

Tipp City, Ohio Council Retreat Goals and Policy Direction

On February 28, 2020, City Council members met to set the direction of the City for the next two years and to lay the ground work for years beyond. City Senior Staff also participated in the Council Retreat to provide content expertise as needed. The session was facilitated by Jane Dockery of Wright State University.

Attendees:

Council Members

- Katelyn Berbach, President
- Joseph Gibson, Mayor
- Kathryn Huffman
- Mike Jackson
- Mike McFarland
- Logan Rogers
- Frank Scenna

Senior Staff

- Tim Eggleston, City Manager
- John Green, Finance Director
- Eric Burris, Chief of Police
- Eric Mack, Director of Municipal Services
- Matt Spring, Community Development Director
- Cameron Haller, Chief of Emergency Services
- Janice Bates, Executive Secretary to City Manager/Clerk of Council

In preparation for the strategic planning session, a simple survey was distributed to City Council members and staff leadership. A list of potential City priorities was developed from the survey results and was used as a discussion guide for the Council retreat. This report summarizes the strategic and policy guidance provided to staff by Council according to the following categories:

- Economic, Business, and Residential Development
- Infrastructure and Utilities
- Beautification and Quality of Life
- Community Communications
- Public Safety
- Fiscal Stability

Economic, Business, and Residential Development

Background: As is the case in every municipality, there are advantages and challenges to developing in the city. Advantages for Tipp City include a low income tax rate, tax incentives for businesses, the municipal-owned electric service, right-of-way access, and a proactive staff who understand regulations and standards to reduce development costs. Challenges include: a need to certify industrial sites, Current Agricultural Use Valuation (CAUV) fees, Intervening User (IU) fees, some locations having difficult-to-develop land, and the city has higher property costs than its municipal neighbors. In terms of residential development, City Staff has been contacted by various developers regarding senior housing. IU and CAUV fees are an issue for residential development, too.

Priorities:

City Staff will recommend the city's long-term industrial, commercial, and residential growth boundaries up to and beyond Peters Road, considering the timing of utility investments that will be necessitated and considering the impacts on traffic patterns.

- Industrial:
 - Council members' vision is to prepare the City for future industrial development which will likely require partnerships with Monroe Township and property owners.
 - City Staff are to continue to pursue certified industrial sites, communicating to private property owners that if they will certify their property, the City will position it for development.
- Commercial:
 - City Staff are to spur commercial redevelopment and development. Plans should address declining strip malls and the lack of commercial amenities near some residential areas. Council and Staff will firm up strategies after the Economic Development Plan is presented by The Montrose Group in 2020. A couple of preliminary ideas are for Staff to make recommendations pertaining to incentives for commercial development such as tax abatements which specify the City's expectations in return; and to consider hiring market consultants that have national commercial development connections, especially medical commercial development.
 - City Staff are to organize a work session with the Law Director to review the current property maintenance codes for commercial development and the most common violations, and to discuss nuisance code enforcement.
- Residential:
 - Residential development incentives should be considered for inner-city areas to enable downsizing options and to ensure a viable downtown/inner core.
 - Staff will point to policies that would enable developers to consider condominium development.

Strengthen the Community Improvement Corporation (CIC) by assigning two members of Council along with the City Manager, the Finance Director, and the Community Development Director; and by providing startup funding. The City Manager will meet with the Port Authority to assess its possible funding support.

Explore strategies to make the river more attractive, accessible, and usable. Staff will gather information from ODNR regarding improving the ramp and this information will inform possible strategies in the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP).

Infrastructure and Utilities

Background: Regarding utilities, City Staff members have initiated the Sanitary Sewer Master Plan, and have completed the electric and water 5-year master plans. Regarding infrastructure, the next 10-year Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) process is underway. The CIP Committee met with Staff to learn about where the previous CIP funding was expended and to discuss needs for the next 10-year CIP. The main

focus is on street improvements with an aim to get the City to a level of spending \$750,000 per year, which will get commercial streets to a 16 to 17-year cycle and residential streets to an approximate 20-year cycle. Other CIP funding need areas include: some stormwater improvements, some park improvements, the quiet zone initiative, and bikeway and pedestrian bridge type improvements which are also poised for grant funding. The CIP is aimed to be on the ballot in November 2020 and will continue to promote safety, street maintenance, and park improvements.

Priorities:

- Council supports continued infrastructure improvements and the CIP to maintain city infrastructure.
- Council supports Staff efforts to address resident concerns about stormwater maintenance, specifically the concerns regarding the Second and Third Street culvert project renovations and effects on property owners. The Miami Conservancy District (MCD) maintains 1.15 miles of levee in Tipp City and works with the City on stormwater management.

Beautification and Quality of Life

Background: The City has completed a Parks Master Plan and a Tree Board Master Plan.¹ City Staff members have also been in discussions regarding increasing the size of Kyle Park by acquiring farm land just north of the park. The City has requested the first right of refusal should the land owner decide to sell the land. City Staff are pursuing necessary engineering plans to upgrade the sewer line in Kyle Park so more restrooms can be added. City Council members recognize that parks and open space improve physical and psychological health, strengthen communities, and make the City a more attractive place to live and work. Numerous studies have shown the social, environmental, economic, and health benefits parks bring to a city and its people.

Priorities:

- Implement a plan to improve the landscaping of the I75 Exit 68 interchange that is a sustainable and low-cost, long-term solution.
 - Ideas include the use of natural materials and pavers, and other low maintenance ideas.
 - Residents would like the exit to represent Tipp City. Signs have to be allowed by the Federal Highway Administration.
- Enhance the quality of life for all age groups by improving park amenities.
 - Seek to increase the size of Kyle Park, improve its playground equipment, develop necessary engineering plans to address sanitary sewer issues, provide more parking spaces (green paver markers are a flexible choice), and study the feasibility of adding an electric vehicle charging station.
 - Identify funding to enhance parks and recreation opportunities.

¹ The City Tree Board consists of three members who are residents of the city and are appointed by City Council. Members of the Tree Board study, investigate, and counsel; develop or update annually, and administer a written plan for the care, preservation, pruning, planting, replanting, removal or disposition of trees and shrubs in parks, along streets, and in other public areas.

Community Communications

Background: Council and City Staff members recognize citizen participation as an asset, and it is valued and encouraged. National research shows that Americans are in many ways less civically engaged than ever before, with many indicators of a civically healthy society at their lowest levels ever.² At the same time, local governments have an opportunity and a responsibility to improve the quality and quantity of civic engagement, given their uniquely close connections to their citizens. Fortunately, there are more tools and models than ever before to do so, such as citizens' academies, citizen engagement platforms like Neighborland, and social media. In Tipp City, a core concern is the lack of citizens seeking City Council election and the need to cultivate local leaders to fill this important role. An example from the City of Lauderdale, Florida aims to increase residents' knowledge about local government for those who have a desire to become more involved in shaping and developing their community (see text box below).

CITY OF LAUDERDALE LAKES CITIZENS' ACADEMY

Number and Frequency of Sessions: Six one-and-a-half-hour sessions. Sessions are held weekly.

Cost to Participate: None

Maximum Class Size: 20. Registration is on a first-come basis.

The Lauderdale Lakes Citizens' Academy is for residents who want to increase their knowledge about local government operations and have a desire to become more involved in the shaping and development of their community. The course is designed to provide a firsthand look at how the city's many services and programs work to create a livable community.

The schedule is: Week 1 – City Government 101: City History and Organization; Week 2 – Dollars and Sense: Budget and Funding, and Other City Functions; Week 3 – Developing and Maintaining the Community: Community and Economic Development; Week 4 – We Build This City: Public Works, Engineering and Construction; Week 5 – Keeping Citizens Safe: BSO Police and Fire Rescue; and Week 6 – Something for Everyone: Parks, Leisure and Social Services.

Priorities:

- Develop and offer a citizens academy, which is an education and training program that teaches citizens about government and helps shape them into local leaders.
- Cultivate leaders from City boards and committees to run for election to City Council.
- Consider recording Board of Zoning Appeals, Planning Board, and other board meetings to increase familiarity and interest in participating in City Boards.
- Offer opportunities to learn about the City and City Council at public gatherings such as hosting a table at the Mum Festival.
- Explore offering a City Hall Open House that provides information and a tour of facilities.
- Continue to make regular posts to Facebook, and continue the Twitter feed.

² <https://cele.sog.unc.edu/how-local-governments-can-drive-civic-engagement-in-2018/>

Public Safety

Background: Three priority areas were identified or confirmed by Council members for this public safety topic: (1) firefighter staffing needs, (2) property crime prevention, and (3) Quiet Zones.

Firefighters: There is a national shortage of firefighters (both paid and voluntary firefighters) for multiple reasons. One reason is the low unemployment rate, which indicates that people can choose less demanding or dangerous work. Another reason is that the training has become more demanding, even for volunteer firefighters to maintain certification. The rising cost of obtaining certifications, a drop in interest in public service, and a decline in available part-time candidates increases demand and competition for firefighters. This trend has impacted Tipp City as well.

Property Crime Prevention: The Tipp City Police Department is doing a lot of education and coordination with citizens on property crime prevention. The intent is to see a reduction in property crime rates, so the next time the *Dayton Business Journal* releases its "Safest Cities Report," Tipp City is number one instead of number two.

Quiet Zones: A quiet zone is a railroad grade crossing at which trains are prohibited from sounding their horns in order to decrease the noise level for nearby residential communities. The train horns can be silenced only when other safety measures compensate for the absence of the horns. There can be costs associated with initiating the zones and in implementing other safety measures.

Priorities:

Fire Department-Related

- Summarize and present the results of a survey of neighboring fire departments. Colerain Township near Cincinnati was identified as a successful combination Fire Department, which consists of both career and volunteer firefighters.
- Develop a tactical plan including budgetary needs and prepare that plan for Council review.
- Conduct a Fire Services Study to provide the foundational information needed to inform a strategic plan for Fire and EMS services in Tipp City. Comprehensive planning for both staffing and funding the fire department are crucial in the next few years.

Property Crime Prevention-Related

- Continue to educate Tipp City residents about the role of cameras and other interventions in reducing residential property crimes.

Quiet Zone-Related

- Exploring train quiet zone costs and alternative safety measures is a priority that is currently underway in Tipp City.

Fiscal Stability

Background: Tipp City Department Heads work diligently to maintain reduced operating expenses wherever possible without jeopardizing safety or affecting current levels of service. The General Fund

has operated with an annual surplus for at least the past thirteen years (net of short-term advances for capital improvement projects). Since 2006, approx. \$3.2 million has been added to the General Fund balance.

Priorities:

- Continue steps to manage the City's finances and to properly sustain fiscal stewardship and stability.
- Council members support recognition and appreciation of City Staff for the cost-cutting innovations they develop and implement.
- Council members support staff's access to training programs that are needed.