



City Council Agenda

Minutes

Monday, April 11, 2022 at 7:00 pm

6550 N. High Street, Worthington, Ohio 43085

1. Call to Order

Minutes:

Worthington City Council met in Regular Session on Monday, April 11, 2022, in the John P. Coleman Council Chambers of the Louis J.R. Goorey Municipal Building, 6550 North High Street, Worthington, Ohio. President Robinson called the meeting to order at or about 7:00 p.m.

2. Roll Call

Minutes:

Members Present: Katherine Brewer, Peter Bucher, Rebecca Hermann, Bonnie Michael, Doug Smith, and David Robinson

Member(s) Absent: Beth Kowalczyk

Also Present: City Manager Matt Greeson, Assistant City Manager Robyn Stewart, Assistant City Manager Economic Development Director David McCorkle, Director of Finance Scott Bartter, Director of Planning and Building Lee Brown, Director of Parks & Recreation Darren Hurley, Personnel Director Lori Trego, Chief of Fire & EMS Mark Zambito, Chief of Police Robert Ware, Management Assistant Ethan Barnhardt

3. Pledge of Allegiance

Minutes:

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

Special Presentation(s)

4. Discussion Regarding Electric Aggregation Renewable Energy Considerations

Minutes:

Mr. Greeson explained how the purpose of tonight's discussion is for Mr. Surace with Energy Alliances to share some information about where renewable energy is going and what future opportunities could be when considering next year's renewal of our supply contract.

Mr. Surace detailed how we are about a year from the current program expiring, so it

is a good time to discuss future options. Other major cities in the state are looking at alternate ways to procure and go about renewable energy. Worthington has been a great environmental steward and has had numerous environmental initiatives. The current aggregation program is at a price of 5.186 cents per kilowatt-hour through AEP Energy, with 100% program consumption offset with Renewable Energy Credits (RECs). By purchasing RECs, you are investing in that resource, and people who generate renewable energy then have more cash on hand to generate more renewable energy. We have utilized wind RECs, purchased from the open market at a national level. The Energy Institute of America (EIA) is projecting that renewable energy is projected to grow with a lot of growth in solar and wind.

Mr. Robinson asked if the EIA is a private organization or associated with the federal government. Mr. Surace replied that it is a government organization.

Mr. Surace described how natural gas dominates energy generation in the midwest and will continue to do so moving forward due to the resources that we are sitting on, which are abundant and cheap. Going forward, solar will be driving the renewable increases in the midwest. Worthington currently purchases national RECs, the question is whether to start looking for something closer to home. Columbus and Cincinnati are committed to renewable-based projects and there is interest in local renewable energy production. It is important to consider whether we want to look at future iterations of this program for local and regionally based options. The main factors for Council to consider include whether it supports the City's initiatives, if we are comfortable with a ten-year plus commitment, and locking in energy costs for multiple years. There is also no guarantee to beat the AEP Ohio rate, and it will be 24-36 months until 100% operational. Energy Alliances works with multiple suppliers that offer renewable energy solutions and products ranging from REC purchases, to "steel in the ground" development. The next steps are for Council to decide whether they are in or out, decide on a commitment level, put together a team to develop goals, and meet with suppliers for the discovery phase. The timeline starts by July, establishing goals and meeting with suppliers for preliminary discussions. By the beginning of 2023, we should select a supplier and design a product with the supplier. About a year from now, the contract and everything would be negotiated with the supplier, with the next program commencing in June 2023.

Ms. Brewer asked about local renewables, and Mr. Surace said that Ohio-based renewable can be a challenge based on regulations, and she wondered what kind of regulatory problems have been seen. Mr. Surace replied that as time moves on, whether it is regulation or legislation, it is tough in Ohio to find land and who can do it.

Mr. Smith asked about the EIA and their information about the region. Mr. Surace replied that the market is not really looking at their forecasts, as we know generation is a merchant business with people looking to make money. There is a reason why natural gas is the primary driver in the Ohio Valley from a cost and location perspective it is tough to beat right now.

Mr. Bucher asked if there was any way to look at ballpark prices if we looked to go

down the route of some of these suppliers and if we did, and considering our scale, whether we could be part of a group project or if we have enough capacity to stand alone. Mr. Surace replied that Worthington could do it on its own, but it is all about how Worthington uses energy. It is too early to have a ballpark price, it has increased significantly over the past six to nine months, and this market is in uncharted territory.

Mr. Robinson asked for a description of the basic business model in terms of what is the role of the supplier, who would own the physical generating capacity, and if it is possible to have a segregated program where the electricity is more expensive. Mr. Surace said that he could not speak specifically about what Columbus did, some are public knowledge and some are not, in their case there is a contract with the supplier, and they would take care of the power purchase agreement with the developer, so there is no upfront cost by the City. Mr. Robinson clarified that the developer would be the one who owns and builds the generating capacity. Mr. Surace said that is correct and there are different ways to mix and match. Mr. Robinson asked if there are instances where a municipality owns its own generating facility. Mr. Surace responded that he is not aware of that. There are co-ops that sometimes have generation facilities.

Mr. Greeson explained how following the timeline, we will follow back up with Council after having had time to digest this presentation. Ultimately, we have choices, if we go down this path we would have the choice to take this path, the RECs path, or the brown energy path.

Mr. Robinson asked what the standard service price from AEP Ohio was. Mr. Surace replied that it is currently 5.3 cents, but that is going up significantly soon, he estimates it goes to 7.5 cents. Mr. Robinson asked if we are under contract through July of 2023 at a rate of 5.186 cents. Mr. Surace said that's correct.

5. Update on Central Ohio Passenger Rail Efforts

Minutes:

Mr. Greeson expressed his pleasure to introduce Thea Walsh who is the Chief Regional Development Officer for MORPC, who is knowledgeable about all things transportation in Central Ohio and has been a great partner to Worthington.

Ms. Walsh expressed MORPC's thanks for Worthington's resolution of support for passenger rail in Central Ohio, they had nearly 35 total letters submitted across the state. These letters were shared with Amtrak, which is excited about the prospect of expanding throughout the state. Amtrak's ConnectUS plan overviewed their broad goals if they are actually funded through the infrastructure bill, which did pass. Ohio's three largest metro areas are among the least well-served top 50 metro areas for Amtrak service in the United States. They also consider Columbus to be the best market case in the entire country for expansion, which is great for our region and speaks to the growth in the region. Prospective service would have three round trips daily between Cleveland and Cincinnati, which would be approximately 2.5 hours from Columbus to Cleveland or Columbus to Cincinnati. The total economic impact

would be close to \$130 million annually, as well as \$2.6 billion in economic activity from installation. This would bring safer transportation options for people. With rail, you have to start in a place you can grow from and this plan is much more attainable than the one from ten years ago. MORPC has also thought about Central Ohio, the corridor from Pittsburgh to Chicago and there are a couple of options that are being considered. Additionally, they are working on a potential connection that would go through Toledo into Detroit. For Columbus to be a rail hub, we would need two lines, and people are really wanting to see the connections from Pittsburgh to Chicago. Ms. Walsh explained how MORPC would be working with Central Ohio's suburban communities to look at potential places for passenger rail stations. Worthington could be a potential rail stop in addition to other locations such as the Convention Center or Delaware. She will make sure to work with Worthington when looking at this process. She overviewed a downtown Columbus concept for passenger rail at the Convention Center. Amtrak has toured the Convention Center already multiple times. MORPC has done as much as possible to make sure that Central Ohio is prepared for this type of expansion, such as the identification of high-capacity corridors. They have also done a number of studies such as the Rapid Speed Transportation Initiative and the 2020 Hyperloop Feasibility Study. The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law has nearly \$102 billion in rail funding which is huge compared to previous rail funding. Every single bucket of money appropriated, is something that MORPC could use and apply for.

Ms. Michael asked if the crossing elimination funding could be used to make existing crossings safer, such as quiet zones and wayfare horns. Ms. Walsh replied that yes those dollars could be used for those types of things. Ms. Michael expressed that we have two railroads that go on either side of the City and many people have brought up the need for quiet zones. If there is any information that could be provided to staff, that would be appreciated.

Ms. Walsh explained how the opportunity before us is a funding program from the Federal Railroad Administration, and Amtrak partners with them on selection, prioritization, and business judgment. This is a two-sided process that is unlike other federal grants that they go after. Other things that we can do with funding are capital improvements, debt service, and even operating expenses. Operating is usually where there is friction due to the contribution requested from the state. MORPC can use help on things such as the Stations RFP which is in the works, they will come out to executive and board briefings, and also join in advocacy efforts. She explained how when the new Hilton Hotel expansion is finished, it will be the largest hotel in the state of Ohio. That would be right next door to the main station in Central Ohio, which would be significant for the City of Columbus, as well as having the feeder stations around the region.

Mr. Bucher brought up the potential vetting of other sites and asked when we would need to talk more about that. Ms. Walsh replied that her team is working on an RFP with an outside consultant for that right now. Once they go into that selection process, staff from municipalities could participate and see what the process looks like. Then a decision could be made on whether it makes sense. That will be

happening over the next couple of months.

Ms. Brewer asked how much space would be needed for a station. Ms. Walsh replied that at the Crosswoods site, there is plenty of room, but it is more about being able to get out of the way of freight traffic. She has seen really small platforms in some places, but she would recommend looking at a community like Worthington, to reference Elizabethtown, PA. They have a new station there that is very nice. You would not need a large amount of space, and would not even need an enclosure.

Mr. Greeson mentioned that the last time we did this, the state was looking at several locations for this. One was at 161 and Proprietors which is now home to the Kemper House. There is also the ODOT maintenance outpost next to McCord Park, and then of course the Crosswoods Park and Ride is an option. When MORPC chooses a consultant, we may be able to piggyback on that to look at our own local situation in a little more detail. Ms. Walsh explained that on Worthington's behalf they would actually do the site identification work, but if a further analysis to go into further plans for a site are desired, they would extend that contract out to take advantage of that opportunity with the consultant.

6. Worthington Area Chamber of Commerce Update

Minutes:

Mr. Lofy detailed that during his tenure, they have been up against a lot of challenges in the first seven months, but if it were not for the leadership of the Board of Trustees, we would not have been able to achieve what has been done. He is excited for the future of our business community, the Chamber, and working together with the Council. The Chamber of Commerce consists of 550 businesses and around 18,000 employees within those businesses. 74% of members are nine employees or less, and nearly 20% have 10-50 employees. Chambers of Commerce strive to support the business within the City, and businesses that want to do business here. They represent about 160 different industries with restaurants, financial services, and legal services being the top sectors. Some member benefits include insurance, discounted office supplies, certifications, and access to other member discounts. Free member benefits consist of an online directory, and the ability to post events on the community events calendar, amongst other things. Some community events and offerings they provide include Shred Day, Groundhog Day Lunch, and Old Worthington Market Day. The Chamber also has a brand new database and website, the site is viewed by people from across Central Ohio to see what is happening in the Worthington community.

He overviewed their new transformational vision for 2022, based on discussions with community leaders, to focus work on. He has learned in his career, that successful Chambers work in lockstep with their City Council, work as an arm of their economic development teams, and serve as a voice of the broader business community. The vision first aims to increase business resources, bringing back every event and resource that they can. The second is to reignite business networks, that is for people who have nine or fewer employees to share in thought leadership and experience.

The third is for the Chamber to become a conduit between businesses, nonprofits, and the City, which he is excited to work on this. Fourth is to collaborate with community partners, and in his time already he has had an amazing experience working with staff and local groups. Participating in the Chamber can be a resource to the City of Worthington. They are a platform for thought leadership, there is an opportunity with monthly Coffee & Conversations, Eggs & Issues, and the Annual Groundhog Day luncheon. Additionally, they provide a connection between the City and outside city businesses considering that nearly half of the Chamber's businesses are within the Worthington School District or just outside. Finally, there are opportunities for collaborations and connections between the City, the Partnership, and regional leaders.

Ms. Michael encouraged everyone to attend the events that the Chamber puts on because it is interesting to hear what the business community has to say about things or what they would like to see change.

Mr. Robinson asked if the general public can go to WorthingtonChamber.org to see what type of public events they can go to. Mr. Lofy said that is correct and for the events they put on, there are member and non-member prices.

Reports of City Officials

7. Policy Item(s)

a. Financial Report - March 2022

Minutes:

Mr. Bartter shared how the City was awarded the Outstanding GFOA Award. The March 2022 report shows that we ended the quarter strongly with income tax collections that were up 10% and total refunds were low, with Parks and Recreation revenue coming back strong.

Mr. Robinson asked about the decision to wait until mid-year to look at the work from home withholding issue and wondered what the early indications would look like. Mr. Bartter replied that January and February were still 2021 withholdings, so he thinks by July we will have a better read on work from home issues.

MOTION: Ms. Michael moved, seconded by Ms. Brewer to approve the March 2022 Financial Report

The motion carried unanimously by a voice vote

Reports of Council Members

8. Reports of Council Members

Minutes:

Mr. Bucher brought up that Power a Clean Future Ohio has recently unveiled an infrastructure assistance grant program, for communities that may want to pursue federal infrastructure funds. He will be distributing information to staff on this.

Mr. Smith noted that the CIC at their upcoming meeting will discuss the alternatives for the properties on East Wilson Bridge Road that Mr. Robinson discussed at their previous meeting.

Ms. Michael explained how we conducted our first Live Government for elementary school kids since before the pandemic started. She brought up her idea to do something with the Griswold Center to have a liquor permit to use the facility to rent out for things such as bridal showers, weddings, and other types of events.

Ms. Brewer provided an update on the week's upcoming MPC/ARB meeting.

Mr. Robinson provided his thanks to the staff for the work on the 90-day City Council agenda planner, he knows it was not easy to initiate this and it will evolve over time and be useful to Councilmembers on where we might put initiatives on the agenda. He then shared his thanks to Mr. Greeson for his work on electric aggregation.

Other Business

Executive Session

9. Executive Session

Minutes:

MOTION: Ms. Hermann moved, seconded by Ms. Brewer to enter the Executive Section for the purposes of considering the purchase of a property for public purposes, and the sale of city property at competitive bid.

The clerk called the roll on Executive Session with the motion carrying unanimously.

Council recessed at 8:38 p.m. from the Regular meeting session.

Council returned to open session at 8:58 p.m.

Adjournment

10. Motion to Adjourn

Minutes:

MOTION: Ms. Brewer moved, Ms. Hermann, seconded a motion to adjourn

The motion carried unanimously by a voice vote

President Robinson declared the meeting adjourned at 8:58 p.m.

Contact: D. Kay Thress, Clerk of Council (Kay.Thress@worthington.org (614) 436-3100) | Minutes published on 05/24/2022, adopted on 06/20/2022

Attest

/s/ Ethan C. Barnhardt
Management Assistant

/s/ David Robinson
President of Council