



City of Gahanna

Meeting Minutes

Finance Committee

200 South Hamilton Road
Gahanna, Ohio 43230

Michael Schnetzer, Chair
Merisa K. Bowers
Jamille Jones
Nancy R. McGregor
Kaylee Padova
Stephen A. Renner
Trenton I. Weaver

Jeremy A. VanMeter, Clerk of Council

Monday, December 2, 2024

City Hall, Council Chambers

Immediately following City Council at 7:00 PM on December 2, 2024

A. CALL TO ORDER:

Councilmember Michael Schnetzer, Chair, called the meeting to order at 8:02 p.m, December 2, 2024. The agenda was published on November 29, 2024. All members were present for the meeting. There were no additions or corrections to the agenda.

B. DISCUSSIONS:

General Questions for Administration; Council Discussion on the FY 2025 Budget

[ORD-0065-2024](#) AN ORDINANCE ADOPTING APPROPRIATIONS FOR CURRENT EXPENSES AND OTHER EXPENDITURES OF THE CITY OF GAHANNA DURING THE FISCAL YEAR 2025

Chair Schnetzer provided a recap of the 2025 budget process. He noted that while the process officially begins in July with the submission of the tax budget to Franklin County, it ramps up in October with the receipt of the budget document. Eight Finance Committee meetings have been held to date, primarily focused on department-by-department reviews. Chair Schnetzer outlined the intent of the evening's discussion, which was to allow Councilmembers to deliberate on items they wished to include, exclude, or modify. He proposed discussing operations first, subdivided into staffing, projects, initiatives, and miscellaneous funding sources, followed by capital projects and any outstanding items.

Facilities Superintendent

Vice President Weaver highlighted a staffing question he previously raised with the Administration. He confirmed receiving an email response and

requested that the information be read into the record.

Miranda Vollmer, Senior Director of Administrative Services, reviewed the recommendation for a Facilities Superintendent position, deemed a priority one level in the Department of Public Service. The role would oversee several City-owned properties, including the municipal complex, Creekside parking garage, and others. Responsibilities would include supervising the Facilities Foreman and a Service Maintenance Worker II, managing day-to-day operations, ensuring facility safety, implementing compliance programs (e.g., automated external defibrillator (AEDs) and fire alarms), and coordinating maintenance programs. The superintendent would also work with the Division of Police to ensure compliance with the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections standards for the detention area and the police firing range.

Vice President Weaver asked how the duties currently handled by various staff members would transition to the Facilities Superintendent role with the move to 825 Tech Center Drive. He expressed satisfaction with the explanation provided and indicated he had additional comments on other topics for later discussion.

President Bowers inquired whether the AED compliance and maintenance program managed by the Facilities Superintendent would extend beyond the municipal complex to include parks and police facilities. Director Vollmer clarified that the superintendent would oversee the citywide AED compliance and maintenance program, centralizing responsibilities currently divided among multiple staff members.

Service Maintenance Worker II

Chair Schnetzer sought clarification on the organizational chart and the inclusion of the Service Maintenance Worker II position. He questioned whether adding two positions was necessary or whether one position could be deferred until the transition to the new facility was complete.

Director Vollmer explained that the staffing study recommended 2-3 facilities personnel based on square footage and operational needs. Currently, the request was for one additional position to onboard during the transition period. Vollmer emphasized the critical need to maintain the new facility appropriately from the start to avoid the backlog of maintenance issues seen in existing facilities.

Chair Schnetzer stated that the focus should not be on absolutes but rather on how quickly changes occur, likening it to a first derivative. He questioned whether having two positions funded immediately was necessary or if one could be deferred until 2026. He expressed curiosity about the reasoning behind the need for both positions at the outset and sought clarification.

Director Vollmer responded, emphasizing that deferring a position until 2026

was not feasible. She explained that civil service rules require a lengthy process to hire staff, which can take 60 to 120 days. For example, if the Council determines funding for a position on December 16, 2024, staffing plans would be made accordingly. She stressed that the process includes creating a test for the Service Maintenance Worker II position, which is both a union position and a classified civil service role. She added that hiring must align with the timeline for the building's operational needs, as the City is scheduled to take over the facility in the first quarter of 2026.

Chair Schnetzer sought clarification, asking if the staffing study anticipated the addition of another Service Maintenance Worker II position.

Director Vollmer confirmed that the staffing study recommended three maintenance workers plus a superintendent. However, she noted that only one position had been added for now, allowing time to assess whether a second maintenance worker would be necessary once the City begins operations in the building.

Kevin Schultz, Senior Director of Operations, elaborated on the operational complexity of the new building, emphasizing that it is much more technologically sophisticated than current facilities. He clarified that this sophistication pertains to building operations, including the fire alarm, security, and HVAC (heating, ventilation, and air conditioning) systems. He highlighted the importance of training staff on the building's systems before its full operation, ensuring it functions at peak performance. He reiterated the need for proper preparation, including the critical role of the facilities superintendent and any additional staff, to ensure the building is ready for occupancy without operational delays.

Director Vollmer confirmed that the Facilities Superintendent and the Service Maintenance Worker II positions were funded for half a year.

Councilmember Jones asked if there was an organizational chart showing the scope of work without the new role. She recalled that a new position might have changed the number of direct reports and reduced the large scope of work for an existing role they had today. She inquired if this was correct. Director Vollmer responded that she believed Councilmember Jones was referring to the Parks Manager position. Councilmember Jones clarified she was thinking of the wrong position.

Chair Schnetzer noted that colleagues were comfortable with the initial conversation regarding the Facilities Superintendent and had included the Service Maintenance Worker II. He then asked Director Vollmer to provide prepared remarks regarding another question that was previously submitted about the Parks Manager.

Parks Manager

Director Vollmer stated that the Parks Manager position was budgeted for a full year. This position would oversee the operations of the divisions of Parks, Forestry, Golf, Horticulture, and Facilities. Establishing a Parks Manager position would allow the Parks and Facilities Superintendent to focus on tasks for those specific divisions. The Parks Manager would make meaningful contributions to the city by ensuring the highest level of safety and work planning for all divisions, including coordinating weather responses, special event coordination, and addressing resident inquiries. She explained that this position would directly impact functions such as the Street Tree Program, establishing and improving standards of care and maintenance programs, trail maintenance and expansion programs, and the continued implementation of City Works, the asset management software program. Additionally, this position would be instrumental in the maintenance and care of new capital assets as they are added to the park system, such as Price Road House, new restroom facilities, park signage, court repairs, improvements at Academy Park, and other planned capital projects in the five-year outlook in the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). She further mentioned the park staffing requests at priority one level, which included a Facility Foreman for Horticulture and Park Trees, a Parks Maintenance Worker I, and the reclassification of Golf Course Supervisor and Forestry Supervisor to Superintendents. At priority two level, there was an additional Parks Maintenance Worker. The Parks Manager position was vital to the implementation of the next phase of the Council-supported Street Tree Program and associated staffing needs for this program to reach the next level. The Parks Manager would provide necessary oversight with the Forestry Superintendent for this program, including oversight of program implementation to ensure alignment with the Parks Master Plan, staff management and work planning, and contractor management. She added that both the staffing study and Parks Master Plan identified that the span of control was too large to be effective for one Superintendent. The Parks Master Plan specifically stated that hiring, developing, and retaining maintenance employees presents challenges. Staffing was indicated as the biggest issue the Parks and Recreation Department faced in meeting the expectations of City leadership and park users, providing highly maintained parks. It was difficult for the grounds maintenance staff to keep up with the expected workload and maintenance standards that were in place. Director Vollmer indicated that the 2025 proposed Parks Division organizational chart was displayed, showing priority one positions in gold, priority two in teal, and reclassifications in gray.

President Bowers expressed concerns regarding future management positions that might be added to the Parks Department. She asked if there were any plans to add a Recreation Manager on the recreation side. Director Vollmer replied that there were not. The five-year staffing study did not provide for any more recommended supervisors in the Parks and Recreation Department.

President Bowers inquired why the City chose this path rather than a deputy director-style organization, as seen in neighboring communities. Director

Vollmer explained that this was the organizational chart style the City had been operating under for a few years. The Parks Manager was at the same pay level recommended in the salary ordinance as other managers performing similar work and oversight.

President Bowers asked if an evaluation had been done to look at a deputy director-style organization and why or why not. Director Vollmer stated that staff did not conduct an organizational study when they did the staffing study. A staffing study looks at current workload, future workload, and the staffing needed to handle that workload. An organizational analysis would look at the overall organization of the City and make recommendations from those findings. She noted that those are two separate studies that can occasionally be combined, but they only did a staffing study. The consultant used the same organizational structure because it was in place for other departments.

President Bowers commented that she did not have any other questions. She expressed that, similar to Chair Schnetzer's earlier comments, she appreciated and understood the division of the different departments. She supported adding the Forestry Superintendent along with the Forestry Foreman and Maintenance Workers, which made perfect sense to her with the justification included in the Parks Manager statement received that evening. However, she had concerns about adding additional management staff, especially as the City continued to expand overall staffing and in consideration of other expenses. She appreciated the presentation; however, looking at overall needs and staffing, she offered it as an open question for discussion from her colleagues.

Vice President Weaver stated that, based on the email received and Director Vollmer's comments during the meeting, the addition of the Parks Manager role was necessary for the Street Tree Program to develop and progress further. Director Vollmer confirmed this, explaining that without the position, the two reclassifications outlined in the proposal could not occur because organizationally it would be inappropriate to have a superintendent reporting to another superintendent. She noted that Director Ferrell could provide further clarification on why two superintendents cannot report directly to her, as this would impede her ability to manage other tasks. Without the reclassification of the Forestry Superintendent, it would be unsuitable for one supervisor to manage two divisions within Parks or Operations.

Vice President Weaver emphasized that without this role, the Street Tree Program would essentially stall. Director Vollmer agreed, stating that the program would remain at its current level and would not advance to the next phase.

Chair Schnetzer then referred to the organizational chart in the budget book on page 82, noting it appeared to represent the park side rather than the recreation side. He asked Director Vollmer for clarification on the significance of the gold, teal, and gray boxes depicted in the chart. Director Vollmer explained that the gold boxes represented new priority one positions, the teal

boxes represented priority two positions, and the gray boxes denoted reclassifications for current employees moving into superintendent roles. She clarified that the gold boxes identified brand-new positions the City intended to fill. Chair Schnetzer thanked her for the clarification but expressed concern about the number of management layers being added. He noted that the current organizational chart showed one superintendent for recreation and one for parks and facilities. The proposed changes would create two additional superintendent positions for a total of four and add a Parks Manager to oversee three of those positions. He stated that, from an outsider's perspective, the structure appeared top-heavy and emphasized the need to ensure these roles were critical to achieving resident-facing projects and initiatives. He asked for further clarification on why the Street Tree Program would be unable to progress without the Parks Manager and why the current operations could not continue as they were.

Director Ferrell addressed the question, stating that while the current Street Tree Program work could continue, it was not operating as a fully comprehensive program. She explained that the current focus was on managing existing assets, specifically addressing hazards. To expand the program, efforts need to include care, replanting, and address areas without street trees. Expanding the program would also require updates to City codes, significant communication with residents, and an education component. This effort would require expertise to ensure the appropriate message was delivered effectively. Director Ferrell emphasized that a comprehensive approach to the Street Tree Program was a substantial undertaking that required additional oversight. She added that while current park goals, such as planting at least 100 trees annually and ensuring more trees were planted than removed, were being met, the forestry team's workload was significant. To meet the expectations of a fully developed program, including maintenance, expansion, and education, the addition of a superintendent was necessary to continue making progress.

Chair Schnetzer raised questions about the organizational chart, seeking to understand whether there was capacity within the existing project manager role to take on additional responsibilities. He clarified that his inquiries were part of due diligence rather than criticism. Director Ferrell explained that there was no bandwidth for the project manager to take on these additional responsibilities. She emphasized the importance of staff development, noting that foremen were working foremen rather than supervisors and, per their job descriptions and contractual agreements, could not lawfully take on supervisory tasks. To achieve the increased standards expected, she underscored the need to invest time and effort into staff training and development.

Chair Schnetzer then asked what residents could expect to see in 2025 or 2026 if the parks manager position was approved. He sought clarification on how this position would change the current baseline. Director Ferrell outlined that residents would see continued, expanded, and improved services. She highlighted examples such as daily maintenance of restroom facilities, which

already exceeds typical standards and would continue under the new role. She referred to these efforts as "invisible work" that is only noticed when not done. She added that the parks manager would enable further progress in education, conservation, and resident outreach, which require time and expertise to implement effectively.

Councilmember Padova acknowledged the high standards of restroom maintenance, sharing positive feedback regarding the cleanliness of park facilities. She then asked if the administrative assistant under the parks manager currently reported to the parks and facilities superintendent. Director Ferrell confirmed that this was correct.

Councilmember Jones asked if the parks manager would have a similar scope of work and number of reports as other managers. Director Vollmer explained that the parks manager's scope of work and pay grade would be similar to those of other managers across departments, such as in Human Resources (HR) and Finance.

President Bowers asked if Chair Schnetzer's question about what residents could expect from the parks manager role had been fully answered. Chair Schnetzer summarized that the role primarily involved an expansion of the Street Tree Program. Mayor Jadwin elaborated on the significance of the Street Tree Program, stating that its implementation was a major initiative requiring substantial effort. She noted that the parks superintendent was currently responsible for overseeing over 800 acres of parkland, 20 miles of trails, multiple pools, a splash pad, a golf course, and other facilities, along with supervising numerous staff members and managing associated administrative tasks. She emphasized that elevating roles to match the scope of work was both appropriate and supported by the staffing study.

President Bowers clarified that her question was not about the Street Tree Program specifically but about what the parks manager role would achieve that the superintendent could not. Mayor Jadwin explained that the reclassifications of the golf course supervisor and forestry supervisor into superintendent roles were already in supervisory capacities. She reiterated that the parks manager role would help distribute the workload.

President Bowers summarized her understanding, stating that the Council was not suggesting all responsibilities remain under the parks and facilities superintendent but instead sought to understand what additional value the parks manager role would provide to residents. She acknowledged the need for the forestry superintendent reclassification, the addition of a forestry foreman, and maintenance workers to support the Street Tree Program, which had been discussed extensively. She emphasized that the Council was trying to determine what the parks manager role would add to the quality of life for residents. Director Ferrell responded by highlighting the expanded infrastructure within the parks system, including 20 miles of trails requiring maintenance as part of the capital maintenance program. She explained that the parks and facilities superintendent currently managed the capital

maintenance structure in addition to supervising staff and overseeing day-to-day operations. Adding a parks manager would alleviate this burden and allow greater focus on maintaining and improving existing assets, a priority identified in the Parks Master Plan. She concluded by noting that residents value the current parks system and expect continued updates and improvements through the capital maintenance program.

Chair Schnetzer asked for clarification regarding the relationship between the superintendent positions mentioned and the organizational structure, specifically the idea of superintendents reporting to one another. Director Vollmer explained that the Parks and Facilities Superintendent oversees unionized foremen, who are not supervisors and cannot perform supervisory duties under Ohio Revised Code. These foremen are responsible for tasks but lack the authority to discipline, evaluate performance, or create work plans. She described the superintendent's extensive responsibilities, including assisting with the capital maintenance program, supervising union employees, ensuring the safety and functionality of the forestry section, and managing operations of the golf course. Vollmer emphasized that having one superintendent oversee two others would create pay inequity and organizational inefficiency. Both superintendents would instead report directly to Director Ferrell, who would then coordinate their efforts.

Chair Schnetzer expressed lingering questions about the essentiality of the parks manager position. He noted his preference for flatter organizational structures, citing their benefits in avoiding bureaucracy. While acknowledging the differences between his professional experience and the City's organizational needs, he deferred to his colleagues for further questions or concerns.

Councilmember McGregor asked about the discrepancy between the levels of the parks manager and the recreation superintendent in the organizational chart, questioning why the parks manager appeared to hold a higher status. Director Vollmer clarified that the chart reflects the structural differences between divisions. In recreation, supervisors report to the superintendent, whereas in parks, foremen, who are not supervisors, report directly to the superintendent. She emphasized that foremen, as field workers, cannot perform supervisory tasks such as issuing discipline or evaluations. These responsibilities are intended for superintendents. Mayor Jadwin also noted that classified workers in parks differ from unclassified workers in recreation, contributing to some disparities in the structure.

Councilmember McGregor questioned whether the parks manager and recreation superintendent roles should be on the same level in the chart. Director Vollmer explained that the parks manager would report directly to Director Ferrell, as would the recreation superintendent and the projects manager, clarifying that the layout of the chart was purely for display purposes. Mayor Jadwin added that the perceived discrepancy might arise from how the roles are positioned in the chart.

Councilmember Jones offered her perspective, voicing support for the proposed changes. She highlighted findings from the staffing study and employee survey responses, which indicated that clear ladders for advancement were highly valued by staff. Jones noted that the current flat organizational structure could hinder employee engagement and retention due to a lack of upward mobility. She added that the parks and facilities superintendent currently oversees too many direct reports, which is not sustainable and negatively impacts management and staff retention. Jones emphasized that, while Council must consider the benefit to residents, they also have a responsibility to address the needs of City staff, ensuring manageable scopes of work and fostering employee satisfaction and growth opportunities.

Vice President Weaver referenced an email from Director Vollmer and Director Ferrell, which included a list of tasks the Parks Manager would oversee. He asked for clarification on where these responsibilities currently lie and why they would be better suited under the Parks Manager role, noting that many of these tasks are continuous within the department. Director Vollmer identified the relevant section of the email, listing tasks such as maintenance and care of new capital assets, including the Price Road House, new restroom facilities, park signage, court repairs, and planned capital projects outlined in the five-year Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). She emphasized that these responsibilities currently fall on one individual, along with numerous variables like weather impacts, wildlife concerns, and new service systems such as "See, Click, Fix," which allows residents to report park system issues. She explained that adding the Parks Manager role would provide the necessary support to maintain current standards and improve them strategically as new assets and programs are introduced. Director Ferrell further explained that new capital assets require detailed maintenance programs and schedules, which the Parks Manager would develop and ensure were implemented by superintendents. She highlighted the risk of new assets falling into disrepair without proper planning, which would lead to higher costs for repairs and compliance.

Councilmember Padova commented that the current setup places too much responsibility on one individual. She supported the reclassification and the addition of the Parks Manager role, citing the importance of investing in the workforce to avoid burnout. She noted that staff survey results highlighted communication challenges and the need for better-defined roles, which the proposed organizational structure would address.

Councilmember Renner shared his perspective, acknowledging the unique demands of public sector work compared to the private sector. He referenced general guidelines suggesting a manager-to-employee ratio of 1:3 in the public sector and noted the extensive workload of the Parks Department. Renner supported the proposed reorganization but expressed a desire for key performance indicators (KPIs) to measure the impact of the changes. He emphasized the importance of demonstrating to residents how expanded staffing would translate into tangible results, such as specific achievements in

the Street Tree Program or maintenance of the City's 800 acres of parkland. While supportive of the proposed changes, he raised concerns about long-term costs associated with salary and benefits increases over time.

Chair Schnetzer thanked Councilmember Renner for his comments and summarized the discussion. He noted that the Council was still addressing the staffing portion of the agenda, specifically the Parks Manager role. Based on the conversation, Schnetzer observed that there appeared to be a majority in favor of approving the position. He then moved the meeting to the next agenda item.

Training Coordinator

Chair Schnetzer introduced the topic of the proposed Training Coordinator position, noting that there had been prior discussion and lingering questions regarding its necessity and timing.

President Bowers opened the floor for discussion. She referenced comments from Chief Spence, who indicated that a training coordinator would be needed solely for the Police Department in the future. Bowers suggested deferring this position until the new facility is operational and revenues could be reassessed. She invited her colleagues to share their perspectives.

Chair Schnetzer expressed agreement with Bowers' perspective, noting that the proposed role seemed to have a narrow scope of responsibilities. He suggested deferring the decision on the training coordinator position to the 2026 budget cycle.

Councilmember Jones requested clarification on the organizational placement of the position and was referred to the organizational chart on page 60 of the budget book. Director Vollmer explained that the position reports to Senior Director Wybensinger in the Department of Administrative Services. She added that the organizational chart was not included in the current slide deck.

President Bowers noted that, according to the organizational chart on page 60, the position was a new request. She recalled earlier discussions suggesting that the role could alleviate some of the workload currently handled by the Risk and Safety Administrator, allowing that administrator to focus on other responsibilities. Director Vollmer disagreed with that characterization but did not elaborate further.

Chair Schnetzer asked whether the position was proposed to be partially or fully funded. He sought clarification on whether the funding would cover six months or a full year. Director Vollmer confirmed that the position was fully funded for the year, with 50% of the salary and benefits allocated from the Police Department's accounts and the remaining 50% from the Department of Administrative Services' accounts. Chair Schnetzer clarified that the

funding still came entirely from the General Fund and not from the Public Safety Fund. President Bowers confirmed that all funding for the position would come from the General Fund. Director Vollmer concurred.

Councilmember Jones requested clarification on where the Training Coordinator would fit in the organizational structure. Director Vollmer explained that the position reports to Senior Director Wybensinger within the Department of Administrative Services. She noted that the role would be responsible for consolidating training coordination across the City and highlighted the significant workload associated with current training responsibilities, such as Ohio Peace Officer Training Academy (OPOTA) paperwork and ongoing state-mandated continuing professional training (CPT) for officers.

Chief Spence elaborated on the need for a training coordinator, citing the growing complexity of state requirements, such as driver training, and the logistical challenges of securing facilities and coordinating expenses. He emphasized that the work was already being done, but without a dedicated coordinator, it placed undue burden on existing staff. He envisioned the position as a foundation for efficiently utilizing the new training facility at 825 Tech Center Drive.

President Bowers noted that the City was also being asked to add a Deputy Chief of Police and additional Evidence Technicians. She stressed the need to carefully consider all staffing requests in context.

Councilmember Renner sought clarification on whether the position was budgeted for six months or a full year. Director Vollmer stated that the position was originally budgeted for six months but was currently reflected as fully funded for the year. She noted that Finance Director Bury was verifying the correct budget allocation.

Chair Schnetzer asked Chief Spence for clarification regarding the position's long-term trajectory, specifically whether it would evolve into a role dedicated solely to the Gahanna Police Department (GPD) in the future. Chief Spence confirmed that while a dedicated training coordinator for GPD might be necessary in a few years, the immediate need was for a citywide coordinator. He emphasized the importance of laying the groundwork for training efficiency and facility use.

Councilmember Padova referred to the employee survey, noting that 85% of GPD staff disagreed or strongly disagreed that the department was appropriately staffed. She expressed support for the position, as well as the Deputy Chief and Evidence Technician roles, to address staffing needs and alleviate employee burnout.

Chair Schnetzer summarized the discussion, stating that while some concerns about timing and costs remained, there appeared to be general support for the position among Councilmembers. He closed the staffing

discussion, ensuring all members had the opportunity to address their concerns, and moved to the next agenda item.

Operations, Projects, and Initiatives

Chair Schnetzer introduced the next topic under operations, focusing on projects and initiatives. He invited input from Councilmembers, noting no specific items in his personal notes.

Sustainability Initiatives

Councilmember Renner expressed concern about the absence of a Sustainability Coordinator and the lack of emphasis on sustainability initiatives. He stressed the importance of embedding sustainability across all departments, referencing programs such as composting and recycling, and exploring alternatives to current practices, like reducing pesticide use in parks or transitioning to electric-powered equipment. He urged City staff and directors to develop sustainability programs within their departments, offering his assistance as needed. Renner highlighted the necessity of a dedicated individual to drive these efforts.

Chair Schnetzer provided additional context, noting that many projects and initiatives for 2024 and 2025 were already funded in the 2024 budget passed in December 2023. He mentioned key efforts such as the strategic plan and economic development study and speculated on whether sustainability initiatives could be included in these broader efforts.

Mayor Jadwin acknowledged Renner's passion for sustainability and affirmed the City's intent to expand its sustainability efforts. She referenced previous Council discussions on a Sustainability Coordinator and noted that minimal feedback from Council at the time had led to its exclusion from the current budget. She explained that the ongoing Strategic Plan and related projects, such as the Comprehensive Transportation and Mobility Plan, would include community input on sustainability and help inform future initiatives.

Councilmember Renner appreciated the mayor's remarks but emphasized the need for a deeper, more process-driven approach to sustainability. He advocated for initiatives at a granular level, such as reducing reliance on gasoline-powered equipment and exploring alternatives to traditional practices. He reiterated his concern that the City lacked a driving force to lead such efforts. Mayor Jadwin agreed with Renner's points and highlighted ongoing efforts, such as electric vehicle (EV) charging initiatives and collaboration with the Grants Analyst to advance sustainability measures. She admitted that the City needed to improve communication about its sustainability efforts to better inform the public.

Vice President Weaver echoed Renner's concerns and noted that there had been support for sustainability initiatives during previous budget discussions. He inquired about the Management Analyst position, which was intended to

lead sustainability efforts along with grant programs. Director Vollmer clarified that the Management Analyst hired last year was focused solely on grants. She emphasized that sustainability and grants required different skill sets and expertise, which was why the analyst was not responsible for sustainability initiatives.

Director Schultz elaborated on the City's ongoing sustainability efforts. He provided examples, including the use of electric chainsaws, the purchase of the City's first EV, electrification initiatives, and a greenhouse gas inventory with Power a Clean Future Ohio. He mentioned the installation of a solar array at 825 Tech Center Drive, expansion of community recycling locations, and increased meadow areas to reduce mowing and promote ecosystem health. Schultz acknowledged that while progress was being made, the City could improve its transparency and communication about these efforts.

President Bowers expressed her view that Councilmembers collectively value sustainability priorities and initiatives, even if their expectations may differ. She highlighted examples such as the Street Tree Program, permeable surfaces, and stormwater management as sustainability efforts intertwined with quality-of-life improvements. She commended the City's progress on initiatives like aggregation, EV programs, and collaboration with Power a Clean Future Ohio. Bowers supported the decision to integrate sustainability efforts into the strategic plan and encouraged the administration to make sustainability a systematic and visible component of City operations. Director Schultz acknowledged these points, referencing discussions at the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC) Sustainability Summit. He confirmed that advancing sustainability initiatives meaningfully without a dedicated coordinator was possible and noted that this feedback would guide efforts in future budget cycles. Mayor Jadwin added that the City recently updated and submitted its application for Sustainable 2050 gold status, an improvement from its previous silver status. She noted that many completed projects aligned with sustainability goals, even if they had not been explicitly branded as such. Jadwin clarified that the absence of a Sustainability Coordinator in the current budget was based on Council feedback during the staffing study discussions and emphasized that sustainability remains a priority. She reiterated the Administration's intent to continue incorporating sustainability efforts and to revisit the need for a formalized program as part of the strategic plan.

Community Improvement Corporation (CIC) Funding Sources

Chair Schnetzer transitioned the discussion to the Community Improvement Corporation (CIC) funding, noting a \$300,000 line item in the Capital Improvement Fund for strategic land acquisition. He sought clarification on whether the funds were intended for acquiring new property or maintaining existing property.

Mayor Jadwin introduced Betty Collins, President of the CIC, to provide further information. Collins stated that the funds were primarily intended for

maintaining existing CIC properties, including five acres in the Creekside area and two houses. She specified that the funds covered real estate taxes, loan interest, maintenance, and minimal operational overhead. Collins confirmed that there were no current plans for new property acquisitions.

President Bowers asked about the previous year's allocation and its usage. Collins clarified that the 2024 allocation of \$300,000 was also used for property maintenance and related expenses.

Vice President Weaver inquired about the potential implications of shifting the \$300,000 allocation from the Capital Improvement Fund to the General Fund. Director Vollmer explained that any reallocation would require recalculating the budget to account for amendments, such as overages and corrections, but would not necessitate cuts to General Fund programs.

President Bowers expressed comfort with the proposal to move the \$300,000 to the General Fund, citing the adequacy of the unreserved fund balance to cover this amount. She indicated that such a shift aligned with historical allocations and preferred this approach.

Chair Schnetzer summarized the discussion, noting Council consensus to reallocate the \$300,000 from the Capital Improvement Fund to the General Fund. He tasked Director Bury with updating the budget to reflect this change for the following week's meeting.

Community Grant Program

Chair Schnetzer introduced the discussion on the Community Grant Program under the operations agenda, thanking those who had participated in the recent public hearings on the topic.

Vice President Weaver expressed strong support for the program, emphasizing the significant progress the City had made, due in part to volunteers who helped pass Issue 12. Weaver highlighted the benefits of the program, noting that nonprofits often achieve more with each dollar than the City could. He acknowledged concerns about metrics and reporting, expressing a commitment to exploring these elements further to ensure accountability. Weaver praised Senior Deputy Director Wybensing for effectively leading the program and confirmed with the City Attorney that funding the program from the General Fund was permissible if proper accounting and reporting were maintained. He described the program as an enviable initiative admired by other communities and looked forward to its continuation in 2025 and beyond.

Councilmember Renner echoed Weaver's support for the program, citing positive feedback from participants who had received funding. Renner proposed creating a transparent and inclusive process for distributing grants, suggesting the inclusion of residents and a Councilmember in the decision-making process. While endorsing the program's value to

constituents, he emphasized the need for clear guidelines to enhance trust and accountability, stating that his continued support was contingent on these measures.

Councilmember McGregor expressed opposition to the program, citing her experience as a board member of a nonprofit that received over \$2,400 in grant funding in prior years. While acknowledging the value of nonprofits, McGregor opposed using City funds for the grant program now that American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds were depleted. She recounted the financial challenges faced by the City before the passage of Issue 12, including the drastic measures considered to secure funding. She emphasized that the tax levy proceeds were intended for capital improvements, safety, parks, and services, and argued that continuing the grant program could divert significant resources away from those priorities. McGregor raised concerns about the City's role in selecting which nonprofits to support, stating that such decisions could create dependencies and fall outside the scope of government responsibilities.

Chair Schnetzer expressed appreciation for Councilmember McGregor's addition of historical context regarding Issue 12. Schnetzer reflected on his own involvement in the creation and promotion of Issue 12, emphasizing the promise made to residents about the specific uses of the funds. He highlighted that a grant program, while noble, would not have been considered feasible five years ago. He proposed removing the \$100,000 line item for the grant program from the current budget and revisiting it in January with the goal of identifying non-tax revenue sources to fund the program. Schnetzer referenced Westerville's grant program, which relies on non-tax revenue, as a potential model.

Councilmember Jones expressed support for the grant program, emphasizing the community's responsibility to support its residents. She acknowledged the need for transparency and Council and resident involvement in the program's structure. Jones argued that the grant program represented a small fraction of the City's overall budget and questioned whether removing it would allow the funds to be used for other purposes. She stated that unless the Council could clearly identify what would be sacrificed in exchange, she supported continuing the program.

Councilmember Renner voiced concerns about framing the grant program as contrary to the intent of Issue 12. He acknowledged the importance of adhering to promises made to residents but cautioned against a narrow interpretation of the funds' permissible uses. Renner stressed the need for balance and flexibility in addressing community needs.

Chair Schnetzer responded, reiterating his position that the grant program did not align with the original intent of Issue 12 and emphasizing the importance of maintaining fiscal discipline. He proposed structuring the program around identified non-tax revenue sources, such as hotel bed tax funds, and suggested revisiting the discussion in January to allow for a more structured

and sustainable approach.

President Bowers noted that Westerville funds its grant program using hotel bed tax revenue. She confirmed with Finance Director Bury that 16.67% of the City's hotel bed tax is retained by the City for General Fund purposes, with a portion allocated to maintaining the Herb Center. Bowers expressed openness to exploring alternative funding sources but stated that she was not willing to delay the grant program for 2025. She emphasized the importance of continuing the program while reevaluating its funding structure during the year.

Finance Director Bury confirmed that the City could estimate non-income tax revenue sources, including hotel bed tax, by January. Chair Schnetzer reiterated his commitment to identifying non-income tax revenue sources to fund the program in a more structured manner, aligning with Westerville's model.

President Bowers referenced discussions on other capital projects, including the sidewalk lookback program, to highlight the constraints on reallocating funds. She noted that prior conversations with department directors indicated limited contractor capacity for expanding the sidewalk program. Director Schultz added that the City's capital budget was balanced, and any additional allocations for one project would require reductions elsewhere. He clarified that while reallocating funds was possible, it would involve trade-offs that Council would need to deliberate carefully.

Director Bury provided an update, reporting that the City's 16.67% share of the hotel/motel tax amounted to approximately \$64,000 in 2023. She noted that a portion of this revenue was allocated to offset maintenance costs for the Herb Center.

Chair Schnetzer reiterated his concerns about the \$100,000 allocation for the Community Grant Program, emphasizing that it was not consistent with the original intent of Issue 12, which was designed to address deferred maintenance and core services such as public safety and parks. He recounted his role in developing and promoting Issue 12, including public meetings and discussions with residents, to underscore his commitment to the promises made during that campaign. Schnetzer proposed removing the \$100,000 from the budget, revisiting the program in January, and identifying non-tax revenue sources to fund it. He referenced Westerville's grant program as a model for structuring the program sustainably.

Councilmember Renner acknowledged Schnetzer's concerns but argued that the program supports the City's vitality and community services, which align with Issue 12's goals. Renner expressed openness to identifying alternative funding sources and imposing guardrails to ensure the program remains focused and sustainable. He emphasized the program's value to residents and nonprofits, voicing his willingness to revisit its structure in January.

President Bowers opposed removing the program from the budget, stating that it accounted for a minuscule portion of the General Fund and posed no significant financial risk. She emphasized the importance of supporting nonprofits and social services, which have been instrumental in the community's recovery from the pandemic. Bowers noted improvements made by the Administration in managing the program over the past two years and expressed confidence in their ability to continue refining it. She supported exploring alternative funding sources in January but did not agree with removing the program from the 2025 budget.

Councilmember McGregor expressed concern about potential "mission creep" and the long-term sustainability of funding the program. She emphasized the need to ensure Issue 12 funds last for their intended 20-year period and reiterated her belief that providing social services was not the City's responsibility. McGregor supported revisiting the program in January to explore alternative funding sources.

Councilmember Jones, Councilmember Padova, and Vice President Weaver expressed support for retaining the program in the current budget. Jones emphasized the importance of community investment, while Padova highlighted the critical role of services provided by nonprofits. Weaver committed to revisiting the program in January to explore additional funding sources and guardrails but supported its inclusion in the 2025 budget.

Chair Schnetzer acknowledged the differing perspectives and thanked Councilmembers for their spirited debate. He summarized the discussion, noting that a majority supported keeping the program in the budget while committing to revisit its structure and funding sources in January.

Contract Services Discussion

Vice President Weaver expressed appreciation for the breakdown of contract services provided to the Council and requested that such detailed information be shared at the start of the budget process in future years. Weaver inquired about a \$60,000 allocation under the Mayor's office for 2024, asking for clarification on its intended use. Finance Director Bury responded, noting that the amount had been earmarked for community initiatives in 2024 and a similar amount was allocated in 2025. Mayor Jadwin clarified she had not received the initial email but deferred to Bury and Vollmer to confirm its purpose.

Vice President Weaver also raised questions about the legal services line items in the budget, asking whether these were intended for specific departments or represented citywide legal needs. Bury explained that department-specific legal services often reflected specialized needs, such as the Regional Income Tax Agency (RITA) services in finance or zoning-related services in planning. These services were separate from litigation and contract review handled by the City Attorney.

City Attorney Tamilarasan clarified her understanding, stating that Clemans Nelson provides consulting rather than legal services, and ZoneCo operates similarly, offering zoning-related expertise rather than legal advice. She emphasized that legal services rendered by attorneys should go through her office, and she coordinates outside counsel when necessary.

Director Vollmer added that the classification of certain services as legal fees stemmed from long-standing City practices, which she referenced a former City Attorney who had identified the need for this practice. She acknowledged that terms like "legal fees" may not always accurately describe the nature of the services and pledged to provide clearer descriptions in future budget documents.

President Bowers concluded the classification of certain services as "legal fees" in the budget to be inaccurate, noting that entities such as Clemans Nelson and ZoneCo appeared to provide consulting services rather than legal services.

Director Schultz added that while the current vendor for zoning services provides consulting, had a different vendor been selected, the work might have been performed by a law firm and approached from a legal perspective. Schultz emphasized that all contracts, regardless of size or vendor, are reviewed by the City Attorney for compliance with terms and conditions. City Attorney Tamilarasan is responsible for ensuring that all contracts are legally sound and properly reviewed before being signed by the Mayor.

President Bowers followed up, seeking additional clarity on the community initiatives line item. Mayor Jadwin explained that the funding supported programs such as the Citizens Academy, the Business Advisory Council, and Gahanna 175 initiatives. Councilmember Padova noted that \$30,000 description appeared to be allocated to events like the State of the City.

Capital Projects & Conclusion

Chair Schnetzer transitioned the discussion to capital projects, noting no additional items on his notepad. He confirmed with Councilmembers and directors that there were no further issues to address. The Council acknowledged the sole change to the budget-a \$300,000 transfer from Capital Improvement Fund to the General Fund (for the CIC). Chair Schnetzer summarized the evening's discussion and noted that the amended budget proposal would be presented at Finance Committee December 9, 2024, with a final vote scheduled for Council on December 16, 2024.

Recommendation: Public Hearing Scheduled 12/2/2024; Introduction/First Reading on Regular Agenda on 12/2/2024; Second Reading/Adoption on Regular Agenda on 12/16/2024.

C. ADJOURNMENT:

With no further business before the Finance Committee, the Chair adjourned

