

Hiram Village Remote Video Conference Council Meeting

Rosser Municipal Building
11617 Garfield Road, Hiram, Ohio 44234

March 9, 2021

The following Members of Council were present online: Mr. Dempsey, Mr. Greenwood, Mr. Hemphill, Mr. Smith, Mr. Spencer and Mr. Szell. The following were also present: Mayor Lou Bertrand, Village Solicitor Tom Reitz, Fiscal Officer Susan Skrovan, Police Chief Brian Gregory, Fire Chief Bill Byers, Asst. Fire Chief Jason Groselle, Village Administrator James McGee and Asst. Village Administrator Steven Schuller.

The following persons were present online: Ed Frato-Sweeney and Stacy Turner with The Weekly Villager.

Mayor Bertrand called the regular meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. The Mayor asked that all cell phones be silenced. There was a moment of silence followed by the pledge to the flag.

Mayor asked for a motion to approve the regular meeting minutes of 2/9/2021. A motion to approve the minutes as presented was made by Mr. Szell and seconded by Mr. Greenwood. The result of the voice vote was 6-0 in favor.

Mayor asked for a motion to approve the special meeting minutes of 2/23/2021. A motion to approve the minutes as presented was made by Mr. Smith and seconded by Mr. Dempsey. The result of the voice vote was 5-1 in favor with an abstention from Mr. Spencer who was not present at this meeting.

Mayor asked for a motion to approve the proposed agenda. A motion to approve the proposed amended agenda as presented was made by Mr. Spencer and seconded by Mr. Smith. The result of the voice vote was 6-0 in favor.

GUEST AND PUBLIC COMMENT

Ed Frato Sweeney provided an update from Hiram College. They do plan an "in person" commencement; it will be limited but they will have one. Ed also wanted to ask about the status of the abandoned property on Plumridge. He did send a letter to the Zoning Inspector stating his concerns. Ed said there were at least four letters he should have received. Ed would like to know what the next step would be in the process. Ed said he did not receive a confirmation that the Zoning Inspector received his letter. The Mayor said he has received a number of letters; our Zoning Inspector is under orders to make the citation and follow our laws. It is not an immediate process. He should be working with our Village Solicitor to resolve it. Paul Spencer said his understanding was that Wendelin did send the letter to the property owners letting them know that there had to be some action taken. They have 30 days to respond. Michael Greenwood said he knew of several letter sent including one from himself; how many letters have been received? Paul said at the time the letter was sent to the property owners; Dominic did not have any letters in hand. That was about a week ago. Dave Smith said he did not see the letter sent by Wendelin on behalf of Dominic, the citation. Paul said the first letter was sent to the immediate neighbors and then, after a given amount of time, Wendelin sent a certified letter to the property owners and one through regular mail. Solicitor Tom Reitz said he has seen correspondence, by either email or letter from four different addresses surrounding the property on Plumridge. Solicitor Reitz said he has had no direct communication at all from our Zoning Inspector. Tom had advised him a couple of times in the past, you do not make your case based only upon the statements of the adjacent landowners, you need a decision or an opinion from someone who has the credentials to do so. Such as, the Fire Chief, the Department of Health, the Portage County Building Dept. Solicitor Reitz has advised Mr. Gualtieri that he needs to do this, but he does not know if he has reached out to them. He may have reached out to them but with the Pandemic; this may not be their top priority. Tom said he saw a citation letter dated February 15, he does not know whether this was the final letter or if it has been sent out or not. Solicitor Reitz did say that we are not at that point of litigation tonight. Michael Greenwood spoke on behalf of Bob Faber regarding the turnaround at the end of Kenyan. He wanted to know if the Village could place some boulders in the center of the island to keep the plow trucks and school buses from making ruts in the grass. Paul Spencer felt it would be a bad idea and spoke about the hazard to our emergency vehicles and our road department to access that area; he would not recommend any boulders. Chief Bill Byers spoke about increasing the useable area of the turnaround; he would not want to see any boulders obstructing the turnaround. VA James McGee felt this is only an issue in the wintertime; it gets fixed in the spring. He spoke about the turnaround and not wanting any boulders when he has to plow the roadway.

DEPARTMENT HEAD REPORTS

***Police Chief Brian Gregory was present to provide their monthly report.** There were 362 offense reports for February. Some of the numbers on his report were inaccurate and will be corrected in his annual report. The discrepancies came out of the dispatch reports; he was going off the log sheets.

His department has been doing a lot of in house training.

COVID-19 vaccinations started last Thursday for his officers, at least five have received them including himself.

Plans are to have his Fishing with a Cop program this year at Camp Asbury.

Plans are also underway for his annual car show; however, the date will be moved later into August.

Paul Spencer asked the Police Chief whether his department has been working on training regarding gender-neutral language during traffic stops. Getting away from using mam or sir. Brian said the Ohio Attorney General will be sending out additional training later in the year reading some of these issues but it will take some time. Paul felt we could start our own training in house.

Chris Szell would like to see the data received to the Police Chief from the speed sign. Brian explained the adjustments that need to be done to the speed sign; then he can provide the data. Dave Smith said having the sign out near Maggie's there does make a difference. Brian said he did have some residents complain about that location.

***Fire Chief Bill Byers provided their monthly report for tonight.** The report was emailed to everyone yesterday.

County dispatch is still working to be acquainted with our roads in the Village and Township and with our surrounding communities. More discussion on the software they are using and its capabilities.

***Village Administrator James McGee presented the monthly report.** James acknowledged several projects with legislation before Council tonight. One piece of legislation for the water meter replacement project and one for the Garfield Road water main project.

The Village is working to resolve some EPA violations with the water. The Well houses are being brought up to code.

His department has begun work in our Fairview Cemetery for spring.

James brought up the use of cell phones for Village employees and having a policy in place. James felt a stipend for the use of employee's personal cell phones would be the best option and mentioned our Solicitor had prepared some suggested legislation. Have members of Council reviewed it. Paul said it is not before him. Solicitor Tom Reitz said he emailed draft legislation to each of Council in advance of your Finance Committee meeting two weeks ago. It is a suggested policy for Council to massage to what you would like to see. Once that is done, Tom will prepare the legislation so it can come before them and then be incorporated into your employee handbook. If you have not received it, let him know and he will forward it onto you. Dave Smith asked about public record requests and them using their own cell phones. Tom said a really aggressive record requester could indicate they want to see all records that memorialize the activities of the administration of the Village of Hiram! If you are someone that likes to use texts and they are only on your phone, you are subject to this request. If you use the gmail account, which the Village provides, those records could be accessed through the records repository with Google's gmail and your personal phone is not at risk. Paul asked whether there are any cell phones issued to department heads. Steve said there are two cell phones for the squads and the police have a flip phone for the duty officer. The plan is under Verizon. Steve said they checked other areas and came up with an average stipend of about \$70.00 per month per employee. This would be for a total of 8-10 cell phones. Chief Byers explained how the phones work for the Fire Department. The Chief and Assistant Chief receive dispatched calls even if they are not on a call as well as copies of the EKGs that our squads send to the hospitals. They review EMS charts, call offs and scheduling by text.

The Mayor spoke about the issues we have all faced during this COVID-19 period and the trouble with using electronic media and relying on it. More discussion. Dave Smith knows of other municipalities that have provided phones to their employees. Should our employees want to use their own phones, they should know the risks. Paul Spencer would like to see the cost to issue cell phones to employees and who would actually need one. He would want to see a monthly log of calls kept. Solicitor Reitz felt that would be very difficult and cumbersome on your employees. Records would have to be retained for as long as our records retention schedule requires it to be. The Mayor would authorize the Village Administrator and his Assistant VA to investigate and find out what is available with cell phone plans and what other communities do for their cell phone policies and report back to Council.

MAYOR'S MARCH 9, 2021 REPORT TO COUNCIL

PLANNING & ZONING COMMITTEE MEETING:

There was no meeting Tuesday, March 2, 2021 as no business was scheduled for the P&Z Committee.

Submitted by:

MAYOR LOU BERTRAND

The rest of Mayor Bertrand's report on the COVID-19 Pandemic has been attached to the original minutes.

***The Fiscal Officer Susan Skrovan presented the monthly financial reports for February.**

The following reports were provided to Council for this meeting:

December/January/February Bank Reconciliations have all been posted to the UAN system and reconciled and are now available for signing by the Mayor and Council.

Cash Summary by Fund as of February 28, 2021 was provided in Council e-Packets.

List of bills as of March 5, 2021 was provided in Council e-Packets.

Council Regular meeting minutes for February 9, 2021 were provided in Council e-Packets.

Council Special meeting minutes for February 23, 2021 were provided to Council by email on Monday.

R.I.T.A. income tax receipts YTD report was provided in Council e-Packets.

Comparison of Budgeted and Appropriated YTD report was provided in Council e-Packets.

The UAN system is no longer in temporary mode; the year-end has been closed. Most of the purchase orders were closed before year-end and some that carried over are now closed. The annual financial reporting and Hinkle notes have been sent to the Auditor of State for both the Village of Hiram and the Hiram ESID.

Susan did receive a galley proof for the renewal levy on the ballot. This is a 4.4 mill renewal levy for the general operating budget. The galley proof has been reviewed and confirmed with the Board of Elections. It will be on the ballot for May 4, 2021.

Susan was finalizing the permanent appropriations once year-end was closed out and planned to provide Council with them this evening, however, while working in the UAN system, she was halfway done and tried saving her work and it was lost. She had to start over and re-create them. Appropriations need to be approved by the end of March. Council will need to schedule a special meeting to approve the Permanent Appropriations.

Paul Spencer asked about the adjustment made last year with moving capital funds back to the General Fund. Susan said it was approximately \$120,000. Paul wanted to know if Susan backed that out of the budget for next year since we are not going to have that money or was it carried over. Susan asked Paul to clarify what he meant by backing it out. Paul said we moved that money last year into the budget to cover, we are not going to have that money this year. Susan said yes, we do have that money. What happened was a transfer was made from the Capital Fund back to the General Fund operating to be used for operating. Paul said, didn't we use that money last year.

Susan said no, we used it to shore up the General Fund until Council can discuss finding other ways of increasing revenues to the General Fund. Paul asked then whether the numbers are still reflecting a higher burden than what we are bringing in. Susan said the cost of operating the Village continuously increases; medical, liability and any raises. Paul said if revenue does not increase, you have to adjust spending to compensate. Susan said that is what she has been doing wherever possible. As payroll and benefits increase, insurance costs increase, she is having to make cuts in operating budgets. It gets harder and harder every year to cut from the budget in order to maintain the personnel we have. She added the \$120,000 helped the General Fund quite a bit and as she cuts, she hopes the General Fund will begin to rebound. Paul asked whether we have made \$120,000 worth of cuts in this year's annual budget. Susan said no, we could not. If we could afford to cut \$120,000 from our General Fund operating budget, we would not have needed to make the transfer from Capital! You cannot cut \$120,000 from General Fund without cutting salaries. Paul said we are not bringing in another \$120,000 this year in revenue. Susan said right, we are not. Paul said we cannot continue down the road of ill repute and expect it to work out at the end. Susan said she is attempting to cut everywhere she can possibly cut; however, you get to a point where you can no longer cut unless you are going to cut personnel. To run our departments, you cannot cut any more personnel. Council needs to look at alternative ways to increase revenue or you will be cutting personnel. Paul would like to see a breakdown of the total dollar amount for staffing with benefits; a lump sum amount. Chief Byers felt it would be beneficial to include these totals by department as well. Paul said you can, the big issue is we think we know what is coming in for revenue. If we have 1.2 million coming in and we are spending \$900,000 on wages, it leaves only \$300,000 to operate the Village. At that point, it does not make sense; it is time to do some correcting. Paul said correcting can be painful but you would not be running your business with only 30% to operate on because it would not be sustainable. Chief Byers agreed that a business could not run that way, and we should try to run like a business as much as we can. However, all of our departments are in the business of life safety or to have pure and clean water. It all needs to be looked at. Paul said we need to be able to sustain it; we need to look at it. We can do this before our regular Finance Committee meeting on March 30 or schedule a meeting earlier. There are five Tuesdays in March. Council members felt we could hold a special Council meeting before Finance on March 30, 2021 at 6:00 pm. Susan will provide Council with these figures as soon as department heads review their figures and advertise for the special Council meeting.

Paul asked about the Special Fund for the fire department, money in, money out, is this on this spreadsheet. Susan said yes, we will transfer from the General Fund to the Special Revenue Fund the Village's obligation to operate the Fire Department. The money goes into the Special Revenue Fund and then paid out of that fund. Susan said it will be a transfer from the General Fund every year. The monies they receive from Hiram Township will now be directly receipted into their Special Revenue Fund; it no longer goes to the General Fund. Paul asked, since we did "in-kind" in the past costs associated with operating the fire department to cover the Village's percentage, would we see a pay back from the fire department to the Village. Susan said no, the way she understood it, she will be charging the fire department directly for those costs that we used to in-kind. Such as the natural gas bill and electric bill.

Susan brought up the renewal documents for our health insurance with Anthem Blue Cross Blue Shield. She just received the documents today. We will see an increase in our May 1 renewal of 8.98% on the medical benefits only. No increases on the dental, vision or life coverages. We will need legislation to approve the Anthem renewal.

Steven Schuller noted for Council that for 2019 we ended with \$195,508 in the General Fund, for 2020, we ended with approximately \$175,000. Therefore, we overspent in the General Fund by \$20,000.

The Mayor asked if everyone can attend the special Council meeting on March 30, this is holy week. If not, we can move it up a week. Council members felt to keep it for March 30, all can attend.

A motion to approve the Fiscal Officer's report for February as submitted was made by Mr. Spencer and seconded by Mr. Hemphill. The result of the voice vote was 6-0 in favor.

The Bill's list was reviewed. A motion to approve the Bill's list was made by Mr. Dempsey and seconded by Mr. Spencer. The result of the voice vote was 6-0 in favor.

HIRAM TOWNSHIP REPORT

No report.

LEGISLATION

RESOLUTIONS

2021-05: A RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING THE EXPENDITURE OF PUBLIC FUNDS OF NO MORE THAN TWO HUNDRED DOLLARS FOR A RECEPTION FOLLOWING THE MEMORIAL DAY OBSERVANCE ON MAY 31, 2021. 2nd READING.

2021-07: A RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING DESIGN PROFESSIONAL WORK BY THE ENGINEERING FIRM OF CT CONSULTANTS FOR CONSTRUCTION ENGINEERING SERVICES FOR THE UTILITY METER READING SYSTEM REPLACEMENTS AND AMR SYSTEMS PROJECT AND DECLARING AN EMERGENCY. A motion to suspend the rules was made by Mr. Spencer and seconded by Mr. Smith. The result of the voice vote was 6-0 in favor. A motion to approve as an emergency was made by Mr. Smith and seconded by Mr. Spencer. The result of the voice vote was 6-0 in favor.

2021-08: A RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING A CONTRACT WITH CORE & MAIN, LP FOR THE METER READING SYSTEM REPLACEMENT PROJECT WITHIN THE VILLAGE OF HIRAM, PORTAGE COUNTY, OHIO AND DECLARING AN EMERGENCY. A motion to suspend the rules was made by Mr. Greenwood and seconded by Mr. Szell. The result of the voice vote was 6-0 in favor. A motion to approve as an emergency was made by Mr. Dempsey and seconded by Mr. Spencer. Asst. VA Steve Schuller explained the project and costs. It is a 50/50 OPWC grant/OWDA loan. The loan is at 1.29% covering \$400,000, which includes the first two years of maintenance/warranty. Steve explained the details, the longevity of the meters and the overall time savings to personnel. Mr. Spencer called the question. The result of the voice vote was 6-0 in favor.

2021-09: A RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING A CONTRACT WITH GRADE LINE, INC. FOR THE GARFIELD ROAD WATER MAIN REPLACEMENT PROJECT WITHIN THE VILLAGE OF HIRAM, PORTAGE COUNTY, OHIO AND DECLARING AN EMERGENCY. A motion to suspend the rules was made by Mr. Spencer and seconded by Mr. Szell. The result of the voice vote was 6-0 in favor. A motion to approve as an emergency was made by Mr. Dempsey and seconded by Mr. Spencer. Steve Schuller explained this project. We put in for an 80/20 grant/loan. We got this on Small Government funds. Project estimate was \$415,000; bids came in at \$342,108. Our out of pocket over 20 years is \$68,000 with a zero percent loan. The line will be put on the east side of Garfield Road with new sidewalks wherever necessary. The result of the voice vote was 6-0 in favor.

2021-10: A RESOLUTION OPPOSING HOUSE BILL 157 AMENDING THE LAW REGARDING WITHHOLDING MUNICIPAL EARNED INCOME TAX FOR THOSE WORKING VIRTUALLY AND/OR AT HOME AND DECLARING AN EMERGENCY. A motion to suspend the rules was made by Mr. Smith and seconded by Mr. Spencer. The result of the voice vote was 6-0 in favor. A motion to approve as an emergency was made by Mr. Hemphill and seconded by Mr. Smith. The result of the voice vote was 6-0 in favor.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS:

Paul Spencer brought up an idea he thought might stimulate some growth in the Village. To allow recreational vehicles to utilize our public properties with temporary hookups. Look at a website: www.Harvesthost.com. More discussion by Council members. Paul provided examples of how this all works; it is happening more and more.

A motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Mr. Dempsey and seconded by Mr. Szell. The result of the voice vote was 6-0 in favor. The meeting adjourned at 8:22 pm.

These minutes are pending approval by Council.



Mayor Lou Bertrand

ATTEST:



Fiscal Officer Susan J. Skrovan