City of Kent

Wednesday, June 1, 2022

City Council Committee Meetings

320 S. Depeyster Street, Kent, OH 44240

MINUTES

6:50 P.M. PUBLIC HEARINGS

At 06:50 PM, Mayor Jerry T. Fiala called the Public Hearing to order.

Present: Mr. Jack Amrhein, Mr. Michael DeLeone, Mr. John Kuhar, Ms. Gwen Rosenberg, Ms. Heidi Shaffer Bish, Mr. Roger Sidoti, Mr. Robin Turner, Ms. Tracy Wallach

Also Present: Mr. Jerry T. Fiala, Mayor and President of Council; Mr. Dave Ruller, City Manager; Ms. Hope Jones, Law Director; Ms. Bridget Susel, Community Development Director; Ms. Melanie Baker, Service Director; Mr. Jim Bowling, City Engineer; Ms. Joan Seidel, Health Commissioner; Ms. Rhonda Hall, Budget and Finance Director; Mr. Nick Shearer, Chief of Police; Mr. Bill Myers, Fire Chief; Ms. Amy Wilkens, Clerk of Council

Absent: Mr. Garret Ferrara (arrived at 7:00 p.m. for Committee Meetings)

Mayor Fiala opened the first public hearing and Ms. Bridget Susel said it was for the proposed map amendment to add parcel 12-049-00-00-012-000,6700 State Route 43, to the City of Kent zoning district map and designate the zoning as I-R: Industrial Research and Office District.

There were no questions from the audience and the hearing adjourned.

Mayor Fiala opened the second public hearing and Ms. Bridget Susel said it was for the proposed map amendment to change the zoning of parcel no. 17-042-00-00-001-000, 6662 state route 43, from R-1 Low Density Residential to I-R: Industrial Research and Office District.

There were no questions from the audience and the hearing adjourned.

BOARD OF CONTROL

COUNCIL COMMITTEE MEETINGS

Committee of the Whole

Mayor Fiala opened the Committee of the Whole meeting, welcoming everyone and introducing the first topic of Board and Commission Interviews.

Board, Commission & Committee Interviews

Kenny Crookston was the first applicant called to the podium to interview for the City Flag Redesign Committee. He is a resident on Vine Street. He finds the opportunity to work as part of a team to redesign the flag exciting. He is interested in flag design and has been for a while. The flag could be something the city can be proud of and represent its values and people. He thanked the Council for considering him for the committee.

Mr. Michael DeLeone asked Mr. Crookston what parts of the flag design that was previously submitted he liked. Mr. Crookston said he really didn't like it. He thought having the bridge and trees on the flag was important, but the bridge is not a focal point of Kent. He thinks simplifying the design with something that is not a fad and finding something that is clean is important.

Mr. Turner asked what elements represented the city to him.

Mr. Crookston said the river, the historical significance of the city being part of the underground railroad, and the origin of the city being two different localities merging into one. He said then figuring out a way to integrate those into the flag to represent who we are.

Next up was Mr. Zach Garster, who resides on Fairchild Ave. He has ten years of graphic design experience and is looking for ways to help his community. Part of what he does every day at his job is to communicate a story in a graphical way. He had practiced doing this and when he saw there was a need, he applied.

Mr. DeLeone asked him what he liked about the previously proposed flag. Mr. Garster said he had not seen the previous flag but would love to see it.

Ms. Valerie Landis was called up to the microphone to tell Council why she would like to be on the committee. She reviewed with Council the five fundamentals of good flag design. She would like to get the community involved and stated that getting residents' input is the most important part.

Ms. Rosenberg asked if she viewed her role as designing the flag or soliciting ideas. Ms. Landis said she had design ideas she could contribute to, but believes community involvement is critical too. She has already reached out to members of the community and received input on ways residents can contribute.

Mr. Mario Morelos is interested in being a part of the redesign process. He is an entrepreneur and is hopeful to help facilitate a process for the city. He loves the city and would love to be a part of this committee.

There were no questions for Mr. Morelos.

Mr. Jonathan Ridinger resides on Harold Ave and has lived in Kent his whole life, spending some of his spare time developing the City of Kent Wikipedia page. He is a member of the Flag Institute in the United Kingdom and a past member of the Vexilogical Society. He said what we heard earlier of the five basic flag dimensions is very important. He thinks the committee should guide the design, picking the colors, symbols and then narrowing down the designs and making adjustments. He said that would be the best way to design a flag.

Mr. Sidoti asked what he would bring to the flag discussion. Mr.Ridinger has looked at many flags across cities and organizations. He said city and county flags are an obscure thing that you don't see very often and people don't know what they are. He gave the example of the City of Cleveland flag that flies at Cleveland Guardians games, with people usually mistaking it for the flag of France. He looked at the city of Chicago's flag, which is a really good flag design, which is very recognizable and used in any marketing they do. It is very visible in Chicago and is seen everywhere in the city.

Mayor Fiala said there is a resolution on the books concerning the current flag's design and Mr. Ridinger said he was aware of that and that it would need to be reviewed.

Mr. Turner said that being from Chicago, he had no clue as to what the stars on the flag mean. He asked if the committee could do outreach to explain the flag. Mr. Ridinger went into a few different examples of things that can be incorporated, including the river, the canal, and the university.

Mayor Fiala reminded the candidates they would vote on appointments at the next council meeting in two weeks.

The next opening is for the Portage Area Regional Transit Authority (PARTA) Board.

Stacey Wilson who resides on Majors Lane introduced herself, stating the PARTA Board would satisfy her desire to volunteer her time to helping with equal access. She said having bus access for people without transportation is extremely important. The other desire is to help with the climate crisis, stating we have solar, electric cars and buses and would like to help spearhead this effort with PARTA.

Mayor Fiala asked when was the last time she had ridden the bus. Ms. Wilson said she moved here two years ago from Philadelphia, and that she used the buses and trains there. She said she also used the bus every day to get to work while living in Houston.

There were no further questions and Mayor Fiala thanked all of the applicants.

Discussion on the Proposed Community Liaison

Mayor Fiala gave a brief overview of the work that has been done over the past few months and said the discussion would continue this evening. He asked who would want to start the discussion first.

Mr. Ruller, the City Manager, said he would like to start the discussion.

Mr. Ruller outlined the idea of hiring a part-time liaison. He said we spend a lot of time philosophizing about national issues, but in the end Council wanted to focus on what could be done locally. He said the NAACP, the InterFaith Alliance and other higher level conversation committees already do this and he does not believe we need another one of those. He said we have a lot of needs and have to prioritize those needs, and has discussed with City Department Heads ideas for this position. He wanted to float the idea to the Council before he began the work on creating this position. After the past few meetings where this was being discussed, he said many people came up to him afterwards mentioning they had no idea of all the City had been working on. He said his person could be the champion and help relay the City's work to the community. Mr. Ruller read through a list of ideas he had for this person to take on, which included working with senior housing, international, black, underrepresented communities; training opportunities; civil service testing; Title VI which deals with discrimination; mentoring and recruiting minority run businesses to bid on jobs; policy review; and HR onboarding and retention. He added that hiring people right now is quite difficult, so any help that can be provided would be appreciated. He welcomed Council members' comments.

Mayor Fiala said the staff and Mr. Ruller worked very hard on coming up with ideas of what could be done. He said we are not Akron or Cleveland, but we are Kent, Ohio and could have characteristics that could be different. He said Mr. Ruller had brought up the hiring process. The previous evening, the Fire Testing took place and there were seventy-two people signed up, fourteen no shows, two minorities and four females. He said we are either not getting the information out, or people are not interested enough to apply.

Mr. Ferrara asked if this position was a result of the NAACP's request for a committee. Mr. Ruller said it's not to appease an organization but is an organic conversation to raise this issue and bring it to the table. He said we wouldn't bring it to the Council because it is a politically correct thing to do. Mr. Ferrara asked who the position would report to. Mr. Ruller said those logistics still need to be worked out. He said it would be a cross over position that would work with all departments. Mr. Ferrara asked if there would be an issue with the unions. Mr. Ruller said there is nothing that would change contract terms, but one who would try to help fill jobs. Mr. Ferrara said there should be a defined chain of command.

Mr. Kuhar said he thinks this person is supposed to promote inclusion and equity throughout the city. He asked what the job description would be. Mr. Ruller said it needs to be developed and the social networking aspects of this job would need to be defined before we take this anywhere. Mr. Kuhar said he thought this was to make more people aware of what we have to offer.

Ms. Shaffer Bish said a job description needs to be developed as well as benchmarks. Engagement can be one of the benchmarks. This can also give a voice to our residents. She likes the idea of working with international families who come to the community to get the full American experience. They can help us be a more inclusive, engaging and diverse community. Our next focus needs to be building the social infrastructure and she thinks Kent can really be a leader in this.

Ms. Rosenberg wanted to touch on a couple of items. She is aware of the Police and Fire Service needs. This person can be a point person and, as a city, this is a great way to formalize it. She sees this working out really well for the City and thinks it is worth investing in a part-time way to dip our toe into it. She said this is an appropriate time for us to do this.

Mr. Sidoti says he struggles with the liaison concept but likes the ombudsman title better. He went back to when we first had this conversation with the NAACP and that we were all a little flabbergasted at the approach. He referenced the data that was brought before council to review. He asked if this position is laser focused on our staffing and is not representative of the community. If we don't clearly define what we are trying to do, we are doing what we've always done. He questioned whether having a liaison was the route we wanted to take. He said we need to know exactly what this person is going to do. He has been working on this for his whole career. We need to be clear about what our goals are and what we are putting our money towards to get things done. He is worried this position will be a vanilla rapport building position. One clear goal has to be using the data that has been laid out to Council in a clear and defined way.

Mr. Amrhein said he was impressed with what was said and this was the time to do it.

Mr. Turner said he waited to speak until everyone had spoken. He mentioned Mr. Ferrara's comments about special interests. Mr. Turner said there are no special interests and towards Mr. Sidoti's comments, we base all of this on hope. He said this is something that fits the value system of Kent. He added that Mr. Sidoti was right and that it needs to be locked down and, to the best of our ability, we create an opportunity for the community. He is not overly concerned and believes it is very reasonable and the staff are very competent and capable at getting the job done. He said this is for making Kent a better place to live and creating a better quality of life. He will continue to encourage forward movement and, however we get to this point, it is an opportunity. He said it was lemonade and lemons and we were going to take the opportunity. We are going to succeed.

Ms. Wallach agreed with Mr. Ruller and said that now is the time to connect the dots and that now is the time to do it. This person would really help get people involved.

Mr. Kuhar said meeting our numbers really wouldn't be a win. He said having a good representation of people at all of the social and educational events would be a good outcome.

Mr. Ferrara referred to Mr. Sidoti's comments and that we need qualified people.

Ms. Shaffer Bish said she thinks liaison is one of the elements of the position. She added research is another one and being a point person to support staff. She said recently that where she works, they put in for a DEI Officer whose job was to increase the number of minority staff and to help retain them. This position doesn't need to be boxed in but maybe prioritize the skills. She said this is not unusual and that we are jumping on a movement.

Mr. Sidoti said a liaison can be a role, but just one element of what is needed. An important skill set would be to help guide us to get in more applicants in an inclusive environment. How do we get quality candidates from the diverse community we live in? He added that there could possibly be grant money to help fund this position.

Mayor Fiala said the staff was looking for a direction.

Mr. Ruller said he appreciated the comments and the next step would be to define the goals of this position.

Community Development Committee

Mr. John Kuhar opened the Community Development Committee Meeting and asked Ms. Bridget Susel to come to the podium to speak.

TREX Agreement for ACES ENTERPRISE, LLC

Ms. Sussell referenced the TREX process that was established in 2013. The Secret Cellar came in 2013 and had a TREXed in liquor license, which then transitioned to the Franklin Hotel Bar. The proposed tenet is operating as Aces Enterprise. The type of permit will be the equivalent to a D5 permit. She introduced Andrew Diebold, who is a resident of Kent. He has a business model to take over the space.He gave an overview of his experience and background.

Mr. Ferrara asked about the TREX license. Ms. Sussel said the Franklin Hotel did not negotiate to transfer the license. This is not in addition to, but in place of.

Ms. Shaffer Bish asked what the name would be and Mr. Diebold replied " The Standard". He will be leasing the space.

Ms. Wallach asked what some items would be on their menu. He replied that bruschetta, salads, perogies, sandwiches, and brisket to start off.

Ms. Shaffer Bish asked who the target audience would be. He said there definitely would be an older clientele. He also plans on having a house band on Tuesdays, an open mic on Thursdays and a live band on Fridays.

Mr. Sidoti asked about why he thought others businesses failed. Ms. Rosenberg called "point of order". Mr. Sidoti then asked why he thinks his business would succeed. Mr. Diebold said he is coming to serve the community and that there are a number of groups of people that are being missed by current establishments.

MOTION TO APPROVE THE TREX AGREEMENT FOR ACES ENTERPRISE, LLC MADE BY Ms.Heidi Shaffer Bish, SECONDED by Mr.Jack Amrhein and CARRIED by a voice vote of 9-0-0.

The Community Development Committee Meeting concluded at 8:19 pm.

Action Recommended:

1. Authorize the TREX liquor license for Aces Enterprise, LLC with the emergency clause.

Health and Public Safety Committee

The item previously slated to be discussed on this date was moved to July, 2022.

Land Use Committee

At 8:20 p.m., Mr. Ferrara called the Land Use Committee to order.

Proposed Zoning Code Map Amendments

Ms. Susel began the discussion by stating this is one agenda item, but she will need two motions for the two parcels that will be discussed. She said the proposed annexation of the property where the Oak Knolls Golf course was brought before Council last month and the paperwork is being processed and almost finalized. In anticipation of this, it was taken in front of the Planning Commission and the parcel will be brought into the I-R Standard (Industrial Research). At the same time, discussions occurred with Davey about the site of the former middle school, which is zoned R-1. It is going to be consolidated with the parcel previously discussed, so this was taken to the Planning Commission as well. She added that the Planning Commission approved both map amendments but wanted to make clear that all of the permitted and conditionally permitted uses would be approved for this area.

Ms. Shaffer Bish asked about the I-R District and said she was not familiar with another area in Kent with this designation. Ms. Susel said this because it is the only one labeled this way. Ms. Susel said the Planning Commission will be reviewing a recommendation to change the name from Industrial, Research and

Office District, with the term industrial causing concern. A new name as been proposed, not changing any of the permitted or conditionally approved uses, but changing the name to "Research, Technology and Office Space". This will be taken to the Planning Commission next week. She added the "Industrial Use" would be equivalent to medical research, but not the type of industrial industry in the "I" district.

MOTION TO APPROVE PROPOSED ZONING CODE MAP AMENDMENTS FOR PARCEL 12-049-00-00-012-000 MADE BY Mr.John Kuhar, SECONDED by Mr. Michael DeLeone and CARRIED by a voice vote of 9-0-0.

MOTION TO APPROVE PROPOSED ZONING CODE MAP AMENDMENTS FOR PARCEL 17-042-00-00-001-000 MADE BY Mr. John Kuhar, SECONDED by Ms. Heidi Shaffer Bish and CARRIED by a voice vote of 9-0-0.

There was no further business to discuss and the Land Use Committee adjourned.

Action Recommended:

1. Authorize the proposed Zoning Map updates for parcels 12-049-00-00-012-000,6700 State Route 43, and parcel 17-042-00-00-001-000, 6662 state route 43, with the emergency clause.

<u>Finance Committee</u>

Mr. DeLeone called to order the Finance Committee Meeting at 8:25 p.m. and asked for the first presenter, Mr. Jim Bowling, to come to the podium to speak.

SR 59 Alternative Transportation Improvements Agreement

Mr. Bowling said in 2020 PARTA and Franklin Twp. did a study from Horning Road to Rt. 261 to help improve the area for pedestrians and bicyclists. The study essentially reallocates the land, taking away some of the pavement and assigns it to sidewalks and tree lawns. The cost was estimated at $4.2 million and the agreement would have all three parties working together to execute the agreement with the Twp. and PARTA to start the next steps of the project. He is before Council to request approval to enter into an agreement with PARTA and Franklin Twp.

Ms. Rosenberg asked if this was the result of the bus ride Council members took with PARTA to see how people used the bus. Mr. Bowling said that it was. She said, for mass transportation and safety, this is good stuff and thanked him.

Ms. Shaffer Bish said one of her concerns is people crossing the road. Mr. Bowling said the project also includes several mid-block crossing areas with islands located in the middle and would be paired with the bus stops in the area.

There were no further questions from council members or members of the audience.

MOTION TO APPROVE SR 59 ALTERNATIVE TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENTS AGREEMENT MADE BY Mr. John Kuhar, SECONDED by Ms.Heidi Shaffer Bish and CARRIED by a voice vote of 9-0-0.

Ohio Public Works Commission (OPWC) Grant Requests

Mr. Bowling said they are before Council to recommend approval to submit two proposals to the Ohio Public Works Commission to receive funding for the waste water plant reclamation facility. This grant would be seeking $700,000 in grants and $1.5 million in low interest rate loans.

The second project is on Summit Street, resurfacing from Rt. 43 to Willow Street. It would include the sidewalks, drive aprons and curbs.

Ms. Shaffer Bish said this will improve the look and safety of the street. She added it is the gateway to the university, so it is important to be looked at.

MOTION TO APPROVE OHIO PUBLIC WORKS COMMISSION (OPWC) GRANT REQUESTS MADE BY Ms. Heidi Shaffer Bish, SECONDED by Ms. Tracy Wallach and CARRIED by a voice vote of 9-0-0.

Heritage Fest Fireworks Funding

Mayor Fiala said that Ms. Michelle Hartman was not able to attend this meeting due to a scheduling conflict. He said this year there has been a price increase for the Heritage Fest fireworks. The cost will be $16,900 for a seventeen minute display. American Fireworks guaranteed the price for this year and the next two years.

Ms. Shaffer Bish asked if they had shopped around for the fireworks. Mayor Fiala said there are not a lot of firework vendors in the area and American Fireworks is a great company to work with. The Chamber has worked with the City over the past two years when the fireworks were canceled and allowed us to carry our deposit from one year to the next.

Ms. Shaffer Bish said she noticed they were not going to have food trucks. Mayor Fiala said they did not have them last year and residents really enjoyed it. He said the Chamber is going back to its original concept of local organizations and social groups selling food at the Heritage Fest.

There were no further questions from council or members of the audience.

MOTION TO APPROVE HERITAGE FEST FIREWORKS FUNDING MADE BY Mr. Garret Ferrara, SECONDED by Mr. Jack Amrhein and CARRIED by a voice vote of 9-0-0.

Mr. Ferrara said this is a fabulous event and one that is needed, especially after coming out of the COVID pandemic. It is an event that promotes the businesses downtown and is a win-win situation.

Mr. Sidoti added that this serves everyone and everyone enjoys them. He said as a local government we are doing everyone a service by sponsoring them.

Mayor Fiala asked if it is his understanding that the motion is for only this year, even though the price would be continued for two more years. Mr. Ferrara replied it would be for all three years.

Body Armor Grant

Chief Shearer is before council to ask for approval to apply for the body armor grant through the Ohio Attorney General's Office, and is funded through the Ohio Bureau of Worker's Compensation. The grant this year is for $4,807.24 and we are required to pay a twenty-five percent match, which is $1602.41. It is replacing body armor that is expiring for some officers and providing armor for new police.

Ms. Shaffer Bish asked if they had the money in the budget. Chief Shearer said they do.

Mr. Kuhar asked what is done with the old armor. Chief Shearer said it the old armor is used for training scenarios or given to departments that don't have funding.

Ms. Wallach asked how long body armor is good for. Chief Shearer said it is good for five years.

MOTION TO AUTHORIZE THE BODY ARMOR GRANT APPLICATION MADE BY Mr. Garret Ferrara, SECONDED by Ms. Gwen Rosenberg and CARRIED by a voice vote of 9-0-0.

K9 Ballistic Vest Donation

Chief Shearer said this is a new item for the police called the Brady K9 fund. They offered to donate a ballistic vest for a police canine, with the value being $1,500. He is before council to ask for approval to accept the donation.

Ms. Rosenberg asked if it is fitted specifically for each canine. Chief Shearer said "Yes, it is."

Mr. Ferrara asked if we've had donations in the past for canine vests. Chief Shearer said we have had donations, but not from this particular organization for this particular dog. Chief Shearer said they have two dogs on the force.

MOTION TO APPROVE THE K9 BALLISTIC VEST DONATION MADE BY Mr. Garret Ferrara, SECONDED by Ms. Gwen Rosenberg and CARRIED by a voice vote of 9-0-0.

Budget Appropriation Amendment #3

Ms. Rhonda Hall presented the last topic for the evening, a budget appropriation amendment. She referred Council to the memo in their packets dated May 23, 2022 for the third appropriation amendment requesting passage.

MOTION TO APPROVE BUDGET APPROPRIATION AMENDMENT #3 MADE BY Mr. John Kuhar, SECONDED by Ms.Gwen Rosenberg and CARRIED by a voice vote of 9-0-0.

There was no further business to discuss and the committee adjourned.

Actions Recommended:

1. Authorize the proposed multi-party Transportation Improvement Agreement with the emergency clause.
2. Authorize the submission of the OPWC grant requests with the emergency clause.
3. Authorize the increase in the City's contribution to the Chamber of Commerce to cover the increased cost of fireworks, with the emergency clause.
4. Authorize the acceptance and allocation of $4,807.24 in grant funding to be used for the purchase of replacement body armor with the emergency clause.
5. Authorize the acceptance and use of the donated K-9 ballistic vest with the emergency clause.
6. Approve the 2022 budget appropriations amendment #3 with the emergency clause.

MOTION TO ENTER EXECUTIVE SESSION MADE BY Mr. Jack Amrhein, SECONDED by Mr. Michael DeLeone and CARRIED by a voice vote of 9-0-0.

MOTION TO RETURN TO THE REGULAR COUNCIL MEETING MADE BY Mr. Robin Turner, SECONDED by Mr. John Kuhar and CARRIED by a voice vote of 9-0-0.

No further action was conducted and the meeting adjourned at 8:55 p.m.

Amy Wilkens

Amy Wilkens
Clerk of Council