

MINUTES

FEBRUARY 12, 2024

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

7:00 P.M.

Council Members in Attendance:

Beth Clodfelter
Micah McCarey
Jeff Risner
Solveig Spjeldnes
Jessica Thomas

Administrators and/or
Other Elected Officials:

President Crowl
Mayor Patterson
Auditor Hecht
Service-Safety Director Stone

Items Discussed:

- Resolution (Middle East)
-President – provided background on receipt of a Resolution proposed for a ceasefire in Palestine – explained that any Council Member can submit an item for consideration through Committee of the Whole – during our last meeting several citizens spoke on the Hamas, Israel conflict – Council Member Wood then requested this item be discussed in Committee of the Whole – some concern was stated that this matter does not pertain to City governance – President and Mayor requested an official opinion from the Law Director's Office on the appropriateness of City Council issuing a Resolution on this matter (see attached) – pointed out that resident Brandon Thompson made an excellent connection to a 2020 City Council Resolution that declared racism a public health crisis, that states: "...affecting our City, County and the entire State..." and "We, the Members of Athens City Council ask the Mayor to establish a working group to promote racial equity throughout the City and to promote community engagement and provide tools for City Departments to engage actively and authentically with communities of color." and this connects very directly to the City of Athens, Ohio, matters that pertain to the harmony of our community – a number of communications have since been received by City Council Members on both sides of issuing or not issuing a Resolution – certainly, all are appalled by this very serious situation happening between Hamas and Israel – he reached out to Athens Mediation Service about the possibility of bringing them together as part of a community conversation to talk about the International Court of Justice,

to talk about these issues and to bring some harmony and peace to our community

-Spjeldnes – is thinking of what is in the best interest of our community – she, too, is horrified about what is happening in Israel and the people of Gaza – it is important to understand this was initiated by the Hama fighters – it is disturbing this is being ignored – suggested those attending this evening on this issue to contact their State representatives, senators and the President to push them to find solutions – she has communicated with many residents with the consensus that foreign policy should not be addressed by our local government; legislation should be directly related to the local area – she supports the Assistant Law Director’s legal opinion – about 10 other armed conflicts are occurring right now around the world, and questioned where we draw the line – she is convinced no Resolution should be passed – Council’s job is to adopt legislation to improve the lives of our residents in a responsible way – these types of issues take the Council away from its responsibilities to the community – feels passing such legislation would be divisive, inspire fear, and undermine inclusion and harmony in our community, and will cause more harm than good – there are other ways of advocating for this important change in the Middle East

-McCarey – read a statement from Wesley Thompson in support of the ceasefire resolution – he then shared the City’s two-year partnership with the Strong Cities Network to help communities work through polarizing issues, to create understanding, and offset instances of violence through developing strategic frameworks, analyzing local assets and vulnerabilities, expanding partnerships and coordination, and offering a robust set of relationships with other communities that are facing similar issues

-Clodfelter – believes everyone has a right to their opinion and discussion, and this is good for grassroots democracy – our community has a lot of international people from places where proposals like this can lead to violence – she, too, would like to see a ceasefire, but agrees with Spjeldnes that this is a national issue that doesn’t relate directly to the City – respects those citizens taking the time to attend this meeting, but she is not comfortable moving this forward through the Council – she, too, encouraged them to reach out to state and national officials, which is more appropriate

-Swank – this is a challenging and emotional discussion – City Council should not be passing a Resolution about war in the Middle East – concurs with Spjeldnes and Clodfelter that such a Resolution would do more harm than good

-Thomas – is comfortable moving forward with this discussion in some capacity – feels it is important to acknowledge the victims on both sides – finds Council Member Wood’s Resolution as a simple call for peace

-McCarey – suggested moving forward with a Resolution offering guidance for navigating local impacts of global crises, preventing hate, extremism, and polarization that would combine the tenets of the Strong Cities Network, potentially integrating some of that work into the City's broader diversity, equity, and inclusion strategic planning

-Mayor – encouraged learning more about the Strong Cities Network – Athens has been identified as one of 6 cities in North America to be a part of this lengthy training – the Strong Cities Network supports cities through a variety of modalities, not only addressing a complex and evolving threat environment, but to fulfill their potential as leading in prevention – he is keenly interested in our community being a leader to improve and develop local approaches, to take account of good practices, internationally, that can be tailored to our local community – this global network is dedicated to addressing all forms of hate, extremism and polarization

-Ash Dasugi, Old U.S. Route 33, Athens County, is a Palestinian American – spoke about the U.S. government's funding of the genocide of her people – not supporting genocide is different from not supporting Israel – daily, she feels fear of being in public – believes seeking a ceasefire is a deeply relevant issue

-Hannah Kopp, Pete Smith Road, Athens County, acknowledged the City of Athens' Resolution 04-23 to become a sister city with the City of Ostroh, Ukraine, it refers to our commitment to values including freedom, democracy, diversity, compassion, unity, and helping each other out in tough times – and, yet, tonight does not find it legally advisable to promote a ceasefire in Gaza – questioned why Palestinians do not receive the same level of care – requested support of our local government in requesting a ceasefire

-Brock Setsor, Oxbow Trail, believes such a resolution would be futile and insignificant to the City of Athens – creates division in the community – need to spend time correcting local issues

-Emma Loomis-Amrhain, Grosvenor Street, acknowledged Resolution 06-23, reaffirming the City of Athens' commitment to oppose all forms of bigotry, prejudice, and racial injustice – questioned that the City is prepared to ban plastic bags, but not genocide

-Valerie Valasco, Shafer Street, opposes any American resources used to perpetuate genocide or any other injustices – our voices need to be heard by those with political power in our local community – quoted revolutionary Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., "The time is always right to do the right thing."

-Ellie Hamrick, Jacksonville, Athens County, expressed concern that our State resources are being used to bomb Palestine and perpetrating genocide –

resources that could and should be redirected to meet urgent needs in Athens County – this connects to our local issue

-Emerson Young, McKinley Avenue, sees both sides and would like everyone to be included – conflict is difficult, and he would like it to end

-William Owens, Arden Place, this issue is causing pain throughout our community, and some residents feel unsafe coming here to speak publicly – this is an important issue, and he is not entirely convinced with the argument to not pass a Resolution – believes that Council Member Wood's proposed Resolution would bring us together

-Aya Syuo, United Lane, Athens County –believes this issue is incredibly relevant to all – she understands that while this Ceasefire Resolution does not define any real geopolitical position, it is about telling the Athens community that we see the humanity in the situation, that we see the collective humanity in ourselves – urged Council's support of a Ceasefire Resolution

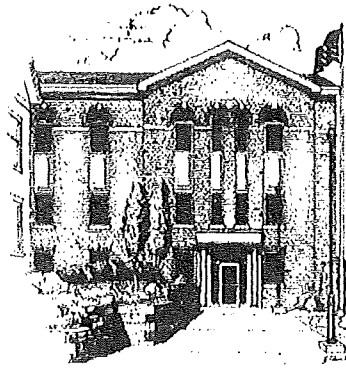
-Zoe Ward Bryson, Mound Street, sees merit in the Strong Cities Network initiatives, and finds this Resolution pertinent to our domestic and community affairs in addition to the obvious global implications – State of Ohio money being sent to Israel is needed in our community

-Alisha Bicknell, Hudson Avenue, noted that strong cities do not let genocide happen

-Heather Cantino, Cable Lane, as a Jewish American is appalled that Jews are being used as a reason to commit genocide – City Council needs to take realistic responsibility within its power to both actually represent the people you represent, and to hold your own government accountable to international law as well – this is our small town's opportunity to be a drop in the bucket of ending this human atrocity

-Brandon Thompson, lifelong Athens' resident, is a member of the Racial Equity Coalition of Athens, acknowledged the Council's adoption of Resolution 10-20 to declare racism a public health crisis, noting that the City's ongoing commitment continues – this very discussion tonight is progress – understands this issue is complicated and that the proposed Resolution could bring division among citizens, and fear; this is not unfounded – questioned how the City of Athens can look at this conflict and do nothing collectively – he urged the Council not to do nothing

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City of Athens

LISA A. ELIASON
CITY LAW DIRECTOR

Tracy W. Meek, Chief City Prosecutor
Jesse Branner Hittle, Asst. Law Director
Justin Townley, City Prosecutor

To: Steve Patterson, Mayor
Sam Crowl, Athens City Council President
From: Jessica Branner Hittle, Assistant Law Director *JBH*
Date: February 7, 2024
Re: City Council resolution regarding a ceasefire in Gaza

You have asked for a legal opinion “regarding the appropriateness of a City Council resolution regarding a ceasefire in Gaza” related to the Israel-Hamas war that began on October 7, 2023.

It is my opinion that Council should not adopt a resolution of this nature for two reasons.

First, while there have been numerous armed conflicts in the last several decades, Council has never adopted a resolution calling for a ceasefire in an active armed conflict. *See* Indices of City Council Resolutions adopted 1997-2023, attached.

Second, a resolution, by its nature, is something “less formal than [an] ‘ordinance,’ [and] generally, it is mere expression of opinion or mind of council concerning some matter of administration” *Black’s Law Dictionary* 1178 (5th Ed.1979).

Council resolutions should be within the scope of issues that arise in local government. Adopting a resolution of this nature opens the door to similar resolutions with tenuous connections to the daily affairs of running local government.

As a result, it is my opinion, based on precedent and the intended purpose of a city council resolution, that adopting a resolution on this matter is not appropriate.

MINUTES: FEBRUARY 12, 2024

FINANCE & PERSONNEL COMMITTEE

Members in Attendance:

Jeff Risner, Chair
Beth Clodfelter, Member
Micah McCarey, Member

Administrators and/or
Other Elected Officials:

President Crowl
Mayor Patterson
Service-Safety Director Stone

ITEMS DISCUSSED:

- Then and Now Certificates

Company Name	Amount	Purpose
Treasurer – State of Ohio	\$ 7,200.00	LEADS Access Fee
Granicus	\$16,306.80	Video Streaming & Sound Search
Athens Co. Economic Develop.	\$60,000.00	2024 Membership
CIVICA	\$11,025.00	License Fees
CIVICA	\$ 4,715.99	License Fees
National Rec. & Park Assoc.	\$ 3,000.00	Directors School
Ohio University	\$ 5,337.00	Fuel Admin. Fee
Flock Group	\$13,100.00	Camera Contract/Install
Enterprise FM Trust	\$28,373.27	Vehicle Monthly Lease Fee
Athens County Commissioners	\$20,512.24	Public Defender Contract
Robson Tree Service, LLC	\$ 3,500.00	Tree Removal

-Auditor – purchase orders are now in place – these are early January invoices over \$3000 that came in before staff were able to enter requisitions into the system after the 2023 year was closed out – she requested Suspension of the Rules next Monday in order to get these bills paid

- Medical Fund
 - Risner – authorization for Reallocating Income Tax to reduce the Street Fund by 2% and adding 2% to a new Medical Fund line has been requested
 - Stone – explained the City is self-insured, less costly than paying premiums – City does still pay premiums for stop-loss insurance for catastrophic claims – in 2023 the City had 8 catastrophic claims (those reaching more than \$100,000), more than twice the number expected – the Street Fund has a healthy unappropriated balance and is the most appropriate fund to reduce by a couple percent
 - Mayor – 1% income tax equals approximately \$140,000 annually
 - Auditor – increased employer contribution started January 2024 – requested transferring \$300,000 from General Fund as a one-time transfer to shore up the Medical Fund until additional funding kicks in – the City spends \$125,000 to

\$200,000 per week toward medical expenses – this will also need Suspension of the Rules

-Clodfelter – understands addressing this critical need – asked if this \$300,000 from the General Fund will cause any shortfalls in other City obligations

-Auditor – it is available in the unappropriated balance – will, however, need to pay attention to spending – there will not be extra money in the General Fund, aside from emergencies

-Swank – asked, if with the 2% reduction in the Street Fund, whether there will be enough money available to address our street paving needs

-Mayor – linear feet of paving has increased over the past several years – using the City's street rating system, with the number of streets that have been paved, milled and paved, or crack-sealed over the past several years, there are fewer streets now needing attention – emphasized that nothing will be ignored because of this reduction

-Auditor – pointed out that annual street paving is approximately \$500,000, and there is over \$3 million dollars unappropriated at this time in the Street Fund

-Stone – over and above the annual paving, external funding requires a local funding match as well that will use some of that unappropriated balance

ITEMS NEEDED ON AN UPCOMING CITY COUNCIL AGENDA:

1. Then & Now Certificates
2. Medical Fund Interfund Transfer
3. Medical Fund Income Tax Reallocation

MINUTES

PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

FEBRUARY 12, 2024

Members in Attendance:

Alan Swank, Chair
Solveig Spjeldnes, Member
Jessica Thomas, Member

Administrators and/or Other Elected Officials:

President Crowl
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Items Discussed:

- Accept Permanent Bike Path & Right-of-Way Easements from the Athens County Public Library
 - Swank – last year the City conveyed a .395-acre parcel to the Library, with the understanding that easements would be granted after the transfer of property to allow bike path maintenance and improvements and access to utilities – legislation is now ready to affect these easements
 - Stone – Athens County Libraries Director Tepe requested both the City and Ohio University convey land to the library that it has been using for many years – final step is the granting of these easements

ITEMS NEEDED ON AN UPCOMING CITY COUNCIL AGENDA:

1. Accepting Easements