

MINUTES OF THE VAN WERT CITY COUNCIL

August 8th, 2022

President Jerry Mazur called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

Pastor Keith Stoller gave the invocation.

On call of the roll: Marshall, Kallas, Bowers, Agler, Moore, and Davis were present.

Agler made a motion to excuse Stinnett for the August 8th Council meeting. Bowers seconded; all concurred.

Marshall made a motion to approve the agenda for the August 8th Council meeting. Kallas seconded; all concurred.

Kallas made a motion to approve the minutes for the July 25th Council meeting. Agler seconded; all concurred.

Agler made a motion to approve the minutes for the July 27th Public Hearing. Kallas seconded; all concurred.

COMMENTS, COMMUNICATIONS, & PETITIONS

Mazur opened the meeting by introducing Mark Spieles, CEO of Westwood Behavioral Health Center, to speak on a few topics of recent importance, including the idea of how the state of a residence can affect children.

Spieles opened by thanking Mazur and the Council for the opportunity to speak. He provided his background, noting he had started in the Child Protective Services Investigations Unit, which meant he went into homes to investigate if there were allegations of abuse or neglect. He explained that most cases of neglect are centered on home conditions. In 2004, Spieles remarked that he moved to the area of mental health, focusing on children and family dynamics.

Spieles stated that the initial discussion with Mazur was around the issue of children and development when there are unkempt residences/properties. In his opinion, anything that inhibits a child's ability to experience social growth is important to look at. He acknowledged this dynamic was on display during the shutdowns and isolation from COVID-19, as there were higher levels of depression and anxiety with children and adolescents. He stated that the number of adults, adolescents, or children that were severely depressed or suicidal almost tripled during that time. So, Spieles determined, this question becomes a matter of whether unkempt property contributes to this type of isolation or social growth impairment, or whether there are other factors at play.

Spieles explained that many factors can go into this situation, but he first wanted to focus on socio-economic status and poverty. He noted that poverty is relative - in Van Wert or in the United States - this is a family of 4 with an income of \$25,000-\$30,000, without a consistent place to live, access to food, or even access to other amenities such as satellite television, etc. In other parts of the world, he noted, poverty can look like no sanitation, no shelter, no clean water, and so on. He stated for the purpose of this conversation, he'll discuss a lower socio-economic status as poverty.

He discussed the idea that poverty, just like wealth, is typically generational. There is a culture that develops as people adapt to their environment and living situations. He noted there's a culture for the middle class, just as there is for poverty or wealth. Additionally, people are more comfortable around people with similar cultures, and then these cultural attributes are reinforced. He referenced a book called Bridges out of Poverty (2006 - DeVol, Payne, Smith), which changed his thinking on these issues, and how he served the people in the Van Wert community.

Spieles continued to explain some of the ideas and differences among the poverty, middle class, and wealth cultures. He focused first on food, conveying the idea that for the culture of poverty, food is about quantity, and how much food can be purchased for a certain amount of money. For the middle class, it is about quality, and the idea that the middle class can spend extra money at times for better quality. And for the wealthy, food is about presentation.

As for money, for those in poverty, money is viewed as something to be spent not saved, due to the idea that money is scarce. When the opportunity is there, which isn't often, the view is what can be purchased. For the middle class, Spieles noted that money is to be managed. And for the wealthy, money is to be invested.

He further explained that for those in poverty, when there is a surplus of money at some point in time, it's viewed as the only time they can purchase items that are desired for themselves or for their children. He continued that this is why there can be a large screen television or a video game system in homes of residents on the lower socio-economic side. Entertainment - escape - is also of utmost importance for residents in this situation.

Turning his focus on unkempt properties or yards, Spieles first noted that the community of Van Wert is built on middle class values and beliefs - hard work, personal responsibility, fiscal responsibility. He remarked that, in order to work with the people in the community, he couldn't force his beliefs or values on others. He needed to work with people on their terms, and learn how to work with them to improve situations incrementally.

He continued that the wealthy will pay for the service of keeping their properties immaculate. The middle class takes pride in this as well, and they mow, trim bushes, and make things look nice. For those in poverty, there is more for them to worry about than clean properties. They also may value the property and the items in their property differently.

He commented on a picture he came across of a broken lawn mower in a yard with weeds grown up around it. For many, that lawn mower still has value - and it's not seen as junk. It can be fixed/repaired, or sold. Even if it is junk, they may not have the resources to get rid of it.

Spieles also observed that the idea of neighborly help doesn't always happen anymore, so for those that don't have the means to take care of their own property, these aspects of the property can spiral out of hand quickly. Whether it is a means of inability, or lack of resources (financially or otherwise), sometimes residents cannot take care of their properties in the manner they know they should.

Continuing, Spieles opined that these issues can't be "cited" out of existence - citations, court appearances, or fines aren't going to simply fix the issue. For some residents who have the right resources, a citation, a court hearing, and a fine is the proper channel to affect change, as they have the means to handle it. However, for some residents, especially those who don't have the financial resources to take care of the issue or pay a fine, it is a waste of time because they have no money to pay and the punishment won't influence their future behavior.

In order to deal with this issue, Spieles suggested that if you identify people who don't have the means to take care of their properties, they are generally already linked up with an agency - Department of Job and Family Services, Westwood, Developmental Disabilities, etc. By communicating with these agencies, they can help to get problems taken care of. He also commented on local churches and Love INC. who can help with these types of issues. The key, in his mind, is organizing those resources, as punishing and citing isn't going to solve the problem.

Summarizing his points, he does believe that it is important for children to grow up in clean homes. However, he also doesn't believe that unkempt properties can cause total isolation, because if they go to a home that isn't kept clean, they may not notice if they also come from a home of a similar state. If things aren't causing harm or danger, kids have the ability to work through some of those issues. That said, he does think that if steps are taken to help kids grow in a home they can be proud of, with a yard they can be proud of, this can help with self-esteem.

Bowers asked how some children from a lower socio-economic status can achieve higher levels of success, where some of their siblings can stay in the generational poverty cycle. Spieles stated that some children can grow up in a depressed state, and have lower motivation for academic success, work success, and so forth. Other children have more resilience, and have the drive to experience more success. He noted it is similar to children of alcoholic parents, as some children fall into that lifestyle, but other children will refuse to touch any substance. He doesn't have all of the answers, but he did mention that the idea of protective factors - such as academic success, extracurricular activities, sports, church, etc. - can all help to improve those odds.

Mazur circled back to Spieles' general comment of church groups in the area, and asked him for specifics on those groups. Spieles stated that most churches in the community have funds that help with housing, or run food kitchens/pantries. He continued that Love INC pools all of those resources together, and is a single contact point for those churches. It was noted that Erica Petrie is the Executive Director/contact person at Love INC.

Matthew Perry, 245 W. 3rd St., explained that he and Joe Jared have put out cards offering assistance to those in need, but the response has been lower than expected. He asked Spieles if pride is a factor in this situation. Spieles stated that everyone has pride, and if he were in that situation, he's not sure he would call for help either. He also noted that some may be afraid of being exposed or having pictures posted online, etc. However, Spieles stated that volunteer work, or the work through Love INC, is what the community needs.

Stoller explained that Love INC is a "wonderful clearinghouse" for these needs, and noted another program - Ignite - is operating in the city. Recently, Ignite completed 52 projects in the county for area residents.

Spieles noted that a single point of contact for area organizations is a critical piece, tying in all of the efforts that are ongoing in the city.

Mazur also commented that Mindy Eales of Job and Family Services will attend a future meeting to further discuss resources in the city.

Hall Block opened by noting that the issues that Spieles spoke to, in terms of improving living conditions, is what spurred Van Wert Forward initially. Block then gave a brief update on the Van Wert Forward project, explaining that work on new sidewalks, curb reconfigurations, and underground utilities would soon begin in the Central Cluster, around the Oddfellows Lodge (starting approximately August 22, 2022 and extending into mid-December 2022). He stated that in order to keep the people safe, they would need to expand their [traffic control during this phase of work, which would involve the temporary closing of turn lanes at the corner of Washington St. and Main St.](#) As work shifts to other sites/clusters, traffic controls would be diminished where possible. Block also explained he would need to speak with Fleming on the radar sensors for those areas as well.

Additional conversation centered on clarification of closures, the temporary taping that will take place to delineate the new temporary lanes, signage, and re-routing semi-trucks in the city.

Kevin Allen, 245 W. 3rd St., asked if they needed state approval for this work and the closures. Mazur asked Block if they had gone through the process with the state. Block explained they have gone through the permit process with the city, Fleming referred them to the state, and the state told them "it's your road, do with it as you please" - with some caveats. Block did note that curb ramps are a federal requirement, and will be put into the refigurations.

Mr. Perry asked about the radar control comment, and if Block was referring to the radar sensors for traffic, or monitoring traffic speeds. Block indicated it was for traffic sensors and turn lanes, and so forth.

Joe Jared, 233 Burt St., made a comment regarding the back alley off Main St. from Jefferson St. to Washington St. He stated that a large sign was blocking the view going left out of that alley. Block mentioned that he had a conversation with the Police Chief today, and asked his construction guys to move that sign. Mr. Jared also asked about another situation involving his neighbor, and Block mentioned that was part of the conversation with the Police Chief. He apologized for that situation, and said it would be addressed.

Mazur stated that he received a sound ordinance proposal from Mr. Jared, regarding the Main Street Van Wert speaker system. He referred this proposal to the Judiciary committee, for consideration and a possible subsequent committee meeting.

Davis recapped his visit to the Ohio Municipal League Conference. He covered the topics discussed during the day, and noted he would forward the PowerPoint presentations from the day to all Council members. He recommended the event to others in the future. Mazur praised the Ohio Municipal League organization, and their work on behalf of the state's communities.

Moore asked if the city could move the speed sign trailer to Shannon St., stating that cars speed down that area (past her business), especially during the school year. Mazur asked the Mayor to speak with the Police Department on moving it to Shannon St. Mr. Allen stated the State Highway Patrol will sit in the Big Lots parking lot if they are contacted.

Mr. Perry asked if the permit idea for golf carts at the reservoirs had been discussed, after it was brought up two meetings prior. Mr. Perry also described the work that he, Mr. Jared, and Mr. Allen, as well as another person, did to cut down the weeds on Reservoir 1. Mr. Jared made a request for the city to mow closer to the rocks around the reservoirs. Markward said he would inquire, and he wasn't sure what the mowing schedule would be for the crews.

ADMINISTRATIVE REPORTS

MAYOR: Markward relayed the phone number for Love INC (419-203-5730), and noted their call center hours were Mondays and Thursdays from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Messages can be left during other times, and volunteers would return calls when they are able. He reiterated this was a volunteer organization, and they can address needs only if they have volunteers available.

Markward informed those in attendance that a new officer, Devin Sanchez, was sworn in last week. The Mayor noted that Sanchez has prior experience with the Paulding Police Department.

Regarding the issue of No Parking signs on Vine St., between Main St. and Central Ave., Markward stated that they reviewed the situation and determined those signs were no longer needed. He also explained that it appeared that signage was never actually codified, and so no amendment or new ordinance was needed to remove them.

Markward also relayed that he's had preliminary discussions with Young's Trash Service, and due to family issues, they would be more likely to be able to do a citywide cleanup in October this year instead of September. He noted those were just early discussions at this point.

The Mayor provided an update on the Bonnewitz project, relaying that utility work started, had stopped, and was scheduled to resume next week (Monday, August 15). He noted that the contractor was also responsible for completion of the bike path as well.

Finally, Markward asked that the third and final reading of the water and sewer rates ordinance - 22-07-037 - be tabled until the next Council meeting. He explained that Stacy Adam, of the Van Wert Area Economic Development Corporation (VWAEDC), would provide details in the future, but that more specific wording would be needed within that ordinance for providing specific information for companies that are submitting Requests for Information (RFIs).

Mazur asked Agler to request that motion during his report. Davis asked what Council could do for that situation. Markward stated that Council made a similar change to an ordinance in the past to help VWAEDC provide more specific information, and this was a similar situation.

SAFETY SERVICE DIRECTOR: Fleming was absent for the evening. (Markward gave the joint report above.)

AUDITOR: Balyeat provided the [2022 July Financial Report](#), with the Bank Reconciliation Report indicating \$18.5 million on the books, and the same amount in various bank accounts and investments. The Cash Position Report reflected a positive balance in all funds, as required. She relayed that as of July 31, 2022, nearly \$340,000 more has been collected than spent. In the Year to Date comparison, 2022 to 2021, Balyeat remarked it was as projected.

LAW DIRECTOR: Hatcher had no report for the evening.

Mr. Perry asked if Hatcher could request that the Municipal Court lower court costs. He argued that if many people are going through the courts that do not have the ability to pay the court costs, then Hatcher could ask for them to be lowered. It was noted that Hatcher didn't have any authority there, but he noted he could have a conversation with the Judge. Hatcher also noted that he attempts actions on his side to reduce costs when appropriate.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

HEALTH, SERVICE, and SAFETY: Marshall asked Hatcher if they are ready to move on a blighted property. Hatcher stated he is a title search away from completing that action. He explained that anyone with a lien on a property is entitled to notice, as it is more or less a foreclosure action. Anyone with a stake or interest in the property needs to be notified. He remarked that he should be able to complete that action either Tuesday or Wednesday of this week.

With regard to the single trash hauler issue, Marshall stated he felt the issue should be finished. He asked if any Council members wanted to take the issue further. Davis stated he would like for Council to meet with the local haulers to discuss the large item pickup concerns, and see if there is a way to organize the haulers to help with the citywide cleanup event. He stated that he wants to see this addressed because if the local haulers would ever go out of business, the city would be left to address the issue, so he would like to hear their opinions and get their expertise on the issue.

Marshall made a motion to remove Waste Management System/Sanitary Conditions from Unfinished Business. Kallas seconded; all concurred.

Mazur asked Jeff Kreischer if he had reached out to the other haulers. Mr. Kreischer stated he had not.

Mr. Perry relayed that Markward had reached out to he and Mr. Jared, and they have roughly 10-15 parties that could help with that effort.

Mazur asked for suggestions from Mr. Perry on how to centralize that effort. Davis asked Mr. Perry if this is an ongoing volunteer effort, or just for the citywide cleanup event. Mr. Perry stated that he felt if many items were taken during the citywide cleanup, then the local haulers should be able to handle less frequent requests during the remainder of the year.

Mr. Jared asked for trailer restrictions to be relaxed to help with these efforts. Mazur asked Mr. Jared to formally submit a written proposal for consideration.

Health, Service, and Safety had no further report for the evening.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: Kallas informed Council that the bid has been awarded for the demolition of the old Days Inn at 820 N. Washington. The project should be completed this fall.

VWAEDC also hopes to close on the acquisition of the former Anthony Wayne school on Jefferson St. within the next week. Kallas relayed that bid packets will be published and distributed upon closing.

Asbestos assessments were completed on two residential properties that will be razed. Property walkthroughs and bid packets will be distributed this month.

Kallas also noted that VWAEDC continues to have an elevated number of RFIs and site visit requests. They appreciate the opportunity to share the benefits of living, working, and doing business in Van Wert.

Mr. Allen asked if the residents around the Anthony Wayne building will be informed of any results from asbestos assessments in that building. Kallas stated that no assessments have been done as it hasn't closed yet, but he will check into that information for Mr. Allen.

Economic Development had no further report for the evening.

PARKS AND RECREATION: Parks and Recreation had no report for the evening.

FINANCE: Agler made a motion to table the third and final reading of Ordinance Number 22-07-037 until the August 22, 2022 meeting. Bowers seconded; all concurred.

Finance had no additional report for the evening.

PROPERTIES AND EQUIPMENT: Stinnett was absent for the meeting, and Vice Chair Agler indicated that Properties and Equipment had no report for the evening.

STREETS AND ALLEYS: Streets and Alleys had no report for the evening, but Moore stated she was glad to hear the No Parking signs on Vine St. had been removed.

Mazur asked if Moore had any resolution on the parking signs on Woodland Ave. She stated she is working on that.

Agler asked Moore if she had any conversations yet with the Police Department regarding the four-way stop/intersection at Towne Center Blvd and Christopher Crossing. She stated she had not, but it was on her list of items to address.

Block stated that he had heard of several requests recently to remove parking spots on streets. Citing his experience as a civil engineer, he cautioned Council from removing parking spots, as this can cause mental friction for residents.

JUDICIARY AND ANNEXATION: Davis scheduled a Judiciary Committee meeting, on Monday, August 22, 2022, at 6:15 p.m. to discuss Mr. Jared's proposal with Joe Dray of Main Street Van Wert.

Judiciary and Annexation had no further report for the evening.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Mazur reiterated that Waste Management System/Sanitary Conditions had been removed from Unfinished Business.

Regarding the Reservoir Weeds/Grass & Weeds Ordinance item, Mazur asked Mr. Perry, Mr. Jared, and Mr. Allen about their weed cutting timeline. They shared they would be out at the reservoirs from 6:00 p.m. to dark this week in work on the second reservoir. It was noted again that Markward would check to see if the grass crews could cut closer to the rocks.

NEW BUSINESS

Agler asked for Hatcher's legal opinion on forced annexation for the next meeting. Hatcher stated he will give Agler the procedure, so Council can decide on their desired action.

Kallas asked for the golf cart permit issue to be on the agenda for the next meeting. Mazur noted it would be on Unfinished Business.

CONSENT AGENDA

There were no items on the Consent Agenda.

RESOLUTIONS & ORDINANCES

Agler made a motion to pass Ordinance Number 22-06-033: AN ORDINANCE TO AMEND VAN WERT CITY ORDINANCES 152.75, 152.751 AND DECLARING AN EMERGENCY., on its third and final reading. Davis second; all concurred.

ADJOURN

Bowers made a motion to adjourn at 7:55 p.m. Kallas seconded; all concurred.


Clerk of Council
Andrew Bittner


Council President
Gerald T. Mazur

08/22/2022

Date