

MINUTES

COUNCIL-MANAGER BRIEFING

August 8, 2011

Vice Mayor Terry Senger called the Council-Manager Briefing to order at 6:00 p.m. at the Fairfield Municipal Building, 5350 Pleasant Avenue. The following Councilmembers were present: Tim Abbott, Tim Meyers, Mike Oler, Terry Senger, Marty Judd, Mitch Rhodus, and Mike Snyder. Staff present: Tim Bachman, Art Pizzano, Angie Johns, Jim Bell, Heidi Schiller, Erin Donovan, Rick Helsinger, Greg Kathman, John Clemmons, Mary Hopton, Carol Mayhall, Ken Gerold, Dave Butsch, and Don Bennett. Also Present: Parks Board Members Doug Meece and Don Hassler and Planning Commissioner Jeff Holtegel.

Residential Retention, Quality of Life and Proposed Initiatives

City Manager Pizzano discussed the second item on the Agenda for the weather alert notification policy. Development Services Director Tim Bachman stated Council's goal created in 2010 was to develop and execute a Public Relations message/strategy around resident/business retention and quality of life in Fairfield. He commented a business discussion was held in March, so he is not going to talk about the business aspects tonight. Mr. Bachman discussed the factors that influence a residential decision including how's the neighborhood, how are the schools and how are the city services. He stated Jim Bell presented information at the June meeting about all the Parks and Recreation 1140 programs, the facilities and 630 acres of park land and the ArtsWave partnership. He discussed the utility services noting that Fairfield was number one in terms of lowest cost for water, number two lowest for combined water and wastewater. He explained the rates and the capacity at both plants are pitched when trying to recruit new businesses. He further explained that capacity allows for ample future development and lower prices to the utility consumer, which is another economic development tool in recruiting businesses. Mr. Bachman briefly commented on the Public Works street maintenance and curb overlays, brush pickup and dumpster program, and snow clearance. He briefly overviewed the large projects including the \$10 million By-pass 4 project which will open next spring; the \$10.5 million Exit 39 project near Cincinnati Financial of which 92% of the funds will not be city funds with bid opening Thursday; the Flood control grant with \$2.4 million in FEMA funds and a \$670,000 Clean Ohio Grant. He pointed out the City is good stewards of local funds at leveraging other dollars to complete projects. He stated those projects especially the By-pass and Exit 39 are an investment in an area that hopefully will pay dividends in terms of economic development in terms of job creation as well as dollars in the community. Mr. Bachman highlighted safety services information including crime is down, there are 59 sworn officers, in house dispatch, 88 fulltime equivalent employees working towards community safety, and they have CALEA certification. He further commented the Fire Department has 75 total personnel with 73 uniformed and of those 35 are medics. He stated there are 6,000 plus calls for service and 4,200 medical responses, there are citizen police and fire academies and the three fire stations are 24/7. He stated the court is a full service court with a mental health and drunk driving court which are new initiatives created by the judge. He discussed financial services transparent accounting including sending the annual report to every citizen every year; in house and centralized utility collections, city revenue stream moving in a positive direction and online payment tools. He explained the mission for Development Services is a safe and orderly suburban development. He noted there were 1,806 building/mechanical permits issued in 2010, 3,250 inspections in 2010, and for property maintenance there were 8,165 inspections in 2010 with 1,983 violations in 2010. Mr. Bachman commented while the schools are not a city department, they are an important ingredient to the retention of residents. He explained the schools are rated excellent with distinction, are currently going through a capital needs assessment, have 9,810 students, seven school buildings in the city and a 6.5 mil levy that will be discussed and debated in the community and voted on in November of this year.

Mr. Bachman displayed and discussed a chart for the number of housing units built and the year the housing units were built. He explained over 10,000 built between 1970 and 1990 and it is time for those to start showing obvious maintenance issues that can become a blight on the neighborhood. He discussed the Neighborhood Enhancement Action Team (NEAT) program started in 2009 in which Development Services works with Public Works and the Police with regard to different areas of the city inspected for property maintenance issues as well as other crime issues of right-of-way. He explained 2668 were inspected in 2010 with 10.9% violations and 2,939 inspected in 2009 with 12.3% violations and an expected 2,800 addresses will be inspected this year. He explained if a violation is found the property owner is given five days to fix or have a plan to fix, a city contractor does the work. In 2009, 73 properties were maintained by the City for a cost of \$14,700, which a lien is then put against the property for the cost. He discussed in 2010 there were 89 properties for \$19,200 and in 2011 to date there are 86 properties and 17 have already come off since we started with 103. He explained that 17 reflect that Fairfield is still a very good market to keep the assets viable in the city meaning they turn over very quickly. He explained there are some exceptions and he created a strategy to deal with these after receiving a petition from property owners in the area of Oberlin regarding their concerns with a property that is over three years vacant and blighted and property owners would like the city to work with banks or convince banks to sell the properties. Mr. Bachman explained convincing banks to do anything is not a good use of time because it takes forever and it is unknown if the city even has that right. He stated there is litigation in Cincinnati that they are watching to see how it works. He explained his strategy instead of convincing banks to sell the real estate is to try to fix the problems. He explained what he is doing is to deal with these types of properties includes additional review and property maintenance. Mr. Bachman defined a chronic vacant property as a property that has been maintained by the City for three years or more. He discussed they started with 1061 Oberlin to concentrate on the exterior front and side yard and they have done that with a property manager model in which property maintenance inspectors are working side by side

with the contractor. He further explained nine properties have been reviewed and two are off the books and have been acquired by private property owners and they are through with about three to four. He explained they are spending an additional two to four hundred dollars additional to work through these problems. He discussed the possibility of considering a property administration fee next year to be assessed for each lot for to compensate for the time of the inspectors, Mr. Helsing and Mr. Bachman. Council and Staff discussed difference of a similarly proposed item in the past for inspections of rental property nothing these fees would be for properties that are already in violation. Planning Commissioner Jeff Holtegel asked of the \$14,700 and \$19,200 spent for the properties, what portion does the city get back. Mr. Bachman explained 100% is paid back when the property is sold because a lien is on the property. Jennifer Matherly, 4909 Holiday Drive, commented on the mosquito problem coming from the pool at 1061 Oberlin, which is next to her home. Mr. Bachman explained we contract with the Health Department to put the mosquito dunks in pool and the health department will need to continue putting the dunks in the pool. Building and Zoning Inspector Rick Helsing explained the health department has agreed to track the pools they are called about and keeping a record of when they treat it and going back whenever the manufacturer recommends adding more mosquito dunks. Mr. Helsing and Mr. Bachman briefly explained how the dunks work. Mr. Helsing explained that pools should not be emptied because they will rise up out of the ground during wet weather. A resident in the audience provided photos of the home and asked if there is a time limit for the home to remain empty and is there a process to condemn it. Law Director John Clemmons explained there is a process by Mr. Helsing's order and a court proceeding that the court can declare a property a nuisance and the property can be torn down, but it has to get really bad and the court has to be convinced that there is not substantial value there. He further explained the problem with tearing a house down or the pools is that the lot becomes a maintenance problem, so you don't fix the problem. The same resident asked if the bank is actively trying to sell the problem to which Mr. Clemmons commented that he did not know. Mr. Clemmons briefly discussed that the Cincinnati is trying to sue two banks civilly for the money to deal with the property, but that is an expensive process to bring a resolution and this program is a more expedient way to deal with the problem. Ms. Matherly discussed the safety concern with the back door of the home having been kicked in, windows being left open, etcetera. Upon further discussion Ms. Matherly was not sure if a police report had been filed. Mr. Bachman displayed an example of a property on Lindale Drive that was cleaned up by the property manager.

Mr. Bachman displayed a chart with 2010 census information and compared Fairfield with Butler County, noting Fairfield's younger people are a lower population than the county average by about 3.2% with the young adults, mature workforce and seniors being a little greater to make up that 3.2%. He explained the burden is lessened on school infrastructure when there are less kids to educate; communicating desirable city aspects of raising a family in the community; and retention of senior citizens by aging in place of providing housing that meets their new needs. Mr. Bachman explained another ingredient of the residential retention is can work be found. He discussed regional data for the Cincinnati-Middletown Standard metropolitan statistical area in which the unemployment was 8.5% in May and the US was 9.2% in June. He explained the year over year regional jobs in which education and health increased 3.8% and manufacturing was 4.6% the regional losses were 4.3% for leisure and hospitality and 4.2% for government. He stated last year was a very good year with regard to industrial absorption of vacant properties of 763,000 square feet. Mr. Pizzano explained now that the existing inventory of available space has been filled it is more difficult to capture those businesses that are looking to come into the region and want to just move into a facility and can't wait for a building to be built and lacking the market beginning to show any signs of taking risks and building speculative buildings our inventory to capture those businesses is really lacking now because we had such a successful year.

Mr. Bachman briefly commented on the most recent tax incentive project, Safety Kleen, which relocated from Sharonville. He read a quote from a prospective business who was very impressed after viewing Village Green. Mr. Bachman discussed some of the other aspects of the way that the City has branded and communicated including the public buildings at Village Green, entry features on the major arteries of the community, publications and through the website. He discussed a new initiative to start a business Facebook page focused on the Community Arts Center, which will allow the City to convey pertinent and timely information to followers via postings. He stated it will communicate the many different shows, plays and art opportunities being showcased in the Community Arts Center. Community Arts Center Manager Heidi Schiller explained the arts center page will be a place to talk about upcoming events, art gallery openings, special events, things that concern both the Community Arts Center and the Village Green Campus to put these things out and write about them. Mr. Bachman explained this is a trial project to review and gauge acceptance and effectiveness. He further explained the internal City policies have been created and written and this will start in September 2011 for the fall and holiday seasons.

Review of the Proposed Changes to the Severe Weather/Tornado Alert Plan

Fire Chief Don Bennett stated 2011 presented an extraordinary number of severe weather situations that raised questions regarding the current policy. He explained the need to simplify information being sent to both city personnel, elected officials and residents during a severe weather situation. He commented they wanted to reduce the potential for notifications to be perceived as a "nuisance" and to give individuals a choice as to when and how they receive notifications. He discussed the history for the standards that were developed in 1999 to be followed for activation of warning signals and the deviation from the policy by certain counties which has created confusion as to the meaning of the siren activation. He stated several months ago the City of Fairfield adopted a resolution in

support of a county wide policy for activating sirens. He explained Hamilton County, Warren County and counties in Northern Kentucky have recently adopted the same policy and have eliminated setting off sirens when a tornado watch has been issued during a severe thunderstorm warning. He discussed the confusion this caused for those in Fairfield near the Hamilton County border that could hear the Hamilton County sirens. He stated the remaining counties of Clermont, Campbell, Dearborn and Franklin are anticipated to do the same. Chief Bennett explained our previous policy required notification of severe weather situations, but the new policy indicates notification will occur for imminent peril that requires immediate action by residents, businesses and schools. He further explained warnings will only be set off for a tornado warning that is imminent for Butler County. Chief Bennett stated on activation of warning sirens, the revised policy will now require the dispatchers to notify select city personnel and elected officials as to the reason the sirens were activated and the duration of the issued warning. He explained the previous policy required notification when a “warning” was cancelled, but the revised policy will not require such notification. The city policy required warning sirens to function until the warning had expired; the revised policy states that warning sirens will be activated for “two cycles” which is approximately 7.5 minutes.

Chief Bennett discussed the CodeRed notification system provides non-weather related alerts to a specific area and the weather warning system which generates notifications based on severe weather warning issued by the National Weather Service. He explained individuals that signed up initially with CodeRed were encouraged to sign up for the weather system when it became available in 2008. He explained since November 2008, individuals registering with CodeRed were automatically included in the weather warning system, which created a “nuisance” for many registered recipients. He discussed the other means that people can now receive those severe weather notifications. He explained since the weather warning system was not available initially, but was added in 2008, individuals were encouraged to sign up for the weather system. Chief Bennett stated if the changes proposed are accepted by City Council they would take effect immediately. He further stated a comprehensive educational effort that staff would initiate using city’s website, newsletter, Channel 18, and local news media to reaffirm the use of warning sirens their intended purpose and what to do in the event of severe weather. He stated there will also be a campaign to educate people on who to “opt out” of the weather warning system to eliminate what many perceive as a “nuisance” and provide a list of services available to residents that may be more compatible with their use of smart phones, laptops, and tablets. Chief Bennett discussed depending on the direction of the storm, we will have the discretion of whether we need to set the sirens off. Staff and Council discussed that multiple notices for the same storm will be eliminated with the changes to the system.

Adjournment

Council/Manager Briefing adjourned at 6:57 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Angela Johns
Clerk of Council