

City Council Meeting Minutes
May 25, 2017
Special Session
6:00 p.m.

The Xenia City Council met in a Special Session on May 25, 2017, at 6:00 p.m. in the City Council Chambers, City Administration Building, with the following members present: Wesley Smith, Edgar Wallace, Sarah Mays, Marsha J. Bayless, and Michael D. Engle.

Jeanne Mills and Dale Louderback were absent.

Budget Priorities. Mr. Merriman said it is time for the 2018 Tax Budget, and staff needs Council to establish budget priorities before they start on the tax budget process, which has not been the case in the past. He turned the presentation over to Mr. Duke.

Mr. Duke said the tax budget is due to the County in July, and the City Charter stipulates that Council must submit budget priorities to the City Manager by the first of July. Therefore, staff is seeking approval of the budget priorities early in the process before the budget is well under way. He noted that Mr. Bazalak's projections for the key operating funds show they are in fairly decent stead. Therefore, the presentation will focus mainly on capital expenditures, which is where the City has the greatest need, but not necessarily the solutions or resources to address these issues.

He provided the following information on budget priorities:

Council Budget Priorities

- **Maintain a cash reserve that meets reserve requirements** (approximately \$3 million)
 - 2 months of key operating fund expenditures
 - Plan for a 27th pay period in 2021
- **Provide safety services to the greatest extent possible while maintaining the reserve**
 - Fire Division daily staffing to 14 per shift through SAFER grant
 - Police Officer staffing restored plus add a School Resource Officer (in cooperation with Xenia Community Schools)
 - Maintain dispatch staffing at 5 per shift

Mr. Merriman stressed the importance in maintaining dispatch staffing at five per shift. There is no reason to believe the call volume for both police and fire will decrease since the City has seen a significant increase with opioid use/overdoses, and the residential and commercial growth Xenia has seen within the City. Staff feels the appropriate response is to continue to expand the dispatch capabilities through the appropriate number of personnel per shift to address the increasing need.

- **Retain quality employees and attract new talent**
 - Offer competitive employment packages (They need to keep pace and stay competitive with surrounding communities; for example, police and fire employees may go to other jurisdictions to make more per year.)

- Tweak Civil Service Commission Rules and Regulations (Example: An employee may not be eligible for promotion if he/she has not been in the position for 6 months, so if no existing employees meet that criteria, they have to hire an outsider with no experience.)
- **Sustain and improve City infrastructure while ensuring its reliability and capacity to serve the public**
 - Address poor street conditions (City has \$150 million worth of streets and the estimated cost of all needed repairs is \$37.5 million); street levy may be necessary to make significant progress
 - Plan for rehab of major stormwater components
 - Continue annual programs for streets, water mains, and sewer mains (sufficient resources are available for water and sewer projects and many improvements have been made in this area)
 - Rehab water towers and standpipes
 - Expansion of City network (integration of more sites, create redundancy)
 - Landfill Compliance
 - Influent Diversion Box

Mr. Duke said the estimated cost to pave Colorado Drive is \$3 million, which totals the amount budgeted for six years of improvements (\$500,000 per year). Mr. Merriman said street repairs and improvements are his top priority from a capital improvement perspective. He understands Council members and/or community members may not support a tax measure for street improvements, but staff has done everything they can with the resources they have and while they have made progress, they are far behind and the problems continue to grow to include curbs, sidewalks, and storm sewers. The bottom line is the problems cannot be fixed without a greater investment.

Regarding stormwater components, Mr. Duke said they are barely keeping up catch basin repair and replacement let alone addressing other stormwater components. Currently, the City charges a flat fee, but they may need to consider revisiting the fee structure model to consider the square footage of properties.

Vice President Smith asked if catch basins are funded by the water fund. Mr. Duke said they are funded through the stormwater fund, which is \$2.50 per month. Mr. Merriman noted the larger retailers and the commercial/industrial businesses are only paying a few more dollars per month than the average homeowner; therefore, there is a significant imbalance in that system. Staff recognizes that people do not want to pay more fees, but the City cannot pay to fix issues it does not have the resources to cover.

Mr. Duke said he will update Council on the landfill compliance issue, but the bottom line is that the City will have some expense to fix the issues—whether that will be through some type of extraction system or the purchase of property. Regardless, the expense for this item is built into the budget model for 2018. Mr. Merriman briefly expressed his concern about a letter he recently received from the Ohio EPA Director and what they are instructing to be done. Therefore, staff will come back to Council to discuss future steps.

- **Position Xenia for Investment (Business Attraction and Retention, new housing starts, rehabilitation of older housing stock)**

- Marketing and Image Enhancement
- Streamline permitting and inspection processes
- Implement Retail Recruitment Plan (Under their contract with the City, The Retail Coach has already developed materials; additional components will be implemented.)
- Develop Industrial Recruitment Plan (Site certifications have been completed; additional components will begin soon.)
- Open X Program (The new brewery has utilized this program and others are interested.)
- Job Fairs (Previous job fairs have been very successful; they are considering a partnership with XHS to provide students with job interviewing experiences, etc.)
- Business Walks (Good feedback received; additional walks will be scheduled.)
- CRA (Community Reinvestment Area)
- CHIP (Partnership Agreement with Greene County was approved, and Xenia will be eligible for up to \$225,000 to be used to improve homes in this community.)

Regarding the permitting and inspection processes, Mr. Duke said strides have been made internally to make Xenia very business friendly including adoption of the Land Development Code. However, customers, builders, and developers have to deal with more than the City during those processes including the Greene County Building and Health Departments. The City Manager has consulted with other communities regarding other options for building regulations to help streamline the permit and inspection process. Mayor Bayless asked how the conversations were going with other communities. Mr. Merriman said there is new leadership in both Fairborn and Beavercreek, but both City Managers have expressed interest in improving the system. It is imperative that the City looks at providing the best service delivery possible because if there is a failure to timely and appropriately provide building inspection services, then people will feel it is a failure of Xenia and not Greene County. Therefore, they need to protect the best interest of the City of Xenia, the community, businesses, and homeowners even if it means looking for alternative service deliveries. He also suggested there may come a point in time where the City has to subsidize the service to enhance the City's competitive disposition. He expects to come back to Council late in the summer or early fall to address the situation.

Mr. Duke said the CRA is in place and was utilized by the new hotel, but he feels the program can be marketed at an even greater extent to be used as a tool for developers. However, many residents are not aware that the program can be utilized to help improve their residential properties, and staff needs to find a better way to get the information out to the public.

- **Turning challenges into opportunity**
 - Xenia Towne Square
 - Collier Property
 - Eavey Building
 - Carnegie Library
 - Vacancy on upper floors of downtown buildings (Hope VI Grant is part of this)
 - H&A

Councilman Wallace asked about the movement with the vacancy on the upper floors of the downtown buildings. Mr. Duke said he did not have an exact time for actual physical construction, but he will ask Mary Crockett to provide an update to Council via email. Mr. Merriman said staff crossed the last federal threshold in order to move the project forward. It has been a longer road than anticipated, but staff expects work to begin in the next four to six

weeks. However, that is contingent upon getting through the Greene County Building Department, which may be the next big hurdle they will face. He noted there may be some extra steps in order to achieve code compliance and permits.

Mayor Bayless asked if the old JCPenney building can be restored. Mr. Duke said yes, and it is under contract. Mr. Merriman said staff has a meeting with the new owner next week to discuss his plans and what the City could do to help leverage funding. Mr. Duke said the owner also owns other buildings in the downtown area and his tenants are very pleased with him because he is willing to invest money to upgrade his properties.

Mr. Duke said staff will continue to market the H&A property, but it is a difficult property because its uses are limited.

Vice President Smith said he appreciated all of Ms. Crockett's efforts with regard to the Carnegie Library, but that is County property and needs to be addressed with the County Commissioners and not the City. Mr. Merriman said he fears the County may just demo the building rather than invest in it. Councilman Wallace said the building is an important part of the historical district in downtown Xenia. Vice President Smith reiterated it is not the City's property. Councilwoman Mays asked if the County was willing to turn it over to the City. Mr. Merriman said he thinks the County would turn over the property if there was a viable plan for the property; however, he was reluctant of the City taking ownership until they are sure there is a sustainable end-user in mind. The County is not doing the property any favors by only mowing the grass and not addressing any of the other issues that are causing deterioration of the building itself.

Councilwoman Mays asked if there is an owner for the Eavey Building. Mr. Duke confirmed, and the City has made it a priority to get the property developed. Staff is working with a developer and are willing to invest staff time and efforts in any way to help the developer move forward. The owner is carefully evaluating all options because it is a significant investment.

- **Continue special event programming and support**
 - First Fridays (May event cancelled due to weather; additional events on June 2 and July 7)
 - Sonnyalb Memorial Fireworks
 - Community Festival
 - Neighborhood Night Out (events have been very successful)
 - ORRRC Marathon
 - Hometown Christmas

Mr. Duke said staff has talked with several of the above-mentioned event planners to discuss changes to the programming and determine how the City can help enhance the events. He noted the Community Festival is looking to make changes, including re-branding the event, but major changes would not occur this year. He noted there will be a beer garden at this year's event. President Engle noted it might be beneficial for the Community Festival to adjust their date to possibly partner with the Sonnyalb Memorial Fireworks to draw a bigger crowd for both events. Mr. Duke said the Community Festival Committee is open to moving the date, but doing so this year was problematic due to timing. They would probably like to partner with the Fireworks Festival because of its success, but there may be some hurdles for them to jump through to ensure all parties are comfortable with the proposed arrangement. Mr. Merriman added it is likely the dates could be moved because the Community Festival Committee recognizes there are

several competing events during their regular event dates. Councilwoman Mays noted the parade seems to go well. Mayor Bayless noted the number one complaint is that the parade is too short. President Engle agreed the parade is not as big as it once was.

Mr. Duke said the Hometown Christmas event will be moved to the Saturday after Thanksgiving, known as Small Business Saturday. Many events will be moved to Shawnee Park, including Chief Person's "Xenia Lights" show. Other changes include a performance from a local artist who was a finalist on American Idol a few years ago.

- **Build a Healthier Community**
 - REACH (Fundraising efforts are underway and there is a possibility for additional new markets tax credits for this project.)
 - Enhance access to health care
 - Improve park systems and amenities (New splash pad and playground at Xenia Station is now open; work on new Frisbee golf course at Sol Arnovitz is nearing completion; improvements at Sterling Green are underway; playground equipment replacement at Shawnee Park in 2018; etc.)
 - Partner with CSU on land grant initiatives
- **Update Strategic Plans**
 - Conduct a Citizen Survey
 - Update the Downtown Plan (Existing plan has been in place for some time and many components have been completed.)
 - Update the Information Technology Strategic Plan (Even though this plan is only 4-5 years old, technology changes so rapidly that this plan needs to be updated.)
 - Refresh the Public Safety Strategic Plan
 - Finalize a comprehensive Parking Plan
 - Develop a Fleet Management Plan

Mr. Duke said it has been almost six years since the last citizen survey was conducted, and the cost of conducting a survey has doubled. However, staff feels it is still important to do; therefore, approximately \$12,000 has been included in the 2018 budget. They could look at alternative options, but there is something to be said about having a professional agency conduct the survey. They would survey approximately 500 residents from various demographics, which is considered an accurate sample of the community. Vice President Smith said he appreciates the survey, but every business is requesting surveys nowadays. He feels people are tired of taking surveys, and they are not always accurate. He would rather see a flyer included in the water bill with a pre-paid postage mailer included. If people do not mail back the survey, then the City is not out anything. Councilman Wallace asked about contacting local colleges like Wright State or the University of Dayton to see if they could conduct the survey at a lower rate. Mr. Duke said Wright State quoted \$12,000 (which was \$4,000 twelve years ago and \$6,000 six years ago); private contractors were closer to \$15,000. If Council desires, staff can certainly choose an alternate route for the survey, but it is more difficult to manage and count the accuracy of a survey included in the water bill versus engaging a reputable company/organization. However, staff will certainly follow Council's direction on the matter. Mayor Bayless asked if it could be done electronically for residents. Mr. Duke said a survey can be done a variety of ways. Mayor Bayless asked if CSU could assist. Mr. Duke said he can reach out to them. President Engle asked staff to bring options back to Council. Mr. Duke confirmed.

Mr. Duke concluded his presentation and entertained additional questions or comments.

Councilman Wallace asked about the return of Hamvention. Mr. Merriman said he intends to talk about the Hamvention results during his updates at the Regular Session, but their initial contract is for three years. The Hamvention folks have invested a substantial amount of cash into the improvements at the Greene County Fairgrounds; therefore, they would not have undertaken such an investment if they did not want to give it a good trial period. Vice President Smith asked if attendance was as expected. Mr. Merriman said it was pretty close, but he will add additional information at the Regular Session. Councilman Wallace said he was disappointed in the lack of attendance at local restaurants. Mr. Merriman said he has a meeting next week to have face-to-face time with local business owners to gauge their results. However, several businesses have already indicated that not only did they not see an increase in business, but they were actually down in attendance substantially, which is very problematic. He was not sure there is more the City could have done to alter that outcome; it is just the nature of the event and the possibility that most visitors decided to eat and spend money at businesses closer to their hotels in neighboring communities. Councilman Wallace added the completion of the new hotel should help increase attendance to local businesses.

Several Council members thanked Mr. Duke for the excellent presentation.

At 6:52 p.m., the Council adjourned their Special Session to prepare for their Regular Session immediately following. No discussion followed. The Roll on this was the following:

Ayes: Smith, Wallace, Mays, Bayless, and Engle

Nays: None motion carried.

Michelle D. Johnson
City Clerk

Michael D. Engle
President, Xenia City Council