

RECORD OF PROCEEDINGS

Minutes of

Meeting

DAYTON LEGAL BLANK, INC. FORM NO. 10148

Held

March 12

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The Village of Weston
Special Council Meeting Minutes

March 12, 2024

The Special Council Meeting at the Emergency Services Building (20761 Taylor St, Weston) was called to order by Mayor Jeremy Schroeder at 6:00PM, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance and presentation of the agenda. A roll call was taken: Ms. Brittney Klockowski, Mr. Dean Babcock, Mr. Craig Warner, Ms. Jessica Susor, Mr. Rob Myerholtz, and Mr. Rick Easterwood. The purpose of the special meeting is to discuss the remaining ARPA funds and a project that council has attached to those funds.

ARPA Fund Status/Use of ARPA Fund

Mayor began by sharing that communication has been a struggle and expressed appreciation to everyone for coming and participating in the process. Mayor asked that any input be constructive. First item is to go over ARPA funds, as the Mayor began to review ARPA funds, a few members of the public tried to interrupt. Mayor reminded everyone that there is an agenda to follow and public comment is at the bottom, and everyone will have a chance to be heard. He explained that while there is discussion nobody will be talking over one another.

A slideshow was presented by the Mayor which provided background information on ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act), improvements, 2024 budget, idea process, and Alumni Park plans. Approximately \$173,213 in ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) funds were received, and \$152,935 has already gone toward infrastructure (Taylor Street culvert project), leaving about \$20,278 + interest remaining for health & wellness. A chart showed a budget of \$135,000 for roads, \$90,000 for safety, \$10,000 for parks, \$25,000 for cemetery, \$20,000 for stormwater, and \$10,000 for sidewalks. 2024 improvement budget includes \$20,000 for stormwater, \$10,000 for sidewalks, \$10,000 for trees, \$135,000 for roads, \$10,000 for grant writing, and \$35,000 for capital projects.

The Village received \$173,213 in ARPA funds, initially with specific limitations on its usage. Council identified a 100 year old bridge which would cost approximately \$300,000 to replace. This project was applied to another grant (OPWC), which covered half of the total project cost. The final payment made on the bridge was December 2023. From the ARPA funds, \$152,935 was used, leaving a remaining balance still to be used. In June 2023, a project that has been in the works for quite some time, a walking path, was put towards a NatureWorks grant by ODNR. The original proposal entailed the construction of a paved asphalt walkway for \$46,000. However, in response to feedback and subsequent revisions, the project was reconfigured into a two-phase endeavor. A revised quote from Morlock came in at \$22,475, prompting the Village to proceed with its submission to NatureWorks. Disappointingly, in November 2023, the Village received notification that the grant was not awarded. The Community Development & Public Affairs committee proposed utilizing the remaining ARPA funds to construct a 9' wide, compacted stone walking path at Alumni Park based on health and wellness goals, through a contractor with an even lower bid (JPX). This proposal was brought before council and received a unanimous vote in favor. Groundbreaking was expected in March. Mayor, in an effort to provide context and vision, shared a decade old Master Plan for Alumni Park, illustrating a comprehensive vision encompassing various recreational amenities, which included: a walking path, skate park, deconstructed prairie, amphitheater, and more. The park already features a 9-hole disc golf course. Mayor cleared up that the path, though not fully ADA accessible, will undergo proper excavation and construction, ensuring accessibility due to the packed nature. Mayor added that grants to increase ADA accessibility are easier grants to acquire, and pointed out demonstrating proactive efforts in area development bolster grant eligibility. Beyond the walking path, the Village is exploring additional projects including sidewalk connectivity improvements, safety corridor initiative, and pursuit of grants to fund future enhancements such as blacktopping the walking path and revitalizing the basketball court. Furthermore, the Village allocated funds from its tree budget to plant 30-40 trees at Alumni Park and proposed the creation of a deconstructed prairie/natural grass area akin to the historic "Weston" - Keeler's Prairie. Mayor acknowledged that he has read about 30 ideas and believes there is room to move those forward. Also sharing other ideas for Alumni Park such as turning the basketball court into a basketball court and a half and adding two pickleball courts, adding a shelter house, a row of apple trees, community gardens, and he expressed wanting to hear more ideas for the area and find ways to collaborate.

Citizens & Visitors

In attendance: Samantha Wick, Logan Wick, Harold Boggs, Harold Kendall, Jessie Kendall, Shad Kendall, Gary Betz, Josh Tschappat, Shirley Moore, Tim Schroeder, Ron Dallas, Erica Rupp, Shelly Myerholtz, Howard Lashuay, LuAnn Hunt, Sabrina Schroeder, Elaine Schroeder, Alaire Blair, Craig Blair, Kellee Downard, Shannon Dusseau, Tammy McClellan, Ashley Patel, Jigar Patel, Rose Searcy, Richard Daubert, Nate Johnson, Angela Courtney & Guest, Randy Hann, Greg Stevens, Lacey & Noah Warner, Bob Desmond, Paul Skaff (Village Legal Counsel), Deputy w/ WCSO

Samantha Wick, a Parks & Rec Board member, voiced her support for the walking path project, highlighting its significance as an enhancement to the park. She believes that it serves as a catalyst for further developments, igniting excitement and fostering community unity. According to Samantha, the walking path represents more than just a simple pathway; it symbolizes progress and collaboration within the community.

Jessie Kendall suggested several ideas including blacktopping the old school track, installing a playset for little kids, and adding a shelter over the old blacktop pad behind the bus garage. Mayor clarified that the old school track, originally for elementary students, was relatively small and not suitable as a trail. He explained that the aim is to kickstart development in the area with the walking path project. Jessie also proposed using the remaining funds for road improvements. The Mayor indicated the Village plans to spend most of the \$135,000 this year on roads and are working on a project to get SIB loan to improve downtown Main Street and Taylor Street. He also acknowledged the Village's fortunate condition of having well-maintained roads, which has made securing grants for road improvements challenging in the past.

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Shad Kendall initially had reservations about the walking path project but changed his stance after reviewing the presentation. He noted that a quarter of the project is already completed, citing the existing sidewalk and Alumni Park plaque. Shad inquired about the timeline for paving the walking path. Mayor responded that they intend to seek a grant for the paving portion, but do not plan to pitch it this year.

Gary Betz raised concerns about some residents not receiving newsletters, indicating that they may not be delivered by the post office. The Mayor acknowledged the issue and suggested exploring the reasons behind the delivery problem. Additionally, the Mayor mentioned the availability of digital newsletters and highlighted the Reach Alert program as an alternative communication method, encouraging residents to sign up for it.

Shirley Moore attended to observe the proceedings and familiarize herself with the layout of the walking path, gaining a clearer understanding of the project.

Ron Dallas questioned the allocation of \$20,000 labeled for "health and wellness" as ARPA funds and emphasized that there are more categories under ARPA for which funds can be utilized. Mayor explained that many ARPA categories are tailored for larger municipalities and tribal lands, but acknowledged that other project categories exist. Ron emphasized the importance of recognizing multiple funding categories. He also raised concerns about the lack of successful grant approvals in the past year, suggesting that mere attempts don't guarantee funding. Mayor acknowledged the frustration but stressed the importance of persistence. Mayor further explained the competitive nature of grant funding and emphasized the need for projects like the walking path to demonstrate community investment or have shovel-ready plans to improve chances of approval. Ron also proposed fundraising as an additional avenue for funding.

Erica Rupp inquired about the possibility of utilizing the funds to hire a grant writer. The Mayor responded that while it's a potential option, there's already a line item allocated for that purpose. Erica suggested that investing in a grant writer would offer greater long-term benefits and enable the completion of additional projects.

Shelly Myerholtz introduced herself as owner of Third Generation Printing and wife of councilman Rob Myerholtz. Shelly expressed concerns about the challenges facing local businesses in the village, such as maintaining employee retention and attracting customers. She pointed out that Porkys typically has people from out of town, not local. Shelly suggested that allocating funds to assist businesses with improvements like facade painting or window installations could help address these issues. Shelly also highlighted problems with abandoned homes, squatters, and accumulated trash, which she feels are detracting from the community's value. Shelly recounted her experience with the farmers market, noting a decline in attendance after the first year and attributing it to negative perceptions of the town's appearance, using the word "armpit". Shelly emphasized a need for stronger enforcement by the Zoning Inspector to address these issues by going into these places and saying "this is not acceptable". Mayor acknowledged these concerns and stressed the importance of addressing them through committee focus, although he noted legal limitations on addressing abandoned properties. Shelly concluded by stating her belief that the village's priorities are backwards.

Howard Lashuay inquired about the specific section of Main Street slated for paving, which includes the residential area from Cherry Street to potentially between Russ Street and Evon Lane. Mayor elaborated that downtown Main Street and Taylor Street are also candidates for a State Infrastructure Bank (SIB) loan, though the planning is just beginning. Howard then raised a concern regarding a matter on his phone and questioned why it was his responsibility to inform the health department. Mayor clarified that while the village had notified the health department, individual reports from neighbors could strengthen the case.

LuAnn Hunt commended the Mayor for his thorough explanation of the situation. She mentioned her lack of awareness regarding the master plan's appearance but suggested that by considering future recommendations, they could potentially develop something akin to Simpson Garden. Additionally, she envisioned this area as a potential location for high schoolers to take prom pictures. Mayor acknowledged the challenges of creating a master plan with a revolving board of six members.

Sabrina Schroeder, the Mayor's wife, emphasized the importance of amenities like parks and recreation facilities in attracting and retaining residents, which ultimately impacts property values. She acknowledged the complexity surrounding the property next to Howard and suggested offering assistance to potential squatters, considering it might involve mental health issues. Sabrina also mentioned the challenges of dealing with the health department but encouraged citizens to voice their concerns to prompt action. She highlighted the limited authority of the council and encouraged citizens to engage with other relevant authorities for issues beyond the council's scope. Sabrina expressed her enthusiasm for outdoor activities and the expansion of Parks & Rec initiatives, envisioning the walking path as a source of community pride akin to the towpath in Grand Rapids or Simpson Garden in Bowling Green.

Elaine Schroeder expressed her satisfaction with the council's efforts to develop ideas for the area that once housed a school with many children. She acknowledged the incremental nature of progress, emphasizing that achieving goals takes time and the concerted effort of many individuals. Despite the challenges, Elaine recognized the potential for Weston's revitalization and the importance of community involvement in realizing that vision.

Alaire Blair attended this meeting after seeing concerns on a neighborhood app that the Village was spending an ungodly amount of money on a path inaccessible to strollers. She appreciated the diagrams but suggested a key for clarity. Alaire reminisced about community-focused walking paths from her time in Florida, and inquired

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about the availability of the funds. Mayor clarified that projects must be committed by year-end. Alaire supported beautifying downtown and understood limitations regarding privately-owned buildings. Mayor discussed ongoing discussions about downtown aesthetics and shared plans for a lighting project on the south side of Main Street. Mr. Myerholtz mentioned that part of the ARPA money can be mini grants for businesses. Mayor clarified he believes that is for organizations, but not businesses. Paul Skaff was asked and added that the focus for ARPA is initially very narrow and has expanded. Alaire expressed disappointment with the cemetery's appearance and queried if ARPA funds could address it. Mayor noted ongoing efforts to improve cemetery maintenance.

Kellee Downard inquired about the Village's efforts to hire a grant writer, suggesting social workers as potential candidates. Mayor mentioned recent initiatives to fund a grant writer and welcomed any leads Kellee might have. Mr. Myerholtz announced finding a grant writer willing to work with the Village. Kellee then raised concerns about the ADA accessibility of the compacted stone for the walking path. Mr. Warner suggested that the stone's compaction meets ADA standards. Kellee stressed the importance of inclusivity in Weston's initiatives, expressing disagreement with phased inclusivity.

Shannon Dusseau, a lifelong resident of Weston, described the town as historically being perceived as the "armpit of Otsego." She emphasized the potential of the walking path to foster community engagement and progress in Weston. Shannon stressed that while improving the aesthetics of buildings can help, it alone won't attract people, especially to struggling businesses. She advocated for additional initiatives to stimulate business growth and community development.

Tammy McClellan expressed enthusiasm for the proposed initiatives and acknowledged the challenges faced by businesses amid tight finances, particularly during an election year. She voiced support for the walking path, envisioning it as a space for her grandchildren to socialize and make lasting connections. Tammy emphasized the importance of addressing various community concerns but advocated for a gradual approach to implementation.

Ashley Patel highlighted the longstanding need for a grant writer, recalling past discussions during her previous time on council. She emphasized the potential of ARPA funds to secure a grant writer, citing the example of the T-Mobile grant and expressing her own need for assistance with such applications due to time constraints. Ashley also shared that (Jill), not in attendance, wants a sidewalk from her property to Michael Merrill Park. Ashley suggested using the funds for smaller projects to beautify Weston. Mayor shared that the sidewalk to the park has been identified, and needs a plan. Ashley pointed out that there was a want to repair sidewalks, but there was controversy that didn't let that happen. Mayor added that it has been identified to fix Village-owned sidewalks, Ashley pointed out that a personal sidewalk was repaired also. Mayor pointed out that the Village has the ability to repair sidewalks in the right of way, and would like to do more of that. Ashley also urged the Village to pay attention to the parks that are not getting attention, and pointed out people don't even know they can rent a shelter for birthday parties. Ashley also added that she found needles at Merrill park during one of her kids' birthday parties. Mayor said that is something that should be reported right away. Ashley said to stop focusing on this park and focus on the other parks too.

Jigar Patel asked "did you think about what your citizens wanted to do?" Jigar also expressed his support for Mr. Myerholtz's proposal to allocate the funds to the Sheriff's Department. Additionally, he suggested that the \$22,000 could be deposited into an escrow account to accumulate funds for future grant matching purposes.

Rose Searcy expressed skepticism regarding the walking path project, considering it a potential waste of money. However, she acknowledged the importance of addressing community needs and supported reallocating funds towards existing parks and revitalizing the downtown area. Rose emphasized the deterioration of Weston's infrastructure, including dilapidated buildings and poorly maintained roads, questioning why the Village isn't investing in essential town necessities. She highlighted the struggles of local businesses, citing challenges such as limited operating hours and high prices, which hinder community support. Mayor acknowledged these concerns, expressing a desire for a different democratic system that could ensure essential services like grocery stores in every town.

Richard Daubert expressed agreement with others regarding the potential use of the available funds for alternative projects. Mayor emphasized the importance of identifying such projects to facilitate their progression. Richard suggested allocating the funds to the general fund for retention. Additionally, he advocated for providing recreational facilities for children in the town to deter vandalism. He noted a lack of utilization of the disc golf course and Mayor clarified its usage, stating that with the addition of the walking path, it could be enhanced further. Richard also urged responsible pet ownership, and the Mayor highlighted the provision of dog waste stations by the Village.

Randy Hann pointed out this is a council meeting and have not heard from any council member, only the Mayor. He questioned the absence of organized disc golf tournaments to promote the course effectively and make its existence more widely known. Randy acknowledged the Mayor's informative timeline of past accomplishments, appreciating the transparency it brought. However, he noted discrepancies in council members' familiarity with discussed dates from previous meetings, giving the impression the council was ill informed and trying to hide something. Randy mentioned his research on ARPA, highlighting its complexity and the need for dedicated time to fully comprehend it. He stressed the timeline does indicate contracts need to be dedicated by the end of the year. Furthermore, Randy expressed feeling misled about the upcoming grand opening of the track, which he believed was concealed. Randy raised concerns about potential repercussions if contracts were to be canceled, noting the commitments already in place. Additionally, Randy questioned the allocation of responsibilities for

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maintaining the walking path, pondering whether new personnel would be hired or if the burden would fall on the Village Administrator. Randy also brought up the conflicting messages regarding grass length ordinances and the potential impact on community behavior. Drawing from his affiliation with the Black Swamp Arts Festival, Randy proposed supporting mural paintings on buildings, citing the economic benefits observed in Bowling Green. The Mayor expressed loving the mural idea. He also mentioned the ongoing efforts to address native grass planting based on community interest. Regarding the walking path, the Mayor clarified that specific dates might not always be readily available but emphasized its signed status. Despite expressing enthusiasm for a disc golf tournament, the Mayor highlighted the course's limitation to 9 holes, suggesting a challenge in hosting such an event. Randy further suggested catering to both the aging population and youth, and introduced the idea of adult-sized playground equipment.

Greg Stevens emphasized his concerns regarding the current economic challenges faced by the community, including rising gas prices and property taxes. He expressed frustration with what he perceives as frivolous spending of \$22,000 on the walking path project amidst the hardships citizens are experiencing. He added that the council should be better than the federal government. Greg finished by pointing out that the council needs to think of what citizens are living through and to consider that.

Lacey Warner mentioned that she has lived in Weston since 2006 and walks her dog every night along the same route. She expressed her interest in exploring alternative walking routes, such as the proposed path. Lacey noted that such a path could benefit various groups, including parents of kids that play ball, younger kids wanting to play, and individuals looking to establish new social connections.

Council Deliberation

Mr. Easterwood expressed his desire for a clear vision regarding the walking path, noting that while the envisioned improvements may be appealing in the long term, they might not be suitable for immediate implementation. He attributed his hesitation to proceed to having considered feedback from the community. Additionally, Mr. Easterwood highlighted an alternative suggestion brought forward regarding an adult gym set, citing literature indicating a cost of \$16,000. He also emphasized the importance of addressing existing infrastructure issues, such as sidewalks, before undertaking new initiatives. Mr. Easterwood mentioned discussions about funds to the Sheriff's department. He expressed frustration over a lack of transparency regarding available funds, having served on council for 6 years and has not had a chance to be part of the committee that reviews available funds. Mr. Easterwood voiced concerns about the lack of a clear vision despite the advancement of the project, referencing a petition with 102 signatures. He expressed surprise at the project's progress, admitting unawareness of a signed contract despite voting on the matter. Mayor pointed out that council voted to move the project forward, with a unanimous vote.

Mr. Myerholtz emphasized his approach to prioritizing projects for the benefit of taxpayers, outlining a three-step plan focusing on priorities, needs, and wants. He noted that the walking path would be ranked low on the list. Mr. Myerholtz referenced a document that was read to the committee that the Fiscal Officer stated she felt most comfortable submitting this plan. Mr. Myerholtz shared that at the time the project was voted on, he had not done research, and pointed out this project is not a priority, it is a want. He noted in other communities projects like this are often submitted to the voters for levy money. Mr. Myerholtz expressed regret over the lack of public input on the remaining ARPA funds and mentioned the absence of support for the walking path project among council meeting attendees.

Mr. Babcock wanted to thank the business people for coming to a previous community development meeting and talking about the condition of things. He shared his recent focus on downtown development, which has been inspired by thorough research into successful models implemented in various cities and towns across the country. Mr. Babcock highlighted the significant challenges posed by the evolving retail landscape and the accelerated changes brought about by the COVID pandemic; he emphasizes the need for nuanced and customized solutions tailored to the community's specific circumstances. Mr. Babcock notes the common theme of bike trails and walking paths in revitalization plans and shares the idea of the creation of interconnected pathways linking the parks, downtown, cemetery, library, and more. Mr. Babcock adds to building on the concept of enhancing community engagement and downtown attractiveness, he suggests leveraging existing traffic flow to draw visitors further into the downtown area, with the idea of installing information kiosks and maps strategically placed to highlight local businesses, events, etc.

Mr. Easterwood left the meeting at 7:55PM for an emergency service call, returning at 8:15PM.

Mr. Warner reflected on a recent setback in the pursuit of the Wood County Park District grant, highlighting a key reason for the denial: the application lacking specificity regarding the amount of partial funding requested. Mr. Warner mentioned discussions with Harold and his outreach to the Wood County Park District, which illuminated a crucial insight: projects that demonstrate a clear vision and direction are more likely to attract funding support. Mr. Warner expressed agreement with Dean's passion for creating an aesthetically pleasing entrance into town.

Ms. Klockowski shared that during the meeting she has taken many notes. She shared that her first vote on council was for the walking path, because as a citizen she attended committee meetings where these ideas were reviewed. Ms. Klockowski shared that she knows people that enjoy walking the towpath in Grand Rapids and even though some have moved out of the area, they still come back to enjoy that feature. Ms. Klockowski has had many conversations with citizens that feel Weston needs to change, and understand there are other issues, but there is a budget to address those issues. Ms. Klockowski expressed enthusiasm for the idea of a mural downtown, reminiscing about a favorite mural from her childhood. She transitioned to the topic of the prairie

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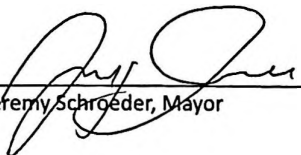
idea for tall grass, reflecting on attending community development meetings where an ordinance for grasses is being worked on; a proposed provision allowing for roped-off areas dedicated to pollinators. Ms. Klockowski noted challenges in finding grant writers, and expressed anticipation for a proposal from Mr. Myerholtz regarding a grant writer he found. During this discussion visitors began speaking, in which Ms. Klockowski expressed that it feels like everytime she speaks someone is always trying to talk over her. Multiple visitors walked out of the meeting, causing a noise disturbance outside that the deputy resolved. Ms. Klockowski continued expressing appreciation for the idea of making the newsletter more accessible, such as placing physical copies in the shadow box at the Village Hall. She acknowledges the desire to allocate money towards sidewalks, although the specifics are still under discussion, but clarified \$10,000 has already been designated. Ms. Klockowski expressed support for other amenities like a shelter house at the park. Ms. Klockowski expressed reservations of shuffling funds into the general fund to pay part of the sheriff's bill, and felt that it may undermine the original purpose of the funds.

Ms. Susor expressed that all the comments are a lot to follow and has been listening in depth to everyone, making notes of all the ideas. Ms. Susor acknowledged varying opinions within the community regarding the walking path and communication issues. She expressed concern over community members feeling unheard and emphasized that addressing communication challenges is a top priority for council. She also commended those who attended the meeting for sharing their perspectives and stressed the importance of representing all viewpoints. Ms. Susor referenced the Mayor's consistent efforts to solicit opinions from community members, highlighting the difficulty in obtaining feedback. She thanked attendees for their support and emphasized the need to hear from both sides of any issue. Ms. Susor also addressed concerns about dialog restrictions, and explained the rationale behind implementing time limits due to recent instances of disrespect and mockery during meetings, wanting to foster a respectful environment for discourse and noted that recent incidents prompted a reevaluation of the council rules. Ms. Susor acknowledged not knowing specific dates, but asserts that proper procedures were followed in the decision-making process. Further clarifying that the contract for the project was not recently signed in secret, but was initiated a month ago, after a 6-0 unanimous vote. Ms. Susor acknowledged the recent communication challenges and views them as an opportunity to improve dialogue with the community going forward. She discussed potential solutions, including passing resolutions for larger projects with multiple council readings and seeking legal advice on community interaction methods. Ms. Susor emphasized council's commitment to transparency and soliciting community input, urging mutual respect and flexibility as council works to establish effective communication structures and decorum processes.

Mr. Myerholtz asserts that there is no new tax revenue coming in, noting the decline in population over the past 8 years. He emphasizes the importance of prioritizing needs over wants, expressing skepticism about feasibility of funding new projects without taxpayer approval. Mr. Myerholtz pointed out the walking path will be a lot of money to maintain, and believes the Village cannot afford that right now. Mr. Myerholtz suggested rescinding the contract based on 102 people signing a petition. Ms. Susor expressed she is not OK with rescinding contracts of any sort, it is an integrity issue. Mr. Myerholtz pointed out it isn't about integrity, it's about what 102 people requested. Mr. Warner requested input from Paul Skaff regarding rescinding contracts, in which he replied there will be consequences.

The Mayor reflected on the current discussion and pondered the logical next steps in brainstorming. Paul Skaff pointing out there is a contract that has been approved. Mayor expressed a desire to work with committees to demonstrate available funds for moving forward with projects. He also noted that \$22,000 is not a game changer, Mr. Babcock emphasized its minimal impact per resident. Mayor also highlighted the past years where revenues exceed expenditures in the general fund, indicating potential financial flexibility for new initiatives. He concluded by expressing gratitude for community input and inviting further discussion.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:18PM.


Jeremy Schroeder, Mayor


Stephanie Monts, Fiscal Officer/Clerk