

City of Worthington
Community Visioning Committee
Tuesday, April 14, 2020 - 6:00 P.M. – 8:00 P.M.
Virtual Meeting via Microsoft Teams

Committee Members Present: Joe Sherman, Don Mottley, Austin Mitchell, Linda Mercadante, Beth Sommer, Laura Abu-Absi, Paul Cynkar, Graham Wood, Matt Lees, Kathryn Burris, Catey Corl, Jon Melchi, and Cindy Findlay

Committee Members Absent: None

Others Present: Assistant City Manager Robyn Stewart, Management Assistant Ethan Barnhardt, Public Information Officer Anne Brown, Lauren Falcone Poggemeyer Design Group, and 15 visitors were in attendance

Mr. Sherman convened the meeting at 6:00 p.m.

MOTION *Ms. Abu-Absi moved, seconded by Mr. Melchi to approve the meeting minutes from the Community Visioning Committee meeting of March 10, 2020.*

The motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Sherman detailed how his intent for this meeting is to try to get everyone grounded. He referenced a New York Times article that explained how this pandemic has brought out some of the best in our society. To make it through these times, the experts are saying it is critical to remember that there are bright spots that exist. We need to try to see that kindness is celebrated across the country. He commented how we are not going to get back to normal anytime soon, so it is important to move through this visioning process with a refined and narrowed scope while maintaining the October 1, 2020 finish date.

Considering how we will need to continue social distancing; he described how the Committee is not going to be able to do focus groups or knock on doors as originally envisioned. However, it is important for the Committee to begin to convey to the community that they are grounded in normalcy. We have an important chance to message what our process is and how this remains a viable platform to be able to express opinions. There is a need to realign resources, retool, and refocus, and the Committee will need to get more creative to create some momentum and keep this process moving forward.

Mr. Mitchell expressed how he shares the same perspective as Mr. Sherman, and he has appreciated their conversations over the past several weeks reflecting on where they are as a committee and their purpose.

Mr. Sherman brought up how in discussion with the City, they are expecting a \$2.5 million shortfall in revenues due to this crisis. Ms. Stewart explained that staff is working to trying to project out the current situation and how that will affect revenues. They have worked with the Regional Income Tax Agency (RITA) and have been conducting projections based upon different assumptions. There will be delays in revenue coming in due to filing and payment deadline changes. The City is also expecting losses in revenue as the economy takes a hit. Currently the Community Center and the Griswold Center are closed and not collecting revenue. If the current closure is kept in place through May, we are projecting a loss of close to \$350,000. We also anticipate gas tax collections to take a hit. City staff are still trying to clarify what the situation will look like, and departmental directors have been asked to find ways to conserve cash. This includes the need to look at non-essential expenditures and what purchases should not be funded this year.

She expressed how the Committee should be aware of costs and that there may be an ask for reductions in what is being spent on the visioning process. This has not been a discussion with the City Council yet, but there will be discussions about what to potentially cut back on.

Mr. Mottley brought up the news story about how the Tru Hotel at the former Holiday Inn site is now on hold. Ms. Stewart said that the City has received word that no hotel will move forward on that site. Mr. Melchi asked if revenues for the Tru were budgeted in the 2020 budget. Ms. Stewart responded that they were not.

Ms. Abu-Absi asked when City Council begins deliberations on the 2021 budget. Ms. Stewart detailed how staff traditionally begins working during the summer on the budget and then Council deliberates in the fall, with the budget being adopted in December. Directors have been asked to look at spending in the near term, but in the 2021 budget, we will need to project longer term.

Mr. Melchi asked about what interval we are at on for our obligation to Poggemeyer Design Group (PDG). Ms. Stewart responded that as of the end of February, we have paid just shy of \$60,000. Mr. Melchi asked if we should consider whether we should go the remainder of this process without the full complement of PDG services. Mr. Sherman said that may need to be considered. Ms. Stewart said the PDG contract has a number of alternates included in it and the Committee can discuss those alternates. The Committee may want to be prepared to consider questions about what the public wants to preserve and what is the most important to focus on. Ms. Falcone said PDG would do whatever they could do to help, and the Committee should look first at some of the alternates as ways to save money.

Mr. Lees detailed how there has been a significant amount of effort done on the website. Mr. Barnhardt and Ms. Findlay have worked to get new content and engagement questions loaded on the site. Going forward we want to pivot to social media interactions and paid social media may be a smart way to use some of our funds to make sure we are finding people where they are. Considering the continued social distancing, this could be a good time to take advantage of reaching people in their homes.

Mr. Barnhardt gave an update on the new redesigned VisionWorthington.org and how the completion of the new design is well timed for the need to engage the community electronically during the continued period of social distancing.

Ms. Abu-Absi shared that she got on the website a little bit and commented that it looks great. However, she had a question about some content on there and how she wondered if one phrase on Speak out Worthington on the "How might we..." tool be changed. She explained that the language "mitigate the undercurrent of discord/discontent" feels a little leading to her and she suggested something more along the lines of "do you perceive any discord/discontent." Mr. Sherman responded that sounds like a better approach and more open ended.

Mr. Lees brought up how he has been asking for the Committee members to share their specific Facebook neighborhood pages. He asked for everyone to input their lists using the chat function for the meeting so we know who can reach out to the different neighborhoods in the community.

Mr. Ball, a member of the public attending the meeting, asked about how the neighborhood pages would be used. Mr. Lees explained how they are meant to move people over to the Vision Worthington website and to encourage that the engagement happens there. It is also a way to advertise and have people provide feedback. We will eventually put materials out on the website to reflect what we have been

hearing from the community and respond to that. We do not want the discussions to be on the Facebook pages. Ms. Falcone explained how PDG has had success on Facebook and the goal to get people to click on the Vision Worthington website. Mr. Mitchell said that the website is critical for the Committee moving forward.

Ms. Findlay brought up the idea of utilizing social influencers to push out ideas into the community. We could come up with a list of social influencers and have them assist with getting the word out about the website. Mr. Mitchell referenced Breakfast with Nick and how he talked with Nick's wife Beth. He thinks this is a great idea and there might be other people to reach out to. Mr. Mottley suggested using our key person interviewees and see if they are a starting point to get a list of influencers. Ms. Findlay asked if anyone had a list of other social media people who we might want to reach out to that have a big social network to better push information out. Ms. Brown added if we are engaging other influencers, we must make sure to prepare them with talking points and information, so they are spreading the same message. It is important to make sure they are knowledgeable about the goal and purpose.

Mr. Cynkar explained we are not going to be able to implement the Speakers Bureau as was originally intended at this time. The Schools are unsure if they will be back before August. No decisions have been made, but principals are keeping in touch with families and staff by using video vignettes and sending links out. A good first step for us would be to identify groups and use that list to continue engaging people through virtual means.

Mr. Sherman asked the committee how they feel about the webinar opportunity. We are trying to focus people back to the website and do the education piece of this. Mr. Cynkar has a very nice slide deck put together than can be the cornerstone. Ms. Mercadante expressed her opinion we should do whatever we can to put this in front of the public and if that is best done online then we should do it. Ms. Corl commented how many of the conferences she attends have been moved to virtual in a webinar format. She does not think that it would be difficult to put together. Mr. Mitchell asked if we could use Microsoft Teams for this initiative. Ms. Stewart said that should be possible. Mr. Cynkar asked about the City's video recording capabilities. Ms. Brown said that the City is doing a lot of videos using our phones. If we use Teams with a camera and slides, we could do it that way and share it with groups to have virtual viewings. Capture video in little snippets for social media is effective in getting people engaged and plugged in. Ms. Falcone said PDG has been using a lot of GoToMeetings and she thinks this is a great idea. She has been doing a lot of webinars and they are valuable. It would be cheap to do it this way. Mr. Sherman said we could even do an educational webinar on how to navigate the website. This community is largely 65 and older and that could help. Ms. Mercadante noted working with groups such as the library and churches and sharing the webinar with them.

Mr. Wood updated the Committee that the Meeting in a Box is currently on hold.

Ms. Findlay explained how she has sent out surveys to people who ran for City Council and several have responded. They are the last stakeholders to be surveyed. The public survey is coming up and that is going to require a lot of help from Committee to get it out to as many Worthingtonians as possible. When the virus hit, we stopped talking about how to get out to everybody. She wondered if it is worthwhile to reformulate a different team to look at the public survey. The entire committee is going to have a vested interest in what the survey looks like. Mr. Mitchell stated that is something we should look at because it is a large undertaking. Ms. Abu-Absi brought up how several weeks ago she was extremely busy, but her

schedule has rebalanced, and she is happy to help work on this. Mr. Sherman said those who want to help with this should let Ms. Findlay and Mr. Mitchell know.

Ms. Falcone detailed how the committee candidate survey has 10 responses. People are spending about 30 minutes on the survey so they are being very thoughtful.

Ms. Findlay brought up the possibility of putting the survey on the website. Mr. Lees suggested that it could be put out in chunks.

Ms. Brown discussed the signage question, explaining how it is possible to put some signage at the entry ways at the Olentangy trail and several key locations at the parks. The Committee has been looking at election type signs with brackets. If the Committee has a strategy about what you want the signs to say and when you want them to appear, staff can facilitate making sure they are placed properly in the parks. Mr. Sherman asked about the costs for the signs. Ms. Falcone replied they could be as little as \$16 for a 2x3, yard sign or about \$101 for 20. Ms. Findlay said she did not think we would need more than five signs since we can only place a few in the parks and nobody is going anywhere else currently. There was originally the thought about placing the signs in high traffic areas such as store windows. If we have some signs printed up, they could move since they can only be in the park for a set amount of time. They could be moved to different parks every couple weeks. A sign could be put up by the Farmer's Market pick up area. Ms. Brown said that the option of still doing a Village Green sign could be worked into mix as well. Mr. Sherman said he would work with Mr. Mitchell to come up with strategy about the styles and number of signs to come up with a budget.

Ms. Brown noted the proposed social media strategy and explained that it is possible to use the City's Facebook account to launch paid advertising. There will be a cost involved with that and it is another piece of the budget pie. There should be a strategy around what the posts say and what demographics we want to target. We will want to have the Committee's guidance on the specific messaging and how that works to drive people to the website.

Ms. Falcone described how she does not think that people are rushing to complete public surveys at this time. A draft survey has been formed in committee, and she requested other questions from the full Committee and asked that they be sent to her or Ms. Findlay by next Tuesday. She hopes by the end of next week to get the draft survey out for everyone to review.

Ms. Findlay asked about the potential of working on a physical mailing to reach people who are not online and wondered about the City's experience with response rate. Ms. Stewart said that the City has not done a paper survey in a while. Ms. Brown noted that the last time the City did a paper survey, the rate of return was not spectacular. Ms. Findlay discussed the option of doing something other than an online survey to reach 80% of residents. There was previously a discussion about targeted mailings and knocking on doors. We need to sit down to see who in the community we are reaching and who we are not reaching in order to formulate an idea of what we are doing. Mr. Cynkar asked given the current financial situation whether it would be worth it to do a mailing. We do not want to open ourselves to criticism by spending on something that is not essential. Mr. Sherman emphasized that we really need to think about the return on investment for the things the Committee does.

Mr. Cynkar brought up how the Farmers Market pickup traffic is good and wondered if there is a way to put a flyer in the bags. Ms. Brown said she understands vendors are out there separately and people pre-

order online from each vendor and drive down the path to on different routes. There may be the threat of social spread. Mr. Sherman expressed that the Committee should put thoughts into this to discuss further at the next meeting. We need to keep the budget in mind and think through how best to do this.

Mr. Mitchell stated that maybe we should get a small group together focused on messaging to pull together these efforts. The idea would be how to think holistically and bring focus between individual Committee meetings.

Ms. Falcone shared how it is an interesting testament to social media because at the peak, there were 28 people on this call at one point. It is a great example of why we should jump into webinars. Maybe we could do the SOAR as a webinar.

The meeting adjourned at 7:29 p.m.