

Regular

September 18, 2019

Ontario City Council met in regular session on September 18, 2019, in the Municipal Building, with Council President Jim Hellinger presiding. The meeting opened at 7:00 p.m. with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Present during roll call were Council members Ken Earhart, Larry Arnold, Eddie Gallo, Dan Zeiter, Mark Weidemyre, Michele Webb, Nathan Sunderland, Council President Jim Hellinger, Mayor Randy Hutchinson, Law Director Andrew Medwid, Service-Safety Director Jeff Wilson and Clerk of Council Cathy VanAuker.

The minutes of the regular Council meeting of September 4, 2019 were presented for approval. Mr. Zeiter moved to approve the minutes, second by Mr. Sunderland. Seven members cast their votes Aye, zero Nay, and the motion passed.

Mayor Hutchinson invited Pastor Chad Guined and Jessica Adams of Storyside Church forward to receive a Certificate of Achievement for the outstanding service to the community by coordinating eight volunteers to paint 24 fire hydrants along Lex-Springmill Road.

Mayor Hutchinson surprised Bud Motter of the Tribune-Courier, who is a lifetime photographer and attends numerous events throughout the county, with a Certificate of Achievement for his outstanding service to the community, mainly for taking pictures.

Mr. Hellinger introduced Ontario Local School Board members: President Heidi Zimmerman, Immediate Past President Sam VanCura and Todd Friend.

Superintendent Lisa Carmichael explained the upcoming school levy to Council and why a levy is on the ballot in November. Informational packets were distributed.

- Coffee chats are being hosted throughout the community to inform residents about the levy and answer as many questions as possible.
- The 6.9 mil levy would generate \$1,935,000 for the district.
- This levy would cost \$20 per month for two years for a home valued at \$100,000. In years 3, 4 and 5 of this levy the 1998 building bond issue will be paid so they will reduce 4.4 mills off of this levy, then a home valued at \$100,000 would be reduced to \$7 per month.
- The State is not going to give Ontario the money they are owed. State Representative Mark Romanchuk notified them it would be 2021 before funds become available in their budget and that doesn't guarantee anything would be earmarked for the schools.
- Out of 607 schools, Ontario is the 12th lowest spending school in Ohio. Their budget is \$18 million, 80% of the budget goes toward salaries and fringe benefits. This is everything it takes to run the district and being 12th lowest in spending shows they have been very efficient. This is not a spending issue, this is a revenue issue.
- This levy is about maintaining everything they currently have in the school district.
- State Representative Mark Romanchuk, an Ontario resident and business owner, offered to pay for his campaign manager to assist in canvassing the neighborhoods and getting the walking list from the Board of Elections. There are approximately 125 volunteers ready to canvas the neighborhoods every evening until November 5th.
- Facebook, Twitter and Instagram social media accounts were launched on August 1st. Those who don't use social media can find the information on the website.
- If the levy doesn't pass in November it will go back on the ballot in March. If the levy does not pass in March then \$1.9 million will need cut from the budget.

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- The Board of Education supports the Proposed Reduction Plan that will go into effect if the levy does not pass in March. If the levy fails in November the Board will be asked to formally approve the Reduction Plan during their November meeting.
- One position at risk of being eliminated is the School Resource Officer.
- Class sizes are the highest they have ever been at 30 -32 students per class. In 2010 there were 110 teachers, this year 113. There are no teachers to cut and not one teacher has been hired due to open enrollment. Special Education teachers were hired to accommodate resident students with IEPs (Individualized Education Program).
- They are at risk of losing every art, music and physical education teacher at the elementary school because they are not required to provide those classes.
- Transportation would be completely overhauled. Students in grades 9 – 12 are not required to be transported, so it would stop. Anyone living within a 2 mile radius of the school are not required to be transported, so it would be eliminated.
- If this plan has to be implemented it would be devastating not only to the school but the community, the school is the backbone of the city and this is a community issue.
- Mrs. Carmichael asked for support and consideration of passing a resolution in support of the schools.

Mrs. Carmichael responded to questions:

Mr. Weidemyre asked if the school received any State Wellness money.

- The school received \$168,000 for the State Wellness.
- Council was generous to provide \$30,000 toward the \$52,000 salary of the Substance Abuse School Social Worker. Some of the Wellness money was used for her salary.
- Akron Children's Hospital was hired for nursing services this year because enrollment is the highest it's ever been at 2,100 students. There is a full time RN and a medical assistant that are funded by some of these funds.

Mr. Sunderland said information about the TIF was incorrect on the website but Mr. Harvey clarified that during a meeting last night.

- The school does not receive only 50% of the taxes from the TIFs. When the first TIF was done with Menards it was 50% but newer TIFs with Buffalo Wild Wings, Fed Ex and Buckeye Village were at 86% for an overall average from the city of 66%. This is being corrected on the website.
- The school is losing \$130,000 in tax revenue due to the TIFs.

Mrs. Carmichael responded to Mr. Zeiter's questions:

The levy handout states the amount will be reduced in 2020, is that written into the language on the ballot?

- Language was not written into the levy being placed on the ballot stating the amount would reduce in 2020. The Board has publically said that is going to happen.

The School Board and Administration hired a firm to survey a couple of hundred families to determine what they like or dislike about the school system. What was the cost?

- \$15,000.

Was a consultant hired to help pass the levy? What was the cost?

- A marketing PR firm was hired to launch the social media sites and a lot of what you're seeing. The cost was \$60,000.

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\$75,000 was spent on this levy?

- They are not our campaign chairs, they are a PR marketing firm, they are the same firm Lexington Schools has used for ten years and they were instrumental in passing Lexington's levy. They were hired for PR marketing, they were not hired for a campaign.

Item #8 on the list is to eliminate the School Resource Officer. Mr. Zeiter was on Council in 2007 during the hostage situation at the school, he said: "I can assure you this body, this administration and the police department will not allow our school to go one day without a resource officer, regardless if this levy passes or not."

- Mayor Hutchinson concurred he was behind this 100%.

Mr. Zeiter referenced the Ohio School District's Performance Index Report Card:

Ontario's Report Card score was 101.7 when Mrs. Carmichael became superintendent in 2011. The most recent score was 92. The school district has declined almost 10% during the last eight years during her tenure.

Ontario ranks 235 out of 608 Ohio schools. There are 234 schools in the State of Ohio that are better than we are at 62%. Mr. Zeiter offered the figures and website information to anyone in the audience who would like to see them.

Mr. Zeiter said in his opinion, instead of asking the community for more money to continue the 62% performance, the community and the school board should be asking Mrs. Carmichael for a letter of resignation.

- Mrs. Carmichael responded that she would put our teachers up against anybody in the state. When she came the district was at 10% free and reduced lunches, now it's 42% and the student population has changed dramatically. Our teachers have the highest class sizes in the state and they are faced with more challenges than when she came nine years ago.

Mr. Zeiter said this was due to open enrollment because all 608 schools have the same conditions. A couple of years ago he offered to sit down with her and Mr. Harvey to work on this and it wouldn't have cost \$75,000, he would have done it for free because it's important to him.

- Mrs. Carmichael said, not all 608, it came from 10% free and reduced lunches to 42%. "You know it all Mr. Zeiter and I expected this, I expected this, I expected this. Maybe you should be the superintendent, maybe you should be the superintendent you know it all, maybe you should, maybe you should, wow, ok, because you're the expert."

Mr. Gallo asked for the timeframe when Mrs. Carmichael met with Representative Mark Romanchuk and Senator Obhoff.

- Ongoing for the last three years with Randy Harvey and Jerrod Them who is their legislative liaison. They were actively going to Columbus before the Fair School Funding Plan, the Cupp-Patterson Plan. The state owes us \$2.7 million. They have been consistently going and they are still going to hear from us.
- Senator Obhoff's assistant told them: We've heard from Ontario schools loud and clear but you have one of the highest average salaries in the city and you have a huge tax base, go pass a levy, we are not helping you. Mark Romanchuk can attest to that.

Mr. Gallo was curious about the meetings throughout the state with state representatives. The state can go back to 2002 when the state Supreme Court, for the third time in eleven years, declared school funding unconstitutional. They have not done their job, they have dropped the ball that includes the court because they washed their hands of it. At what level are all districts pushing back on the state representatives and senators? This is an issue across the country.

- For the last five or six years the Points of Pride updated the community where they are with the state but they literally said mid-July, they are not helping Ontario, they need to

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pass a levy. Until then they were very hopeful of receiving the \$2.7 million. They were in a coalition with 50 other schools in the state to hopefully be relieved from this and all of a sudden there's no money. That's why there is such an urgent need because we're hearing there won't be money in the budget until 2021 and that's not to say any will be earmarked for education. That's why it really is about taking care of our own, we have to take care of our schools. The need is right now. We're still going to be actively pursuing, we're not going to forget and let them off the hook, all of our efforts are on passing this levy.

- Our Board has talked in open session during the Board meeting about filing a law suit with the State of Ohio. I think it's long overdue and I think it's something we will be pursuing in the next several months.

Mr. VanCura said Ontario is one of a very small number of school districts that is capped and doesn't get what the state owes us. One of the comparisons was Ontario spends about \$8,000 a student, Mansfield City Schools spent over \$15,000, other school districts have no interest in helping the few that have a cap on their income.

- The majority of the feedback and the direction was from the July meeting that was spearheaded through Senator Obhoff's office.

Mr. Arnold said the burden would be carried by the community to pass a levy. There are 26 items on the reduction list and it would be good to have dollar amounts affixed to those items. Buses stop twice in his cul-de-sac. There should be centralized locations for kids, maybe not grade schoolers, but this is high school.

- If grades 9 -12 busing is eliminated, in order to make that work there would need to be a common start time for the elementary school and middle school. The school day would be shortened because they are in excess of the hours per day and all teachers would have their planning period at the end of the day. Transportation would look very different. Part of that plan says preschool through grade 8 would all be transported at the same time and only picked up and dropped off at the residence, no more dropping off at different locations different days of the week.

Mr. Arnold referenced pay to participate and charging open enrollment students higher fees.

- This is for every student and it is not legal for them to pay more. Once they are accepted as an open enrollment student they are entitled to a free and appropriate education, they are an Ontario student.

Mrs. Carmichael said they have not passed new money in Ontario Schools for 13 years. To do what they've done and add college credit plus programs in 2011, students are entitled to earn 40 free semester hours, teachers were paid to become adjunct professor status, one to one chrome book initiatives where students grade 6 to 12 have personal devices at \$200 apiece. We've done a lot with programs and services but have not passed new money in 13 years and are still the 12th lowest spending in the State of Ohio.

Mr. Medwid said if the school should decide to take any legal action toward suing the state, he advised they speak to their own School Board and their own attorney and not take any legal advice offered by some of the comments this evening.

Mr. Earhart asked if the list of 26 items on the Proposed Reduction Plan equated to \$1.9 million.

- Mrs. Carmichael said it equates to about \$1.7 million and deeper cuts would be needed. Some of those items would be negotiated items with both unions in the spring for every employee.

Mrs. Webb asked if school buses leave the district for open enrollment students.

- No. There are 470 open enrollment students with our district this year and approximately 140 are transported. There are four designated open enrollment locations in the district and there is some room on the buses that go by so they stop. Buses don't ever leave the district to pick up any students.

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Mr. Hellinger asked if open enrollment has been stopped.

- There is a waiting list of about 100. We are at capacity which is another reason we need the levy.
- Open enrollment continues to generate \$2.5 million for the district but it is now maxed out. If open enrollment was eliminated the 6.9 mill levy would be a 15 mill levy because we would have to make up \$2.5 million.
- 1 mill generates about \$280,000 for the district.

Mr. Arnold asked if passing the levy and generating the \$1.9 million would open the capacity for more open enrollment.

- No. Absolutely not. Our buildings are at capacity, our class sizes are the highest they have ever been.
- There is a very small kindergarten class of 120 students so there are still openings in kindergarten. Some classes are 180, 185, and 189.

Mr. Sunderland said he held a meeting last night and asked the School Administration to attend. One thing the citizens of Ontario need to remember is we're not voting for a levy because of Mrs. Carmichael or the School Board, we're voting for a levy because of the students. Make sure to read the facts. He commended Mrs. Carmichael and her staff for what they are doing for our schools and to continue the hard work.

Mr. VanCura stated he is in his 20th year, and final year, on the School Board. If the levy fails in November he will make a motion to sue the State of Ohio.

In response to Mr. Zeiter's question as to how much does the school receive for the 470 open enrollment children, Mrs. Carmichael said, a little over \$6,000 per student, they are generating \$2.5 million.

- Mr. Zeiter asked if they cost \$8,700 each, the \$2.5 million costs us about \$4 million. Mrs. Carmichael said, that is not what it costs per student that is the total cost of everything, that's administrative salaries, teachers' salaries, that is our total cost, our total expenditures. That's not per, that's not what it cost, that's a per pupil calculation.
- When Mr. Zeiter pointed out that it says "district total expenditure per pupil", Mrs. Carmichael replied, "there again Mr. Zeiter, you want to be superintendent, figure it out, but you're not qualified, darn it, darn."

Mr. Hellinger thanked Mrs. Carmichael and the School Board for coming.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Mr. Weidemyre said the Economic Development Committee meeting was rescheduled for October 2, 2019 at 5:30 p.m.

Mr. Sunderland announced the Parks Committee will meet on October 9, 2019 at 6:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers.

MAYOR'S REPORT

Mayor Hutchinson said the Law Director finished a letter pertaining to cleaning out Touby's Run. Mrs. Fraley, who presented a petition during the last meeting requesting the city do improvement work on Touby's Run, was not home but Mayor Hutchinson was able to explain the letter to her son and that the city was not allowed to go on private property to clean out Touby's Run.

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Mayor Hutchinson received another call from a player on the Ontario 1994 State Champion Baseball Team about signage. The Street Superintendent is looking into pricing, the city has a few signs but not enough for every entrance into the city.

SERVICE-SAFETY DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Mr. Wilson had no report.

LAW DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Mr. Medwid had no report.

MISCELLANEOUS MATTERS

A liquor permit request was submitted for Target Corporation to have a C1 license, carry-out beer sales. Hearing no objections, the permit request will be returned to the Ohio Division of Liquor Control.

PUBLIC COMMENTARY

Chris Hiner, 247 Camelot Lane, would like the school district issue to be thought of as an economic development standpoint. There are 266 acres on W. 4th Street everyone wants developed to bring jobs. We need a strong school. He challenged anyone to find a community that is not supportive of their schools that is prospering economically. Mr. Hiner has done research and this is bigger than the school district, it's for what the community stands for, it's the foundation for future jobs, it's the foundation for pride. If we don't stand for our school district in the time of need, I have a hard time believing those students will come back here. Look past the personal vendettas and think about it from an economic development point. All of our communities are only as strong as our schools. It's harder to redevelop 266 acres on W. 4th Street without a prospering school, without a prospering community.

Barbara Jordan, 2363 Forest Hill Circle, came forward to speak for many in the community to ask for support of the Ontario school levy. They moved to Richland County five years ago and the success of the school district influenced their decision. Ontario had a long standing history of academic and educational success and a strong community who supported their schools. The schools are now in a difficult financial situation and despite their best efforts to cut costs and get more funding from the state and gain revenue through open enrollment they are now asking for voters support. Good schools are the cornerstone of a nice community. This is not a school issue, it is a community issue. We voted for you to represent our community. The success of the community and schools are dependent on each other. A public show of support as a Council costs nothing, but lack of support could cost the schools dearly and have a negative ripple effect in the Ontario Community.

Mr. Zeiter explained to Mr. Hiner that he has been in Ontario since 1996, a past founding member and past President of Ontario Youth Sports, this is his 14th year on City Council, three sons graduated from Ontario. There is no vendetta between himself and Mrs. Carmichael, unless she has one, but he refuses to award poor performance. The district is regressing every year as long as she is at the helm. Just facts. Not vendettas. Not anything else.

Mr. Hellinger said he felt open enrollment has been the culprit, when you max out the classrooms everything goes a little bit downhill. He graduated in 1967, his children graduated from Ontario in the 90's, his dad graduated from here, and he supports Ontario schools. Mr. Hellinger thanked everyone for being here.

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Brooke Breitinger, 250 Sugar Maple Lane, came before Council to say her children go to Ontario and she teaches Title 1 Reading. Working in the school has been very eye opening. She has multiple letters she would love to read to them, but can show them, from teachers in the elementary who are begging for their support. She believes in this community, she grew up here and returned after college. Not only is this the best place to live, but the best place to raise kids and send your kids to school.

Mr. Weidemyre said, personally everyone can support the levy, we have some of the greatest schools around, but Council quit doing resolutions because if they do for one they have to do for everyone and they want to be consistent. It's not that Council isn't in support, we made a decision across the board and don't formally endorse levies.

Mrs. Webb added, years ago they agreed that Council would not do resolutions of this kind. It has nothing to do with not supporting the schools, I'm sure we all do, but we told the library when they came with their levy, Children Services with their levy, and we've told the school in the past when they come with their levy. We all support the schools but in no way, shape or form, by not doing a resolution, are we saying we don't support the school, it's just something we don't do.

Craig Hunt, 3680 Park Avenue West, stated his concern was if the school levy passes we would be setting a precedent for the decision makers in Columbus to say, if they are willing to pay, let them pay.

Fire Chief Matt Perry came forward to introduce himself as the new Springfield Township Fire Chief. Previously, he was the Fire Chief outside of Cincinnati and began here June 1, 2019. Because he prefers to be out in the community he is not in his office very often so the best way to contact him is by cell phone.

CONSIDERATION OF ORDINANCES AND RESOLUTIONS

ORDINANCE NO. 19-27

AN ORDINANCE AMENDING ORDINANCE 19-06 KNOWN AS THE PERMANENT APPROPRIATIONS ORDINANCE FOR 2019 BY MAKING ADDITIONAL APPROPRIATIONS IN THE GENERAL FUND, THE SPECIAL REVENUE FUND, THE ENTERPRISE FUND, THE TRUST AND AGENCY FUND, AND THE EMPLOYEE DEDUCTIONS FUND.

Mr. Zeiter moved to suspend the reading of Ordinance No. 19-27 on three separate days, second by Mr. Weidemyre. Seven members cast their votes Aye, zero Nay, and the motion passed. Mr. Zeiter read Ordinance No. 19-27 for the first time, by title only.

Mr. Zeiter moved to adopt Ordinance No. 19-27, second by Mr. Weidemyre. Hearing no discussion, seven members cast their votes Aye, zero Nay, and Ordinance No. 19-27 was adopted.

At 8:00 p.m., there being no further business to come before the meeting, the same was adjourned upon a motion by Mr. Sunderland, second by Mr. Arnold and the motion passed unanimously.

James A. Hellinger, President of Council

Cathy VanAuker, Clerk of Council