$175, plus all reimbursables. So, Greg in my meeting with him this morning, two things, I introduced the concept to him about having some flexibility and the success we have had with Engineering. He was asking for a \$15 an hour increase for services. So, anybody we use is going to be, whatever is adopted by Council won't give one more advantage over the other in my perspective. It just gives the City flexibility. Sometimes you have to, I think the Vice Mayor said, certain people have certain specialties, and it's not to diminish anyone or the other; it just gives us flexibility. Sometimes you need something done yesterday, and sometimes you have a specific area that a firm has a reputation of being one of the premiere; and Taft has served us well and will continue to serve us well, that's not the issue. It's giving us the flexibility that should be under consideration.

Councilperson Kapusta said may I ask Mayor, I respect what you are saying; and I understand about the flexibility. Have we identified areas over the past 2 years of your term where we felt we were lacking in that flexibility?

Mayor Kurtz said well I used Mansour Gavin on a small item, probably \$15,000 to review the northwest quadrant lawsuit, and they were able to add another layer of defense. They offered to add another idea into the concept to put into our position that made me realize no one group has all the answers. I think they were collaborating at one point where they added the extra ideas or concepts into our position. So, all to protect the City. Look, I think we all agree, we want to put ourselves in a position to do what is best for the City of Independence. So, to answer your question, that was one area that I did. It was a real estate issue. Again, sometimes we will just check a little bit.

Councilperson Kapusta said I understand what you are saying, and I respect that and think it makes good sense. I just know that in my tenure both on Council and prior to that when I worked for the City, just seeing the magnitude of the services that got the expertise level of the services that we got from the Taft firm, but more specifically from Greg O'Brien. I would not want anything that we do, and I am not saying it would, but I would just like to be on record for this; would not want anything that we do to jeopardize that relationship because I think his expertise, but even combined with that, the history that he holds relative to any legal issues that we face to me has been invaluable. When we sit at a meeting, and he doesn't even have to look, he just clicks them off, it's this and this, and he remembers. That to me is worth the price. I feel very strongly about that, and I am not saying you are moving in this direction; but I know that at one point and time, and the Vice Mayor can remember this I am sure and some other Councilpersons as well. We were actually moving as a City into an alternate direction to not even use this firm, and I think that would have been to our detriment to do that. I respect involving others, but I certainly want to hope that you maintain a strong link with Greg O'Brien and his law firm because I think what they bring to us, I don't even know if you can put a dollar amount on it. So to me I sit here laughing when I think \$15 because he is worth his weight in gold as far as I am concerned.

Mayor Kurtz said let me be clear. My intention is to retain Taft.

Councilperson Kapusta said right, I understood that.

Mayor Kurtz said to retain Greg O'Brien, so let me be clear, but if we have, in this case, I would recommend Mansour Gavin, and he could be of special counsel. That may be more appropriate just to make sure it's clear.

So, I hope this gives us flexibility where we can use, or we need flexibility. We are too sophisticated, and we have too many fast moving parts to not make sure that we are protected to the best of our ability, and that we get multiple dimensions put before us rather than one single strategy so that we are giving a full range of exposure so that we can make good decisions or better decisions forward.

Vice Mayor Grendel said I think Greg we were blessed too because I remember when I first got on in 2000, this is when Fred was our Mayor. We had Steve O'Bryan, and he had been here quite a while, and then Greg was brought along. Slowly but surely, Greg was coming to some of the meetings. I don't know if it's Planning or BZA, but Steve kind of introduced him. When Steve was ready to move on to other adventures, we had Greg already in place. So, after Greg, I don't know, I know we have met Will a few times.

Councilperson Walchanowicz said he has been sitting in on my BZA Board for the last 2 months.

Mayor Kurtz said that's the other component of this. You are exactly right. We had Steve O'Bryan, and it morphed into Greg O'Brien; but it took time, especially the transition period. It wasn't seamless. Now we don't have that same, at least today, maybe next year we will; but until then, what we have gone to is an opportunity where we have a backup. It is the same sustainable concept that we are talking about with everybody else, whether it be positions here or special needs. We need a backup. We need something that can support us because we move fast.

It's just a strategy that I exposed. We were talking about Legal. We spent a lot of money on legal, and if we could consider a special counsel, Mansour Gavin as special counsel, it's something that maybe you should consider.

Vice Mayor Grendel said especially with real estate, that's so important to have the best possible legal experts that you can have, and especially nowadays with the high stakes.

Mayor Kurtz said when you see these agreements you are going to be getting today or tomorrow, and you look them over on the weekend, the time and effort that has gone into these is way beyond your initial thoughts, I can assure you.

Vice Mayor Grendel said what you are saying is just having the option to have an additional, he's not going to replace Greg.

Mayor Kurtz said he will be Law Director. This will be special counsel.

Vice Mayor Grendel said I think we all respect Greg. He is always responsive just like anyone else. You call Greg even on off hours and everything. I try not to do that very often, but if there's an important issue, he's always available and gets back to you.

Mayor Kurtz said absolutely, but if something happens to Greg.

Vice Mayor Grendel said and Steve was the same way. When I first got on, Greg was already being introduced by Steve at that point.

Councilperson Trakas said with respect to the relationship that we had with this firm since the 1960's, should we talk to Greg about, and try to see if he has someone he's going to be bringing along? Is that part of the strategy?

Mayor Kurtz said we have had people. We have had a number of people over the years that have come in, and today especially, they come in, they get embedded with you and then all of a sudden they are gone. Just like personnel, whether it be professional personnel, or they go on to another law firm. A good example of that is Steve Strang. Taft recommended this specialty group to come in and protect us. Well, he is gone; but the lawsuit is not gone. As a matter of fact, I think there were oral arguments in front of the Board of Appeals today, this morning. I haven't heard anything. But that is another example, a perfect example of what we are dealing with; how quickly people can change and move on.

Vice Mayor Grendel said in the legal field, people are getting burned. Attorneys used to work until their 70's, and I am one of the few from my class that are still working. I have one fellow that I do his taxes every year, and I don't know what law firm he was with, he was making a quarter of a million a year, and he left to become a minister now. He said he couldn't stand the pressure and that.

Councilperson Kapusta asked Dave are you trying to tell us something?

Vice Mayor Grendel said even people you deal with, your clients, you have a misunderstanding and right away they will run down to the Bar Association and file a complaint against you over a thing, a claim that you lost their will. It's months of going through hell, and it's gotten to the point now that I am ready. Everybody is like that. There is no patience. There is no respect. There is no respect anywhere really when you think about it.

Mayor Kurtz said most private sector companies have multiple law firms they deal with now. There is just not one law firm anymore.

Finance Director Blaze said Greg O'Brien and mentioning that next generation. There is legitimacy to that, but when Steve O'Bryan took over, everything is so different since then; and maybe the Law Director in 2022 doesn't have to be that encompassing person that knows everything about everything. That's the one reason we use a law firm like Taft who has grown significantly since the Steve O'Bryan days that if we have a real estate issue, Taft is like hey we have a real estate expert. Hey we got sued, and we are defendant; we have trial attorneys. Hey,

you have a labor and employment issue, we have that. They have all those specialties under the roof, and maybe the Law Director is like the facilitator of the specialties under him or her.

Mayor Kurtz said this creates some flexibility for us, consistent with the private sector, and what the world is evolving. So, Greg O'Brien is the Law Director. Taft is the primary firm. I want to make sure there is no misunderstanding.

Vice Mayor Grendel said but you want to be in the position that if there's somebody out there that can really help the City and is an expert in this area, we are going to go.

Mayor Kurtz said we have some flexibility. That's why I bring that up because he has asked for a raise, and so I thought I would leave it altogether.

Vice Mayor Grendel asked any questions Tom or Kathleen? Anything further?

Councilperson Kapusta said no more.

Councilperson Narduzzi said I'm good Dave.

Councilperson-Elect DiGeronimo said history wise, like 2017, 2018, 2019 \$200,000, is that a normal year day-to-day stuff, legislation on ordinances? Then last year plus these half dozen extra issues?

Mayor Kurtz said lawsuits.

Councilperson-Elect DiGeronimo asked every year in 2017, 2018, 2019?

Several people began speaking at once again.

Mayor Kurtz said that's not in there. We have a Self-Insurance Fund John that used to have \$1,700,000; and I'm not sure what it has anymore. It's way too little. This is where we have to put some money.

Vice Mayor Grendel said usually Greg gives us a summary at the end of the year what lawsuits are still pending, and hopefully John you will get that.

Mayor Kurtz said I will get that to you.

Vice Mayor Grendel asked any other questions? There were none.

I guess that covers everything Vern.

Finance Director Blaze said I just sent Council this afternoon an update with an email with some of the November updates, now that the November books are closed. That monthly cash flow statement that I produce, and then I added another column, 2022 estimate based on the budget

numbers that have been presented to you. Look it over, and if you have any questions, reach out. There are revenue estimates. There is some verbiage I put in the email as far as some of the thinking that went behind the estimates. I think I don't have any more of a crystal ball of what municipal income tax is going to be in 2022 than anybody else; but we have to start with a number and will just adjust accordingly as circumstances dictate for 2022. So, read it, if you have any questions or comments about the revenue, the expenses and capital since we didn't go through the capital budget and process in detail yet, I am just throwing in the figures that were listed in the 2022 column of the most recent CIP. There is over \$2,000,000 in capital, \$14,000,000 in infrastructure. We did have \$500,000 in the Capital Improvement Plan for 2022 for real estate acquisitions, but the number you will see in the document was increased based on the discussion that took place in here recently at an Executive Session about another opportunity that is available to the City. So, we threw some money in assuming that the deal would maybe come to fruition in 2022 as well.

Vice Mayor Grendel said so at the December meeting we are going to approve the appropriations for 2021.

Finance Director Blaze said 2021 a final amendment, and a temporary 2022; but the goal is, if there is no feedback, response between now and the end of the year, the temporary budget that is passed next week will pretty much be the same thing we put before you in January. It's more a formality. It's just to give John and Anthony the opportunity to have some ownership in that budget instead of being handed a budget that they had no input into.

Vice Mayor Grendel said so we can anticipate 2 pieces of legislation from Finance then. Then Greg any new additional pieces?

Mayor Kurtz said the agreements. So, you will get those hopefully tomorrow so you have all weekend to get through those.

The Clerk said we are waiting for one other agreement, and I have 3 more pieces of legislation that I just got this afternoon.

Vice Mayor Grendel asked what nature are they Debi?

The Clerk said the additional Lieutenant for Police. The additional in Fire, and changing the time with regard to the Council meeting.

Mayor Kurtz said that's what we talked about a little bit, a couple of us about like other communities are doing. By ordinance you can change the time of the Council meeting. In other words, we do a 5:30 p.m. Caucus, the same thing we do with the Planning Commission. The Council meeting following the Caucus.

Vice Mayor Grendel said so if we are done at 6:45 p.m. we can go right into the meeting. Vern, you brought up a good point when talking about the committees, and I like the fact that down the road, the committees are still important; but it would be nice to meet for Council meetings every

2 weeks, so if we have legislation, introduce it, and have time to still approve it in a couple of weeks. Maybe have shorter meetings every 2 weeks.

Finance Director Blaze said my suggestions wasn't so much have 2 Council meetings a month, it was just a workshop, like a Committee of the Whole, and if Council wanted to go down that path, the 7 committee structure works well for you, keep going at it. I think there are also benefits to the 7 you, myself and the Mayor sitting around this table more frequently.

Vice Mayor Grendel said if we have a workshop, we can still approve legislation if something comes up.

Councilperson Trakas said you can tell with some of these big ticket issues that we don't have a chance to do.

Mayor Kurtz said if there is no objection, we will put that on the agenda for the December Council meeting.

Vice Mayor Grendel said that makes sense. Thank you, Debi.

Councilperson Trakas said just out of curiosity, so a Council meeting more structured, you usually have a Caucus ahead of time, it's a little more free flowing. Why don't we start the Council meeting at 5:30 p.m.?

Mayor Kurtz said well you really are, but you are calling it a Caucus.

Councilperson Trakas said maybe just keep it that way.

Vice Mayor Grendel said you still want to have the discussion, especially with the Consent Agenda now, the meeting is almost a formality.

Councilperson Trakas said you want the public to participate.

Mayor Kurtz said they are. There are more people on Zoom than ever came to a Council meeting.

Finance Director Blaze said I told people when I served on Council, come to the Caucus before the Council, that's where you are going to hear the discussion and debate and really learn about the legislation. At the meeting you just get the reports and the vote, and you can get that the next morning online like that. The heart of everything is done in Caucus.

Mayor Kurtz said that is the genesis of that legislation. The two for the Police and Fire were based on a discussion we had a month ago. The ones that we really have to act on next Tuesday are the PSA's because the goal is, Town & Country did say they would close before the end of the year which is critical.

Councilperson Trakas said so we have to move on it.

Mayor Kurtz said if we go past next Tuesday, the President of the company called me and personally asked me a week ago. I told him you do your job, and we will do our job. The deadline I have given everybody is we are acting on December 14th, which Council would love to have the documents to review by Friday; so you have to have it to us by December 10th, your signed documents so we can have a meeting of Council, and Council knows exactly what we are agreeing. We approve it on the 14th, and it goes to the title company.

Vice Mayor Grendel said they have already gotten their Planning Commission approval, all the boards.

Mayor Kurtz said most of the things that they need that are going to be done after are the final drawings, the engineering plans; but that's not part of what we have to do here. We just have to approve the framework of the agreements.

Councilperson Trakas said I thought we did.

Mayor Kurtz said in retrospect, we are doing it right. We are making sure that both you and me, we are both protected to the best of our ability, and our customers know that once we get this done, the ball is in their court. The responsibility is theirs. They are excited, we are excited.

Vice Mayor Grendel said Debi I think we had 6:00 p.m. for the start of Caucus.

The Clerk said we are changing that to 5:30 p.m. because we have a lot more legislation that came through.

Vice Mayor Grendel said we have a presentation.

The Clerk said we have a Swearing In too.

Vice Mayor Grendel said I think 5:30 p.m. because there's a dinner afterwards.

The Clerk said you can't start the meeting until 7:00 p.m. because that legislation needs to be signed.

Several people began speaking at once again.

Finance Director Blaze said if you schedule the Caucus at 5:00 p.m., call the Council meeting for 5:30 p.m., and you can start at any time after that.

Councilperson Trakas said he has to sign it and everything.

Finance Director Blaze said regardless of the legislation, just call the Council meeting instead of 7:00 p.m. say 5:30 p.m.

Councilperson Trakas asked isn't it by statute that it's 7:00 p.m.?

The Clerk replied yes, by ordinance. It's in the Codified Ordinances.

Vice Mayor Grendel said I would hate that 7:30 p.m. or 7:45 p.m. we are just starting the Council meeting.

Mayor Kurtz said we aren't going to do that.

Vice Mayor Grendel said famous last words.

Finance Director Blaze said you can do a motion.

Vice Mayor Grendel said let's make it 5:30 p.m. then. We had 6:00 p.m. before so we will move it.

The Clerk said the revision says 5:30 p.m. on the agenda.

Mayor Kurtz said one more thing, I'm not sure how we can handle this; but we have a situation, we are going to hire those 2 new Police Officers. We are going to swear them in. They have been fully vetted. There's an outstanding issue though that we discovered. Their sick time transfer, they both have about a couple of hundred hours; so in the CBA it says no transfer. They would like to transfer, and we have a little bit of a situation. I am not sure how to handle it, so I am putting it on the table.

We hired 2 Police Officers, one in 2016 and one in 2018 and transferred their sick time.

Councilperson Trakas asked you have to do it by ordinance don't you?

Mayor Kurtz said not if it's part of the CBA.

Councilperson Trakas said the only thing that could go over the CBA is an ordinance.

Mayor Kurtz said now we would need to pass a motion, not necessarily an ordinance. It would be a motion by Council to do 2 things; clean up the one from 2016 and 2018 and allow the 2 for 2021. The challenge is this, the Police Department, the ball is in their court. If they want to object to us doing that, then they can file a grievance with the CBA. Let them file a grievance against us.

Councilperson Trakas said we are in negotiations now, can we negotiate that now?

Mayor Kurtz said yes, for the future. That would be our solution. Let's work through it with the CBA.

Councilperson Trakas asked so what's the strategy of not having it? Why do they have it in the contract to begin with?

Finance Director Blaze said evidently it was put there in 1991.

Mayor Kurtz said and I can't remember why.

Finance Director Blaze said absent that, it says State law says any public employee shall be able to transfer.

Mayor Kurtz said if it's State law, we are a Charter city.

Councilperson Walchanowicz said my thoughts are, it's such a rough world now to find good cops, there is nobody that is going into the academy that wants to be a cop; so if we are going to lose potential future officers because we can't transfer vacation or sick time, I don't want to see that happen.

Finance Director Blaze said they are willing to do laterals, but they don't want to go back to square one like a brand new employee. If they can come on fairly equal knowing that there is opportunity for growth, but they don't want to take a step back to one week vacation.

Councilperson Trakas asked so why can't their original communities pay them out?

Mayor Kurtz said they are not sick.

Several people began speaking at once again.

Mayor Kurtz said this is something they may never need.

Finance Assistant Osysko said there are some communities that pay out once you leave, whether you are retiring or not. Our ordinance is the City says you have to be retiring, and you get a percentage. There are some cities that pay out when you leave.

Councilperson Walchanowicz said perfect example is my uncle Paul who passed away in 2021. When he first had to go out on disability, he had over a year's worth of sick time where he got his regular pay for over a year until he went to disability.

Mayor Kurtz said people misconstrue this whole sick time. It is an insurance policy. It is not a defined benefit. It is meant to, and I had a lengthy discussion with, God rest his soul, Ray Miati. He was really upset with me because he said I was a long time employee all these years. I didn't use my sick time, I didn't do anything. I said Ray, but if you did need it, you had it. So, that means if they get 125 hours a year, and that means that there is 2,500 hours over 20 years of service if they don't use any of it, and we only pay out 450. That means you would have to have 1,350 banked to get that; so the chances are they are going to have an excess of that. Now if you have a situation like a couple of our people, like your uncle, where you need them, that is the

purpose of them. They are not a defined benefit like your retirement. I have argued with people about this for years. Bank them, keep them, protect yourself, and if you have a problem it will protect your family; but you are not going to get paid out dollar for dollar. We have gone from 25% to 33%; so I would not go any higher myself. We have to book that at the end of the year as liability.

Finance Director Blaze said we have a Compensated Absence Fund.

Mayor Kurtz said the auditor makes us do it; but my point is the chances of them not hitting their minimum is remote anyway. So, if the majority of Council would agree, then we could do a motion. I will confirm with Greg, that we do a motion at the Caucus, and we can at least get these 2 guys sworn in.

Councilperson Trakas asked do you want to consult with labor ahead of time so they don't grieve us on it.

Mayor Kurtz said they may grieve us. They said they may grieve us, but what are they going to grieve. It's not helping their people.

Vice Mayor Grendel said check with Greg O'Brien and everything. Debi, maybe make a note of it too, we have that motion at the beginning of Caucus.

Vice Mayor Grendel said well I guess it's time to entertain a motion to adjourn.

Moved by Veverka, seconded by Walchanowicz, to adjourn the Council Workshop of December 9, 2021. Voice Vote: 6 yes/0 no; motion carried.

There being no further business, the Council Workshop of December 9, 2021 was adjourned at 5:26 p.m.

Debra J. Beal, Clerk of Council
Minutes Unapproved at Time of Release 12/13/21
