

MINUTES

CITY & SAFETY SERVICES COMMITTEE

FEBRUARY 24, 2025 - 7:00 p.m.

Members in Attendance: Micah McCarey, Chair
Jeff Risner, Member
Alan Swank, Member
Jessica Thomas, Member

Administrators and
Other Elected Officials: Acting Mayor Crowl
Treasurer Thomas

ITEMS DISCUSSED:

- Fiber Project (#347), Phase 4 Construction
-McCarey – this phase of the project will install fiber down Court Street to President Street, then down Richland Avenue to Canterbury, and also connect Fire Station 2 – fiber installation has been an ongoing effort by the City since 2022 – the cost for this phase will be approximately \$450,000 – this phase will install city-owned fiberoptic cable from City Hall south underground along Court Street to connect the traffic signals at Court/Union and Court/President, then along under President Street and across the Oxbow Bridge – the fiber will then transition to the conduit installed several years ago with the “Richland Pedestrian Passageway Project #311” and the “Between the Bridges Sidewalk Project #291” down to Shafer Street to connect the Richland/Shافر signal – it will then transition back to new conduit and continue south to connect the overhead variable message sign, then cross the Richland bridge over the Hocking and through the roundabout where it will include connection points for future camera use – at that point it will transition to conduit previously installed with the “Richland Avenue South Project #244” and proceed south along Richland, connecting the Richland/Hooper signal and Fire Station 2 to the network, then stop at Canterbury – this project will allow the City to drop the Spectrum Business Class internet service at Fire Station 2, as well as connect all the aforementioned signals and signage to the central network – as with other phases, phase 4 will have a considerable number of additional fiber strands to be leveraged for future economic development or other purposes – the design for phase 5 will connect City facilities along W. Union, including the Congress/Union Signal, the Shafer/Union Signal, and the ALCO building – funding will be as follows: (\$400,000) from the Street Fund and (\$50,000) from the General Fund, Fire

-Beth Clodfelter, South Shannon Avenue – asked if this project will include traffic light synchronization, more efficient for drivers and reducing carbon emissions
-McCarey – understands traffic control adjustments are one of the intended benefits – need to clarify what kind of data this will provide that may allow the City to improve its traffic flow

- Dairy Lane, Project #317 Closeout (amend 0-127-23)
-McCarey – this project installed new sewer and new City-owned water on Dairy Lane, and new sewer across the “Ridges Tier II property” in support of the county sewer project and new development on that Tier 2 property – in addition to the utilities, this project included re-laying of the historic brick pavement on Dairy Lane and installation of a new sidewalk, as well as a new multi-use path, and also repaving of the existing multi-use path in Southside Park along Dairy Lane – in order to close out project 317, we need an additional \$200,000 appropriated from the Street Fund – the purpose of these funds to finish the project is due to the added sidewalk, bike path, and final quantity adjustments based on field conditions – this is the final payment to close out the project – delays in this final payment and appropriation request were due to a dispute on final quantities between the contractor and the construction engineer that have now been resolved

ITEMS NEEDED ON AN UPCOMING CITY COUNCIL AGENDA:

1. Fiber Project #347
2. Dairy Lane Project #317

IMINUTES

FEBRUARY 24, 2025

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

7:00 P.M.

Council Members in Attendance:

Beth Clodfelter
Micah McCarey
Solveig Spjeldnes
Alan Swank
Jessica Thomas
Michael Wood

Administrators and/or
Other Elected Officials:

President Pro Tem Risner
Acting Mayor Crowl
Treasurer Thomas

Items Discussed:

- Proposed Resolution (anti-discrimination efforts, Ohio University YDSA)
-Wood – the Young Democratic Socialists of America (YDSA), Ohio University Chapter, are requesting a Resolution from the Council calling for the City of Athens to be declared a safe haven for individuals seeking gender-affirming healthcare

-YDSA President – lives in fear that fellow neighbors are on their way to being legally shoved back in the closet, fear that classmates are going to have their physical and mental resources stripped away from them, that friends are going to have their personal lives subject to the hatred of legislators and politicians who have an ideological wish to eliminate them from existence – the time has come to put in place local protections, both rhetorical and legal, that would halt the formalized legislative push of transphobia in our state and in our nation – there is a belief by some, that transgender and non-binary individuals deserve to be persecuted and legally discriminated against for their identity, and do not deserve to be treated like individuals who can pursue their own health care decisions – the Safe Act, HB 68, specifically applies to trans and non-binary youth – the fear is that politicians will target transgender and non-binary individuals – Athens is a diverse community – a gender affirming care commitment in our community would mean a lot, not only to the LGBTQIA+ community in Athens, but for people all across the City from all different identities as well – 90% of LGBTQIA+ youths surveyed by the 2024 Trevor Project stated that recent politics have negatively impacted their mental health, and 45% of transgender and non-binary young people reported they have considered moving to a different state because of LGBTQIA+ related politics and laws – the science and studies are both in agreement that treatment is better for their well-being, not worse

-Sonny Sparks (legal name), but now goes by the name of Oran Underhill – Member of the Trans Community – spoke in favor of the Resolution – as a future social worker, feels an ethical responsibility to address social problems, and believes our community is at a tipping point – current bans on gender affirming care are dangerous – gender affirming care for children can be something as simple as going by their preferred name – the Trevor Project, an organization dedicated to trans youth suicides, reported in 2024 that anti-trans laws correlate with a 72% increase in suicide attempts – being a safe haven city would literally save lives – this Resolution is the moral and ethical right choice, as caring for each other should be our first priority

-Abigail William, North McKinley Avenue, Member of Trans Community – believes this Resolution needs to be put into place to protect not only Ohio University students, but others living in the City of Athens – medical services are needed for gender affirming care – now is the time for City Council to support their community

-Spjeldnes – supports the Resolution – indicating the need for review by the Law Director

-Clodfelter – supports the Resolution, also expressing the need for review by the Law Director

-Thomas – agrees – support for emotional safety is important

-McCarey – believes that, from many people's perspective, the University and Athens Community have been operating like a safe haven, aiming to promote diversity and inclusion, and providing access to resources that allow them to be successful – that is something we can be proud of – justice and freedom are important – to allow people to make decisions for themselves – should support the needs of those who are often marginalized and underrepresented

-Swank – civic engagement is the cornerstone of a strong democracy – unfortunately, standalone resolutions are simply a statement of beliefs that may or may not manifest into concrete actions – in 2020 Athens City Council adopted the 2040 Comprehensive Plan that includes a statement of our mission and guiding principles – Principle #8 reads, "We will be inclusive for all, regardless of race, creed, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, national origin or ancestry, marital or familial status, religious belief, a disability, or economic status" – since gender is included as a guiding principle, he suggested engaging the City's Community Relations Commission to develop language that expands upon Principle #8, incorporating it into our vision statement and guiding principles, and prominently displayed in our Plan – would be much more powerful and longer lasting than a standalone resolution

-Clodfelter – while our Comprehensive Plan includes language to protect rights, she believes, it is important at this time to move forward with the proposed Resolution, again, citing the City's stance on discrimination in our community is important

-McCarey – noted the following as adopting similar resolutions: Cincinnati, Ohio; Cleveland Heights, Ohio; State College, Pennsylvania; Kansas City, Missouri; and Bloomington, Indiana – has found no backlash or published consequences to these resolutions – recognizes that resolutions seem to be the standard mechanism through which city councils respond to citizens' requests, letting their voices and concerns be amplified and made public – is very open to expanding our guiding principles, whether it's those reflected specifically in the Plan or other places – would be good in conjunction with this Resolution

-Wood – agrees, this language is very well researched – the group has made this a community effort

- Proposed Resolution (tax-exempt status of municipal bonds)
-Risner – the Ohio Municipal League has requested municipalities support their efforts for the preservation of the federal tax exemption of municipal bonds

-Treasurer – tax exempt bonds provide essential financing for needed infrastructure projects – without these municipal bonds the cost of borrowing would be more expensive, causing an increase in taxes and fees that would place an undue burden on taxpayers – Athens has used tax exempt bonds in funding the building of our Community Center, the widening of our East State Street corridor, upgrading our Wastewater Treatment Plan, and more recently the building of our Municipal Pool and new Fire Station Headquarters, with bond interest rates ranging from 3 to 5 percent – this year the City will pay \$766,166 in interest – without these bonds, the City's rate could be as much as 2 ½ percent higher, making this year's interest payment \$463,132 more, hence the importance of having tax exempt bonds

-Spjeldnes – municipalities have seen these types of continual unfunded mandates pushed by the federal government down to states and then to the local level – it is important that we take a stance

Treasurer – pointed out that the federal government is only providing about ¼ of the investment – if suddenly ¾ is taxed at a higher rate, municipalities will not be able to afford such projects, and they will not get done, which is a real problem

ITEMS NEEDED ON AN UPCOMING CITY COUNCIL AGENDA:

1. Anti-Discrimination Resolution
2. Tax Exempt Bonds Resolution

MINUTES

FEBRUARY 24, 2025

FINANCE & PERSONNEL COMMITTEE

Members in Attendance:

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

Administrators and/or
Other Elected Officials:

Acting Mayor Crowl
Treasurer Thomas

ITEMS DISCUSSED:

- 2025 NOPEC Energized Community Grant
Risner – the City received (\$7,337) in grant funds from NOPEC this year, and legislation is required to accept the funds – past grant-funded projects:

2018: Athens Public Transit Solar Bus Shelters
2019: Solar Powered Personal Device Charging Stations
2020: Near East Side Solar Light Project
2021: Continuation of Near East Side Solar Light Project
2022: Community Center Energy Efficient LED Lighting Project
2023: Meadow Lane Pocket Park Solar Pathway Lighting Project
2024: Voluntary Lawn Tool Going Electric Program (VoLTaGE)

2025: Proposed:

-the City proposes transitioning our cemetery maintenance equipment from gas-powered to electric alternatives – this transition will significantly reduce our carbon footprint and lower operational costs – the primary goal of this project is to replace outdated gas-powered push lawn mowers, trimmers, and leaf blowers with efficient, low-noise electric models – additionally, electric equipment requires less maintenance, reducing long-term costs and ensuring the sustainability of our operations – the total cost of this transition is estimated at \$7,000, covering the purchase of electric maintenance tools and necessary accessories such as batteries and chargers – this investment will provide immediate benefits, including a healthier work environment for City groundskeeping staff

-Alan Swank, 40 Townsend Place – suggested consulting with groundskeeping staff to make sure the battery powered mowers will be able to cover the acres of our cemeteries – noted that the City of Athens uses NOPEC for gas aggregation – as of today, the NOPEC rate of 59.9 cents for 100 cubic foot is a great rate – pointed out that the more people signing up for NOPEC, the bigger these grants get for the City

ITEMS NEEDED ON AN UPCOMING CITY COUNCIL AGENDA:

1. 2015 NOPEC Grant