

CITY OF HURON

CITY MANAGER’S REPORT

January 21, 2022

Matthew Lasko, City Manager

ECONOMIC/COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Firelands Scientific: The City has received final site plans from Firelands Scientific related to a substantial expansion of their facility in the Huron Corporate Park. The site plan was presented to the planning commission on 12/15/21 and received unanimous approval. The project does need to get additional approvals on lighting plans, however. This is truly an exciting project, and we are appreciative of the Company’s willingness to expand operations in the City. The expansion includes, but is not limited to additional growing space, offices, warehousing, and parking along with landscaping enhancements.

USGS/Harbor Point Marina: At the planning commission meeting on 12/15, the next phase of the Harbor Point Marine project was presented. The second phase (the first being the construction of the USGS facility which is underway) includes a new storage facility and the construction of an approximate 2,500 square foot Harbormaster House. The site plan received approval, however, the developers will need to still secure approval of their landscaping plan and undergo design review of the exterior materials for the facility. We are excited that the owners/developers continue to move forward with additional phases of this transformational project. Developers are still determining what, if anything, will happen to the larger blue storage building on site.

Buckeye Sports: The City has received plans from Buckeye Sports for the construction of their water/marine craft facility in Lake Erie Parkway. This will be a wonderful addition to the City and the corporate park and will result in development on the last remaining parcel within the Corporate Park. We are hoping to see construction commence soon and want to wish them a big welcome to the community.

Ardagh/Sawmill Pkwy: Construction continues on the approximate 300,000 square feet worth of additions to the expanded facility. The City has approved the vacation of about 300-400 feet of roadway at the eastern end of Sawmill Parkway based on a recommendation of approval from the Planning Commission. That vacation agreement has now been fully executed. Related, the city is finalizing the process of receiving a dedication of land from Ardagh which will be partially utilized for the installation of a turnaround primarily to aid emergency vehicles in their maneuvering the eastern terminus of the Parkway. We hope to have the new plat recorded shortly.

OHM continues to progress with final design and construction drawings in hopes of bidding out the construction in early 2022.

Based on Council actions at the meeting on January 11, 2022, a 15-year, 100% tax exemption was granted to Ardagh. However, via two separate school compensation agreements, Huron School and EHOVE will continue to receive all real estate taxes due to them that they normally would have received if there were not an exemption in place. The City has received all completed CRA Agreement paperwork from Ardagh and has submitted it to the Ohio Development Services Agency for review and hopeful approval. Copies of said documents have also been provided to the Erie County Auditor’s office. The City is waiting on signatures from Ardagh for the School Compensation Agreements which are the final pieces needing to be sent to Erie County for this abatement. A big thank you to all parties involved and the amazing collaboration between the City, Huron School, EHOVE and Ardagh.

Related, the City will be approaching Council on January 25th to create a new tax equivalent fund related to the recently amended Rye Beach TIF. The new account is needed to receive TIF payments due to the City for projects undertaken within the TIF area that resulted in increase real estate tax liabilities. Reminder, this is a non-schools TIF and the districts will received all taxes normally due to them. For the first few years of the TIF (until certain tax abatements expire), the City is anticipating receiving $30,000 annually. This amount will increase once previously approved abatements expire. All funds being deposited into the account are to be used for infrastructure improvements in or around the Rye Beach TIF area.

ConAgra: Based on the recent Council resolution authorizing staff to begin negotiations with NAI Harmon Group from Toledo, a kick-off call is schedule to occur during the week of October 11th. Action steps and updated timelines will begin to become clearer over the next few weeks. The city has engaged the assistance of Cushman Wakefield of Cleveland, a global commercial real estate service company, to assist the city in providing an updated broker price opinion (like an appraisal) for both the land as-is and with certain public infrastructure improvements in place. We receive the draft appraisal yesterday and are currently reviewing the results of the analysis. This will provide a great reference point during site control negotiations. Additionally, the City and NAI Harmon have begun the process of putting a framework together for a development agreement which would outline, amongst other items, responsibilities for infrastructure investments and timelines for development/construction to commence.

Council referred the application for rezoning of the ConAgra property from I-2 General Industrial to MU-GD Mixed Use Granary District to the Planning Commission at its last meeting on November 9, 2021. Planning Commission held a public hearing on the request at its December meeting on December 15, 2021, and approved the rezoning application which will now be presented to Council in January of 2022 and will require three (3) readings. In addition to approving the rezoning, there are a few items Planning Commission needs addressed in the zoning classification – which is now many years old since its inception. Items to be discussed at an upcoming planning commission meeting include but are not limited to whether to permit transient rental uses within the district and greater clarity on what retail/commercial signage and uses. This was also presented in January to Council and will require three (3) readings.

Finally, the City has made a request of both Huron Schools and EHOVE to consider school compensations agreements related to the development as part of a Tax Increment Financing package to aid in the financing of the public infrastructure on the site – which includes roadways, utilities, and seawall restoration/construction. These are critical requests for the public improvements to be financed to support the development. We are happy to report, Huron Schools unanimously approved the request at its December 21, 2021, Board meeting and EHOVE considered and approved the request at their first board meeting in January of 2022.

Sawmill Creek: On July 13th, the City voted to pursue the annexation of nine (9) parcels currently located in Huron Township – and more easily recognized as the Sawmill Creek Resort, Conference Center and Golf Course. On July 16th, Huron Township consented to the annexation and agreed to move forward. The reasoning behind the proposed annexation is to provide local subsidy to the project via a financing tool commonly referred to as a “Section 41 Tax Increment Financing.” The type of proposed financing can only be undertaken by a municipality ad cannot be undertaken by a township – hence the need for the proposed annexation. The final major hurdle needing to be accomplished was consideration and approval of the TIF by the Huron School District. We are happy to report that on July 20th, the School Board voted to approve the 30-year, 75% TIF. We are so grateful for the support of the School Board and the Administration and believe we set forth a truly mutually beneficial package that will both ensure a long-term predictable revenue stream to the district while also ensuring adequate revenues to both complete the Sawmill Creek Resort project and fund a capital infrastructure fund to address the western gateway to the City and the intersection of Cleveland Road and Rye Beach. This is truly a tremendous public private partnership involving the city, Township, School District and Cedar Fair. There is still a great deal of legislation needing to be brought forth to effectuate the annexation and TIF, which will be occurring over the next several months including but not limited to:

* Development agreement
* Service payment agreement
* TIF Ordinance
* Final Annexation Agreement
* Bond issuance for Sawmill Creek redevelopment

On January 11th, 2022, Council approved both school compensation agreements for the project, one with Huron Schools and one with EHOVE.

Most recently, Cedar Fair is in the process of executing the deed sets and will be sending to the City in the very near future. Once this step is accomplished, the City will be able to move forward immediately with consideration of both School Compensation Agreements and consideration of the final TIF Ordinance.

Additionally, Cedar Fair agreed verbally to an annual service payment of $450,000 on top of what is currently being collected from the property. Based on the agreed upon School Compensation Agreements, this will equate to a new $112,500 annually for Huron Schools and $6,750 for EHOVE. The remainder, $330,750 a year (or nearly $10M over the life of the TIF) will be utilized to retire the debt to renovate the project and to undertake public infrastructure investments around the property.

508 Main Street: Staff has been approached by a developer with interest in the City owned property. The primary use would be some form of residential development. Talks are still very preliminary as significant due diligence would need to be undertaken by the interested party along with further discussions internally about the long-term vision and desired use for that site. Staff will continue to keep Council apprised of any progression in these discussions.

INFRASTRUCTURE/STREETS/UTILITIES

Rye Beach Road/Cleveland Road Corridor: Based on the continued redevelopment of Sawmill Creek Resort and all the existing and growing investments along Rye Beach Road and industrial parks, the City has begun conversation with the Ohio Department of Transportation about safety and traffic control upgrades along Rye Beach Road – with major emphasis on the intersection of Rye Beach and Cleveland Road. Additionally, the City will be meeting with staff from the Erie Regional Planning Commission and Huron Township who may have additional interest in upgrades on the Cleveland Road corridor heading west from town – primarily at Camp Road and Perkins Avenue. Based on the previous traffic study that was done a few years ago, coupled with all the major investments in the area, the corridor may be a good candidate for a Transportation Review Advisory Council application to fund a significant portion of the needed traffic and safety upgrades from Rye Beach to Perkins Avenue which total well more than $10M. Applications would be due to the state in May of 2022.

Sidewalks: The City, in partnership with Huron Township is exploring a sidewalk installation project that would link the current eastern sidewalk terminus (Gateway Boulevard) all the way to the entrance of Huron Green. This project is instrumental for enhancing walkability and connectivity between multiple subdivisions and Huron’s multiple amenities but will more importantly create a safe connection for those traversing Cleveland Road. OHM has completed their proposal for design which is approximately $40,000. If Council and the Trustees desire to move forward, 2022 would be used a planning design year with construction to occur in 2023. It should be noted, the 2022 budget does include the City covering half of the design costs for the project.

Additionally, staff plans to seek Council approval at on January 25th to make application to the Erie Regional Planning Commission – Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for supplemental funding for this project. The MPO recently released a request for proposals, due February 25th, 2022, seeking transportation alternative projects (bike and pedestrian) based on having additional Coronavirus Relief and Response dollars. The MPO has approximately $280,000 available with project maximums set at $93,414.

Rt. 6 Streetlights: Installation of the new streetlights as part of Route 6 Phase I is substantially complete. There are several of the new lamp heads that malfunctioned during testing which have since been removed. once new heads are received, those will be installed as quickly as possible. Additionally, all wooden poles have since been removed. Ohio Edison crews still need to remove steel poles on the west side of the bridge. Finally, Ohio Edison has reinstalled the streetlamps across the bridge. As mentioned before, the City will continue ongoing conversations with Ohio Edison to ultimately have the poles abandoned to permit the City to install similar heads that exists throughout the corridor.

Rt. 6 Striping/Signage: Crews have finalized new signage installation to account for the slightly revised traffic pattern for Rt. 6 – resulting from significant public feedback. A final punchlist walkthrough is still planned with the City, construction crews and ODOT. The City anticipates presenting legislation to Council on January 11, 2022 adopting the final striping plan and amending our traffic code to permit our safety forces to begin enforcing the final striping plan.

Staff has completed the Rt. 6 user guide. A big thank you to Erik Engle and OHM for their work on finalizing this piece. This is available electronically on our website and, we have hard copies available in our office.

Safe Routes to Schools: The City is exploring submission of multiple applications for the Safe Routes to Schools program administered by the Ohio Department of Transportation. The grant application deadline is set for March 4th, 2022. Currently, the city is exploring making reapplication for sidewalks/multi-use path along Jim Campbell Boulevard and additionally, installation of sidewalks along Berlin Road heading southward to the city limits.

Street Resurfacing: The City has received a proposal from OHM to undertake an update to our pavement condition report and is currently reviewing in hopes of approving in early 2022. We hope to undertake this work in early 2022 to develop a plan for resurfacing in future years. We are planning to have approximately $500,000 available for local street resurfacing and critical repairs in 2022 which is a combination of normal capital budgeting of $200,000 and year end transfers of $300,000. The list of roads to be recommended for resurfacing and repair will be based on the 2020 pavement condition report. Our Streets Foreman and OHM will be meeting shortly to provide recommendations for roadwork for 2022.

Huron Public Power: Staff recently presented to the Utilities Committee related to the expansion efforts of Huron Public Power. The Action Plan update undertaken in mid-2021, prioritized the thoughtful expansion of the utility to reach additional potential customers, but more importantly, to increase the competitiveness of Huron electrical utility as an economic development tool. Based on this meeting, staff will presented to Council, on January 11, several proposals for design work to expand the system: (1) boring under the N/S railroad on Rye Beach to extend the utility northward to Sawmill Parkway, (2) extending the utility down Sawmill Parkway as part of the street reconstruction project, (3) extending the utility across Route 2 and (4) adding a third transformer to the substation in order to both create redundancy in the system in the event of a bad transformer and to add additional customers. Council approved these proposals and they have since been executed. Staff will continue to keep Council apprised as it relates to progress on this project.

Stormwater Management: The City and OHM staff recently met to review a proposal to undertake a stormwater management plan for the City. The City continuously is engaged by residents related to stormwater issues they are facing across the City. The ultimate plan would be to undertake an exhaustive process to map the existing stormwater system throughout the City, undertake hydraulic modeling to determine capacities of the system, and then put together a capital improvements plan to systematically make upgrades to the system which will denote cost and priority. Staff is in receipt of the proposal and is currently reviewing to determine what portions of work may be able to be accomplished in 2022.

ZONING/CODE/PLANNING

Condemnation and Demolition: Staff is currently working with SSEG to explore ways to increase the expediency and efficiency of the City’s condemnation and demolition process. Although not needed often, when it is, time is usually of the essence. We hope to have recommendations for Council review within thirty (30) days.

Tree Assessment: Similar to the sidewalk assessment program, the City is exploring a tree assessment program for property owners who need to remove dead, dying or diseased trees from their property. The cost of removing a tree can be very expensive. Through the assessment program, property owners would have the option of, in essence, financing the removal through an assessment on their real estate taxes. Additionally, we are proposing to amend the code to ensure the services of a certified arborist are engaged to determine the health of trees being removed. Additionally, it may be worth considering a requirement be included to replant a new tree in its place to ensure long term health of the City’s tree canopy.

Signage Code: The City is also undertaking a comprehensive review of our signage code – related to both permanent and temporary signage. This review is aimed at simplifying our code for greater clarity while also taking into consideration some recent court rulings at the state level regarding enforcement capabilities. We hope to have a draft for consideration in early Spring of 2022.

Main Street Corridor Plan: in an effort to advance the action steps resulting from the Vision 2020 Action Plan Update, staff has received a proposal from OHM to lead a public outreach and visioning process for Main Street which will ultimately result in conceptual design and proposed upgrades for the corridor – with a primary focus on South Main Street. The plan will look for necessary improvements to enhance the pedestrian and vehicle experience on the corridor such as a comprehensive parking plan, sidewalk and curb upgrades, buried utilities, installation of landscaping and public art and other methods of softening the experience. Our goal is to have a robust community outreach process facilitated by OHM’s planning and design teams.

PARKS AND RECREATION

Costal Management Assistance Grant: on October 15, 2021, the City submitted two (2) pre-applications to ODNR for their Coastal Management Assistance Grant Funding. Upwards of $500,000 (which requires a 1:1 match) is available to communities within a limited coastal area to help fund projects related to coastal planning, public access, water quality, land acquisition, habitat restoration and research. On November 2, the city was notified by ODNR that we are being encouraged to re-submit both of our applications for full consideration. The City submitted two (2) pre-applications:

* A request to secure funding to increase public access to the developing beach behind the water plant and
* A coastal planning grant that would cover the area of Lakefront Park eastward to the Huron River also encompassing the northern portion of main street.

Staff has officially submitted both proposals and will be awaiting decisions from the grant funding applications at some point in 2022. We will keep Council aware of any news related to these applications throughout 2022.

Lakefront Park/Shoreline Enhancements: Staff has received 3 proposals from qualified contractors to undertake critical shoreline improvements and reinforcement work at Lakefront Park. Specifically, crews plan to install additional armor stone on the shoreline near where Wall Street dead ends into Center Street. Due to historically high water levels the past few years, the shoreline has been eroded and is nearing above ground and underground infrastructure. A proposal to undertake the work will be presented to Council on January 25th with work expected to occur later on this winter.

Fish Cleaning Station: OHM is near complete on final design drawings and the construction bid package. Staff and OHM are currently providing a final review of the design and bid package. Based on an updated schedule provided by OHM, bidding is set to begin on January 31. Bids will be due to the City by February 25 so that we can present a proposed contract to Council in early March. Based on this schedule, we believe we can substantially complete the project by June 30, 2022. Additionally, after further discussion with OHM, we are proposing the bid the entire project as one package – versus having the City purchase certain items separately.

FINANCE

2022 Budget Preparation: The finance committee unanimously approved the budget and recommended its consideration to City Council, with a few additional considerations. The budget was sent to Council at the end of November and approved at the public hearing on Tuesday, December 14th. A link to the approved budget book is provided below:

<https://stories.opengov.com/huronoh/published/NRBeyu58b>

American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA):  Staff presented a preliminary spending plan to the Finance Committee at the December 13th Finance Committee Meeting. The following link will direct you to the ARPA spending plan, as well. Staff will request a work session in January to review this plan more in detail.

<https://stories.opengov.com/huronoh/published/YTvWGMOYO>

WATER DEPARTMENT

N/A

PERSONNEL

Annual Report: The City plans to reinstitute the production of an annual report. Hopefully to be published and available in February, the report is meant to provide the public with a summary of department outcomes and accomplishments for 2021 and a snapshot of the City’s financial position. We feel it is very important to both celebrate the accomplishments and hard work of our various departments and staff while also increasing the avenues that we can communicate to the public about the work of the City.

Service Director/Director of Operations: The City has concluded all interviews for this position. We had a great list of qualified and capable candidates for both positions. Based on these results of those interviews, the City is proposing to combine the Director of Operations and Service Director positions into a singular position which will be titled “Service Director.” The administration is proposing to hire Stuart Hamilton, currently the City of Sandusky’s Director of Information Technology as the new Service Director. This position will be responsible for overseeing, among other duties, Streets, Water Distribution and Filtration, Engineering, Information Technology, Huron Public Power and Capital Project Planning. Since the Service Director is a charted position, the appointment of Mr. Hamilton will require Council approval – which is being sought at our next meeting on January 25, 2022.

Police: The City is beginning the process to add an additional full-time police officer to the force – which was included as part of the 2022 budget. We anticipate this hire to be completed either in January or February.

Zoning Inspector: Also included as part of the 2022 budget, was permitting the current part-time zoning inspector position to be converted to full-time. The City has finalized the appointment of current part-time employee and zoning inspector, Katie Maloney, as the new full-time zoning inspector. In this role, she will also be able to provide additional assistance to the planning and zoning department related to zoning reviews and board of zoning appeals processes. Katie Maloney will begin full-time employment on January 24, 2022.

Planning Director: Effective last week, the City has promoted Erik Engle to the position of Planning Director. Erik was hired in early 2021 to oversee planning and zoning activities of the City. Mr. Engle has excelled in this role and the title change more appropriately reflects his role and responsibilities leading that department and these critical functions and services of the City. We are excited for Mr. Engle and look forward to continued growth and advancement of this department.

CONTRACTS

2021 was a busy year with renegotiation of several multi-year agreements/contracts that were set to expire.  Agreements/contracts that were reviewed and renegotiated for 2021 include:

* OHM Advisors (Engineering) – **Completed**.
* Erie Soil and Water Conservation District (Engineering) – **Completed**.
* Chief Building Official and Inspection Services (Building) – **Completed.**
* Prosecutor (Court) - **Completed**
* HJRD Annual Agreement (Recreation) – **Completed**.
* Huron Township Fire Protection Agreement - **Completed**
* Seeley, Savidge, Ebert & Gourash Co., LLP (Law) - **Completed**
* FOP – Patrol Officers (Police) – **Completed**
* FOP – Sergeants (Police) – **Completed**
  + IAFF (Fire) – **Completed**
  + AFCSME – **Completed**

The Garbage contract with Republic is set to expire in the summer of 2022. The City met with representatives of Republic a few weeks ago to begin laying out a calendar and plan for ongoing discussions in 2022. The City anticipates integrating the Utilities Committee and Finance Committee in these discussions as they progress prior to presenting a proposal to Council for trash hauling services.

UPCOMING MEETINGS

January

City Council Meeting: Tuesday January 25, 2022 at 6:30pm in the Council Chambers.

Planning Commission Meeting: Wednesday, January 26, 2022 at 5:00pm in the Council Chambers.

February

HJRD Meeting: Tuesday, February 1, 2022 at 6:30pm in the Council Chambers.

Utilities Committee Meeting: Wednesday February 2, 2022 at 5:00 in the Council Chambers.