

**THE CITY OF HURON, OHIO**  
**Proceedings of the Huron City Council**  
**Work Session Meeting Tuesday, October 22, 2019 at 5:30 p.m.**

The work session meeting of the City Council of the City of Huron, Ohio was called to order by Mayor Trey Hardy on Tuesday, October 22, 2019 at 5:30p.m. in the Conference Room of City Hall, 417 Main Street, Huron, Ohio. The Mayor directed the Clerk to call the roll. The following members of Council answered present: **Christine Crawford, John Jones, Trey Hardy and Joe Dike.**

Members absent: **Glen A. Ginesi, Rick Schaffter and Sam Artino.**

Staff present: City Manager Andy White, Assistant to the City Manager Mike Spafford, Finance Director Cory Swaisgood, City of Huron Engineer Doug Green, and Executive Administrative Assistant-Clerk of Council Terri Welkener.

Also present: Russ Critelli from OHM Advisors

**New Business**

**Phase 2 of US 6 Corridor Project – Design Proposal**

Mr. White recognized Mr. Green and Mr. Critelli from OHM Advisors. There is a deadline to get the design work approved because the State will be looking at an acceptance of our plans in early 2020. Phase 2 is the stretch beginning west of the end of Phase 1 (Williams Street) and will run through the bypass. Several concepts looked at installing a variety of roundabouts either at the Center Street intersection or further west, but those concepts were extremely expensive because of the excavation and site work involved. Staff has been working with Safety Committee and discussions with Council over the past several months to come up with the current proposal. The main focus is the intersection of US 6, Center Street and Jim Campbell Boulevard. The concept maintains all of the infrastructure in place and limits the amount of excavation, which drives the cost down significantly from the early estimate of \$1 Million to the new estimate of just over \$300,000. The main design features include elimination of the traffic signal, delineated crosswalks, and adding a cut-through to Van Rensselaer. As it stands today, when approaching the intersection from the east, you can turn right and go north on Center Street – you will no longer be able to do that. You would have to use the off ramp to Van Rensselaer to Jim Campbell Boulevard. The concept includes a one-way directional only to the north. This would result in elimination of the troublesome traffic pattern caused by southbound traffic entering the intersection from Center Street. Staff is looking for Council's approval of the engineering design portion of the project so that timeline deadlines can be met.

Mr. Critelli stated that the design plans must be submitted to ODOT by the spring of 2020. His company ran some simulations using information gathered from an earlier traffic study conducted by TMS to show how the change in configuration would affect traffic flow. Mr. Critelli showed two simulations, one at the AM peak and one at the PM peak. The overall summary is that the intersection performs at a level of service B or better on a scale of A to F, with F being failing. There were no issues with traffic capacity or accidents. Mr. Green stated that the center stacking lane between the two lanes of Rt. 6 would be wider than pictured, with room for at least 2 cars. Mr. Spafford said that making the center stacking lane wider was the reason for eliminating the turn lanes on either side of Rt. 6. Ms. Crawford asked for confirmation that there would be no more stop sign at Center Street and Jim Campbell Boulevard. Mr. Critelli stated that the idea was to eliminate the conflict between westbound US 6 to Jim Campbell Boulevard and creating the one-way traffic gets rid of the need for a stop sign. Mr. Hardy asked why the simulation wasn't showing much traffic using the ramp, which he regularly sees quite a bit of traffic taking the quick right/left from US 6 West onto Jim Campbell Boulevard. Mr. Critelli explained that the study showed only a 15-minute

period during a peak hour. A discussion ensued regarding the advantages and disadvantages to the residents living on Center Street regarding the one-way street designation from US-6 north to Cleveland Road. The plan calls for a one-way street with parking and a bike path on one side of the street. Mr. Dike asked which side of the street would have parking, to which Mr. Stafford answered that was still being worked on. On the current drawings it is on the left traffic as you enter Center Street is already in the right lane. The proposed parking and one-way designation would make the street safer. There is enough room for a 5'-6' bike lane, on street parking and a 12' lane of traffic. Mayor Hardy asked if the bike lane would be delineated by fiberglass pillars, but that would make it difficult to plow in the winter. Mr. Green indicated that the entire bike lane could be colored blue or green.

Mr. Dike asked how the house at the end of Van Rensselaer would have an access point. Mr. Critelli stated that a drive access would be created directly to US 6. With regard to the sidewalk crossing US-6 on Center street, there will only be a sidewalk on one side (west side). Mr. Green stated that staff was looking into doing a Safe Routes to School grant to connect from the corner of US-6 and Center Street along the south side of Jim Campbell Boulevard to the pedestrian bridge in front of the high school. There is a consideration amount of right-of-way and what is now tree lawn between the edge of Jim Campbell and the fence. The sidewalks will be 8' wide. A comment was made regarding the number of signs, and Mr. White said that they are trying to clean that up to have as few signs as possible. Mr. Green stated that several people have asked for one-way signs on US-6 because they are seeing people turning into oncoming traffic.

Mayor Hardy asked what is needed from Council's perspective. Mr. Green indicated that approval is needed for the design contract to get things started, and tweaks can be made as things move forward. Mr. Critelli stated that OHM's design proposal will be based on the configuration discussed in this meeting.

Mr. Spafford said that staff has started a dialog with ODOT regarding the Safe Routes to School program. The limits to the paving on this project are where Rt. 6 meets the vehicle lane of Rt. 2. On the way back in, it is where the lane leaves Rt. 2 before it heads over the bridge coming in. All paving work would lead up to the bridge deck, but not go over it.

There is a public outreach component to the project required by ODOT. Mr. Critelli explained that there is an opportunity once they get into the plan development as part of the first phase to have an open house meeting with the public to let them see the plan. Council has had work sessions relating to this phase of the project, but there have not yet been any public meetings. The public meetings are required as part of ODOT's process. Current engineering estimates of costs shows total project cost of approximately \$1.8 Million, of which the City's portion is \$345,000, ODOT's is \$987,000 and the County's is \$500,000. This is a good mix of cost benefit in terms of keeping the City's costs as low as possible while still impacting the intersection in the best way. Mr. White explained that this plan maintains what is currently there with a minimal amount of change. Conversations were had with ODOT about the possibility for the City to acquire some limited access along US-6 running between the fence on Jim Campbell Boulevard to the residential neighborhoods over in Oklahoma. Mr. Critelli mentioned the long-term benefit of lower maintenance costs for infrastructure. The cost of one roundabout was approximately \$750,000 at Ohio or Center Street, and would fundamentally change the infrastructure forever. The next step is to formalize the design and then go through the process of public outreach. What has been done in the past is partner with the library to have information available there, and set up a presentation.

The Mayor asked if there were any other questions or comments. There being none, the Mayor introduced the next topic for discussion.

## **Water/Sewer Billing Consolidation**

Mr. White explained that during the last few months, staff has had discussions with the County Commissioners relating to \$120,000 in back payments owed by the customers of the Erie County Sanitary Sewer Filtration Program, without a mechanism to compel payment. For example, in the City, our ordinances require several periods of notification, but if the individual customer refuses to make payment after a certain period of time, the door will be tagged. If there is no action, the Water Department goes out and physically turns the meter off, which usually compels payment. Because we eliminated the City's sanitary filtration service back in the 1970's and went with the County, we don't have two separate meter pits at City properties. The City currently provides data to Erie County billing for their sewer bills based on water consumption. The County reached out to see if something could be done to compel payment. As a result, Ms. Lane did some research and found examples of intergovernmental agreements in Greater Cleveland allowing this through a service agreement. The County would have to pass legislation stating that the customer's water could be turned off for non-payment of the sewer bill. The City would have to pass similar legislation and enter into a service agreement with the County.

The City has been providing consumption data to the County at no cost, and Mr. White indicated that the City should be charging a premium for this service. A couple different options were discussed, and it seems like the best option would be to eliminate one of the billing cycles. Right now, there are 3,500 paper bills sent out by the City to all of the customers in the City four times a year. That same information contained in the City's bill is sent out to 3,500 customers twelve times a year by the County. That amounts to sixteen different series of bills sent to 3,500 customers. The solution may be to outsource the billing function for everything to the County, or vice versa. The City would continue to remit the same data to the County, and the consolidated bill would also have the water bill information on it. Our employees would continue to collect the metering information, but the County would remit one bill four times a year and eliminate all redundancy. The savings realized by doing this is close to \$30,000 when you consider postage, paper, production and consumption of personnel's time. There would also be an indirect savings related to not requiring an additional staff member in the Finance Department to assist with the billing process. If the billing function is outsourced, a lot of those responsibilities can be shifted internally without having to add more people. The biggest change would be that traditional water customers that like to pay their bill at City Hall wouldn't be able to do so. Those customers wanting to pay in person would have to go out to the Erie County services building to make that payment.

County staff came to City Hall last week to review our process to get a handle on it, and we are going to be going out to their facility in the next week or so to see how their operation works. By expediting the billing process, time would be freed up internally to get more accurate readings. The City would collaborate with the County to get that receivable off of their books. Some agreements have been provided to Council for review. Mr. Swaisgood stated that the Sewer Monitoring Committee discussed making this change effective in January of 2020. Given all of the processes involved, it would most likely be the next billing cycle. We want to make sure we have everything straightened out and everyone is on the same page before the change is made. It is not 100% that this will happen, but it seems beneficial for the City to explore this. The Finance Department has one clerk that spends at least 10% of her time just billing and processing payments. That would save us tremendously in the cost of stuffing and sending out mail – we use a company to help us do that. There is a lot of benefit to the City if an additional employee is not needed to help out with that process. This would save on audit costs as well. Mr. White recommended the consolidation of the billing with the County, and believes doing so would be beneficial to both entities. Mr. White recognized that there may be some resistance to the change similar to the circumstances leading up to the formation of the Huron Area Sewer Monitoring Commission, particularly with regard to the inability to make payments at City Hall. In response to Mayor Hardy's question regarding a previous discussion regarding monthly billing, Mr. White indicated that it was still a possibility, but the County agreed that it was willing to bill the water quarterly while continuing to bill sewer monthly. From the standpoint of the

amount of labor it takes to take readings, billing on a quarterly basis would eliminate the expense of taking additional readings. Quarterly billing results in the least amount of change to the customer – billing stays the same,

Mayor Hardy asked about the County taking an administration fee. Mr. Swaisgood said that the County would get back to them with the specifics. Mr. White and Ms. Crawford thought there shouldn't be any charge from either side. Mr. White stated that it has been a good-spirited conversation and the County is glad to be able to do something about the issue. Mr. White stated that more and more people are going to the automated payments, and Mr. Swaisgood will try to determine the number of residents that actually come to the window to make a payment, which has decreased over time. The clerk in the Finance Department has said that a lot more people are signing up for auto-pay and paying online. Mr. Swaisgood thought that while it may be a negative that some residents might have to go to the County to pay, based on the data he expects will be collected, it should not affect too many people.

Ms. Crawford stated that the idea makes sense, but the City should not pay an administration fee. Mr. White did not think that would be a sticking point for the County. Mr. Swaisgood indicated that the County wanted to take over the billing and processing, which helps both the City and County, with the City still doing the labor, including shutoffs. He thought that there would be neutral costs to each entity. Mr. Swaisgood indicated that the payments would be transmitted monthly to the City.

Mayor Hardy reminded everyone that the Huron Area Sewer Monitoring Committee meeting was scheduled for November 6, 2019 at 3:30pm.

Mr. White emphasized the advantage the new billing arrangement would have on the Finance Department. Staff would have more time to produce more finance specific output, which will be very important going forward.

### **Sidewalk Repairs**

Mr. White explained that during the Safe Routes to School Project, he received correspondence from residents in the Portland Brunswick area confused over why the project started where it did when there is a section a few hundred feet east of the SRTS project site going back toward Old Plat in front of Colonial Colony that is in serious disrepair. Staff explained to the constituents that it is outside of the approved footprint for the project, but would reach out to the owners and ask them to guaranty a fixed price to make the repairs as part of the larger project. The owners rejected that offer and suggested that they would do the work on their own and are getting prices. The project is not going to get done in 2019 due to weather, and Mr. White assumes conservatively that it is not going to get done at all. In working with the Law Department and the engineers looking at our existing legislation, several weak spots have been identified in terms in how the City can compel that improvement to be made. The City feels that it is on shaky ground if it provides an order to the homeowner that says you have "X" amount of days to make the repair. The City must declare a nuisance, give them an opportunity to cure, and then attach it to the property taxes. There are better ways to do that, and in the long term, the City may look at its responsibilities being from curb to curb instead of from sidewalk to sidewalk. That would include tree limbs trimming, curbs and sidewalk panels. Ideally, the City would mark any sidewalk panels needing repair and let the citizen know when the repair would be completed. The City does not have that service as of now, but a couple of examples were included in Council's packet for review. There is no rush because the weather is not conducive to do any infrastructure work for the rest of this year. Mr. Green explained that the City has conflicting legislation on the books that could be an issue should the City try to force the repairs on the homeowner. For enforcement purposes, we need to take a look at writing new legislation and look at a perspective approach of how to handle these situations.

Ms. Crawford stated that Phyllis Wassner indicated her desire to have sidewalks down both sides of Center Street going into Oklahoma. The sidewalks currently end at Adams and pick up on the other side of the street at the underpass. These pockets of missing sidewalk are a problem in multiple locations throughout the City. The City would like to have policy to systematically make the repairs, but there is no resource stream to pay for the repairs. The City's current practice is to send out a letter to the property owner giving 30 days to make the repair, or as part of a development plan you put it in or you don't get a Certificate of Occupancy. There are sections on the east side of the City, such as Chaska, where sidewalks are not possible. The main focus is to have sidewalks on main thoroughfares or to repair existing panels as they come into disrepair, and the City should look into other revenue sources to get the work done. The ideal plan would be to do, for example, ½ mile of sidewalk repairs each year, whether it is laying out new ones, or repairing existing panels. In the alternative, the City could beef up the ordinance so that if you don't have a sidewalk, there will be an assessment added to property taxes, which would be similar to the water line assessment in the Oklahoma neighborhood.

Ms. Crawford liked the idea of having the City responsible for sidewalk to sidewalk repairs – it is a quality of life issue, and would be a nice service to have.

Mayor Hardy asked if there were any other comments, questions or thoughts. There being none, the work session meeting of October 22, 2019 was adjourned at 6:18pm.

  
Terri S. Welkener, Clerk of Council