



City of Kent
Wednesday, April 3, 2024
City Council Committee Meetings
320 S. Depeyster Street, Kent, OH 44240

MINUTES

At 07:00 PM, Mayor Jerry T. Fiala called the City Council Committee Meetings to order.

Present: Mr. Jack Amrhein, Ms. Melissa Celko, Mr. Jeff Clapper, Mr. Michael DeLeone, Mr. Chris Hook, Ms. Gwen Rosenberg, Ms. Heidi Shaffer Bish, Mr. Roger Sidoti, Mr. Robin Turner

Also Present: Mr. Jerry T. Fiala, Mayor, and President of Council; Mr. Dave Ruller, City Manager; Mr. Eric Finkle, Assistant Law Director; Ms. Bridget Susel, Community Development Director; Mr. Jim Bowling, City Engineer; Ms. Joan Seidel, Health Commissioner; Ms. Rhonda Hall, Budget and Finance Director; Mr. Nick Shearer, Chief of Police; Ms. Julie Morris, Sustainability Coordinator; Ms. Angela Manley, Parks and Recreation Director; Ms. Dominique Bollenbacher, Community Engagement Coordinator; Ms. Amy Wilkens, Clerk of Council

Committee of the Whole

Mayor Fiala opened the Committee of the Whole meeting at 7:00 p.m.

Board and Commission Interviews

Mayor Fiala said there is one spot open on the Parks and Recreation Board to fill Neil Duke's spot and asked Clerk Wilkens to call the first candidate.

Clerk Wilkens said there were seven applicants for one open position that expires 12/31/24. She called the first candidate to the microphone.

Ms. Crystal Foster of Silver Meadows Blvd. introduced herself to Council. She expressed her interest in becoming more involved with local government, specifically mentioning her desire to join the Kent Parks and Recreation board. She highlights her lifelong residency in Kent, her educational background, and her current employment at First Energy, where she works in substation compliance. Crystal also mentions that she has been researching grant opportunities and has ideas to share, indicating her proactive approach to contributing to the community. She expresses openness to serving on other boards if there are vacancies and indicates her willingness to explore different opportunities to contribute to local governance. When asked about her vision for the parks and recreation board, Crystal praised the existing youth sports programs, but suggested enhancements like splash pads, a public pool, and improvements to the Middlebury Road boat launch. She also proposed a Kent Parks passport program and emphasized the importance of community engagement.

Crystal responded to questions about her involvement in past surveys and her business analyst experience, highlighting her analytical skills and process-driven approach. She also discussed her deep roots in the Kent community and connections with local leaders and organizations.

Ms. Shari Jeffers was not present for the interview due to illness.

Ms. Chelsea Treveline introduced herself as a newcomer to Kent, having moved there because her husband is a new faculty member at Kent State University. She works remotely for a small women-owned business called Making Sense International, focusing on international development, youth development, gender equity, and social inclusion in various countries. Chelsea's background is in social science research and public health, and she is passionate about the connection between the natural environment and human health. She expressed interest in serving on the Parks and Recreation board due to her belief in a "one Health" philosophy, which considers the impact of the natural and built environment on overall health and well-being. Chelsea also highlighted her experience serving on the Gender Equity Commission in Pittsburgh and participating in business development and diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts in her current role. Chelsea emphasized her skills in project management, business development, and environmental impact assessment, indicating her readiness to contribute to the Parks and Recreation board's work. She sees the board as a crucial space for promoting accessibility and environmental sustainability within the community. She discussed her approach to contributing to the committee, highlighting her research skills and commitment to diversity, equity, and accessibility. She emphasized the importance of gathering community perspectives through surveys and listening sessions to inform decision-making and improve engagement with Kent residents. Chelsea also expressed her project management abilities and willingness to collaborate with other boards to promote inclusivity and environmental sustainability.

When asked about her impressions of Kent and her potential contributions beyond the Parks and Recreation board, Chelsea spoke about her interest in leveraging partnerships with Kent State University and engaging youth in local government. She discussed opportunities for research collaborations with students and serving as a liaison between local government and student groups.

Ms. Jillian Tipton expressed her passion for outdoor education and her extensive experience in the field, particularly in programming for youth and adults through organizations like the Girl Scouts and YMCA. She highlighted her background in training volunteers to lead outdoor activities such as high ropes courses and white-water rafting. Jillian emphasized her desire to contribute to the Kent Parks and Recreation board as a way to give back to the community and utilize her skills in outdoor education, which she feels are not fully utilized in her current role as the executive director of a nonprofit in Akron. She sees this position as an opportunity to support the mission and vision of the organization while promoting access to outdoor resources for the community. Ms. Tipton identified staffing issues as a key area for improvement within the Kent Parks and Recreation department, particularly during the summer months when programming is in high demand. She emphasized the importance of investing in quality staff to ensure the success of programs and suggested collaborating with Kent State University and other community partners to recruit capable individuals.

Tim Wonderly of 420 Bowman Drive introduced himself to Council, noting his extensive experience and dedication to the Parks and Recreation department, having worked with and for them for 30 years. He emphasized his confidence in being able to contribute effectively to the board and expressed a desire to help further improve the department's operations. Mr. Wonderly highlighted the historical evolution of the Parks and Recreation department, emphasizing the need for greater attention to the recreational aspect. He expressed a desire for the department to acquire more facilities, citing specific areas such as the church

across from the bowling alley and the North Water Street Horning area as potential locations for expansion. He proposed turning these areas into recreational spaces, such as a bike community, to enhance community engagement. Tim advocated for allocating more resources and funding towards recreation, aiming for it to become an equal partner alongside parks within the department's focus.

Ms. Calley Mitchel who resides on Elmwood, expressed her deep connection to the Kent community, having lived there for most of her life. She outlined her diverse background, including experience in animal hospitals, biology, organizational communication, and speech-language pathology. Cali recently opened a clinic in Kent, specializing in working with children. She sees the Parks and Recreation board as an opportunity to support families and children further in the community, leveraging her passion for the town and her expertise in child development. Cali emphasized her dedication to working with kids and supporting families, along with her experience in small business management. Cali Mitchell highlighted the importance of supporting children with disabilities in parks and recreation programs, noting the significant need within the community. She expressed her desire to contribute to filling this gap, leveraging her experience working with families and children with disabilities in her clinic. When asked about her interest in other boards or commissions, Cali expressed openness to exploring other opportunities but emphasized her strong connection to Kent and her eagerness to serve the community in any capacity.

Mr. Chris Syphrit, a longtime resident with over 28 years in Kent, expressed his interest in joining the Parks and Recreation board after a conversation with his family while walking along the local paths. Drawing from his experience as a maintenance facilities manager at Solon City School District and previous roles at Laurel Lake Retirement Community, Chris highlighted his expertise in facility management and event organization. He emphasized the importance of maintaining and enhancing existing infrastructure, such as bike paths, and facilitating community events to benefit both children and adults. With a background in facility management and event organization, he has a keen eye for maintaining and enhancing existing infrastructure, such as bike paths and community spaces. His involvement in the Safety Committee for the City of Solon and discussions with local officials about transforming old railroads demonstrate his commitment to improving recreational opportunities for residents.

Mayor Fiala expressed gratitude for the applicants' volunteerism and acknowledged the importance of their contributions to the city. He mentioned that the unexpired term would be voted on during the council meeting on the 17th and encouraged unsuccessful applicants to reapply in the future. Additionally, he noted that there would be other board positions opening up in December. The Mayor also praised the strength of the candidates and thanked them for their willingness to serve.

Eclipse Event Preparation Report

Mr. Dave Ruller introduced tonight's topic of the upcoming eclipse.

Ms. Seidel began her PowerPoint presentation that was included in the April 3, 2024 City Manager's Communication to Council. She highlighted safety strategies the city is taking, which involve staff from Kent Area Chamber of Commerce and Main Street Kent. The Portage Emergency Operation Center will open 4/5/24. All social media will have updates on the events and activities of the weekend and the Kent City Health Department, Kent Police Department, Fire and City will be sharing messages on their social media sites. Ms. Seidel went through the list of concerns about the event and how each had to be handled. Additionally, she highlighted the distribution of Naloxone kits, the creation of a frequently asked questions list, and the promotion of eye protection for safe viewing. Ms. Seidel also addressed concerns such as crowd management, traffic, food shortages, and sanitation issues. She emphasized the importance of patience and reflection after the event to assess

goal attainment and opportunities for improvement. She expressed gratitude for the support and readiness of the community in preparation for the event. She is hoping the intensive planning of the events will prepare everyone for the large influx of visitors that are expected to see this once in a lifetime event. She thanked Council and asked if there were any questions.

Ms. Melissa Celko expressed gratitude for the efforts of the entire team in preparing for the solar eclipse event. She acknowledged the extensive planning, hard work, cooperation, and relationship-building that went into the preparations. Ms. Celko expressed hope that the efforts will benefit the community for decades to come and thanked the team for their contributions.

Mayor Fiala thanked Ms. Seidel for everything her and her team did to make the event a success.

New City Hall Project Update

Ms. Melanie Baker has asked for Committee time to share an update on the status of the construction of the new City Administration building. Ms. Baker was out due to illness and Mr. Ruller provided the update.

- The first floor drywall is complete, and all the glass is installed on the Haymaker Parkway side.
- The remaining glass will be delivered today, with installation of the remaining frames and glass to follow as weather permits in the coming weeks. Installation is expected to take about five days.
- Permanent power is now on in the building.
- All brickwork is finished on the Haymaker side, and power washing and caulking will be done in the next two weeks.
- Work on the public lobby area is starting tomorrow.
- The presence of windows in place gives the building a more finished look, and they have been receiving positive feedback about the building.

Community Development Committee

Chair Rosenberg opened the Community Development Committee meeting at 7:51 p.m.

Climate Action Plan and Sustainability Update

Mr. Dave Ruller introduced Julie Morris, the Sustainability Coordinator, acknowledging her previous volunteer work on the sustainability commission. He highlighted her dedication and effectiveness as a volunteer, which led to her being hired for the role. Mr. Ruller emphasized the importance of actively implementing the climate action plan and praised Julie's instrumental role in this challenging task. Despite Julie currently being part-time, Mr. Ruller expressed his efforts to potentially transition her to full-time due to her valuable contributions. He concluded by expressing his anticipation for Julie's presentation and handing over the floor to her.

She began her PowerPoint presentation which was included in the City Council Agenda Packet, as well as the City Manager's Communication. She highlighted the key priorities of Stationary Energy, Transportation, Waste, Agriculture and Forestry, Education and Outreach, and the Updated Greenhouse Gas Inventory.

The Climate Action Plan is focusing its priorities in 2024 into four areas: Stationary Energy,

Transportation, Funding and Education and Outreach. She went into each area of focus in more detail, providing an update on the Climate Action Plan (CAP), highlighting the progress made since its adoption a year ago and outlining future initiatives. She explained that the CAP is a five-year plan organized around various focus areas and includes 15 initiatives aimed at reducing emissions and promoting sustainability in Kent. Much of the recent work has focused on obtaining a greenhouse gas inventory update, laying groundwork, building internal frameworks, and exploring funding opportunities.

Key initiatives include developing a Municipal Energy Management Plan to lead by example, expanding solar energy, promoting electric vehicle infrastructure and bike/walk infrastructure, and enhancing education and outreach efforts. The city is also exploring funding mechanisms such as internal budget appropriations, grants, and in-kind services from organizations like NOPEC and participation in regional sustainability cohorts.

Looking ahead, the focus will remain on implementing initiatives outlined in the CAP, continuing education and outreach efforts, and conducting regular greenhouse gas inventory updates to track progress. The ultimate goal is to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050 or sooner. Julie concluded by thanking the audience for their time and acknowledging the comprehensive nature of the information presented.

There were no questions from Council. Ms. Rosenberg thanked Ms. Morris for her presentation.

Finance Committee

Chair DeLeone opened the Finance Committee meeting at 8:07 p.m.

Donation of Kent Parks and Recreation Youth Football and Cheer Equipment

Ms. Angela Manley, Parks and Recreation Director, said the attached list includes items for donation to the Kent Youth Football and Cheer organization, consisting of sports equipment and uniforms necessary for the program's operation within the Kent community. As the program serves up to 160 members and much of the equipment bears the Kent branding, the Kent Parks and Recreation Board has unanimously voted to donate these items to the organization.

She asked Council if they had any questions.

The council asked Ms. Manley several questions regarding the donation and its implications:

Legal ramifications: They inquired about any potential legal issues with the donation. Ms. Manley clarified that since the donation is below the threshold for competitive bidding, there are no legal concerns. Council has the authority to waive competitive bidding in appropriate cases, and Ms. Hope Jones, the city law director, confirmed this in previous discussions.

Tightening organizational structure: Ms. Manley explained that the organization has taken steps to strengthen its structure by registering as a nonprofit and forming a board of ten members. This move allows them to operate more efficiently and pursue their goals more effectively.

Equipment sourcing: Ms. Manley confirmed that the equipment is owned by Parks and Recreation and is branded specifically for Kent. The helmets, in particular, are recertified every two years, ensuring their quality and safety.

Staffing and program sustainability: The council discussed the challenges of sustaining such a program within Parks and Recreation due to its size and dedication required. Ms. Manley noted that while it's demanding, the board's involvement will alleviate some of the strain and allow for more focused management.

Budget implications: Council inquired whether the transition would result in budget savings. Ms. Manley explained that while there might be some savings in the long term, the immediate impact is mitigated by personnel costs and the loss of registration fees and donations that would have otherwise supported the program.

MOTION TO APPROVE DONATION OF KENT PARKS AND RECREATION YOUTH FOOTBALL AND CHEER EQUIPMENT MADE BY Ms. Gwen Rosenberg, SECONDED by Ms. Melissa Celko and CARRIED by a voice vote of 9-0-0.

Celebrate Kent! Grant and Social Service Grant Funding Updates

Ms. Bridget Susel and Mr. Eric Helstedter has assessed the applications received for the 2024 Celebrate Kent Grant Awards and the 2024 Social Service Funding Grants. Staff finished reviewing the applications and determined the funding awards. The funding had been previously approved by Council in the Operating Budget. The Celebrate Kent Grant Awards total \$15,000 for 7 recipients, while the Social Service Grants amount to \$61,944 for 7 organizations.

The Request for Proposals (RFP) for the 2024 Celebrate Kent! Grant Program was issued on January 25, 2024, resulting in thirteen proposals from seven organizations. The total funding requested exceeded the allocated \$15,000 budget, with requests totaling \$24,133.93. Staff allocated funding to at least one proposal from each organization, while two proposals did not meet eligibility requirements and were not funded.

Attached is a summary table detailing the funding requests and final awards for each eligible project. Also included are the application and eligibility guidelines from the 2024 Celebrate Kent! RFP package. Bridget Susel provided a detailed summary of two grant programs:

Celebrate Kent! Program:

- Originated from the idea of Dan Smith, the former economic development director.
- Aimed to support events downtown to attract people to the town and assist organizations hosting such events.
- \$15,000 allocated annually with a matching requirement.
- Received 13 proposals from seven organizations.
- Some proposals were not funded as they didn't meet grant criteria.
- Consideration is being given to potentially changing or modifying the program to better support small businesses.

Social Service Funding Program:

- \$65,000 allocated annually to assist nonprofits.
- Seven nonprofits received assistance this year.
- The program provides support to agencies not always covered by other grants, such as eviction prevention, legal aid, housing support, domestic violence shelters, and youth programs.
- All recipients received their requested funding, with close attention to ensuring the funds directly support service delivery.
- Two proposals were not funded due to not meeting grant criteria or exceeding available funds.

Ms. Susel highlighted the importance of these grant programs in providing vital support to various community initiatives and expressed a willingness to adapt them to better serve the community's needs.

During the discussion, it was clarified that the grant funds are derived from tax dollars from the City of Kent, not from state or federal sources. Bridget confirmed this and mentioned that while she couldn't speak for other communities, Kent's allocation of local funds for such initiatives is unique in her experience. The continuity of funding, even during challenging times like COVID-19, reflects the commitment of the community to supporting local initiatives.

Council members also acknowledged the historical context of the grant programs, with Bill Schultz being mentioned as one of the individuals who spearheaded the initiative.

No further questions were raised, and it was determined that no action was needed from the council regarding the grant programs at that time.

Streets, Sidewalks & Utilities Committee

Chair Sidoti opened the Streets, Sidewalks and Utilities Committee at 8:30 p.m. .

Earth Day Vendor Market

On Saturday, April 20, 2024, Branded in Kent plans to host an Earth Day Vendor Market in Dan Smith Park. The number of vendors interested in participating exceeds the park's capacity. Consequently, the organizers have submitted a special event permit application to the City, requesting the closure of East Erie Street between South Water Street and the private alley used by Tree City Coffee as a drive-through lane. This closure would provide additional space for vendors unable to fit into Dan Smith Park. The event organizer anticipates around 2,000 attendees.

MOTION TO APPROVE EARTH DAY VENDOR MARKET MADE BY Mr. Michael DeLeone, SECONDED by Mr. Jeff Clapper and CARRIED by a voice vote of 9-0-0.

MOTION TO ENTER EXECUTIVE SESSION TO DISCUSS BOARD AND COMMISSION APPOINTMENTS MADE BY Mr. Jack Amrhein, SECONDED by Ms. Gwen Rosenberg and CARRIED by a voice vote of 9-0-0.

MOTION TO RETURN TO REGULAR COUNCIL MEETING AT 8:56 P.M. MADE BY Ms. Gwen Rosenberg, SECONDED by Mr. Roger Sidoti and CARRIED by a voice vote of 9-0-0.

No further business was conducted and the meeting adjourned at 8:57 p.m.

Amy Wilkens

Amy Wilkens, CMC
Clerk of Council