

**THE CITY OF KENT, OHIO
KENT CITY COUNCIL
WORK SESSION
WED, JUNE 4, 2008**

This Work Session of Kent City Council was called to order by John Fender, Mayor and President of Council, on Wed., June 4, 2008 at 7:00 p.m.

PRESENT: MR. AMRHEIN, MR. DELEONE, 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

ABSENT: MR. FERRARA

Mayor Fender explained the first item was requested by Mr. Ferrara, who was absent, so they would return to this item at the end of the meeting. He said they would be hearing a presentation from staff on previous work with respect to strategic planning. He said the Manager distributed information from staff on their thoughts regarding "make or break" questions. He said they need to set another date where they can discuss the information and possibly decide on the top three or five issues.

DAVE RULLER, CITY MANAGER, explained he has taken some grief for the volume of material he distributed. He said the City has been very good about it's planning efforts. He said most sessions were retreats, and dealt with strategic planning. He said there is an enormously good body of work. Mr. Ruller said he only printed copies for Council, adding as they flip the pages, they can see the evolution over time. He said there is an enormous amount of public input, which is a credit to the City. He said it has not been lost to people outside of the City.

Mr. Ruller said they received a national award for the Bicentennial Plan, adding that Plan is another step. He said he did not go back far enough, adding that Mr. Wilson remembered additional work that was not captured.

Mr. Ruller said the information is available on line, adding it is only right to put it out there for the public. He said that most Council members were part of that public before they were elected, and have a stronger sense of what has been done. He said they are not starting from scratch, adding the good news is that they are standing on the shoulders of others who have done good work.

Mr. Ruller said the threads are pretty clear from the mid-1990s. He said they have the same themes, including economic development, redevelopment, downtown, the hotel/conference center, infrastructure issues, and University/City collaboration issues. He said the City has done a great job with the core mission, vision, and values. Mr. Ruller said financial issues reappear, adding it is closely linked to the economic development issues. He said also included are neighborhoods and the quality of life.

Mr. Ruller said the City should be proud of those things accomplished. He said they did not do a great job of celebrating their successes. He said they have had a lot of base hits. Mr. Ruller said he would not review the book section by section, adding he assumed they are capable to do that. He said he would welcome their comments and/or thoughts on what else should be in the notebook. He said it was meant to get them started in a big way.

Mr. Ruller said he tried to capture any survey data, adding it is direct citizen input, which is an important issue for everyone. He said the West River Neighborhood may not have been a strategic core area, but it is one of their success stories. He said they did not have the grand finish, adding Mr. Fuller has a few things he is trying to do. He said they are about 70% completed. Mr. Ruller said they are still working on a status report of the West River area, adding they did a follow up survey in the last year and it will be part of the report.

Mr. Ruller said they have benefited from some class study work from the University. He said it is a different stakeholder perception, as they wanted to capture the students of Kent. He said they have some Council surveys also. Mr. Ruller said the notebook was meant to be a resource, allowing them to get a feel for where they are at this time.

Mr. Ruller said from the staff's perspective, he feels they have done a great amount of work. He said strategic planning never ends, but he is comfortable with the sense of their position in the market, as well as their perceptions of themselves as staff. He said when he thinks about it, his question is about their action plan. He said they have to identify those things they need to do. He said he is proud of the work done, but not satisfied with their completion rate. He said he wants to celebrate their successes, but wants to keep moving forward.

Mr. Ruller said it is time for action planning. He said he took a little guidance from their facilitator who suggested five questions. Mr. Ruller said he asked each department head and some senior staff for their input. He said that while they did not start with focus areas, all of them fell into the same categories. He said that some are more policy related, while others are project level questions.

Mr. Ruller said he did not want to direct them into one direction or another. He wanted them to see the full list and absorb it, without any bias. He said the list was not edited nor was it prioritized. He said it is meant as a preparation for the next step.

Mr. Fender said the Manager did not compile the information on his own, and thanked the Clerk, the Manager's Assistant, the Law Department Secretary and the HR Manager for their assistance.

Mr. Fender said he has been a part of many of the strategic planning sessions, and he asked himself why they have not taken more action. He questioned why they have not completed some things, adding he came to the conclusion that it was because of a lack of money and a lack of hard decision-making. He said they have a chance to do some good things.

Mayor Fender said they need to set a date to discuss this information further.

Mr. Wilson said he has lived through many of these exercises, adding the Manager could probably fill up another book from the 1990s. He said as they read through it, almost every session covers the same areas. He said he reread most of the information, and realized they did not put in benchmarks. He said they do not know if this has been done or not. Mr. Wilson said, as an example, on the list from the Manager, it mentions improved web presence and land banking. Mr. Wilson said they are doing both of those now, but never patted themselves on the back nor recognized they did it. Mr. Wilson said they need to spend their time deciding on how to measure their success to be sure they doing things.

Mr. DeLeone said he did not see anything about the JEDDs, which is an important part of the picture. He said they help out Kent, Franklin Township, and Brimfield Township. Mr. Hawksley asked what they have to decide on those, and Mr. Wilson said the JEDDS were part of the discussions in the 1990s. Mr. DeLeone said they should be a major focus. Mr. Fender said for the sake of discussion, he would like to see them return at another date, where they select three or five different priorities. He said included in that discussion may be something that is not included in the list of "Make or Break" questions.

Mr. DeLeone said he always hears how they are landlocked, adding those agreements are revenue to pursue. Mr. Ruller said that Mr. DeLeone is answering one of the questions, adding the question is how they solve their financial problems, and one answer would be the JEDDs. He said Mr. DeLeone has already taken it to the solution.

Mr. Hawksley said the sheet distributed by the Manager speaks to what Mr. Wilson mentioned, which are the measures and/or the benchmarks. He said he likes the categories, adding he would like to talk through the form. He said it covers the major areas they are trying to define. He said it would be good to include measuring how they work with their strategic partners. He said one example is they were fighting

the townships ten years earlier, and now they are working together. He said they are having discussions about a fire district. Mr. Hawksley said he likes that information on one piece of paper. He said they need to figure out how to work through the strategic partners and how to determine their benchmarks to find out how they are doing. He said they can always “tweak” it, so to speak.

Mr. Kuhar said he is trying to figure out how to relay this information and make it apply. He said he had an interesting conversation with a couple in Kent who was close to his age, and they discussed some of the things being done at city hall. He said they made an interesting comment that it sounds to them like “the government” is building a small empire they will own by all the proposed projects, and they are paying for it with tax dollars. He said they felt that some things being done accommodate others, and not the citizens. He said they felt that since they had no ownership, and were just paying the bill, what government is doing to support what they expect to be the basic necessities, such as police protection, fire protection, road repairs and safety. He said they called it “government owned things”. Mr. Kuhar told them they are working on a plan, adding he did not totally understand the question.

Mr. Kuhar said he thinks the same question is in the minds of a lot of people. He said he talked to Mr. Lillich about the use of long boards, adding he will probably never use one but there is a whole generation who will use long boards. He questioned what groups they include, adding they cannot just focus on one group of citizens and what they like. He said when they do strategic plans, they need to remember people like himself with bad knees who like to shop and eat. He said they must include everyone in the plan.

Mayor Fender said in a number of surveys done previously, they have been graded positively on their basic services. He said he feels they cannot do all things for all people. He said one of their necessities deals with basic services, and they are very aware of that necessity.

Mr. Amrhein said they are having exams at the high school this week, so he ate with a different group at school. He said they are excited with what Kent is doing, adding they are younger and live in the City. He said he has heard some positives, and was very encouraged at lunch by the people who are urging them to keep on going.

Mr. Wilson suggested that Mr. Kuhar might want to tell people they are doing their basic services the best possible way with a set amount of money. He said they are using some of their money to reinvest in the community, and this will keep them from going to the voters every year. He said they are trying to invest money in their community to generate new funds, as opposed to asking the public to dig deeper.

Mr. Turner said he wished to reinforce what Mr. Wilson said. He said their responsibility is telling the people that it is about reinvesting and expanding the economic base. He said this would get them to the point where they generate income, thus decreasing the burden on the residents of the community. He said they need to create new opportunities and a new economy. He said the bottom line, if that does not happen, is they would have to cut services. He said they have to explain to the public that it is about investment, and they have to create a new ability to get funding into the coffers to get what they want done. He said this is what they have to do to move the community forward.

Ms. Shaffer said they have talked about economics and what they can do. She said as a government, they have some arenas where they can work, like the river, and the downtown. She said those are the “commons” in Kent. She said that they are increasing their quality of life, which creates a sense of vibrancy. She said that everyone who comes to Kent says there is a potential. She said people want to stay in Kent after graduation. Ms. Shaffer said they are lucky to have “good bones”. She said by building on their “bones”, they would enhance the quality of life for everyone. She said they have to keep in mind the different sectors of the population.

Mr. Kuhar said he understood what was said, adding they need to be careful on their return of investment when investing the taxpayers’ dollars, so as not to squander it. Mr. Kuhar said one thing they have to do is fill a definite gap, adding that gas is communications with the University. He said he was talking to someone who is the coordinator at Kent State’s recreation center. He said this individual was wishing he

knew of a park setting where he could relax and read during lunch. He said he directed him to the River Edge park on Main Street. Mr. Kuhar said it is amazing to him that this individual did not know about their parts. He said that is a gap that needs to be filled.

Mayor Fender said their next free Wednesday is June 25, and they are planning to go to Akron to see Spicer Village. He asked what they felt about July 9 as the next night to discuss their strategic planning. Mr. Silver said that one of their staff members took vacation that week, as it was not a scheduled Council night. Mr. Wilson said they would be discussing their feelings, so they did not need the staff. Mr. Kuhar said he would be out of town. Mayor Fender said they would meet on July 9 at 7:00 p.m.

The next issue was the "field trip" to Spicer Village in Akron. Mr. Ferrara, who had suggested this time, was going to be late.

Mr. Hawksley said he spoke with Mr. Ferrara, and Mr. Ferrara wanted to encourage them to go. He said the owner wishes to give them a tour. Mayor Fender said they wanted some indication on who was going, and suggested they let him know, and he would share it with Mr. Ferrara who would relay it to Mr. Maynard.

Ms. Shaffer asked if they can meet in the parking lot and carpool, and the consensus agreed. It was decided they would meet in the parking lot at 4:30 p.m.

Mayor Fender adjourned this meeting at 7:35 p.m.

Linda M. Copley, Clerk of Council

John Fender, Mayor & President of Council