



**OBERLIN COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT CORPORATION
MEETING MINUTES
MAY 11, 2011
CITY HALL CONFERENCE ROOM #1
85 SOUTH MAIN STREET, OBERLIN, OHIO**

1. Call to Order.

This meeting of the Oberlin Community Improvement Corporation (O.C.I.C.) was called to order by the President Doug Lawton at 8:02 a.m. in Conference Room No. 1, City Hall, 85 South Main Street, Oberlin, Ohio.

The following members were present at this meeting: Marianne Cochrane, Steve Fleming, Doug Lawton, Christina Nichols, Eric Norenberg, Scott Schell, Sandra Hodge and Michael Murray.

Also present were: Gary Boyle; Tita Reed; and Wendie Fleming, Secretary to O.C.I.C.

2. Approval of the April 6, 2011, 2010 Meeting Minutes.

Nichols made a motion to approve the April 6, 2011 meeting minutes as submitted. Norenberg seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

3. Discussion on Economic Development Plan

a. Advertising Opportunities

Reed stated that, per the Board's request, she had contacted Clear Channel regarding information on the billboards that they own around Cleveland Hopkins Airport. She had included pricing for billboard advertising in the Board's agenda packet. Reed indicated that advertising costs for a billboard for one month would be \$7,000.00. She advised that this information is being provided to the Board for its information and discussion. Reed noted that the price list includes billboards around the airport and other advertising areas within the airport, such as the baggage claim area. Reed stated that this form of advertising is very expensive, but these locations are very visible for people outside of Oberlin and for visitors to the Cleveland area.

Cochrane indicated that any advertising is best if it is done repeatedly and it would not be possible for the Board to do so, given those expensive advertising costs. Nichols asked if Reed had contacted Cleveland Plus regarding its advertising rates in the airport and whether they had advertising space available? She advised that with Cleveland Plus,

a business pays a fee for advertising, but it is considered to be a donation to Cleveland Plus. Nichols indicated that the Cleveland Plus advertising spaces would be small but she noted that many business travelers do not check bags and placing advertising at the baggage claim might not be the best location. She stated that putting some advertising in Concourse C of the airport would be the best place as it has the most traffic.

Reed stated that Concourse C is much more heavily travelled, but advertising in that area is much more expensive too. Lawton indicated that advertising the City of Oberlin in and around Cleveland Hopkins Airport is a great idea, however, the Board needs to have a steady stream of income to be able to afford those advertising rates. Hodge advised that the College has a partnership with Cleveland Plus, and she indicated that it may be possible for the College and the City to do some joint advertising through Cleveland Plus. Fleming noted that since advertising in and around the airport is so expensive, would it not be better to advertise closer to Oberlin? Hodge stated that many visitors and residents in and around Cleveland think that Oberlin is much farther away than it is. She indicated that advertising in the area around the airport would help to draw new people in and let them know that Oberlin is not that far from Cleveland. Nichols asked if advertising would be any cheaper in a city close to the airport, like Brookpark. Lawton indicated that Brookpark would likely be an expensive place to advertise as well. Hodge reiterated that she would contact Cleveland Plus to ask for information on cost-sharing. Lawton suggested that price information be obtained on the rotating/scrolling billboards. He noted that those types of billboards have multiple advertisers so they may have a better advertising rate. Reed advised that she will work with Hodge regarding the possibility of joint advertising between the City and the College with Cleveland Plus. Hodge agreed with Lawton that a billboard that can have multiple advertisers may be more cost effective. Reed asked the Board if there was a figure for advertising that it would be comfortable with? Nichols stated that she would consider \$8,000.00 for 6 months for a smaller sign/billboard to be feasible. Cochrane indicated that 6 months may not be a long enough time period to get the most exposure. Nichols suggested that any billboard/advertising should have Reed's name as a person to contact for more information. Reed stated that Schell's name should be listed as a contact person too.

Norenberg indicated that there are too many variables with this type of advertising to put a cap on how much the Board would be willing to spend for it. He suggested that after the City and College find out how much it would cost to do joint advertising, the Board can discuss this matter further. Norenberg also advised that possibly additional organizations/businesses can partner in the advertising to help further reduce the cost. Lawton stated that this matter can be discussed a future meeting. He indicated that it appears that the Board feels that the advertising rates that were provided are much too high. Lawton asked Hodge and Reed to report back to the Board regarding joint advertising at the next meeting.

b. Residential Development

Lawton advised that at the last meeting, the Board had discussed whether it should pursue residential development. He noted that Reed had provided the Board with a list of vacant properties in the City that could potentially be developed.

Reed indicated that the list that she provided included the properties' locations and prices. She asked the Board if it was considering adding residential development to its purview since it is not currently part of the Board's charter. Boyle stated that if the Board does want to focus on residential development as well as commercial, the charter would need to be changed. He advised that currently the City has a Community Housing Improvement Program (CHIP) and has partnered with other agencies/organizations in the past, such as New Sunrise Properties and Habitat for Humanity to upgrade housing stock and to build new houses in Oberlin. Cochrane suggested that the list Reed prepared should be forwarded to the Lorain County Realtors Association as they may know of a developer or individual looking for property in the area. Nichols stated that she does not believe that residential development should be part of the CIC's purview since there are many other organizations/agencies that are involved with residential development throughout the County and in the City of Oberlin. She advised that the Board should focus on commercial and industrial development.

Reed noted that because there is a connection between jobs and housing, housing could be seen as economic development. Norenberg advised that the City does not own any of the properties on the list and it is likely that some of the locations would be desirable to private developers. He further indicated that the City would probably not be in a position to purchase any of the properties and suggested that possibly the City could help to try to market these properties to a private developer. Norenberg stated that many of the properties already have utilities and that could potentially make them more desirable to a developer.

Norenberg advised that it would likely be very time consuming for the City to try to develop those residential properties and again suggested that relaying information and helping to facilitate private development would probably be the best approach for the Board to take. Murray stated that after a house on a property is condemned, ownership of it goes to the City and nothing is being done with these vacant parcels of land which in turn weakens a neighborhood. He further advised that if the Board were involved, new residential development would help to improve the appearance of and strengthen the neighborhoods. Murray also indicated that he feels that this is a great project for the Board to pursue and that the Board should be involved in both commercial and residential development. Boyle stated that when a property is condemned, title of the property does not revert to the City, the property would be owned by private individuals or banks. He noted that property maintenance enforcement is important in keeping neighborhoods looking good and keeping property values up. Boyle advised that several years ago, the City partnered with New Sunrise Properties to redevelop several infill

residential lots. He indicated that the City essentially gave the property to New Sunrise Properties and helped that organization with Community Housing Improvement Program funds to build houses on the properties. Boyle explained that to his knowledge, this infill development did not significantly increase property values in the areas surrounding the new houses and even though this project was done when the housing market was still very good, New Sunrise Properties walked away from the last two lots that the City gave them and did not pursue development of them.

Hodge stated that Zion Community Development Corporation (Zion CDC) was looking to redevelop properties in Oberlin and suggested that the City may want to bolster the CDC. Hodge noted that housing is central to Zion CDC's mission. Reed advised that when she was on the Zion CDC Board, the CDC changed its focus away from new construction, presumably because of the recent downturn in the housing market. She indicated that Zion CDC has instead focused on establishing a community garden at "Legion Field" and has used funds that the City gave the organization to do some small property maintenance projects in the Southeast Quadrant. Reed indicated that Zion CDC is not looking to land bank or to do full rehabilitation projects on homes as that organization has gone in a different direction. Hodge advised that there will likely be a change of staff at Zion CDC as the Director and her husband are going to be moving and this change in staff may be an opportunity for the CDC to hire someone to take on these types of housing issues. Reed stated that the City has been very supportive of Zion CDC for many years both monetarily and by giving the CDC authority to use Legion Field for community garden space. Norenberg advised that the City has nudged Zion CDC to do more residential development and he agreed that there may be additional opportunities when a new Director is hired. He also indicated that the list of vacant properties should be forwarded to Zion CDC's current Director, Judy Wright.

Cochrane again suggested that this list of properties be forwarded to the Lorain County Realtors Association as they likely get many requests for property information.

Lawton asked if the City gets inquiries from developers or realtors regarding vacant properties? Boyle stated that yes, the City often does get inquiries and does give information regarding vacant properties and ownership information to those individuals. He further advised that staff will forward a copy of the list of available vacant properties to the County Realtors Association. Lawton asked if some potential hurdles that a developer may face when considering these vacant properties for development are liens? Boyle stated that yes, with properties that are in foreclosure or short sale, working with a bank or lender can be complicated and some banks do not always seem anxious to sell the properties. Lawton asked if Habitat for Humanity would be interested in some of these vacant parcels of land? Reed stated that the City has worked with Habitat for Humanity in the past and has given that organization funds from the City's CHIP program to build new houses in Oberlin. Boyle also noted that the City worked with USDA Rural Development and that agency contributed funds to the New Sunrise Properties project along with our CHIP funds in the past.

Reed indicated that the CHIP program has a full rehabilitation activity which helps to bring houses up to Code, but is not necessarily a “beautification” program. She advised that the City has given Zion CDC funds to help with “beautification” projects. Schell noted that Habitat for Humanity has been affected by the poor housing market and may not be doing many projects. Boyle indicated that through the CHIP grant program, the City gave Habitat two parcels of property and they did not proceed with building on either lot. He stated that he was advised that Habitat could not get any qualified buyers who were interested. Reed suggested that the residential housing development focus maybe should encompass more than just affordable housing. Boyle noted that the East College Street Project is a mixed use development and the City partnered with the developer through use of Tax Increment Financing (TIF). He suggested that the Board could make recommendations to City Council on similar mixed use developments in the future.

Murray advised that he would like to see the Board do something to fix up the housing stock in Oberlin. Fleming noted that most of the properties on the list that was provided to the Board are vacant parcels and until the housing market rebounds, there probably is not much anyone can do. Cochrane stated that often houses become vacant and are left to deteriorate to a point where it cannot be rehabilitated. Boyle agreed and noted that Campbells recently purchased the dilapidated Price property on West College Street and have begun rehabbing that house. He further advised that there have been a few blighted properties that have been recently condemned in the north campus area and the community would like to see those fixed/cleaned up.

Lawton stated that he knows someone who works for Habitat for Humanity and he will speak with that individual to get more information on the process Habitat uses to find or obtain property and prospective house owners. Reed advised that it is her understanding that usually land and building materials are donated for Habitat projects. Hodge asked about the turnover of owners for Habitat houses and how this is handled? Boyle noted that likely there is turnover in ownership of these houses despite Habitat trying to help families transition to ownership. He indicated that staff could contact Lorain County’s Habitat Director to obtain more information on its current and future projects.

Lawton advised that if the Board decides to change its charter to encompass residential development too, staff would likely have to do a lot of the work researching and marketing available properties to potential developers. He noted that Smith was going to provide the Board with information regarding the residential project in Columbus that he had reported on at the last meeting, however, he was not able to attend this meeting. Reed indicated that she spoke to Smith and he is still collecting information on the Columbus project.

Lawton indicated that he does not support a change to OCIC’s charter to include residential development. The Board agreed that it did not want to pursue a change in focus.

c. Marketing Available Commercial Property

Lawton noted that the Industrial Park sign at the entrance to Artino Street used to have several open spaces on it, but now it is full. He indicated that it is great to see that additional businesses have moved into the Industrial Park and thanked City staff for their hard work in bringing businesses to Oberlin.

Reed reported that current Economic Development page on the website has a list of commercial properties in Oberlin that are available, including information on contact information, square footage of the space, pictures, other amenities, etc. She advised that the businesses/companies in the Industrial Park have some marketing through the City's website. Reed noted that to date, the City's Economic Development website page has had approximately 5,000 "hits" per month. She advised that Peerless, the City's website designer and manager, suggested that they can create a "show case" on the website that could be used to feature current Industrial Park businesses/companies. Reed noted that other forms of advertising that the City currently uses do not necessarily benefit the Industrial Park businesses.

Lawton stated that the cost for having Peerless put this information on the website is rather expensive, and he asked if it would be possible to get donations from some of the Industrial Park businesses to help defray the cost to the City? Reed advised that she can pursue this should the Board be interested in doing so. She also asked whether the Board would still like to proceed with the advertising even if donations cannot be obtained? Fleming advised that it seems to be expensive for a link page and suggested it may be more cost effective to provide links to the Industrial Park businesses on the City's Economic Development webpage. Hodge agreed that cost for this service seems expensive and she asked if this is the company that manages the City's website. Reed advised that it is the company that manages the City's website. Hodge indicated that it may be possible to "package" information regarding the Industrial Park businesses with information on the Oberlin project. Nichols stated that using the slogan "Oberlin is Open for Business" is a great idea and shows that the City/Board is trying to promote economic development. She noted that the showcase of pictures for the Industrial Park businesses is expensive, but she feels that it is better than just providing links. Boyle advised that the City should provide links to the businesses' website in any event.

Murray indicated that he would like to see Oberlin "more" open for business. Nichols advised that the City has been working hard to offer more incentives to businesses to get them to relocate to or stay in Oberlin. In addition, City staff members have been very helpful and responsive to inquiries made by businesses looking to relocate to Oberlin. She did not see how it could be much more "open for business."

Lawton asked if Peerless could put a list of links for the Industrial Park businesses on the website first and the Board can further discuss whether it would like to pursue having the business "showcases" added to the website in the future. Reed advised that she would

contact Peerless to see what can be done. Schell stated that he feels that adding the links for the Industrial Park businesses is a good first step and will be more cost effective. Lawton agreed. Reed indicated that she did like that the “showcases” would highlight one of the businesses and would provide links to articles and other sources regarding that particular business. Boyle asked Reed to contact Peerless to see if they can add the Industrial Park businesses’ links the City’s Economic Development website page and whether there is anything that City staff could do “in-house” to minimize costs. Reed stated that she would do so and also noted that by highlighting a particular business, it shows that the City cares about the businesses in Oberlin is helping to promote them.

Boyle and Fleming both agreed that the cost of adding the business showcases seems rather expensive for the number of hits that the City’s website gets. Reed advised that staff will see what can be done “in house” as far as providing links to the Industrial Park businesses’ websites. She further indicated that she will discuss the matter further with Peerless to see if a lower cost for these types of services can be negotiated. Fleming suggested that possibly the money spent for these services could be used to train staff to add this information to the website and to update it. Lawton questioned whether the Industrial Park businesses may be willing to donate some money for this advertising? Fleming advised that it is likely that they would since it is a one-time investment. Boyle indicated that staff can broach this subject at the next Industrial Park Roundtable meeting. Reed stated that she could contact Peerless to do a presentation at the Roundtable meeting to demonstrate what information can/would be included in the business “showcases.” Lawton indicated that if Peerless could provide a less expensive alternative for advertising or if the Industrial Park businesses would be willing to contribute money toward this advertising to make it less costly, it may be possible to go forward with this idea. Boyle agreed that it may be possible to do this advertising if the Industrial Park businesses could split the cost with the City. Reed advised that she would follow-up on this matter and would contact Peerless to check to see if a better price could be negotiated and to invite them to attend the next Roundtable meeting.

4. Treasurer’s Report.

Lawton commended Talarico for all his hard work. The Board reviewed the account statements which had been prepared and it was noted that there was not much change in the account balance since the last meeting. Lawton noted that there was some interest income received and advised that the Board is going to have to discuss ways to increase its funding if it wants to pursue purchasing of land, etc. in the future.

Cochrane moved to approve the Treasurer’s report as submitted. Nichols seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

5. Other Business.

Reed advised that Pierre had contacted her to ask the Board for its thoughts on allowing property owners to pasture cattle in the Industrial Park as an environmentally friendly way keeping grass cut. She further indicated that the "M-1"/Light Industrial Zoning District would not permit this type of use. Reed stated that Pierre thought this type of agricultural activity in the Industrial Park would be good publicity for Oberlin and gain some "social capital." The cattle could eventually be slaughtered and the meat donated to organizations like Oberlin Community Services. Boyle advised that it is his opinion that allowing an agricultural use in an industrial area is not appropriate. Murray agreed and stated that there is already a lot of agricultural land surrounding Oberlin for this type of use. Lawton and Nichols also concurred that this use is not appropriate for the Industrial Park.

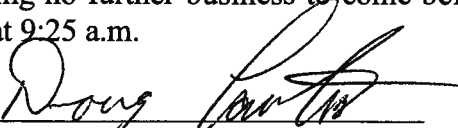
Murray asked for information about the land that the City owns on Oberlin Road that is being marketed for a new Commerce Park. Boyle advised that infrastructure is already in place for the Commerce Park. He further noted that the City has been and is currently active in marketing the property to prospective buyers and that this property has not been subdivided into lots and the City has not extended the road through it in order to provide prospective buyers with more options with respect to size of lots, location of future buildings, etc. Also, the City would have the expense of having to maintain a road until the Commerce Park was built-out.

Murray advised that he has heard that income taxes in Oberlin are high and that is a deterrent for prospective businesses. Fleming stated that most of the surrounding cities tax rates are comparable to Oberlin's. Boyle indicated that after a certain tax level (1%), residents would have to vote on further increases. He advised that City earmarks some income tax revenue for certain projects. Boyle further noted that approximately 50% of all the real property valuation in Oberlin is tax exempt because the College, schools, churches, FAA, etc. own so much real property. He stated that the property tax revenue does not affect the City as much as it affects the Public Schools. Boyle advised that perhaps tax levies would not be needed by Oberlin Schools if Oberlin did not have so much tax exempt real property.

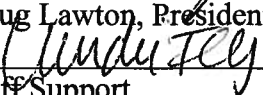
Lawton asked how some of the recent budget reductions at the State level have affected the City? Boyle advised that the City has had to cut its spending since it will be getting much less funding via the state local government fund transfer, the estate tax, etc. in the future.

6. Adjournment.

There being no further business to come before the Board at this time, the Chair adjourned the meeting at 9:25 a.m.



Doug Lawton, President



Cindy Tely
Staff Support