

**THE CITY OF KENT, OHIO
WORK SESSION
WED., JANUARY 7, 2009**

This work session of Kent City Council was called to order by John Fender, Mayor and President of Council, on Wednesday, January 7, 2009 at 7:00 p.m.

PRESENT: MR. AMRHEIN, MR. DeLEONE, MR. FERRARA, MR. HAWKSLEY, MR. KUHAR, MS. SHAFFER, MR. TURNER, MS. WALLACH, AND MR. WILSON

ALSO PRESENT: J. FENDER, MAYOR; D. RULLER, CITY MANAGER; J. SILVER, LAW DIRECTOR; AND L. COPLEY, CLERK OF COUNCIL

Mayor Fender explained the only item on the agenda dealt with interviews for vacancies on boards and commissions. He said they have applicants for four different commissions, who are present. Mayor Fender said the appointments would be made on January 21, after balloting, at their regular Council meeting. He asked those applicants present to give them a brief biographical sketch, and to explain why they chose to apply. He said the Committee may ask questions also.

Jackie Loomis, Applicant for Civil Service Commission: Ms. Loomis said she has been a resident of Kent all of her life. She said she has served one partial term and two full terms on the Commission. She said she has enjoyed serving, adding they do some interesting things as well as some boring things. Ms. Loomis said she would like to continue.

There were no questions for Ms. Loomis at this time.

Susan Roxburgh, Applicant for Board of Health: Ms. Roxburgh explained she has served one partial term and one full term, and wished to be reappointed. She said she is a professor at Kent State, and is a medical sociologist. She said this includes studying the social characteristics of health, which explains her continuing interest in the Board of Health.

There were no questions for Ms. Roxburgh at this time.

Kelly Douglas, Applicant for Planning Commission: Ms. Douglas said public service has been a tradition in her family, adding that giving a positive contribution to society is a win/win situation. She explained that she has only lived in Kent for a few years, and was a domestic engineer for many years. She said in 2002, she decided to seek a career in architectural, receiving her degree in 2007 in architecture. Ms. Douglas explained she received a General Studies degree in 2005, with an emphasis in Planning and Interior Design. She said she worked for an architect, and was laid off after one year. Ms. Douglas said she is seeking full time employment currently.

Ms Douglas said she wishes to serve as she loves participating in communities and organizations, especially if it contributes to a positive impact in society. She said she felt she was well-suited.

Mr. Kuhar asked if she is appointed, what would be the biggest thing or change she felt would be necessary with respect to how they do things now, and Ms. Douglas said that due to her new residency in Kent, she did not know at this time.

Mr. Turner asked Ms. Douglas how she viewed the function of the Planning Commission, and Ms. Douglas said a Planning Commission has the ability to improve the community with the allowed structures. She said they also provide the aesthetics and different business opportunities, whether it has a positive impact or whether it should be denied because it is too negative.

Mr. Wilson noted that Ms. Douglas listed a post office box for her address, and asked if she lived in the City limits, and the Clerk said it was verified that Ms. Douglas lives in the city limits. Ms. Wallach asked Ms. Douglas if she felt the projects should be first presented to the Planning

Commission, followed by the Board of Zoning Appeals, or vice versa, and Ms. Douglas said she felt they should go to the Planning Commission first. She said they can review projects, to see if they will have a positive impact, prior to delving into the specifics.

Ms. Shaffer asked Ms. Douglas her thoughts on the new urbanism, and if she agreed with the perspective. Ms. Douglas asked her which part she meant, and Ms. Shaffer said they are currently working with the Planning Commission to explore rezoning and revising of the zoning code. Ms. Douglas said she was not aware of that process. Ms. Shaffer asked her if she was interested in how people see areas zoned for multiple usages, and Ms. Douglas said she would like to know more with each individual case. She said her personal view is that business is important to Kent, but what is good for the flow and impact within the neighborhood is very important. She said it should be a win/win situation for everyone.

There were no further questions for Ms. Douglas at this time.

John Gargan, Jr., Applicant for Planning Commission: Mr. Gargan explained he moved to Kent when he was five years old, as his father had accepted a position at the University. He said he is a product of Kent City Schools, and received his degree from Kent State. Mr. Gargan said he received his Masters from Ohio State, and worked for a large multi billion dollar bank in Michigan. Mr. Gargan said for the last six years, he has worked for Portage Community Bank. He said he served, previously, on the Planning Commission from 2005 thru 2008, but at the advice of his attorney, he resigned, as he was going through the disability process. Mr. Gargan said he has since received approval from the Social Security Administration that they would not have a problem with his service.

Mr. Gargan said he enjoyed his experience when he served previously. He said his father taught Political Science at Kent State for thirty-five years, instilling the importance of local government and community involvement. Mr. Gargan said he is also involved in a partnership that owns several rental properties, including some college rentals. He said it is really easy to pick on rental property owners, but added there are two sides to every story. He said that perspective is important.

Mr. Gargan said while growing up in University household, he always thought Kent and Kent State University was one. He said over the years, he never realized the divergence in the community between the "Town and the Gown." He said he would like to foster better relations with the University, as it is the only thing that Kent has at this time.

Mr. Kuhar asked him if, from his knowledge about the operations of the Planning Commission, what major change was needed and why, and Mr. Gargan said the joint review of the Zoning Code by the City Council, Planning Commission, and Board of Zoning Appeals is very important. He said they need to be rational and pragmatic on how zoning is done in Kent.

Ms. Wallach asked Mr. Gargan if he felt the Planning Commission should do the first review, followed by the Board of Zoning Appeals, or vice versa, and Mr. Gargan said one of his frustrations is that the important part of any project deals with the zoning variances. He said the Planning Commission would recommend zoning variances that would subsequently be voted down by the Board of Zoning Appeals. He said it really does not matter who goes first, as the Board of Zoning Appeals is the ultimate control with respect to variances.

Mr. Turner referenced Destination 2006, and asked his overall feedback from the community as it relates to the planning aspect of that document. He asked Mr. Gargan if he felt it was important, and whether it should help guide the commission as it relates to development, and Mr. Gargan said he believed so. He said another frustration he had with the Planning Commission is that they did very little planning. He said the name is almost misleading, if they read the scope of the commission.

Mr. Ferrara asked if he would be a proponent of change in terms of what the Planning Commission is doing, and asked why he wanted to be reappointed. Mr. Gargan said he has attended some of the joint sessions, and asked Mr. Gargan to rephrase his question at this time. Mr. Ferrara asked Mr. Gargan how he saw his role on the Commission, and Mr. Gargan said it would be to bring a common sense approach

to the Commission, and to help foster a good relationship between the University and the City. He said that without the University, they are just a suburb of Ravenna. Mr. Ferrara asked if he felt it should be an active role, instead of a passive role, and Mr. Gargan said that was correct, adding they should not overstep their bounds.

Mr. Turner said it appears Mr. Gargan feels that the Planning Commission should take a more proactive approach, as it relates to development and planning. He asked how Mr. Gargan saw that happening, and Mr. Gargan suggested they work with the Board of Zoning Appeals, as opposed to working separately.

Ms. Shaffer noted that Mr. Gargan mentioned he owned some rental properties, and asked how he would go about, on the Planning Commission, of considering the neighborhoods around the University. She asked if he would want to see more student rentals, or see them revert back to single-family homes, and Mr. Gargan said there is no simple answer. He said there are some deep rooted divisions in the community. He said that Boulder Colorado and Ann Arbor Michigan are examples of how a college town can integrate students with residential population. He said the Planning Commission cannot do that for Kent, but can get the parties together so they work together.

There were no further questions for Mr. Gargan at this time.

Melissa Long, Applicant for Planning Commission: Ms. Long said she was present as she desired to serve on the Planning Commission. She distributed additional information at this time. She explained she has lived in Kent for two years, coming from Trumbull County where she served on Council and as the Mayor. She said she can bring an outlook to the City and the Planning Commission from both the administrative and legislative sides. She said she can contribute something.

Ms. Long said she understands their zoning ordinances, adding they need to be reviewed after the recent conflicts that occurred with approval of a business in the community. She said she is willing to look at that, and work with the Administration, Law Director, and Council to see where some gaps need to be filled and to review areas that are not allow the City to move forward.

Mr. Hawksley asked Ms. Long what she meant by "going forward," and she said it meant an inclusion of the University. She said she lived close to Youngstown, previously, and saw the cooperation between the City and the Youngstown State University. She said that cooperation is with the local, state, and federal governments. She said it can occur through similar projects, state or federal grants, or into a community where they can both exist. She said she would like to see that happen.

Mr. Turner said Ms. Long alluded to an issue regarding the zoning and planning on a particular business, and asked if she was talking about the recent case dealing with a gas station, and Ms. Long said that was correct. He asked how she would have viewed it, and how they could have reduced some of the conflict, and Ms. Long said with their existing ordinances, there was no way they could do anything but comply. She said that now brings a red light, and they need to look at it and decide if they want to change it, go forward or backward.

Mr. Turner asked if she reviewed the ordinances since that occurred, and if so, how she thinks they should be changed, and Ms. Long said they need to change the ordinances to restrict that type of business from that possible area.

Ms. Shaffer asked how long she has lived in Kent, and Ms. Long said she has been in Kent for two years. Ms. Shaffer noted she said on her application that she had no preconceived vision of the City, and Ms. Long said she is coming in with an open mind and open eyes. She said she is a native of northeastern Ohio, having been born and raised in the area. She said she has been coming to Kent for nearly twenty years, as her extended family lives in Kent. She said she has listened, and has seen what has occurred. Ms. Long said she would go home, grateful it was not her problem. She said she has been aware of some of the issues for a long time.

Ms. Shaffer asked if she thought that Kent has unique problems, and Ms. Long said they are no more

than any other community of the same size. Ms. Shaffer asked what she saw as the greatest strength, and Ms. Long said it is the ability to cooperate, and ask what they can do together.

Mr. Wilson noted she took classes at Kent State with Jim Tinnin, and asked when, and Ms. Long said between 1997 and 2001. Mr. Wilson commented he took the same classes, and thought they may have been classmates, but he took the classes at a different time.

There were no further questions for Ms. Long at this time.

Andrew Kunos, Applicant for Parks and Recreation Board: Mr. Kunos said he retired from Goodyear as a Mechanical Engineer with more than thirty years of service. He thanked them for allowing him to serve on the Park Board for the last three years, adding the time went by fast. He said Kent has a good director in John Idone, adding the Board works well with him, which is an asset for the City.

Mr. Wilson asked his thoughts about Council's liaison, and Mr. Kunos comment that "Wayne is okay."

There were no further questions for Mr. Kunos at this time.

Debbie Smeiles, Applicant for Parks and Recreation Board: Ms. Smeiles said she lives in Kent, and has four children that have attended Kent Schools, with the last one finishing high school. She said she was privileged to serve on the Park Board for one term, adding she appreciated her time of service. Ms. Smeiles said she is an avid outdoor person, and hikes all year long, including winter days. She said she felt she was a natural fit to the Board, and appreciated her service. She said she felt she brought something to the board, and enjoyed her time on the board. She said she would be privileged to service, if they will have her.

Mr. Ferrara asked as she look back, what did she wish she could have done, and Ms. Smeiles said she was upset they did not bring about a recreation center. She said the project fell apart, and she felt bad. She said they have great parks and trails in Kent, and a lot of good people. She said they do not have a good facility for their children, adding she is glad they get along with the school district and can use their facilities. She said she wished they had made the recreation center happen for the City, as it would have been a big asset to Kent. She said she would love to see an arrangement with the University for the use of their wellness center, as it is very cost prohibitive to many people in Kent. She said that would be a nice idea to explore.

Mr. Kuhar asked Ms. Smeiles if she meant a fitness/wellness center, and Smeiles said that is what they were trying to do in conjunction with Summa, and it did not work out. Mr. Kuhar asked how she felt about the Parks and Recreation Department bringing about some weekend entertainment programs for young adults that would keep them out of trouble, like dances, and Ms. Smeiles said if they had a facility available, it would be a great idea. Mr. Kuhar said one community had one, and all the bad kids showed up, which meant they were not breaking out windows. Ms. Smeiles said they had similar ideas when they tried to pass a pool levy, she said structured programs would be good ideas for young adults.

Mr. Turner said it seems her priority is to revisit the issues of a facility for the community, and Ms. Smeiles said she would jump on it, if there was an opening. She said she is realistic to know that all cities, and the County are all having money problems. She said it was possible before because a hospital was interested in partnering with them, and would have carried a big part of the cost. He said when they stepped out, the City lost its ability. She said if she had millions of dollars, she would love a fitness facility in Kent, but knows the money is not there.

Mr. Turner asked if she would look at other collaborative efforts, and Ms. Smeiles said she would keep her eyes open. She said when she looks at other communities that have these centers, such as Tallmadge, she sees they are used all of the time. Ms. Smeiles said it would be a wonderful asset to the community, if they could pull it off, adding it would be a challenge. She said she would like to see a swimming pool also.

There were no further questions for Ms. Smeiles.

Jim Smith, Applicant for Parks and Recreation Board: Mr. Smith said he is used to teaching at-risk students. He said he is a native of Canton, Ohio, and attended Kent State. He said he fell in love with Kent, and has lived in Kent for a total of fifteen years between two different times. He said he is married, and has three kids, ranging from a college senior to a middle school student. Mr. Smith said he has been involved in recreation programs as a parent, and when they moved back to Kent ten years earlier, he went to the recreation center to play basketball. He said he was astonished by the condition of the facility.

Mr. Smith said collaboration is the way to go, and as a former YMCA employee, he understands collaboration with cities and health care providers. He said he has wanted to get involved, adding that the recreation and park facilities are a “make or break” for a community. He said today’s Kent is much better than Kent from ten years ago. He said things are turning the corner, and looking brighter, adding that the recreation component could put it over the top.

There were no questions for Mr. Smith.

Hearing no further business before this Council, Mayor Fender adjourned this meeting at 9:24 p.m.

Linda M. Copley, Clerk of Council

John Fender, Mayor & President of Council