

RECORD OF PROCEEDINGS
Minutes of Bellbrook City Council Work Session
January 18, 2021

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic the January 18, 2021 City Council Work Session was conducted using Zoom's remote webinar platform.

PRESENT: Ernie Havens
TJ Hoke
David Van Veldhuizen
Forrest Greenwood
Elaine Middlestetter
Nick Edwards
Mayor Mike Schweller

ALSO PRESENT: City Manager Melissa Dodd

Mayor Schweller called the work session to order at 6:00 pm.

ROLL CALL

Mr. Hoke, yes; Mr. Havens, yes; Dr. Van Veldhuizen, yes; Mr. Greenwood, yes; Mrs. Middlestetter, yes; Deputy Mayor Edwards, yes.

INTRODUCTION

2:17 Mayor Schweller began by explaining that this work session was scheduled for Council to come together and decide on the goals and direction that Council and City staff should aim to work on in 2021.

20:48 The Mayor responded to questions about the purpose of the work session by clarifying that the goals being set were for Council concerning the City. The City Manager will be the point person on a lot of the items. The agenda was designed to align with the Council Committees. This will allow some oversight of individual goals and give Mrs. Dodd a go-to group of people when questions arise, or ~~decisions are~~ direction is needed. If appropriate, a timeline for individual goals can be set with the knowledge that the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic may make changes necessary.

*Note: These minutes have been prepared and organized to follow the agenda instead of a chronological record of discussions. ORC 121.22(C) A public body must keep full and accurate minutes of its meetings, but those minutes do not have to be an exact transcript of every word said. Minutes

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must be promptly prepared, filed, and made available for public inspection.

GOAL ESTABLISHMENT

1. General

8:52 Mr. Hoke asked about how items from the Downtown Improvement section or that were included in the packet gantt chart will be addressed. He also asked if there are specific capital improvement projects that need to be highlighted but might not fall under one of the Goal categories. **9:45** Mayor Schweller answered that the capital improvements are already going to be included in an upcoming meeting, but **if** we find something that has not been included, we can add it. **11:10** Mrs. Dodd answered that she created the gantt chart using the Comprehensive Plan and it is reviewed by staff and the Planning Board about every six months.

17:19 Mr. Havens stated that he felt that community engagement needed to be on the list of goals so that those items don't get forgotten. He would add the Farmers Market, the 10k Run, and participating in other community organized events. **18:10** Mayor Schweller answered that they had talked about community engagement but had left it off the list because those things are part of the ongoing expectations. **19:32** Mrs. Middlestetter opined that community engagement items will continue to be limited due to the pandemic. **20:06** Mr. Edwards added that community engagement has been an area where the City Manager has excelled and enjoys so there isn't really a need to make this a goal.

20:56 Mr. Havens apologized because he thought the goals were for the City Manager. **20:48** Mayor Schweller reiterated his opening statement that the work session was for goals for the city which does include the City Manager but also Council. **22:11** Mr. Havens still contended that community engagement should be a goal considering we will be coming out of the pandemic and there has been a year off from events. **22:51** Mrs. Middlestetter explained that goals were for items that are not already part of the expected functions. **23:30** Mr. Havens clarified that he didn't mean things that are already in place but to foster and encourage more things like them. **24:22** Mr. Edwards opined that anytime a Council member identifies a new item it should be

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brought up. If we make it a goal, then we are accountable for making things happen that we don't necessarily have control over.

He would like to have Mrs. Dodd provide an update on the progress of the goals in early March so that council keeps its focus.

- a. **6:06 Ongoing pandemic - continue to monitor coronavirus and its impact on city finances, employees and infrastructure**
- b. **Updates to Zoning Code**
- c. **Updates to Property Maintenance Code**

50:14 Mr. Havens asked about the progress on the code updates. He stated that he has not seen that the city is doing a good job with enforcing the codes. He would like to add **d. Enforcement of Zoning and Property Maintenance Codes**. He does not want to see the city letting things go as they have done for years and can give example after example. He wants it to be a goal and made a priority. **52:23** Mr. Hoke pointed to a trend in downtown of erosion. **52:50** Mrs. Middlestetter and **53:08** + **72:59** Mr. Edwards pointed out that it is important to have our codes up-to-date and correct before we can enforce them or we could again end up in court when enforcing them. Council did agree that the codes that have been put in place are good and the City needs to enforce them.

53:14 Mr. Havens stated that sidewalk maintenance codes were put into place 15 months ago and nothing has been done to uphold them. He added that he thinks every sidewalk square in downtown is in violation. **54:00** Mr. Edwards responded that this is a financial issue that affects businesses and he of which Mr. Havens has stated he wants to help. Mr. Edwards believes the city needs to be sensitive to that fact. especially this year with the impacts of the pandemic. **54:28** Mr. Havens said it is a balancing act. He does not think we really have any level of enforcement going on. The **54:46** City Manager explained that just last week letters went out to all downtown property owners that within the next few months the city will perform an inspection of the sidewalks. **55:00** Mrs. Middlestetter expressed concern for the property owners who need to make repairs since typically contractors do not like small jobs and suggested the City consider ways to help facilitate

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the repairs. 55:44 Mr. Havens stated that he could supply names of contractors who could do the repair work. It was agreed that a list should be compiled to assist in this repair work. 58:06 Mr. Greenwood added that dead or fallen trees leaning on utility lines is another problem that our Code Official has not been able to get compliance from property owners.

59:20 Mr. Havens commented that he thinks the Planning and Zoning Administrator was hired in December 2019. He thinks the review and updates to the Zoning and Property Maintenance codes should be complete well before the end of 2021 and then enforcement can become a priority. 79:11 The Mayor agreed and 60:29 Mr. Havens asked to put a date on when the code updates would be complete. 60:59 Mrs. Dodd and 61:16 Clerk Pamela Timmons explained the lengthy process involved in reviewing and updating code. Code in need of review is first reviewed by staff for glaring issues and inconsistencies. Then it goes to the appropriate board for initial review. The Board review has no set deadline and will take as much time as necessary for it to be approved. There might be a second Board that needs to then review it. After Board passage an Ordinance is written. Then it goes to the Municipal Attorney. Once he is satisfied the Ordinance goes through the Council process. A chart was created so that everyone could see where different parts of code stand at any time. 63:12 Dr. Van Veldhuizen appreciated the spreadsheet that shows the progress that is being made. 65:12 Mrs. Dodd said we can give regular updates to Council but it is not possible to put deadlines on the items. 65:33 Mrs. Middlestetter understands wanting these done but she appreciates the work of the city's small staff and the volunteers who give of their time and talents to do this critical work.

74:01 Mr. Havens said he has spoken with Mrs. Hansen the Code Official about particular code violations and she said that the city works on a complaint basis. An inspection is not done until a complaint is received. He said he didn't want to be the Council member who just sends in complaints but there are things in downtown that should have been dealt with a while ago. He supplied the example of an abandoned car parked next to the property that holds Grace and Love Cakes that hasn't been registered in two years and

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has a missing window. The vehicle blocks the view of the business sign. He was told that no complaint has been received. 76:54 Mr. Edwards explained that the city has limitations due to the size of the staff. Staff has been working very diligently on the codes in addition to their other responsibilities while also working remotely due to COVID-19. He believes steps are being taken but they are going to take time unless Council wants to consider hiring more people. It is also worth considering that if the city starts aggressively enforcing maintenance codes it could adversely affect the city's ability to attract businesses. 77:33 Mr. Hoke countered with the idea that for every voice that complains there are a thousand who don't speak up but want the work done. 51:50 Mr. Edwards answered that the city needs to put itself in the best position for moving forward. 78:07 Mrs. Middlestetter opined that there seems to be a large section of the city who does not want government telling them what to do. The 78:53 Mayor thinks we now have a good list and plan. He thanks the Boards whose work can be somewhat thankless but their work is vital.

2. Financial

a. Community Improvement Corporation – Establish and identify funding sources

80:48 Mayor Schweller pointed out that there will be a work session on this for an hour and a half on February 22 with a goal to have it set up by June. He thinks the most important consideration is the funding so that citizens do not think tax money is being used for this. 81:55 Mrs. Middlestetter added that Council needs to decide if it is necessary. 81:18 Mr. Hoke had spoken with some people at Greene County who can provide the paperwork coordination with the Greene County CIC. He does not know why they wouldn't want to pursue a CIC as it can be funded without tax dollars and will provide a return for the city. He does not want this postponed again because the city is decaying and if this trajectory is not changed there will be nothing left. Mr. Hoke added that there are light industrial and storage violations in downtown. 83:34 Mr. Havens added that ~~Council needs to take action pointing to a body shop, a landscaping business, two general contractors, and a roofer in downtown which is against Bellbrook's Zoning Code. These properties can't just go to the highest bidder.~~ "we're going to be an industrial park in

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our downtown if we don't grab the reins. We already have a body shop, landscaping business, a general contractor, another general contractor, a roofer. None of these businesses are even supposed to be in downtown. I can't just go to the ... highest bidder. We've got to get moving on this. If we had a goal of June for a fully operational, manned CIC I could see that."

b. Future levy projections

33:11 Mr. Havens reported that he has heard several times that the city does not want to ask for a levy because the schools are trying to get one passed. The school's problem with passing a levy should not affect the city's need to request one since it could take the schools five years to pass one. **33:23** Mrs. Middlestetter explained that traditionally the city and the schools have not had levies on the same ballot. **33:57** Mr. Edwards agreed that in the past the city did not want to compete with the schools for taxpayer dollars but if there is a need for a city levy, we would definitely put it on a ballot regardless of what the school does. He added that it has not been needed in the past and worries that it could weaken the chances of either levy passing. **34:51** Mayor Schweller announced that the next planned city levy would be a renewal for the General Fund in November 2022. Everything else is continuous unless Council wishes to make Police and Fire self-sufficient. He added that if the city needed a levy, they would put it on the ballot.

3. Safety

a. Tornado Sirens

37:19 Mr. Havens stated that he would like to remove tornado sirens from the list as he believes that they are not needed because we already have a very effective system in place. Many cities have gone to alert systems and does not believe sirens are worth the expense. **37:54** Mr. Edwards agrees that technology has changed but added that every year there are citizens who request the city have emergency sirens. **40:50** Mayor Schweller sees both sides and added that a couple of years ago past Council Member Darryl McGill made a presentation on a low-cost option. He thinks the Council should reevaluate the information this year and make a decision. **41:50** Dr. Van Veldhuizen and

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42:44 Mrs. Middlestetter agreed that since there is citizen interest Council should keep the item on our agenda until a determination is made. **43:34** Mr. Greenwood reported recently being in contact with Kurtis Benedict, the Emergency Management student who supplied Council with information. He is working on determining what would be necessary to adequately cover our residents and researching companies. He found a system for around \$50,000 using three sirens to cover Bellbrook. **46:02** Mr. Havens suggesting changing the goal to clarify that Council will assess the need for tornado sirens and the rest of Council agreed.

b. Fire Department needs and future – possible consolidation of Stations 1 & 2, explore fire district possibilities

91:16 The timeline for this will be decided in conjunction with the new Fire Chief after he has gotten settled in sometime in the summer or fall.

4. Service

a. Little Sugarcreek Road – borings for solution and next steps

47:51 Mr. Edwards opined that this project should be a priority for 2021. It also ties in with other goals like safety, walkability, and downtown revitalization. We don't want to get caught in a position where the road washes away and the city has no plan. **48:24** Dr. Van Veldhuizen agreed that this one stands out to him as of vital importance. The **90:11** City Manager reported that the borings are the next step, and she has a quote for them.

b. Walkability

i. Downtown crosswalks

The **90:11** City Manager has estimates for these.

ii. Sidewalk connections

15:54 Mr. Hoke asked if the Franklin Bridge sidewalk would be considered a goal or a capital budget item. **16:22** Mrs. Dodd said that would be goal in 2023 since it is a big project that requires management. There is some preliminary engineering

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taking place now, but the actual construction project won't begin for another couple of years.

5. Community Affairs

a. Downtown Improvements

i. Truck route

89:14 Mayor Schweller volunteered to talk with Ernst Construction and Tom's Mulch to give them notice that this is being considered. Mrs. Dodd has started working on the rest of it.

ii. Streetscape design and implementation

This will be an ongoing item. **90:11** Mrs. Dodd is going to do an RFP for design and implementation to get an idea of cost.

iii. Mast arms for the traffic light at Franklin and Main Streets, underground utilities

10:30 Mr. Hoke recalls that having the downtown utilities run underground was included in long range discussions and he believes that it would be a good thing for the downtown aesthetically. **15:02** The Mayor agreed and said that underground utilities would be included in 5.a.ii. Streetscape design. **12:20** The City Manager added that underground utilities are the property of DP&L and would be determined by them. **13:00** Mrs. Middlestetter added that she would someday like to have the utilities underground, it is a very expensive project and that future problems require digging them back up.

b. Reestablish the Quarterly Community Meetings

25:20 Mr. Hoke asked if an item under Community Affairs could be added that would bring together local organizations like the schools, the chamber, the township, and others. **27:50** Mrs. Middlestetter explained that this is being done by the Council members who are the liaisons to the community organizations. This brought up the **Quarterly Community meetings** that use to take place with those groups. The last one was in the fall of 2019. Then the pandemic halted any more of these. Council agreed that

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we should try to bring back these meetings. Item **5.b Reestablish the Quarterly Community Meetings** will be added for this purpose.

29:24 Dr. Van Veldhuizen commented that he sees this goal similarly to the underground utilities in that the city has little control of completing the goal. We can invite the others to a meeting, but we have no way to make them follow through. Council agreed that they can reach out to the organizations and try to schedule these meetings. **30:26** Mr. Greenwood added that Mrs. Dodd is very involved in many community organizations and does work to ensure good communications. **31:49** Mr. Havens ~~opined that he believes it should be a priority because he feels Council should be doing better~~ said, "I don't want to see that fall off or for us to think that the status quo is adequate. I think that's a really important thing and growing it is something I think is still important." "I just think that should be an ongoing priority. We should look to improve not just consider as good because I think otherwise it can fall off the plate. And it isn't something we've been doing, in my opinion, adequately enough supporting as a whole on city council. I'm not saying Melissa wasn't doing it adequately enough but, I don't believe that I believe we can do it a lot better and especially if there's council supporting of it."

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Schweller announced that there was no further business to come before the Bellbrook City Council and declared the work session adjourned at 8:20 PM.

Michael W. Schweller, Mayor

Pamela Timmons, Clerk of Council