CALL TO ORDER – Roll Call, Pledge of Allegiance

Worthington City Council met in Regular Session on Monday, May 14, 2018, in the John P. Coleman Council Chambers of the Louis J.R. Goorey Municipal Building, 6550 North High Street, Worthington, Ohio. President Michael called the meeting to order at or about 7:30 PM.

ROLL CALL


Member(s) Absent: Scott Myers

Also present: City Manager Matthew Greeson, Assistant City Manager Robyn Stewart, Director of Law Tom Lindsey, Director of Finance Scott Bartter, Director of Planning & Building Lee Brown, Director of Parks & Recreation Darren Hurley, Chief of Fire & EMS John Bailot, Chief of Police Jerry Strait, Clerk of Council D. Kay Thress

There were approximately forty visitors present.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

President Michael invited all to stand and join in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag.

REPORTS OF CITY OFFICIALS

Discussion Item(s)

President Michael reviewed Council rules associated with speaking on a topic. Anyone is welcome to speak, she just asked that they fill out a yellow speaker slip and give it to Ms. Thress, the Clerk of Council. She asked the people to keep their remarks to five minutes so everyone has a reasonable amount of time to speak. If someone has already made a point you want to make, you can simply state you agree with the point that was already made. She asked that people not repeat the previous points.
Mr. Greeson shared that he is pleased to make some introductory remarks prior to turning the presentation over to our Parks Director, Darren Hurley and members of our Parks and Recreation Commission who have worked hard over the last few years first developing the Parks Master Plan and now helping advance implementation of some of the priorities that are within that plan. Tonight we are discussing developing a long term plan for McCord Park. Our approach this evening is to have a presentation and overview of some of the Parks and Recreation Commission’s recommendations after which public input will be presented. The third step is to have Council ask questions and discuss the matter in a workshop format. There will be no vote tonight however after discussing the issue if there is clear consensus that will form the basis of what comes back to members in a future meeting, as early as next week. Staff feels that the best approach is to adopt by Resolution the McCord Park Conceptual Master Plan as such point in time that you are ready. He invited Mr. Hurley to share his presentation and thanked everyone for their effort.

Ms. Michael acknowledged the Parks and Recreation Commission Members who were present.

- McCord Park Master Plan

Mr. Hurley introduced Commission Members Peter Calamari, Chair, Bob Burpee, Vice Chair, Dan Armitage, Dave Kessler, Michele Miller and Rob Wendling. Laura Ball, as a City employee of Westerville has her own meeting tonight so she was not able to join us. He also introduced Steve Kolwicz with POD Design who has put in a great deal of work along with his team. His staff members who worked behind the scenes but who played a big role in this effort were Julie Sergent and Mike Burgdorfer.

Lastly, he recognized Marc Zody who is our community garden volunteer coordinator. Since 2010 when the garden first originated he has put in a great deal of time and effort and has taken much of the work out of staff’s hands. He thanked him for his work.

McCord Park

Mr. Hurley shared that this effort began nearly three years ago as part of the Parks Master Plan. McCord Park was a big part of that conversation as one of our largest and major community parks. He shared a page from the Master Plan that included recommendations for McCord Park. The item that made it on the list of Most Critical Park Improvements from that Master Plan was the Redesign and renovation of the entire McCord Park using a professional consultant.

Mr. Hurley shared that he arrived in 2010 and at that time the McCord Park improvements were sitting out two or three years in the CIP and didn’t have much definition. We carried it for a couple of years and decided that we really needed to have a plan in order to fund this effort. Mr. Hurley shared the long process that was utilized. He thinks the biggest point is that it has been a long process.
The first drafted Concept Plan was shared at an Open House on September 11, 2017. A Concept Plan includes things we would like to see in the Park. Design will provide the looks and items included. This is more of a “markers on a map” effort. Staff worked with POD to compile feedback from the Open House to share with the Parks Commission at their September meeting. There were three themes that came out of the first Open House.

a) Some Neighbors Opposed Multi-Use Trail from Playground  
b) Some Neighbors Concerned with Playground Location  
c) Location Garden Related to Other Added Features

The Commission reviewed that feedback and walked the Park with the POD team. The walk provided members a visual for the space and how things might lay out. The identified a list of amenities that they desired to have in that entire area. The Wish List included:

1. Add Programmable and Rentable Shelters
2. Add a Circular Multi-Use Trail
3. Maintain Existing Community Garden
4. Add an Outfield Fence for Adjacent Ball Diamond
5. Increase Existing Soccer Field to Full Size
6. Provide Green Space for Youth Programs and Large Special Events Held at McCord
7. Redesign the Playground to Serve Neighborhood, Community Center, and Ball Diamonds
Mr. Hurley reported that it really comes down to which of the seven items members want and how much of them. That has been the process they have gone through over the last several months.

The Commission discussed with POD ways to configure items into a plan and came to the conclusion that all of those things did not fit well in that area. They began to discuss some changes and came to the conclusion that they wanted to see what the plan would look like with the Community Garden moved to another location. At that point POD completed a drawing that did not include the Community Garden and showed that to the Commission at their October meeting. The Commission asked staff to evaluate options for a relocated garden to another site. Between the October and November meeting, staff met with Garden leadership to talk about the drawing and advice of the ongoing discussion. The Garden leadership was invited to present at the November Parks & Recreation Commission meeting. Staff continued to work with POD to identify options for the Garden relocation. At that November meeting staff presented five options for possible Garden relocation. Garden leaders came and advocated for the Garden to stay in the current location.

At the end of the November meeting, the Commission moved to recommend a plan that did not contain the Community Garden and to relocate it to one or more of the identified locations.

He thinks that is when Council came more into play because at that point they began receiving feedback from the Community Garden and Sustainable Worthington members who reached out to staff and the Council with concerns about that relocation. Further process was encouraged, and POD met with Gardeners on January 17th to work on alternative designs that did include all or parts of the garden. The results were two concepts, one showing the full garden in its current location while the other showed a design with 80% of the current garden staying. The Commission reviewed those concepts at their February meeting and provided input to POD. Another Public Open House was held on March 12 where the public was shown the originally recommended plan from the Commission that did not contain the Garden, a plan that showed the full garden, and one that had the 80% garden as part of a workshop where the public could play with the different amenities and items to see how they would work into a design. POD compiled all of the feedback from the Open House and the on-line comment period. They had fifty five comments from the Open House and another one hundred twenty six on line. He thinks it is fair to say that 70% of the comments were in support in some regard to the community garden.

The Parks and Recreation Commission discussed the feedback, their ideas on how to move forward, and listened to additional public comments at their April 17th meeting. After much discussion and debate a motion was made and approved by a 4 to 3 vote. A summary of said motion is as follows:

**MOTION:** Move that their original plan from that October drawing be recommended to City Council with the understanding that the phased construction of McCord Park
keep the current garden in place through the end of 2019, that the new garden location be identified and initiated immediately including marking of plots and soil improvements with the intention that current gardeners be given priority for those plots, the relocation of the garden be contingent on successful identification and implementation of a new site, and that the plan show a demonstration garden to be utilized for education and awareness in McCord Park.

Mr. Hurley stated that they didn’t spend much time in the very detailed part of what the demonstration garden would be other than it would be there for education and awareness purposes in response to some of the feedback about the garden being there sends the message of sustainability and so forth. They thought having a small demonstration garden would at least meet that goal.

Mr. Hurley shared that that was how the process played out to get us to where we are tonight. He invited Steve Kolwicz from POD to show different drawings and how they arrived at the final recommendation.

Mr. Kolwicz stated that he is the principal and owner of POD Design. He is also a forty year resident of Worthington. McCord is a park that he grew up playing in so it is really exciting for them to be a part of the master planning process. He intends to go through an overview of the graphics that support the various steps of that planning process.

Mr. Kolwicz showed an aerial view of McCord and the Community Center. He added that all but one item from the master plan made it into the proposed final plan for McCord Park. They worked hard to incorporate the expressed desires of the Commission and the community into the overall master plan. He will go through the sketch plan, the resulting modifications to the plan and then some of the areas of focus that he thinks many are here to talk about.

Using the McCord Park Conceptual Master Plan as a guide and using the list of desired items, the following is the initial attempt to incorporate the different elements into the plan.
Mr. Kolwicz reported that the largest use of green space on the plan is the reorientation of the ball fields. They worked to scale the fields and then working in a little more of a clear cut circulation flow through the space for users. They also felt good about fitting in a ½ mile loop path in the park.

This plan was the initial presentation that they offered to the Parks Commission and utilized in the initial Open Houses. The feedback was generally positive for all of the elements that were included in the design. They actually relocated the playground from its current location into the new green, assuming it might be more desirable to have it where children of those coming for athletics and to the community center can play.

Mr. Kolwicz highlighted that the entrance to the park from Wilson Bridge Rd. was designed to align with the driveway to the businesses on the north side of Wilson Bridge Rd. The COTA turnaround that is there is confusing so by making a standard intersection the hope is to eliminate some of that confusion.

They attempted to utilize the current parking configuration as much as possible to assist with costs but were able to double the size of the parking lot east of the ball fields. The
main parking lot was cleaned up to help it work more efficiently. They also modified the roundabout in an effort to make it more of a proper drop-off.

On the west side of the park, the parking lot was redesigned to the north of the green space in an effort to fit a full size soccer/field hockey field in that location.

The green space north of the community center has two reservable shelters and open lawn space. One of the elements that came out of the community meeting was the concept of a PlayTrail, which runs from the green space back to where the playground is currently located. That would allow for a unique play experience and distributes the playground which encourages children to keep moving in the space. It also places the playground near the community center, the ball fields and the neighbors. That finishes the main elements of the design.

Mr. Kolwicz shared that they had some follow up meetings regarding the community garden. The slide below shows a yellow box that represents where they need some element of the seven “Wish List” items that the Commission asked them to include in this space.

Mr. Kolwicz commented that as a reminder, the following drawing is what was originally approved during the McCord Park Master Plan open house in March of this year.
This particular option contemplates that the Community Garden would be relocated.

They also shared two other options for consideration, Options B and Option C. Option B, kept the community garden, the loop trail was moved a little closer to the neighbors to the south, and the green space outside of the community center got a little smaller.

Option C is a compromise plan that preserves the green space, still has the path pushed a little bit to the south and shows a smaller garden footprint.

The Master Plan graphically that goes along with the motion that Mr. Hurley read is shown on page 6 of these minutes. He thinks with the idea of a demonstration garden, or whatever portion of the garden is still on the plan, needs to still be determined in that focal area.

Parks and Recreation Commission
- Peter Calamari, Chair
- Bob Burpee, Vice Chair

Mr. Hurley invited Mr. Calamari and Mr. Burpee to talk through some of the thought process of the Commission as they went through some of the steps previously discussed.

Mr. Calamari expressed his appreciation for being able to address Council on this topic. He provided background on the process to this point stating that it was not something that they took lightly. The McCord Park was on the schedule for work in the 2016 CIP. They decided to wait until the completion of the Parks Master Plan before doing anything to that park. The Master Plan took about eighteen months to complete and they then
transitioned to the McCord Master Plan. They had nine meetings with several Community Open Houses and many e-mails related to the McCord Park.

Mr. Burpee shared that there was a great deal of resident interest and many e-mails to sort through related to this park. As they gathered the information from the stakeholders, one of the things that was quite clear from the beginning was that the Community Garden group told them that they really weren’t interested in moving the garden. So that was an important consideration as they began the process. They also had many other goals to factor in and consider. He showed a slide of the plan that was presented at the first Open House. They received a fair amount of feedback from the neighborhood that the playground that currently needs a great deal of help. It is fairly close to the neighborhood and under this plan; it was not at all close.

Shortly after the Open House at one of the Commission meetings, they decided to walk through the park to think about the various features they were considering and how they would fit together. One thing that became very obvious was that in order to accommodate everything it would require some compromise and maybe cause some things to be a little too close together.

At they got back inside and were talking about it a little bit, they realized that if they were thinking about moving ball fields a little bit, adjusting the entrance to the park, putting in some new infrastructure for bathrooms, and doing a lot of things that they should really have everything on the table. That included the location and shape of the community garden. They considered it part of their mission as an advisory committee to give Council the best advice they can based on the long term interest of the community.

Mr. Calamari in going back to the Wish List shared that earlier in the year they had asked POD to revisit the current park as it is transfigured with the idea of moving the garden out and if that eased the burden of trying to accommodate a number of other Wish List items. They did that. As members saw that plan stretched out, the change to the garden would allow for the inclusion of a number of the Wish List items included back into the design.

He thinks if you look at this version of the plan, the thinking for his group was really what the benefit to the larger community is. Who uses the park? How do they use the park? What are the options to really identify information that can tell us more about that and instruct us as we go forward.

Mr. Burpee provided the following data on who uses the park:

2017 McCord Park Data
- 1,250 Summer Camp Participants (140 per week x 9 weeks)
- 1,100 Participants in WCC Spring & Fall Youth Programs (excludes swim lessons)
- 70 children enrolled in on-going preschool which runs during the school year
• Approximately 9,000 people attended Special Events (Barnyard Bash, National Night Out, Egg Scramble, St. Patrick’s Day cycle Search, Touch a Truck, Community Bike Rodeo)

• An average of 148 kids per week visited the Community Center as part of local daycares, school groups, and camps. (These numbers reflect additional groups not affiliated with the City)

• McCord Park ball diamonds and soccer fields were available to be reserved for 198 days in 2017. At least one of those fields was reserved 193 of those days for games or practices. On average, the park would have 1,900 visits per week (players one) as a result of the field permits granted. Adding parents, sibling and spectators the number would at least double to 3,800.

• The Community Garden currently has 30 plots rented. If each plot represents a household with an average of 2.5 people per household you could estimate 75 active garden users in 2017.

• The addition of two small or medium reservable shelters would be estimated to serve 5,600 people per year based on an average of five rentals per week each and 20 people on average per rental for a seven month period of time. The number does not include internal usage such as camps, programs, and special events or informal usage such as walkers, sporting events, spectators etc.

From the data, Mr. Burpee concluded that as for the Community Garden, the numbers just aren’t in the same ball park as the other users of the park. They haven’t mentioned to this point the number of children who would be using the playground area. That is really a forgotten special interest group. All the kids that are going to be born and raised in Worthington, we want them to have a park that works really well for them.

Looking at the various users of the park and trying to factor all of this in to our thought process, members started thinking seriously about maybe relocating the garden. As much as we love it, maybe we should relocate it and consider one or two or three or more other places for the community garden. Based on that there was a great deal of feedback supporting the garden and that is great to see. Since it first went in as an experiment it has had a great deal of use and we are happy to see that. Obviously we gave very strong consideration to all that positive feedback about the garden.

Mr. Calamari shared that as they approached the April meeting the Commission was somewhat split in opinions and thoughts on how to move forward. At that meeting they took feedback from members of the garden, residents who lived nearby and they again discussed the issue. At the end of the day they decided to move forward with a vote on the motion that was on the table. As Mr. Hurley noted, that motion was approved by a vote of four to three. At the end of the day, he thinks the thinking moving forward is that this plan in the long term will benefit the most users over an extended period of time. He thinks that was really where it came down to. With all respect to the garden group, a very passionate, very loyal group of people, they have demonstrated tremendous resolve as this process has played out and tremendous support for the garden. They did include a small educational portion of a garden to leave in the park. A concept that it is hoped
could serve as a front door to the garden system. That we would be able to establish maybe a smaller garden or series of gardens at other locations that were identified.

Mr. Burpee added that at some point staff had come up with roughly twelve locations that they were considering as acceptable plots for new community gardens. That fits in with something they had discussed as a commission before. It would be great if they had more community gardens scattered around the City making it more convenient for more people to get easier access to the gardens.

Members saw the long recommendation that had a lot of accommodation in there for future gardens in other locations. The Commission really is committed to that as they fully endorse community gardening. They fully support the concept of a community garden. Moving forward, they don’t want to move forward unless they have a good accommodation for the gardeners with enhanced soil and all of the amenities that they have grown accustomed to, although at a different location. They believe that the community garden in general is an important part of our parks system in Worthington. The one thing that their vote also indicates is that they are not convinced that having a community garden at McCord is critical to the success of a community garden in Worthington when you consider all of the other interests that have to be considered with respect to McCord Park.

Testimony

Lucie Pollard, 446 Haymore Ave. N.

Ms. Pollard said that she was one of the original founders of Sustainable Worthington. They did not intend to found anything, only to put out a few notices asking people to come together for a discussion about sustainability. Thirty-nine people showed up right around Thanksgiving, which shocked them but it was a wonderful conversation. There were many people who knew each other from many years before and others who had not lived in Worthington all their lives. It served as a fascinating window into the many different people in this community with a depth of knowledge in many different areas. The Farmers Market was their top priority and they wanted to extend it into the winter and the second thing was the Community Garden. They learned early on that they did not want to be a traditional organization, so they formed individual groups that took the ball and ran. They would support them any way that they could, which meant helping different sustainability groups across central Ohio. But the group that worked on community gardens spent a lot of time looking at other gardens, including the Victory Garden in Grandview which has been there since World War II. They talked to people as frankly as they could about plusses and minuses, what the problems were, and they knew it would be an ongoing project. Her sense of it is that there has been real consistency there and every season there are more people wanting plots than plots were available. When she came to the planning meeting she had the question if they ever considered a plan with a larger Community Garden since we are not meeting the need that there is now. However, that had never come up apparently. So she thinks there may be a glitch, in terms of not hearing the entire community in some ways.
Ms. Pollard said that parks do change over time, which is expected. Since her time in Worthington since 1990, there has been expansion of tennis courts, some of her children’s high school friends were concerned about getting a skate park, and these things take time. She wanted to advocate for the Community Garden because she thinks it really has been more than a matter of just a few families. Many people often come while other members of their families are taking classes or participating in other activities at the Recreation Center. She has heard about people who advise other gardeners in various ways. The community of gardeners itself is important because they work with each other if one person has a problem, they can get advice from a more experienced gardener, or exchange seedlings, or many other things that may make it a richer experience. Some people say this is the social experience in the community that means the most to them due to all the different ways it affects them. So she is not sure they can count time for those who are gardening in the same way we count time for somebody who is a participant in a class. It is kind of like apples and oranges in a way. She is also a little concerned reading over minutes of meetings, because some of the current members did not appear to be very comfortable with the Community Garden at all. Some comments were rather dismissive over the fact that the garden has many people who would write supporting letters. She said that she doesn’t garden in the Community Garden, she gardens at home but she pays tax dollars here too and she likes having the Community Garden here and what it does.

Sara Bihari, 6966 Eastview Dr.

Ms. Bihari wanted to preface her comments by saying that she and her husband were married in Worthington, raised their children in Worthington, and they love Worthington. But this is not their first re-design rodeo. They were here before the pool was. So they have experienced the loss of property value, the loss of privacy, the loss of enjoyment of their property, and nothing they have seen in the plan will alter that in a positive way. However, they have decided they will live in Worthington probably until they day they die.

Ms. Bihari stated that about the Community Garden specifically, in theory they are very supportive of the garden and they actually see it being in the flagship park as a positive. People come from outside the community come and see the garden, which is a statement of their commitment to a green environment and climate change. However, having lived nearby, many people but not all who use the garden have forgotten what it means to be a good neighbor. They use the land as if it is their own private property, without regard to what they are leaving behind. This year in particular there have been eight foot high fences being erected around their squares, which is an eyesore and has the potential to be dangerous for small animals, pets, and deer. She and her husband took a walk in late winter/early spring and they saw pots that had been left behind all winter long, decaying vegetable matter, plastic bags and a pile of railroad ties. Some made no attempt to clean up their plots for the winter and it looked disgusting. Things that they would not have put in their front yard, they left out in the garden right next to our homes and that is not being a good neighbor.
She explained there is a lack of respect for privacy and she understands they are next to a park and there is going to be some noise, but the gardeners forget they are next to people’s homes. Their dogs will run free, Worthington is not a leash city which she believes is a mistake, but their dogs will run up to their property which upsets their dog, and can cause ground to be dug up. Kids are also running free and little kids will come up to their fence line wanting to pet their dog and it is a nuisance. There is a lack of a sense that this is somebody’s home and it is getting increasingly worse. Whether they keep the garden there or not, she is concerned no matter where it is. Is there going to be the oversight to make sure people are taking care of the plots appropriately. If they are not, maybe they should not be allowed to have a plot. If this is a community center, then we need to think about the community, including the people on Eastview Drive.

Kathy Kessler, 6988 Eastview Dr.

Ms. Kessler said that she lives next door to the Community Garden at McCord Park. She is here to support the plan put forth by the Parks Commission to have play trail in place instead of having the garden. She believes that this would result in having a really attractive, fun park for the citizens of Worthington and any visitors to the City. She understands that McCord Park is the busiest park in Worthington and she really wants it to shine for the City. Because she lives next door to the garden, she must say that she agrees with Ms. Bihari that they are not good neighbors. She stated that she brought some pictures to show of the garden. Some of the gardeners are good at taking care of their plots, making them neat and organized, but many are not. Right now the gardeners have been full force this spring doing all kinds of soil amendments to the garden. It currently looks as good as it will look and it is still very unattractive. Most of the people have put up fencing of some sort. People leave things in the garden such as folding chairs, parts of bird baths, they tie shiny ribbons to the fence, scrap wood is left behind and if this were a home it would never be tolerated. It is not very neighborly.

She has attended some of the meetings for the focus groups, the discussions, and the Parks and Rec Commission meetings. She has heard some of the comments that people in the garden are making in support of keeping the garden where it is. The two main reasons seems to be an educational value of the garden and also they have worked hard over the last eight years to put in soil amendments that maybe will take them more time if they move to another location to make the soil as good as it is right now in the current location. First in regards to the educational value, she has been a teacher for thirty years and she really does value the teachable moment. Someone spoke at the parks meeting last time about how a child could walk by the garden and ask a question and a gardener may be there to answer the question. However, she knows as a teacher of thirty years that education takes planning and curriculum, and you cannot count on a curious child wandering by the garden the same time a gardener is there to make this sweet interaction. She stated that hoping a visitor comes by to ask a question is not enough of a reason to change the design of a park. To the second argument about the soil amendments, she noticed that since they live next door, they amend the soil constantly as she does in a bed in their own yard where they grow vegetables. You have to test the soil and add things to it to make it the right soil for whatever you want to grow. So it isn’t a
process that hasn’t just been taking place for eight years, but it is something that goes on all the time.

Ms. Kessler stated that the gardeners will not leave anything by moving and the parks commission has committed to find them new spots. The garden should be in a location where it is not someone’s neighbor. The people drive to the garden as it is, even the people in their neighborhood still drive there, so they can drive to another site. Simply that they do not want to move should not be enough reason to change the design of a park.

Beth Hoerauf, 6987 Eastview Dr.

Ms. Hoerauf stated that she lives in the corner house facing the Community Garden. Her living room and all her bedrooms look out onto the garden 365-days a year. She agrees 100% with Ms. Bihari and Ms. Kessler’s statements on the way that it looks. What she does not understand is that there is a Parks and Recreation Commission which has gotten input from the community and the hiring of a firm to make recommendations for the park to have as many of the features that the community has asked for. However, we have allowed one group to question this and force the development of more plans. It is one group. She believes that we should make the most of this park. She has lived in her home for over twenty years and when the garden first went in eight years ago, nobody asked her if they wanted this garden. She is acceptable of the garden and does believe it is an asset to the community, however eight years ago she would not have accepted the idea if she had been asked. Before the garden was there, it was a nice, big field where the baseball and softball players would warm up; there was an athletic wall at the far end that the neighborhood kids would use. She and others in the community miss that wall. There is also a small hill next to the garden where her kids were able to sled that was great for elementary age children. Now the hill goes right into the garden where there are dangerous wooden stakes and fences.

Ms. Hoerauf has asked herself the question many times, who is responsible for all the things that are left behind. If a kid ever got into all the different gardening implements left there, who would be responsible for that, she does not know. We cannot move the baseball fields or the soccer fields, they are not going anywhere. We must make McCord Park as beautiful as possible and it should be our shining star for members of the community and people who visit Worthington. It should be there for everyone, maximizing that space for everyone as much as possible. Not just a prime piece of land for just a handful of folks.

Marc Zody, 285 Highland Ave.

Mr. Zody said that he is a Worthington Community Garden volunteer and since their official opening in 2010, they have hosted volunteers from Leadership Worthington and the Franklin County Master Gardeners. They are an official Franklin County Master Gardener volunteer site. Over the last four years, they have supplied over 800 pounds of produce to the Worthington Resource Pantry. About a third of their gardeners are
seniors and there are also several gardens taken care of by young families with small children who garden with them. He would argue this program has as much diversity of age as any program within the Community Center’s programs. As of March of this year, there are over 20 people on the waiting list. The most recent additions to the garden have waited over two years to receive a spot. Since the very beginning of the process when Mr. Hurley showed the revised garden plan, a concept that completely included the garden, to the final draft which completely eliminated the garden, they have maintained that they could definitely come to some kind of compromise.

He showed the redesign of the park with the existing footprint of the garden as an overlay and explained that he finds it hard to believe that the garden needs to be completely relocated. Because of that single playground and where the path is routed, the entire garden has to leave the park. This winter, Mr. Hurley asked to send a small working group to meet with POD Design to try to work out some sort of compromise. POD came back a month later with two alternate layouts. The first illustrated the garden remaining the same, moving the path to the south side of the garden with a mulch path on the north side of the garden, cutting the oval on the right hand side because the garden clipped part of that path. The compromise plan removed over 3000 square feet of the garden, which accounts for 20% of the existing garden. While they still believe the full garden would easily fit within this concept the way it is by making a couple of small changes. They agreed as a group to fully support the compromise plan and get behind another location in the city that would accommodate the displaced gardeners and those on the waiting list.

We maintain that this does not need to be an all or nothing proposition. Both sides are going to have to give up something but right now the garden is giving up everything. There is a lot of discussion in this plan about how these alternate gardening sites will solve the problem. He hopes that you will look at the five sites given that do not meet the criteria for space, a water source nearby, a place safe for seniors and families, and full sun all day long. One site that was offered is in the middle of a parking lot right next to Phoenix Middle School, up against a wall and beside ten full sized trees. The garden cannot be tucked away into a hidden corner, if it is then it is not a community garden.

On April 17th of 2011, Mr. Zody said that he and Mr. Hurley visited WBNS 10TV for an Earth Day presentation. During that time, they boasted about Precycle Day, The Moses Wright Cleanup and the Worthington Community Garden. He respectfully asked that the plan as it sits be rejected and urged the commission to work on a compromise plan.

Lynda Chambers, 124 Northigh Dr.

Ms. Chambers explained that she thought it was important to clear up one point that she feels is an error that was distributed in multiple letters to the neighborhood. It stated that when the garden was put in place, it was not done in a public manner. She stated she was the Parks and Recreation Director at that time and in 2009 when they located an appropriate location for the garden, they went through all the appropriate public procedures. They conducted and open house, mailed letters to all of the letters, then went on to publish the garden as a program in the Community Center brochure, and had an
official start up with registration. Also there were programs such as “Starting Plants from Seeds,” and “Going Green – Organic Vegetable Gardening.” We listed all these programs in the brochure for the first few years before moving to social media with the Facebook and the Sustainable Worthington Google group. They have not done their due diligence lately publishing the educational programs to the greater public as was done in the beginning. The garden project was picked up by both ThisWeek and The Worthington News, with stories printed about it. She is not aware of what else could have been done to conduct a proper public process.

Beth Black, 334 Highland Ave.

Ms. Black stated that she is in attendance to speak in support of the Parks and Recreation Commission’s recommendation for McCord Park. They chose their house because of the parks and they were often in McCord Park when their children were young. Her son Ethan Black served as a youth member of the Parks and Recreation Commission for several years. She walks and runs in the neighborhood several times a week and is excited for the new plans for McCord Park, particularly the pedestrian path and the play trail that will pull the park together because it seems disjointed now. She is also exited for those who attend sporting events to have the chance to be active themselves when they get bored and restless and still be in view of the athletic fields. She looks forward to having more than the streets and the half mile path to run on. She said that her heart goes out to the gardeners because it will be disruptive, but it will be chance to bring in more people who want gardens and rejuvenate the educational programming taking place in a more public way. She concluded that it is in the best interest of the majority of the visitors to this park to proceed with concept plan A and to relocate the community garden.

Matthew Goshe, 273 Halligan Ave.

Mr. Goshe explained that he is a resident and a gardener who wanted to speak in support of the garden. For him the garden is a very important thing, growing up he spent time a lot of time in a garden and it is an important experience for him and his family. The experience of working, putting in effort, and having the patience to earn a reward at the end is a useful life lesson. Everything that has been presented for McCord Park looks great because it is a wish list and we want it all. He moved to the community five years ago and the total package of McCord Park and the amenities are why they moved where they did. Looking at the plan, there is nothing there that he can say that shouldn’t be there. However, it is important to have that garden and in a walking distance to his house. Based upon the alternatives, some would be a walk on a busier street instead of a nice neighborhood walk. Another perspective he would like to have kept in mind is that the garden does have a waiting list for people who want to use it. We have all these other things that we want in the park, are those other things like ball fields, but are all those things utilized to their full capacity. He doesn’t want to start over, but looking at the wait list for the Community Garden, it is a testament to how popular it is.

Julie Weatherington-Rice, 298 W New England Ave.
Dr. Weatherington-Rice explained that she has worked with the Franklin Water and Soil Conservation District since 1974, she is an associate supervisor for life, served as an adjunct professor at Ohio State University in Food, Agriculture and Biological Engineering for 14 years, and have had the privilege of being the first member of the Sharon Township-Worthington Cemetery Advisory Board for the past 21 years. She is a soil scientist and a hydrogeologist. She is here to provide technical information which needs to happen. When we look at great green pastures of lawn space and parks with no dandelions, what we see is a biological desert. It is a community of vegetation that can supply almost nothing if it is treated chemically, which it often is, the microbiological community that would have been in that soil is killed. For all practical purposes, virtually all the organic material in the soil which allows for carbon sequestration is gone. We’ve been told since the 1980s that this is our ideal, but it really is not. What we know is that as soil scientists, the moment we decide to start integrating with the soil, and start looking at the soil’s health, beginning to grow the microbiological community that is there, we begin to develop a carbon sync that slowly but surely is one of the few answers worldwide as we begin to look at climate change. In a healthy shovel full of garden soil, you may have a million microorganisms that are beneficial as they proliferate; they break down the clods of soil creating beds. Those beds are what make possible for vegetation to grow so well, building nutrients. If you are wise about recycling and rotating crops you actually build the nutrients in the soil year after year after year.

Whether it was the right place to put the garden or not, that’s where it got put. For the past eight years that is where the soil has been being built. And when you walk away from that, you start the clock over again and it is not a quick clock. So if you do decide you have to move it, I suggest you take the top foot or two with you. Otherwise, you have broken faith with the soil and have broken faith with the planet earth. Because we are slowly but surely carefully building ways to recover from the climate change we are seeing all around us. It is so incredibly important to think about this holistically. She welcomed the opportunity to answer technical questions and to help understand what is going on in those soils.

Phil Hennigan, 6971 Eastview Dr.

Mr. Hennigan said that he lives on Eastview Drive and is a very strong proponent of Parks Commission’s current plan to relocate the garden. If a compromise is done, then the smaller the garden, the better. He explained that he likes the garden but it just does not make sense where it’s at. It does not matter what the previous process was, the plan that has been presented, every single thing that is included benefits lots and lots of people. As the weather turns, it becomes clearer to him each day that there are maybe 150 people who want the garden. How many people come to McCord Park each day, it is much more than 150. We are not eliminating the garden, we are moving it. Take the soil, move it to the other place and get the clock ticking. This McCord plan is a long term plan that has one chance to do it right. The consultant that has already been hired said everything cannot fit here and it will get too cluttered. He keeps coming back to the
fact these two things don’t fit together. He likes the garden but does not like where it is. He has been at the park almost every single day for the past two years and he can say that very few of the gardeners there use the other features of the park. So, yes it will be disruptive to move the garden, but it is the price of progress. Someone will be upset in this process. If there is no place left in Worthington for the garden, then leave it where it is. But this is a 20 year plan where we are spending so much money; it makes sense to do it right because we have one opportunity. Listen to the recommendation of the consultants that we paid money to.

Suzanne Seals, 123 E. New England Ave.

Ms. Seals explained that having Community Garden at the Community Center is the type of community that she wants to live in. What is more sustainable, environmentally friendly, community oriented, family friendly, and forward thinking than having community gardens located in the midst of where multigenerational activities take place. The close 4-3 vote of the Commission is not a sound endorsement for Plan A. She stated that as she understood it, the majority of resident feedback supports maintaining the gardens at this site. In fact, many residents have called for additional sites. She would hate to see this as another situation where it seems to be a heavy support of the community to maintain the gardens, where citizens are allowed to speak but are not heard. She mentioned that she is not a member of Sustainable Worthington, though she fully supports what it does. She may not have a garden, but she believes that gardening is such an important part of what Worthington should represent and she sees many benefits of keeping the gardens were they are. One benefit is the soil enrichment which was discussed earlier. A demonstration garden here is a waste; it is like a fake garden. There is already a demonstration garden there and it sounds like it needs to have its game upped and tweaked to represent good gardening. Good gardening is not always pristine and beautiful; however the problems that were shown in the photographs will exist anywhere unless there are guidelines and requirements about what needs to be done. Wherever the garden is located it needs not to be an eyesore. These gardens give kids the opportunity to be exposed to gardening. Another aspect of child development is responsibility and this can be a place for them to observe the gardeners taking care of the plants and see the outcomes from the garden. This is more important during a time when many kids don’t have an appreciation of what goes on outside. These public gardens benefit not only the individual gardeners, but make a statement about Worthington values. She agreed with one of the councilmembers who said, “to reduce remove or minimize the garden any way is a step backwards” and asked to please keep the Community Garden at the Community Center.

Jim Seals, 123 E. New England Ave.

Mr. Seals explained how gardening is the essence of civilization. Humans used to be hunters and nomads before they started gardening. Worthington is very civilized with wonderful parks and people; however cities in some older civilizations across the world have found gardens so important they set aside large areas where people were allowed to garden in the city to get back to nature. They recognized the value of families with their
children, teaching skills that can help the environment, sustainability and lead to a better future and connecting us to our past. All the complaints that Mr. Seals have heard about the current garden are cosmetic and beauty is in the eye of the beholder. He illustrated his point with an explanation of how many years ago he had a prominent German scientist visit and they had dinner at a home on Halligan. On the way there he began fidgeting in the seat next to him and asked why there were so many cookie cutter yards where everyone cuts the grass short and said how horrible it was. He believes that instead of talking about relocating the garden, the discussion should be people working together and being reasonable with each other. The Community Garden should be duplicated; there should be more gardens not fewer.

Laura Hennigan, 6971 Eastview Dr.

Ms. Hennigan explained that she wanted to bring a unique perspective. Her husband spoke earlier and he mentioned that they have spent almost every day over the past two years at McCord Park. Their children are seven and four and she is not sure if anyone else has children that young. She stated her children attend elementary school less than a mile from McCord Park and they take part in a multitude of activities at the Rec Center. There are numerous school and daycare groups there all the time. Of all the children she has seen there, none of them express interest in the garden. What she has seen are a lot of parents making their children stay clear because of all the dangerous sharp objects. They encourage their children to be environmentally conscious and curious about the world. They love community gardens; however this particular one is not in the right place. It has gotten too big, so let’s put it in a place where anyone who wants to access it can. She concluded by stating she fully supports the Commission’s recommendation.

Tommy Hoerauf, 6987 Eastview Dr.

Mr. Hoerauf explained that he lives at the corner of the park and when the garden went up in 2010, he was just entering high school and now has graduated college. In all that time he has yet to talk to any of the gardeners. He keeps hearing about how the garden is educational and community friendly, however over the years when he and his friends would walk to the park they would steer clear because the gardeners were threatened by them.

Frank Proano, 6928 Eastview Dr.

Mr. Proano stated how he has been a resident of Worthington for last 38 years and lives a block away from the park. He wanted to talk about the relocation of the Community Garden and how it is a terrible idea. If there is problem with the garden, relocate those problem makers. There are neighbors that are not pleased, those issues should be resolved but we should not destroy. There are things in Worthington, like anywhere else, that are not pleasant but they have a function. A visitor to the Dairy Queen is not taken there to admire the architecture; they are taken there for an ice cream. That is similar to the garden. Don’t expect beauty, there are stakes and containers, but it has a function.
Just because the Dairy Queen’s building is ugly does not mean it has to be demolished or relocated. The aesthetics of the garden have to be resolved because there are problems, but do not try to destroy something that is magnificent. Mr. Proano explained he is not a gardener, but he walks through the garden every day and enjoys the process of gardening. The problem is unrealistic expectations, the garden does not have to be beautiful and the function is to produce what has been planted. There are many ideas how to make the garden less unappealing, such as building a garden fence around the perimeter.

President Michael thanked everyone who spoke for coming tonight and being prepared with thoughtful views and thoughts. She observed that there is definitely a divide in the community relating to feelings about the Community Garden. She asked if Councilmembers had any questions or if they request additional information.

Ms. Kowalczyk asked for Mr. Zody to come up for a question. She asked about the organization of the garden, how people are oriented, what the expectations are, and thoughts on how to address some of the issues brought up regarding aesthetics and fencing. Mr. Zody explained that fencing is definitely an issue, anyone who brought that up is correct. When the garden first started, there were no fences and the deer population would come through the garden at will. The deer population seems to have grown and over time as fences have gone up, the deer are funneled to the people who do not have fences. Before this process began, they had begun looking at other gardens with deer fences to see what it would cost to put in an attractive perimeter fence. Unfortunately, it is out of their budget at this point in time. Additionally, he stated that under their by-laws the fences should come down over the wintertime; however he was personally responsible for failing to make sure that they did come down this past year. Any of the unsightliness is completely his fault. Ms. Kowalczyk asked if there are by-laws, do they include guidelines for regarding cleaning up plots. Mr. Zody replied that they give a “Welcome Packet” that is about 15-20 pages long regarding those items. Ms. Kowalczyk asked if Mr. Zody is responsible for enforcing the guidelines if they are not followed. Mr. Zody responded that was correct.

Mr. Foust asked Mr. Hurley if staff had evaluated the viability and costs to move the top layer of soil from the garden and move it to a new location and giving the current gardeners first access to those new areas. Mr. Hurley replied they have not done a cost estimate on that yet; however it is something that in conversations with other communities, they have chosen to do something similar. They brought in equipment and moved the soil plot by plot, but there can be some challenges doing that. If gardeners are open to that, they would be able to accommodate that type of thing.

Ms. Dorothy inquired about the recommended Plan A and how many of the additional sites for the garden relocation have been vetted. She wondered how many of the listed sites may be viable. Mr. Hurley explained they have gone through a process, partially with POD, where they started with any park space up to 5,000 square feet, the existing garden is 15,000 square feet. Staff including the City’s arborist went out to the different sites, looking at different aspects such as if water could be provided, are there shade
issues and what is the size. They have not gone through the step of soil testing or other things of that nature; however as has been represented tonight it will not be possible to start out with the eight-year quality of soil that exists at the current garden. Mr. Hurley explained that he initiated two community gardens with the City of Delaware and several Commission members have been involved with other city’s gardens. With that background, that is why the thought process was to give a couple of years to begin soil conditioning and other things that could help to keep the gardeners from having to start from scratch. Ms. Dorothy asked further about the trade-offs with the proposed sites and the viability of them from a community aspect. She wondered how well they are integrated in the community because from the looking at the map it is not clear. Mr. Hurley replied they looked at several locations and as part of the Parks Master Plan; one of the goals was to add a second community garden. So, it has been the intention to add to the community gardens before this conversation began taking place. As anyone who has been involved in the parks planning process knows, there is not much green space lying around. It would be a challenge to find 15,000 square feet in one location; however with time he is confident they could with time and ability to treat the soil, there could be a viable second garden or relocation of the existing garden.

Ms. Michael followed up on Ms. Dorothy’s question by asking Mr. Hurley for more specific information on the proposed sites. Mr. Hurley replied they looked at five locations. One is the Sharon Township Police Station on the curb of Wilson Bridge Road, behind that location is parking that leads to a greenspace that has approximately 10,000 square feet of unshaded open area. Another Sharon Township location along 161 at the Memorial Hall there is a slightly smaller greenspace at that location. Next, at Snouffer Park there is a large island in the middle of the parking area. Currently there are dead trees there that will be coming out and instead of planting new trees that area would be converted to garden space. There are a couple other locations in Snouffer that could be considered as well. At Linworth Park they are looking at either re-orienting the ball diamond there with the development that has occurred to the north of it, or removing the ball diamond. Somewhere in the greenspace at the corner of the park, there could be space for a garden. The last location being looked at is probably the worst of the five, down in the flats. The idea is that there is already a small garden that has been initiated there that could be expanded on.

Mr. Foust asked for a point of clarification about the draft minutes from the April 17th meeting of the Parks and Recreation Commission. In the minutes are listed options one, two, and three, but the motion at the end calls for current “Option A.” Mr. Hurley explained that options one, two, and three were listed as optional motions that could be made. Staff was just presenting a starting point for a motion to be made at the meeting. The plans have been labeled as labeled in the presentation as: A, B, and C. Mr. Foust asked if the Commission voted with a split vote to support Option A which was staff’s original recommendation. Mr. Hurley stated that they voted to support Option A which was the originally recommended option by the Commission at their November meeting. In their motion they noted some alterations to the plan such as the demonstration garden that would be built into the future design.
Mr. Smith inquired about the north side of the garden as it currently exists and the new proposed ball diamond that is closest to the garden, exactly how many feet are there between the garden and the fence of the ball diamond. Mr. Hurley said that he was not sure of the exact measurement and he was not comfortable guessing. He explained they looked at whether the garden would move up against the outfield fence or whether it be a grandfathering of the garden when gardeners vacate they start to develop that as an alternative location. He believed that the incremental gain from the location change, there was not much space there that made a difference in the rest of the things to be squeezed in the park. Mr. Smith said that his thought process was less about the garden expansion and more about the shifting of the trail from the south side to the north side. Mr. Hurley said they struggled about the trail’s orientation, with whatever configuration of the garden in place; it shifts that trail one way or the other. If it is shifted to the north, which keeps it further away from neighbors, it provides more of a cut through from the ballfields to whatever play is on the west side of the garden. The reality is that if you spend any time at the Community Center, if you watch how people come from the neighborhood to the Community Center, people would be cutting on the south side of the garden. In the versions shown with the garden, there is a hard asphalt trail on the south of the garden and a chip trail on the north side. They know people are going to use both sides of the garden; the question is if you want the cow path there or if you want some sort of a trail.

Mr. Robinson stated two factors stick in his mind. First, he believes the garden can be retained with a little compromise on the design of the rest of the park and the loss of few, if any amenities. Second, is that roughly three quarters of the community feedback was in support of retaining the garden. Given these two things, he does not feel like he has heard a compelling case from the Commission on how and why they justify the elimination of the garden. Mr. Robinson asked why given the public feedback, eliminating the garden is the preferred route. Mr. Calamari stated that they never advocated the elimination of the garden; they were really talking about relocating that function. In terms of compromise, that is certainly on the table as an option and they have gone through the factors in their decision making. The question is what do you want more of, and their group was clearly divided but they had to come to some sort of decision. People voted with their best intentions after giving it a lot of thought. In terms of introducing new information, he cannot provide that, but he can answer questions about the process and what the decision making was about.

Ms. Michael explained that it would be helpful for staff to know what direction council is going since this is up for a vote at the next meeting. There have been multiple options discussed. Mr. Robinson asked for what the options would be. Mr. Greeson asked Mr. Hurley to show options A, B, and C on the screen and explain them. Mr. Hurley showed the aerial of the park, highlighting the area in question. Option A is the recommended option that does not show the garden with a two year move. Option B shows the full garden staying. Option C shows a version with 20% of the garden removed as the compromise version. Mr. Smith asked for timelines as far as implementation and planning processes for this. Mr. Hurley stated that it is dependent upon funding and the process from here is starting with whatever concept plan is approved, and then breaking
it up over time since we do not have the ability to pay for it all at once. So, the next step would be to bring some sort of estimate to plan for the CIP and prioritizing what should be funded first. The first step is to have some level of design that allows the start of looking at things such as what the playground looks like and how big are the shelters. There is some thinking that if this part of the plan can be resolved then there could be a phase one, because the playground is in really bad condition and there is already money programmed for the repaving of the parking lot. You could address the playground, already address the parking lot, and then buy some time to figure out how to do all the field improvements without totally disrupting the Worthington Youth Booster organization. Ms. Michael asked if the 20% compromise was on the slides Mr. Zody showed. Mr. Hurley said his was a hand drawn version of this and there have not been significant changes to it. The commission has still been trying to figure out the play areas that would be to the south of the garden and there may be some issues with the trails and play areas abutting the neighbors. Ms. Kowalczyk asked what is gained by reducing the garden by 20%. Mr. Hurley said that with the garden the biggest dilemma is how to treat the playground. It came through loud and clear from the neighbors they like some play area where the existing playground is and it is clear through this process that there is some desire for play over between the community center, the ball fields and that area. What is removed from the garden opens up more open space and gives the opportunity for a small play area there. Part of the idea of the open space is the creation of reservable shelters that staff in the community center can maintain. Depending on the size of the garden impacts the amount of space for the shelters and the greenspace.

Mr. Foust stated that this is a decision that has gotten big enough that he is not comfortable going further without all seven members present. He has read all of the nearly 200 comments posted online and nobody can argue against the virtues of community gardening. He stated that there is only one chance to get this right. The process from the start called for using a professional consultant, which has been done. A well informed and engaged Parks and Rec Commission have been utilized and he can find no fault with the process. He said that he supports the City, at its expense, to remove the top couple of feet of soil and moving it to help jumpstart the next location. Either Mr. Burpee or Mr. Calamari stated that the McCord Park location is not critical to the success of the Community Garden. He would also suggest that the Community Garden is not critical to the success of McCord Park. What is critical is good thoughtful design focused on the greater community good. Mr. Foust stated to Mr. Robinson’s question about the impact, there would be folks numbered in the thousands affected by this. For the sake of the thousands and thousands who will use this park for the decades to come, he sees no reason to set aside the recommendations of the staff or the consultant. With that said, he would like to see Mr. Myers present for this conversation.

Ms. Dorothy stated that she would like to see all three of these options presented at the next meeting. It was her understanding that this meeting tonight was for getting input and not taking any other action. Ms. Michael said that they were just trying to make it easier for staff next week. Mr. Greeson said that if there was consensus staff would just bring forward one resolution, they can easily have three resolutions with two motions that fail and one that passes. Mr. Greeson said that there would most likely be one
resolution with three exhibits and council selects which exhibit they would like to insert into the resolution.

Mr. Robinson asked for a point of clarification if staff recommended what the commission ended up voting for. He was at the meeting and was under the impression that if anything staff and Mr. Hurley in particular was suggesting the compromise plan, whether that is the case or not. He did not think that staff had a formal recommendation. Mr. Hurley said that staff spent time prior to the last meeting speaking with the individual commission members and the thing that rang the trusest was that they wanted to move the plan along. So, they crafted three different options with option one that moved to keep the proposed compromise garden in the concept plan. It did list several conditions with some having to do with aesthetics, and a phased approach that would shrink the garden size significantly. It was in the spirit of getting the plan moving along and providing a compromise. There were two other option that were provide, one to recommend the existing plan and the other that was a similar grandfathering situation. There has been a lot of time, energy and effort put into this and they want to see it get moving.

Mr. Foust said that where he is struggling is the comment of further shrinking the existing garden. Initially there would be 20% taken off, but he asked if there have been any specifics about the further shrinking of the garden. Mr. Hurley said that this option was in the spirit of trying to promote conversation and some compromise knowing that some of the commission members were not going to be open 80% of the garden staying. It is not detailed because it was meant to serve as a conversation starter and the idea behind that was to not make existing gardeners move and this process is going to take time. As gardeners vacate, the garden would shrink over time and they would be able to create additional locations for new gardeners.

- Wilson Bridge Road

Mr. McCorkle explained the conversation tonight was motivated by the need to bring resolution to the question of whether the Community Improvement Corporation (CIC) and the City want to acquire parcels of land along the south side Wilson Bridge Road. $600,000 was previously set aside for the CIC to investigate whether it made sense to acquire several currently residential properties. As part of that conversation, he wanted to give a summary of some of the activities currently taking place on Wilson Bridge Road. As a result of the 2011 Wilson Bridge Road Corridor study, a great deal of investment has been made. The key findings from the study included: increased improvement for pedestrian and bike safety, Worthington Mall need help, I-270 needed to be integrated properly, promotion of economic growth, and integration of diverse housing. Wilson Bridge Road is important to the City from an income tax perspective, 52%
of all withholdings collected by the City come from this corridor. This is split 57% to the west and 43% to the east.

Mr. McCorkle highlighted several of the recent successes on Wilson Bridge Road. 350 West Wilson Bridge Road was a complete renovation with a $9,000,000 investment with over 100 employees currently there and more expected to fill the second floor space soon. Central Ohio Urology Group currently occupies the entire first floor. Dr. McClatchie’s office and Wheels-Up occupy space on the third floor.

Worthington Industries has acquired their building and occupies it and half of the building to the east of them. It is a huge $10,000,000 investment from a key employer that will be in the City for a long time.

The Heights is a $16,600,000 investment currently with 90% apartment occupancy and 100% office occupancy. There is an OSU family practice on the first floor that moved from the Harding site, so the jobs are not net new. The second floor will soon be occupied by an OB-GYN that will be new to the community. Mr. Smith inquired about the demographics for the residents of the apartments at The Heights. Mr. McCorkle replied that it is populated by many empty nesters. Mr. Robinson asked what the average rent is for the apartments. Mr. McCorkle explained that rents recently dropped. The Heights has come to the City to request an updated signage package because they feel that has something to do with decreasing rental rates. Rents began in the $1,200 - $1,300 range for a one bedroom unit, which has decreased to closer to $1,000. This has been attributed to turnover rates from first time renters, decreased enthusiasm since the apartments opened, and other competition in the region.
The Worthington Mall was acquired in 2013 for less than $5,000,000 and the valuation has risen to $9,000,000. The TIF for this property is beginning to produce for the first time. This property is an over $15,000,000 total investment. The City continues to work with the mall and Tom Carter to make sure that he is filling the spaces. With the current retail environment there are some challenges keeping those spaces occupied. However, while retail has had some hurdles, the restaurants have done very well.

First Financial Bank was a $1,700,000 investment with 100 good paying jobs.

MedVet just acquired the former ADD building behind them so they now occupy two buildings, 300 and 350 East Wilson Bridge Road. They are a key employer with a long-term commitment to the community, including over 400 jobs and $22,000,000 in annual payroll.
There has been over $50,000,000 in private investment over the past few years in addition to some additional public investment dollars from the trailhead and the West Wilson Bridge multi-use path.

Looking ahead is a summary of the private and public investment coming up. The Holiday Inn is an over $30,000,000 investment and according to recent conversations, we anticipate demolition sometime in September. McDonalds will be demolished and rebuilt with a $2,700,000 investment. President Michael inquired about how long that was going to take. Mr. Brown responded that they anticipate completing it in six months. Mr. McCorkle continued to explain that Shirk & O’Donovan is an engineering firm on East Wilson Bridge Road; they anticipate hiring an additional 5-6 employees and to do $500,000 in renovations. There will also be additional public spending, including McCord Park, the Olentangy Parklands restrooms and pickle ball courts, the Northeast Gateway that will make substantial improvements, and the East Wilson Bridge Waterline Project.

The North Side Mega Fix was completed in fall of 2017 and according to ODOT; they intend to begin resurfacing in June which will be a $6,000,000-7,000,000 investment. The project itself in total was over $200,000,000. The Northeast Gateway construction demo is set to begin in 2019.
The East Wilson Bridge Waterline Project will begin later this year with an estimated cost of $1,000,000.

Mr. Brown updated that in 2015, Council adopted the Wilson Bridge Road Corridor Enhancement Plan that looked at wide-ranging improvements such as street trees, lighting, pedestrian cross walks, trails, and wayfinding signage.

The first phase of the city-wide wayfinding was installed last year and the next phase will begin in the next few months around Old Worthington where streets signs and posts will be installed. Later this fall, the Griswold Center will get a new sign and they will work with Mr. Hurley to identify which parks in the system will have updated signage. It will take three years with the money allocated in the CIP to update all the parks.
In April 2016, new Wilson Bridge Corridor zoning and design guidelines were adopted by City Council. Some of that has been implemented over the years, including pushing for the Holiday Inn site to meet those guidelines. Mr. Robinson asked Mr. McCorkle to speak about the Northeast Gateway project and what it means from an economic development perspective. Mr. McCorkle explained he has recently met with several businesses in Lakeview Plaza as well as MedVet and Worthington Industries. They are excited about what it means for their supply chain and the potential to cut their drive times down. Overall, there has been no worry in regards to construction. The hope is that this project will position the corridor for future development and redevelopment.

Mr. Robinson asked Mr. Brown why the southern side of East Wilson Bridge Road was divided in two, why the office area was limited to two and a half stories and why is there higher density residential area to the right and how does it benefit the City. Mr. Brown replied that in the 2005 Comprehensive Plan, it identified the Wilson Bridge Corridor as a key area to look at. Then in 2009 the City started a study to really look at the river to rail study of the entire Wilson Bridge Road Corridor leading eventually to the adoption of the Wilson Bridge Corridor Study in 2011. It was his understanding when going through the planning study; and looking for opportunities for future growth, whether that is office or multifamily, the South Side of Wilson Bridge road was identified as the only area available since we are a landlocked community. The lots are larger and deeper than that found in typical subdivision. His understanding was that the original proposal was for the entire south side to be office.

Part of the neighborhood group that was worked with when doing the zoning text in 2016 was originally involved in the 2009-2011 Wilson Bridge Corridor planning and the residents had a heavy hand in determining what would be on the south side. They felt comfortable with a portion of it being office, but as you went towards the east there should be housing options. Some of the residents preferred to be backed up to residential as opposed to commercial. In the previous slide, there is a bump-out lot that it was determined there should be a variety of housing styles with medium density residential. The resident’s engagement on North High and that cul-de-sac helped to guide how the south side proposal was developed. President Michael replied she was there for that discussion and complimented Mr. Brown’s summary as being very good.

Mr. Robinson inquired more about why the office section was constrained to two and a half stories. Mr. Brown replied it was due to the residents to the south that did not want to look up to office buildings as a compromise from the original proposal that called for higher heights of 3-5 stories. President Michael explained that there were hours of time put in to come up with a decision that the neighborhood could deal with.
Mr. McCorkle explained the CIC subcommittee met early last year focusing on the $600,000 approved for the CIC to look at purchasing land along the southern side of East Wilson Bridge Road. Mr. McCorkle explained that Councilman Myers encouraged looking at office space first since that is the City’s bread and butter.

A quick overview of the Columbus office environment shows that vacancy rates have dropped significantly. Since 2009 Columbus has averaged 500,000 square feet of new construction each year, with 2016 being an exception due to Grandview Yard. Since 2013, Worthington has created 100,000 square feet primarily coming from 350 West Wilson Bridge Road and The Heights. It is important to pay attention that the highest gross asking rate is $25.00 per square foot. 350 West Wilson Bridge where Central Ohio Urology is located has been getting approximately $14.00-16.00 per square foot. This is similar to what is found at the Heights.

The takeaway here is that the trend has been into multi-family and industrial, less so for office space and retail space. There has been a large amount of investment in recent years into multi-family and industrial corridors.
This shows 39 properties in Central Ohio totaling nearly 5,000,000 square feet coming from buildings 50,000 square feet or larger.

This shows the sales volume and sales price per square foot. The takeaway is that Worthington has had very few sales and when there were sales it was for a very low price. The Anthem building recently sold for $29.00 per square foot.

These are market drivers for office development. Owner user is when the owner is building it themselves. This is a big driver of costs since construction costs have gone up 20-30% over the past several years. Parking is a significant cost driver as well.
Specific to the Worthington office market, there are 31 properties that are at least 10,000 square feet or more with the majority being ‘Class C’. However there are several ‘Class A’ properties in The Heights and at 350 West Wilson Bridge. The average sale price over the past few years has been $39.00 per square foot.

These slides show the previous zoning and the proposed corridor zoning.

The two yellow furthest to the west have since been rezoned to the medium density residential already.
This slide gives more detail on the office area being focused on. R-10 and C-3 are geared towards professional office use with a maximum of two and a half stories and a height of 35 feet.

Based upon the two and a half stories and 35 feet here are two scenarios. The Boulevard concept is two stories along Wilson Bridge and one story to the rear along the residential side. This concept is approximately 71,000 square feet. The Courtyard concept is also two stories along Wilson Bridge and the 98,000 square foot building on the back is one story.

Here is an estimate of a development scenario. There are nine parcels total, one has a fairly new build on it, so this analysis includes the other eight parcels. The estimated land acquisition based upon the County Auditor’s page is valued at $2,300,000 with $120,000 in demolition. You are looking at a total cost to get the land ready for potential office development of $2,400,000. Under the development cost projections of 75,000 square feet of office at $192 per square foot, the total
development cost is almost $15,000,000. For revenue, using the price per square foot currently going in Worthington multiplied by the square footage, there would be approximately $1,162,500 in annual rent income. After accounting for management expenses, there would be a net operating of approximately $1,000,000 per year for a developer.

Under a best case scenario for the city, there would roughly be approximately $375,000 in new annual withholdings to Worthington. If the City buys the land for the developer, we would be looking at breaking even in Year 7 assuming the buildings are full occupancy on day one and not accounting for any abatement. Developer returns on investment would be at Year 13 with no property tax abatement or giving them the land. If the City gives a developer the land, the breakeven point would be year 11. If the City gives a developer a maximum Community Reinvestment Area (CRA) with a 15-year property tax abatement, the breakeven would be Year 8. If the City gives a developer the land and a max CRA, then the breakeven year would be Year 6. Under the best scenario for the developer, their investment per square foot would be $94.50. Worthington’s average square footage is going for $39.00 per square foot. In this scenario, the developer would have an asset that they have put in a lot more money than it is worth at that location. For this reason the CIC subcommittee decided that the $600,000 would not be a good investment at this time. They believe that the space should be office, but the cost at $300,000 plus per parcel is tough. If the costs were lower, it might make more sense. President Michael explained that part of the problem is that with the limit of two and a half stories, the density is not available to make it work. Mr. McCorkle explained that he is not making a formal recommendation tonight; however he wanted to explain why the CIC was deciding against using the $600,000 to acquire the parcels of land that may only realistically purchase one and a half to two of the parcels.

Mr. Brown explained that in 2016 when there was the adoption of the Wilson Bridge Corridor zoning, council directed staff to meet with property owners. He, Lynda Bitar and former law director Pam Fox met with all the property owners over the summer of 2016 on how they would like to move forward with implementing Council’s adoption of zoning for Wilson Bridge Road. At the time there were 18 different properties and 12 property owners showed up to the meeting. There was the discussion of what to expect, what not to expect, and options on how to jumpstart moving things forward. One option was the status quo, and taking the chance of another vacant lot having a house built on it. Another option was to proactively rezone the corridor so that there would not be any ability for the vacant parcels to turnover to new houses. That made a number of residents uncomfortable about having a nonconforming use on their house, making it difficult to rebuild in the event of a fire with them having to go to the Board of Zoning
appeals to gain approval. Many property owners also raised flags in regards to their mortgages and insurance.

This led to another option to proactively rezone vacant and for sale properties. That is where you saw in 2017 the two properties that were completely vacant rezoned to avoid a future vacant parcel from having a 3500 square foot house built when you know that you wanted the corridor to have something different. Mr. Foust asked if in the non-conforming scenario, if the house burns down, the owner cannot rebuild in that spot but they would have the insurance to rebuild in a different location and sell the land. Mr. Brown said that was correct and according to the planning and zoning section of the codified ordinances, if your property is destroyed by more than 50% then the owner must go to the Board of Zoning Appeals to request approval to rebuild. While he would feel bad for the owner, the recommendation to the board would be not to grant that approval since the long-term goal is for that property to be office space. The residents at that time were very vocal about not wanting that scenario to happen, leading to the decision to rezone the vacant parcels so that they would not turn into single family homes.

President Michael commented that if the homes were under a non-conforming use it would be difficult for property owners to conduct renovations or make additions to the homes. Mr. Brown added that many mortgage and insurance companies look at it differently and how it would be handled. Prior research by Pam Fox provided clarification that if everyone was not on board with the proactive approach, it would be best to back off a little bit and at least rezone the two vacant properties to get them out of play. President Michael mentioned that they were keeping watch for other properties in the area coming up for sale that can be rezoned.

Mr. Robinson asked whether rezoning both for vacant properties and properties with homes on them, would it negatively affect the property value. Mr. Brown said that he would need to look into it; however he did not know if it would negatively impact values. There are several properties within Worthington that are zoned for one thing, but are used as single family. The only time it may come into play is when someone is trying to sell the property or get a mortgage. Sometimes if the property is zoned in a commercial district, the mortgage company may request that you get a commercial loan. Mr. Robinson then asked if someone is living in a home and it has already been rezoned, and then want to put it up for sale, how that process would work. Mr. Brown said he would not be able to speak to that. Mr. Greeson stated that the challenge at this point is the incremental spot rezoning versus zoning for a whole stretch that makes logical long-term sense but is difficult for the homeowners in the short-term.

Mr. Robinson asked if there is any possibility for a company to buy property to build its own headquarters, would that do anything to affect the return on investment or not? Mr. McCorkle responded yes and he has talked to companies on Wilson Bridge who have been interested in constructing their own. They looked hard at it, but ultimately the land basis was too high with too much work to buy it, rezone it, demolish a house, and then construct new. Yes the numbers look better for a business that owns their site; it is a better investment for them with the equity they are investing. We would be smart to
target something like that, but there are not many businesses that want to make that type of a large scale investment.

Mr. Smith stated he requested this presentation and wanted the update in an official format for the residents on that western part of East Wilson Bridge Road concerned about the direction as a whole of what the City is going to do. He has met with eight of the nine residents in that area. They wanted to get on the same page as a block to sell the property or have the City help them sell the nine parcels as a block. Since that time one property owner has sold his property since he was unsure of what was going to happen from the City’s perspective, despite his promises that there would be a decision by the end of 2017. That was the extent of his outreach to the residents there and the market for the commercial is not there. Mr. McCorkle agreed that the market is not there and the costs to buy the house and tear it down it is cost prohibitive if you are trying to put a two story office building on it. Mr. Smith said one property owner who owns three of the parcels and is motivated to sell for the right price. The market with residential is what he is thinking. Mr. Smith wonders if there needs to be a formal or informal declaration to the CIC to say to back off officially and let the CIC keep the money for future use. In the past there have been opportunities where parcels have come available at a reasonable price and the City was not in a position to act quickly enough to acquire it. Mr. McCorkle said that was the question for council, if there was an appetite for the CIC to keep the $600,000 and come back with a plan of action. Mr. Greeson explained as a technical issue, the $600,000 is encumbered by Council’s actions but not transferred to the CIC’s accounts. He stated that should be looked at more closely in the budget process.

Policy Item(s)

- Financial Report – April 2018

Mr. Bartter provided the following highlights for the City’s financial report for April:

- The Fund balances for all funds increased from $26,697,378 on January 1, 2018 to $28,168,668 as of April 30, 2018.

- Year to date income tax collections are below 2017 year to date collections by $268,946 or -3.22%.

Mr. Bartter requested a motion by Council to accept the Financial Report.

MOTION Mr. Foust moved, Mr. Smith seconded a motion to accept the Financial Report.

The motion carried unanimously by a voice vote.

Mr. Greeson shared the following items:
1) Bike and Pedestrian Appointments
2) 1st Quarter Report was distributed. Contact staff with questions.
3) Survey work regarding School Resource Officers and City Contributions. He understands that the schools will be making a request to the City for funding.

REPORT OF COUNCIL MEMBERS

Mr. Smith shared that the CIC did meet last week and he understands that Mr. McCorkle will discuss PACE funding in the future.

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION Ms. Kowalczyk made a motion, seconded by Ms. Dorothy to adjourn.

The motion carried unanimously by a voice vote.

President Michael declared the meeting adjourned at 10:32 p.m.

/s/ D. Kay Thress
Clerk of Council

APPROVED by the City Council, this 4th day of June, 2018.

/s/ Bonnie D. Michael
Council President