City of Kent

Wednesday, July 10, 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. Clerk of Council, Amy Wilkens, called the roll for the two public hearings.

Present:	Mr. Jack Amrhein, Ms. Melissa Celko, Mr. Jeff Clapper, Mr. Michael DeLeone, Ms. Gwen Rosenberg, Ms.Heidi Shaffer Bish, Mr. Robin Turner
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. Jamie Samels, Fire Chief; Ms. Dominique Bollenbacher, Community Engagement Coordinator; Mr. Eric Helmstedter, Economic Development Director; Ms. Julie Morris, Sustainability Coordinator; Ms. Angela Manley, Parks and Recreation Director; Ms. Amy Wilkens, Clerk of Council
Absent:	Mr. Chris Hook, Mr. Roger Sidoti

MOTION TO EXCUSE MR. CHRIS HOOK AND MR. ROGER SIDOTI MADE BY Ms. Heidi Shaffer Bish, SECONDED by Mr. Jack Amrhein and CARRIED by a voice vote of 7-0-0.

Ms. Rhonda Hall, Budget and Finance Director stated that in accordance with O.R.C. §5705.28, notice was given on June 17, 2024, that a Public Hearing will be held on the City of Kent Annual Tax Budget for the fiscal year ending December 31, 2025.

Mayor Fiala asked if there were any members of the public who wished to speak. There was no response and the public hearing concluded.

The next public hearing was in regard to the Designated Outdoor Refreshment Area request for expansion. On June 25, 2024 and July 3, 2024, notice was given that the Kent City Council was conducting a Public Hearing to allow for public comment and questions regarding the City of Kent's application for a Designated Outdoor Refreshment Area Expansion.

Mayor Fiala asked if there were any members of the public who wished to speak. There were none.

The Public Hearing concluded at 7:02 p.m.

Council Committee Meetings Immediately Following Public Hearing

Committee of the Whole

Mayor Fiala opened the Committee of the Whole meeting at 7:02 p.m .

Board and Commission Interview Process

Ms. Gwen Rosenberg suggested that the interview process for boards and commissions could be improved. She proposed making it more like a job interview and less like a public trial. Currently, the process involves the entire council, is on the record, and requires city staff to wait until all interviews are completed, which can take up to an hour. She believes the process could be streamlined based on information collected by Amy Wilkens, Clerk of Council. Gwen Rosenberg proposed revising the interview process for boards and commissions to make it more efficient and fair. She suggested conducting interviews before council meetings with a minimum number of council members present, such as two council members and the mayor, or department chairs with substitutes. Interviews should be conducted one at a time with candidates waiting in the hallway to prevent any unfair advantage. This approach would make the process more like a job interview and allow council members to give candidates their undivided attention without rushing. Rosenberg emphasized that this would be fairer and less burdensome for both candidates and city staff.

Ms. Heidi Shaffer Bish expressed concerns about the interview process for board and commission candidates, questioning if virtual interviews could be considered to alleviate the pressure of in-person interviews. The discussion highlighted that if all council members are present, it constitutes a public meeting, which must be open to the public. She suggested that a less formal and more streamlined approach could be achieved by having fewer council members conduct interviews outside the main public meeting. Heidi also proposed having executive sessions before council meetings to interview candidates, thus reducing the time the public and candidates spend waiting. Ms. Shaffer Bish, Mr. Turner and Mr. Clapper all emphasized the need for a friendlier and more efficient process, suggesting a limited number of questions per candidate to avoid lengthy and potentially intimidating sessions.

Ms. Gwen Rosenberg stated that it seems there isn't significant opposition to conducting interviews before a council meeting. The choice is between having an executive session or a public meeting prior to the council meeting. For months with many candidates, a special meeting could be scheduled. Ms. Rosenberg clarified that a public meeting wouldn't necessarily require YouTube streaming, although it would be open to the public, allowing all council members to attend.

MOTION TO APPROVE CHANGING THE BOARD AND COMMISSION INTERVIEW PROCESS, SCHEDULING INTERVIEWS OUTSIDE MEETING TIME IN A PUBLIC MEETING MADE BY Ms. Gwen Rosenberg, SECONDED by Mr. Robin Turner and CARRIED by a voice vote of 7-0-0.

City Hall Project Update

Ms. Melanie Baker provided an update on the progress of the construction site. Initially, the absence of cars on site caused some concern, but it turned out that everyone was inside working. The painters have started on the first floor, specifically where the council chambers are located, and they will finish the third floor drywall and paint it, then move to the second floor. The elevator installation will be completed and operational starting Monday, and light fixtures are being installed inside the building.

By the 22nd, the "Kent City Hall" lettering will be added to the building's front, leading to increased public interest. Site work will begin the first week of August, starting at the front corner of Haymaker and Water Street, and then progressing around the building. Exterior lighting, capable of changing colors, has also started to be installed, which will enhance the building's aesthetic. Overall, the project is progressing well, with many workers diligently contributing to the completion. Additionally, a specific piece of glass that needed replacement has been addressed.

Community Development Committee

Chair Rosenberg opened the Community Development Committee meeting at 7:20 PM.

Decarbonization Planning for the City Buildings

Ms. Bridget Susel, Community Development Director, introduced the topic of discussion. She said the Community Development Department has been working with World Kinect, a consultant group hired by NOPEC, to assist the City of Kent with developing a decarbonization plan in order to identify possible actions to be considered as the City moves forward with its efforts to implement various aspects of the City's 2023 Climate Action Plan. The decarbonization plan includes: Analysis of the City's energy and carbon use/emission portfolio; Evaluation of sourcing strategies to reduce emissions; Assessment of four possible "on-site" solar locations, two of which will need to be identified by Council as possible future solar implementation sites; Review of best practices to consider the application of renewable energy credits.

Andrew Smiser, a sustainability consultant with World Kinect, presented an analysis and recommendations for Kent's decarbonization efforts. The study funded by NOPEC covered Kent and four other cities, focusing on energy use and carbon footprint reduction strategies.

Key Points:

Current Carbon Footprint: Kent's carbon footprint is primarily due to electricity, natural gas in buildings, and liquid fuels (gasoline and diesel) for vehicles.

Scope of Study: The study included 16 buildings and multiple electric accounts, excluding the new City Hall. It categorized carbon emissions into three main components: electricity, natural gas, and liquid fuels.

Main Findings:

Electricity is the largest part of the carbon footprint and the easiest to mitigate through renewable energy credits, renewable power contracts, or installing solar panels.
Scope 1 emissions (fuel burned by city operations) are more challenging to reduce, with liquid fuels making up 53% of these emissions.
Electrifying the vehicle fleet could eliminate 50% of Scope 1 emissions.

Recommendations:

Focus on renewable energy, particularly solar, to reduce electricity-related emissions.
Electrify the city vehicle fleet to reduce liquid fuel emissions.
Specific sites recommended for solar installations include the water treatment plant, the Water Reclamation facility, the new safety (police) facility, and the fire station.

Projected Reductions:

Installing solar panels at four key sites could reduce emissions by 628 metric tons,

contributing to the city's goal of a 50% reduction in carbon footprint.
Further reductions can be achieved through renewable energy procurement and energy efficiency measures.

Site-Specific Details:

The Water Treatment plant and Water Reclamation facility are the largest electricity users and prime candidates for significant solar installations. The new safety facility and fire station also present viable opportunities for solar installations, though on a smaller scale.

Next Steps:

Select two of the four proposed sites for a detailed financial analysis, considering funding, rebates, and incentives.
Evaluate the payback periods for solar investments to determine the most cost-effective approach.
Andrew emphasized that all proposed investments would be beneficial long-term, with the selection of sites for further analysis to balance immediate impact and comprehensive understanding of different solar array scales.

Ms. Shaffer Bish raised several pertinent questions regarding the sustainability study presented by Andrew Smiser. She said that the safety facility (police facility) is a high electricity user, though not as high as the fire station. Andrew clarified that both the safety and fire facilities are 24-hour buildings, but the safety facility is larger, contributing to its higher electricity use. Regarding Solar Awnings and Charging Cruisers: she asked about the possibility of using solar awnings to charge police cruisers. Andrew acknowledged that charging cruisers with solar power is an excellent idea but highlighted that solar awnings significantly increase costs due to the additional structure required (pillars and supports). He mentioned that the current solar panel recommendations were based on available large open roof areas with minimal shading.

Andrew Smiser explained that the current designs are preliminary and can be adjusted. The focus was on identifying the best initial layout to set up the decarbonization process and achieve carbon reduction goals.

Ms. Shaffer wanted to know if the studies could be modified. Andrew confirmed that the studies are not final and can be tweaked as the process moves forward to optimize carbon reduction and accommodate practical considerations.Heidi emphasized the importance of visibility for the city's sustainability efforts, highlighting a desire for projects that can inspire others. Here are the main points of her and Andrew's responses:

Visibility and Inspiration:

Ms. Shaffer Bish noted that while the water treatment plant offers a substantial carbon reduction potential, it’s not a location frequently visited by the public.
She suggested that having visible solar projects can serve as a model and inspire others in the city to adopt similar measures.

Balancing Visibility and Impact:

The staff acknowledged the importance of visibility but emphasized that the primary goal is carbon reduction. Andrew suggested that combining a large ground array (like at the water treatment plant) with a visible rooftop installation could balance both goals.

Demonstrating Solar Generation:

Andrew Miser mentioned that even if solar panels are not in highly visible locations, their impact can be showcased through other means. He proposed using graphics, billboards, or digital dashboards to display the power generation data, making the benefits visible to the public.

Mayor Fiala asked about the return on investment for the solar projects, particularly the fire station, leading to a detailed response from Andrew Miser and Mayor Fiala. Andrew noted that they haven't run the specific financial numbers yet because that will be the next step. He mentioned that for larger arrays like the one at the water treatment plant, the payback period is around four to five years due to lower cost per kilowatt and available incentives. For smaller rooftop installations, such as the fire station, the payback period is closer to seven years. He said Solar panels are warranted for 25 years and typically generate power well beyond that, making it a long-term investment in reducing power costs. The power generated by these installations is power that the city won't need to purchase for the next 30 to 40 years. The main maintenance cost is replacing inverters, which usually happens around 15 years after installation. Financial projections will include this cost to provide a realistic view of long-term savings. NOPEC is covering the decarbonization study and the deep dive analysis for two sites, so there is no immediate cost for the next steps of the study.

When the city decides to proceed with solar installations, there will be installation costs. While NOPEC might not cover these, they do have programs that could potentially assist with funding.

MOTION TO APPROVE DECARBONIZATION PLANNING FOR THE CITY BUILDINGS, UTILIZING THE WATER PLANT AND FIRE STATION MADE BY Ms. Heidi Shaffer Bish, SECONDED by Mr. Jeff Clapper and CARRIED by a voice vote of 7-0-0.

Proposed Operating Agreement for the Sale of Adult Use Marijuana

Ms. Bridget Susel revisited her last visit to Council regarding zoning matters with the adult-use dispensaries. Medical dispensaries are now able to have a dual use. Bridget updated the council on the zoning issues related to adult-use cannabis dispensaries. She noted that new licenses for such dispensaries are not available, but existing medical marijuana facilities can apply for dual-use operating licenses under recently passed legislation. Bridget highlighted that the city has the option to prohibit these licenses, but existing facilities can challenge this through a public ballot initiative. To avoid such uncertainties, the city is working on an operating agreement with the owner of the existing dispensary at 331 East Main Street, ensuring compliance with current regulations on lighting, signage, traffic, and parking. While the dispensary has been cleared for a provisional license, adult-use cannabis sales are not yet permitted in Kent.

James Dulick, the owner of the property at 331 East Main Street where Bliss Ohio operates, assured the council that there will be no changes to the dispensary's operations, including name, signage, lighting, and operating hours. He emphasized adherence to state-mandated hours (9:00 AM to 9:00 PM), strict security measures with continuous video surveillance and on-site security guards during business hours, and prohibition of on-site consumption of products. Reflecting on initial community concerns voiced during the zoning process, he noted that none have materialized, and security measures have even helped solve crimes in the area, including an armed robbery nearby, captured on their surveillance system. Bridget, responding to a concern from Dr. Martin, a neighboring dentist, affirmed that overflow parking in his lot would be prohibited by zoning regulations and addressed promptly if reported to the Community Development Department.

Ms. Shaffer Bish asked about increased business and traffic. James Dulick responded to your question about accommodating potential business expansion at the dispensary due to the opening of the adult-use cannabis market. He expressed cautious optimism about increased business but noted that any growth would likely be gradual. He emphasized that the current facility, parking, and staffing are adequate for the existing operations, which have not yet been profitable for the medical marijuana market. Regarding parking, he assured that overflow would be managed, potentially by coordinating with the courthouse nearby rather than impacting Dr. Martin's property. In terms of staffing, he mentioned plans to increase modestly but not excessively, keeping a few bays dedicated to medical marijuana at all times.

Ms. Susel clarified that the recent zoning code amendment allowing dispensaries, cultivators, and processors in the industrial district does not impose different parking requirements compared to the existing medical marijuana dispensary. She emphasized that regardless of the type of cannabis operation, the parking requirements remain consistent with those for retail operations.The parking needs for these facilities would adhere to standard regulations, ensuring they meet or exceed the necessary limits for such land use.

Kelly Wymer, a resident of 306 North Willow, expressed concerns about the potential impact of legal marijuana, both recreational and medicinal, on the neighborhood. She raised issues regarding environmental impact, community safety, and potential effects on children. Ms. Susel clarified that the current discussion only pertains to permitting Bliss Ohio, an existing medical marijuana facility, to also sell recreational marijuana under strict regulatory oversight. The city council's role is limited to approving or denying additional local regulations for this specific business. Residents concerned about specific issues related to the facility can report them to relevant city departments, but broader community opposition would need to be addressed through voting processes.

Dave Smith, a resident of 1613 Woodway Road, expressed concerns at the council meeting regarding the proposed legal operating agreement for Bliss Ohio. He emphasized that while Dr. Martin hasn't reported adverse effects, but he does have reservations about the expansion of the facility and its impact on the neighborhood. Dave, an engineer, suggested adding additional "whereas" clauses to the operating agreement to address federal legality issues of marijuana, security concerns due to banking regulations, and potential zoning discrepancies. He urged the council to consider these factors when making their decision.

MOTION TO APPROVE OPERATING AGREEMENT FOR THE SALE OF ADULT USE MARIJUANA MADE BY Mr. Robin Turner, SECONDED by Mr. Jeff Clapper and CARRIED by a voice vote of 7-0-0.

Dora Expansion Request

Eric Helmstedter, the Economic Development Director, addressed the council to request consideration for expanding the Designated Outdoor Refreshment Area (Dora) to include the Board and Bevy at 141 East Summit Street. He emphasized that since Board and Bevy holds a valid liquor permit and is in proximity to the existing Dora, it's a reasonable request to allow patrons to enjoy alcoholic beverages on their patio. Eric mentioned that both Chief Samles and Chief Shearer had no concerns about this expansion. He sought council authorization to approve the Dora boundary expansion request with emergency authorization.

Ms. Melissa Celko clarified for the public record that the proposed expansion of the Designated Outdoor Refreshment Area (Dora) will cross South Depeyster Street at the intersection with State Route 59, heading southbound to Summit Street. On South Depeyster, the boundary will be on the west side of the centerline of the road, following along the sidewalk of the fire station, and including the property lines that encompass 141 East Summit Street.

Mr. Jeff Clapper began a discussion about expanding the Designated Outdoor Refreshment

Area (Dora) in Kent, Ohio, specifically to include the area around 141 East Summit Street. Mr. Clapper raised a question about whether the boundary could include other areas, such as down to Water Street, to accommodate foot traffic from different directions. It was clarified that the proposed boundary currently follows a specific path to include the requested property, and any further expansions would need to be considered and possibly included in subsequent amendments.

There was a suggestion to amend the expansion to include additional areas, which would require checking with other property owners and possibly holding another public meeting. The council decided to approve the expansion for the specified area and later amend the application to potentially include other areas if feasible and after further consultation.

MOTION TO APPROVE THE DORA EXPANSION REQUEST MADE BY Ms. Heidi Shaffer Bish, SECONDED by Mr. Michael DeLeone and CARRIED by a voice vote of 7-0-0.

Finance Committee

Chair DeLeone opened the Finance Committee meeting at 8:30 p.m. .

Tax Budget

Ms. Rhonda Hall introduced the preliminary tax budget that needed approval by Council before July 15th and submission to Portage County by July 20th. This initial budget outlines the expected revenue for the 2025 fiscal year, which serves as the foundation for planning expenditures in the detailed budget to be presented later in November or December.

MOTION TO APPROVE THE TAX BUDGET MADE BY Ms. Melissa Celko, SECONDED by Ms. Gwen Rosenberg and CARRIED by a voice vote of 7-0-0.

Insurance Coverage

Ms. Rhonda Hall discussed an update regarding the city bonds held on Mr. Ruller herself, and Brian Huff These bonds, previously managed separately, are now being phased out and integrated into the city's regular insurance coverage. Specifically, they are now part of an employee dishonesty and faithful performance of duty insurance policy. This change ensures coverage for situations where mistakes occur that are beyond their control, aligning with current industry standards and maintaining compliance. This update serves as procedural housekeeping to keep the city's insurance practices current.

MOTION TO APPROVE INSURANCE COVERAGE MADE BY Ms. Gwen Rosenberg, SECONDED by Mr. Jeff Clapper and CARRIED by a voice vote of 7-0-0.

Budget Appropriation Amendment

MOTION TO APPROVE THE BUDGET APPROPRIATION AMENDMENT MADE BY Ms. Gwen Rosenberg, SECONDED by Mr. Jack Amrhein and CARRIED by a voice vote of 7-0-0.

OPWC Grant/Loan Application Request

Mr. Jim Bowling requested approval to submit a grant application to OPWC (Ohio Public Works Commission) for Sunrise Boulevard. The roadwork had been delayed due to scheduled bridge work starting on August 12th. He sought approval to proceed with the application and to sign the agreement if the grant is awarded.He acknowledged the residents' patience and emphasized the necessity of fixing the road once the bridge work is completed.

Ms. Shaffer Bish asked and Mr. Bowling clarified that the roadwork on Sunrise Boulevard would involve replacing pavement, fixing curbs, sidewalks, drive aprons, and overall refurbishment of the street. She acknowledged the logistical challenge of the road being one way in and out, but assured that they had managed similar projects before with residents' patience. If the grant is secured, construction could potentially start in July 2025, pending the availability of the funds.

MOTION TO APPROVE THE OPWC GRANT/LOAN APPLICATION REQUEST MADE BY Ms. Heidi Shaffer Bish, SECONDED by Ms. Melissa Celko and CARRIED by a voice vote of 7-0-0.

Executive Session

MOTION TO ENTER EXECUTIVE SESSION TO CONSIDER THE PURCHASE OF PROPERTY FOR PUBLIC PURPOSES, THE SALE OF PROPERTY AT COMPETITIVE BIDDING, OR THE SALE OR OTHER DISPOSITION OF UNNEEDED, OBSOLETE, OR UNFIT- FOR-USE PROPERTY IN ACCORDANCE WITH SECTION 505.10 OF THE OHIO REVISED CODE MADE BY Mr.Jack Amrhein, SECONDED by Mr. Jeff Clapper. Roll call was taken.

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

MOTION TO EXCUSE MR. CHRIS HOOK AND MR. ROGER SIDOTI MADE BY Mr. Jack Amrhein, SECONDED by Ms. Melissa Celko and CARRIED by a voice vote of 7-0-0.

MOTION TO RETURN TO REGULAR COUNCIL MEETING WAS MADE AT 8:44 P.M. BY Ms. Gwen Rosenberg, SECONDED by Mr. Jack Amrhein and CARRIED by a voice vote of 7-0-0.

The meeting adjourned at 8:44 p.m.

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Amy Wilkens, CMC
Clerk of Council