
CITY OF CARLISLE COUNCIL – WORK SESSION MINUTES
Tuesday, August 8, 2023
CARLISLE COUNCIL CHAMBERS - CARLISLE, OHIO

Mayor Winkler called the Carlisle, Ohio City Council Work Session of Tuesday, August 8, 2023, to order at 6:00pm in the Council Chambers at the Carlisle City Hall building, 760 Central Avenue, Carlisle, Ohio with the following members in attendance:

Council Attendees:

Mr. Tim Humphries

Mr. Chris Stivers

Mr. Michael Kilpatrick

Mr. William Bicknell

Mrs. Debbie Kemper

Mr. Jason Faulkner

Mr. Randy Winkler, Mayor

Staff members present: City Manager Chris Lohr

Discussion Items:

New Finance Director

Mr. Lohr introduced the City's new Finance Director, Kristina Cooper. Her office will be on the second floor as he saw value in having the finance team all on one floor. Council welcomed her and indicated they are very excited she's here.

Personnel Manual, Ordinance Updates

Mr. Lohr wanted to discuss the following items that either he has noticed or Kristina has brought to his attention since she started.

1. Our Charter requires certain employees to be bonded, specifically employees that Council identifies. This helps to protect the City if there is any negligence or theft. Currently the way we do this is Council identifies those employees by incorporating the position titles and bond amounts into the Personnel Manual. Bonded employees are currently the City Manager, Director of Finance, and Income Tax Administrator and coverage amounts are \$35,000. The last update to our policy was done in 2007, which may explain why the coverage amounts are so low. He reached out to the liability insurance people at the Ohio Plan, and they said back in 2019 the State passed a bill where cities do not have to bond individuals separately if they don't want to. We now have the option to incorporate them into what is called an "Employee Dishonesty and Faithful Performance of Duty Coverage" policy.
2. We currently have a \$250,000 policy to cover everyone other than the bonded employees. If we decided to move forward with this, we would need to pass an ordinance that states this is how we want to take care of liability coverage rather than doing a bond for each employee. We would then specify the City Manager, Finance Director, and anyone else in a position of particular importance with authority over money, but all would be included on the same General Liability policy.
3. Minimally, he recommends upping coverage amounts to help protect the City from malfeasance. He recommends moving ahead with what the Ohio Plan suggested, taking away the individual bonds and just covering everyone on the policy as a whole. Mr. Humphries asked if this type of umbrella is typical of what most communities do, and whether it is necessary or not. Mr. Lohr stated it is not necessary but we now have other options that until 2019, were not previously available to us as a City. It is very common for municipalities to have individuals bonded. He believes that we need to get higher amounts as the current \$35,000 is not in line today. The Ohio Plan rep was recommending \$250,000 per individual. Mr. Humphries asked if there was a

breakdown on cost differences and Mr. Lohr stated it is basically the same. It would be simpler to maintain administratively to do it through the policy, but it is not a terribly complicated process. However, it would be the cleanest way to do it. We could continue to do the bonds like we are doing, but he would recommend an ordinance to up the coverage amounts, or we can go ahead and have everyone covered under our General Liability Policy.

Mr. Humphries said if we go back in time where our Service Director was guilty of stealing from Carlisle, the terrible thing is they only got him for less than \$4,000. It might have been \$10,000 in value, but they could only narrow down \$4,000 worth, so is this something that would help cover the City? Mr. Lohr responded yes, as he understands it, and if someone were going to steal funds, it would be quite easy for them to go over the \$35,000 limit. For instance an incident in Middletown was quite a bit more than that. He thinks the cleanest way to do it is to incorporate everything into the General Liability Policy that we have at the \$250,000 mark, if that is agreeable to Council. Several indicated it was agreeable and a few asked if that number should be raised to like \$350,000. Mr. Lohr will check back with the insurance company as they had recommended \$250,000 but he will inquire about best practices. Mayor Winkler stated bigger communities with a larger budget may need a higher number.

4. Mr. Kilpatrick asked what checks and balances can be put into place before a loss reaches \$250,000. Mayor Winkler stated he was surprised to hear that the Utility Clerk and Court Clerk weren't bonded because they both handle money. Mr. Lohr stated those positions were actually covered prior to the last update which was made in 2007. Before that, it used to be the Mayor, Utility Clerk, Mayor's Court Clerk and Building Permits Clerk had bonds in addition to the City Manager, Finance Director and Income Tax Administrator. He would guess that they were able to achieve some of that coverage through the liability policy the last time they renewed but he does not know for sure why the changes occurred back then.

Credit Card Policy

1. In 2018 the State set regulations that each municipality has to pass a credit card policy. That was taken care of for the City. The current policy we have in place is what the Auditor calls "The Custody and Control Model". It's the more restrictive of the two models the Auditor issued as guidance. We currently have two credit cards that are maintained in a locked box and controlled by the Finance Director. It has become clear to him how that creates some challenges, especially when we were doing National Night Out purchases, when the Service Department needed to make purchases, and when the Fire Department needed to purchase new appliances from Lowe's for the new J.E.M.S. station.
2. He would like to propose changing to a "Compliance Officer Model." It is what he is used to at the City of Riverside and what Kristina is accustomed to. She served as the Compliance Officer previously in Middletown. The change would allow us to issue a credit card to each Department Head, so that any purchase for that department would be the responsibility of the Police Chief, Fire Chief, or Service Director. We would then designate a Compliance Officer which is part of the "checks and balances" system mentioned earlier. This person cannot be the Finance Director or a credit card holder. Quarterly, this person would be required to put together a report to ensure we are consistent with our policy and with State law. Beyond those checks and balances, every month when we receive the invoice for the credit cards, we are making sure that each purchase has a Purchase Order approved and a receipt. There are a lot of checks and balances in this plan that he believes would keep us safe and help to regulate spending, but he thinks we should extend some flexibility in allowing Department Heads to be able to have their own credit card.

Mr. Bicknell asked will there be an established amount that they can use on their own without prior approval? Mr. Lohr stated yes. Right now our policy is part of our ordinances, so we would have to repeal that and replace it and set new parameters in the policy. What he has typically seen is \$500 or more on a purchase

would require a Purchase Order; any amount under that you could do a multi-vendor or a blanket Purchase Order. Any amount over \$500 would have to get a Purchase-Specific Purchase Order, and then we would put a maximum such as a monthly amount or specify the maximum card limit, which is usually \$7,500. Mr. Lohr stated neither of these items are an emergency. He would plan a First Reading at the next meeting, and then it could be wrapped up by the end of September. Mayor Winkler asked if it is possible to do it as a Single Reading and get it done in 30 days to speed up the process. Mr. Lohr stated we could. Mr. Bicknell pointed out the only downside he sees to that, and it is just a perception thing, that even on a Single Reading a lot of the community does not really grasp Single vs. Emergency but yet we are passing something that allows more hands accessing the City's funds. Mr. Humphries stated it's not an emergency anyway and there are at least two cards sitting in the box. Mr. Lohr agreed. He and Kristina are working on getting new credit cards issued under the City Manager's name and Finance Director. They can make do with that until we get through three readings. Mrs. Kemper asked if those cards are through People's Bank. Mr. Lohr stated they are not; they are through Bank of America, which is something he plans to look into as he's not sure there is any benefit to having a separate relationship with a different bank.

Income Tax Ordinance Language Update

1. Mr. Lohr stated the Income Tax Ordinance that we have on our books is something the State specifies the language on and there have been some updates in recent years that have not been incorporated into our Income Tax Ordinance. He doesn't have the specific details on it at this time, but he has asked the law director to start drafting an updated ordinance with the required changes from the State. He is hoping in September he can bring that to Council to discuss it further.

Employee Benefits Considerations

1. Mr. Lohr stated when he started here, he discovered that we have two different Vacation Accrual Schedules; one for Department Heads and one for everyone else. That is not something he is used to and his first impression was it doesn't feel right to him because the Schedule for Department Heads is more generous than what it is for all non-union employees. He also discovered we are covering the employee OPERS contribution portion for Department Heads, which is a great benefit, but we are not covering it for anyone else. If you're not familiar with OPERS, the way it works is the City contributes 14% of the salary. That's our contribution, and then there is an employee contribution which is 10%. It's been an interesting discovery process here because our Personnel Manual has had some updates over the last 15-16 years that have not actually been incorporated into the document itself. The Personnel Manual that he received when he started was very old. There have been changes that were made that actually were not incorporated into the text going back to 2007. Prior to that we were picking up that 10% employee contribution to OPERS for all non-union employees, Department Heads and Council only. In 2008, that was changed to where it was only for the Department Heads. So for instance, we are doing that for the Police Chief but not the Police Officers, so there is disparity in the benefits we are providing for employees. He has noticed a little bit of angst from some of the employees as a result.

He would like, to the extent that we can, try to align this altogether. He believes we should have one Vacation Accrual Schedule and make it the same for all positions. For example, we would specify 0-5 years is two weeks for everybody; 5-10 years is 2.5 or 3 weeks so that everyone gets the same so there's not that feeling of management is getting better than we are. That wouldn't affect the Police Officers though because their schedule is their schedule in their union contract.

In terms of picking up the employee pension, there is a cost associated with that but he believes it is worth discussing and considering. Right now, we are picking up the employee contribution for the City Manager, Finance Director, Police Chief, Community Development Director and Service Director, so there is a portion of salaries that are already being covered. If we were to do that for everybody else, it would be an additional \$80,000 annually based on the actual pay rates of employees right now.

Mr. Faulkner asked if it is in the PD contract? Mr. Lohr stated it is not. That is something we would have to figure out there because if we were to do this for the Police Officers he would have to sit down with them and either do a Memorandum of Understanding or go ahead and start renegotiating their contract. Mr. Faulkner stated you're basically giving a 10% raise to everybody. Mr. Lohr said yes. Mrs. Kemper stated the county she worked for picked it up for everyone and they were all on the same level and the Commissioners approved it every year. Mr. Lohr stated where he spent most of his career on the north side of Dayton it is not common for the municipalities to pick up the employee portion of it but in this area it seems to be very common. Franklin picks up the 10% for non-union, civilians, and for police and fire and he knows Monroe does it as well. Mrs. Kemper added it's one of the reasons employees want to work for the government is to get that perk.

He said although it is \$80,000, it represents approximately a 6% increase of total personnel wages. He will say there's a benefit to doing this and it's not the same as giving a 10% wage increase. It's actually to the City's benefit to do it this way rather than in wages because it's not equivalent to increases in wages because you have all these roll-ups. For instance, a 10% wage increase ends up being more like a 15-20% wage increase when you calculate all the roll-ups, so it's not the same as giving everybody a 10% raise – at least in what it costs us. He would welcome discussion on what everybody thinks.

Mr. Stivers stated his thought is he knows that we put the general fund levy on the back burner and there was a reason we were talking about it in the first place, so if we're going to increase our output every year by \$80,000 then how much sooner are we going to have to revisit that original discussion? Mr. Faulkner agreed this matter has to be considered thoughtfully and diligently but not necessarily decide today. Taking Police Officers for example, they are probably the lowest paid in Warren County, and that would be a nice benefit to get. He is supportive of it but there are cost considerations. Mr. Lohr said it definitely changes our financial outlook, although \$80,000 is not a huge increase to what we look at when just looking at personnel numbers. Mr. Stivers asked about a gradual increase. Instead of 10% all at once for instance this year we do 2%, next year we do 4% to get up to the right amount. Mr. Lohr thinks any move in that direction would be a good thing to try to get us on parity with all the employees we have, and that it would certainly be appreciated by the non-union staff and Police Officers.

Mr. Bicknell works for a billion dollar company and said the Vice President of all sales and procurement is under the same vacation structure as the \$10 an hour production person just starting his 90 days, so he is 100% on board with starting that right away as that can create a divide between your management team and workers. Mr. Lohr stated that could be done by ordinance, just amending the Personnel Manual to eliminate the extra Department Head list that we have and make a consolidated list. Mrs. Kemper asked for clarification when the Department Heads started, they got more vacation than say a clerk? She indicated everyone was the same where she was at. Mr. Bicknell said their accrual rate is higher. Mr. Stivers asked what is the policy as to whether we allow Vacation to roll-over? Is it a use it, or lose it? Mr. Lohr stated it is a combination. You are permitted to roll over and he thinks it's 40 hours of vacation per year. Mr. Lohr stated he checked Resolutions and Ordinances for amendments to the current Personnel Manual going back to 2003. There may have been updates prior to that, but the point where he stopped researching was 20 years back. Mr. Bicknell asked about sick time. Mr. Lohr said the State mandates every public employee earns 10 hours per month and it all can be carried over. Mr. Faulkner said he would be curious as to how much somebody could cash out at retirement because you don't want to get bankrupted with somebody working 30 years but never taking a sick day. Mr. Lohr said there is a cap but he didn't know the details for sure but he's thinking it's like 12,000 hours and if you

go over that they require you to convert that to vacation leave and then you would either use it or lose it. Mr. Faulkner suggests looking at all the different elements and giving them one ordinance. Mr. Lohr stated Chapter 9 of the Personnel Manual is the section on Leave. He would want to revise that entire chapter at the same time. Mr. Faulkner said we should probably look at another municipality to see what's competitive because you have to attract the talent. Mr. Lohr stated we're going to have to go back out to the voters at some point and ask for an increase if we want to continue with Police operations the way they are or expand operations. We have to keep in mind that it may not look right that we're increasing benefits while asking for more money, but at the same time we do have to remain competitive. Franklin next door is doing 10% for Police Officers. Mayor Winkler stated we have to remain competitive. Mr. Lohr agreed and said it is a very competitive market out there for all employees, but especially for Police and Fire.

Mr. Lohr summarized we want to do the Vacation schedule, but what information could he bring back for discussion regarding picking up the OPERS contribution? Mr. Bicknell proposed looking at three years. Looking at our total budget and then do three options. If we did the full 10% at once, what would that look like in the total budget for three years. If we did 50% what would it look like, and then if we did 1/4%. If we did 50%, we would carry 50% the first year and 50% the second year. If we do a quarter, it would take us four years to reach that 10%. Mr. Stivers asked if in addition to that how will that affect when we have to go back to the voters. Mr. Faulkner said perhaps Mr. Lohr would read another policy and find we are saving another \$100,000 somewhere. Mr. Lohr said he is optimistic, although he doesn't know for sure that he can get us into some health insurance that may save us some and the same thing with Worker's Comp. Although we don't pay a whole lot in Worker's Comp premiums but he doesn't know if we're doing everything that we can to get discounts and rebates there so there may be some savings in that part. Mrs. Kemper said sometimes with a small number of employees it is difficult to get good discounts and benefits. She asked if we could go in with another municipality, city, or the county for the health plan or if that is even allowed? Mr. Lohr responded that is an option, though his first thought is to look at a larger pool of government entities like the Ohio Benefits Cooperative or the Center for Local Government. If we could get into one of those groups, that would be fantastic. He knows for certain that the plans we have available to us now are a lower quality at a higher cost than what the Ohio Benefits Cooperative is getting right now. That's because they are a pool of like 1,200 people when right now we're at 15 enrolled in health insurance. Mr. Humphries said he remembers several years ago they were asked to decide to go to an HSA. It may have been the right thing to do back then, but is there opportunity to look at that today as part of the program? Mr. Lohr stated the way it works in the Ohio Benefits Cooperative is they don't require every jurisdiction to have the exact same plan. They have a menu of plans like here are your PPO options 1 through 5, and here are your HSA options, 1 through 5 and you pick which ones you want. It seems like when HSAs first started to be common in government there were big savings there. Mr. Lohr stated there's not much cost difference in the cost for us providing a PPO plan or an HSA plan to an employee here. There's been 5-10% increases over 30 years so it is very expensive.

Mr. Lohr stated one of the other things he wanted to discuss is we currently have in our Personnel Manual what's called a Spousal Carve Out. That means we're going to guarantee insurance coverage to our employee, but if their spouse or dependent has access to other insurance, like if they have a job that offers the spouse insurance, then we can enforce we're not going to provide insurance to your spouse. While he hears that's very common in the private sector, it is sort of mixed in the public sector. He has seen that in some places. He would like to take that away and give people the option to have their spouse on the same coverage as they have. What he would like to do is maybe get some information from our insurance broker and ask what something like that might cost us, and then consider that. But at the same time, offer a waiver payment which would be we will give you some sort of stipend, like \$200 per month if you don't take our insurance. Mr. Faulkner said more like \$75. Mr. Lohr said he used \$200 as an example as that's what he's seen at some other jurisdictions. But when you consider that the City could pay \$20,000 on a family plan, then paying somebody \$200 per month not to take our insurance and push them off on their spouse's insurance with the

spouse presents a potential for some cost savings. That is something he would like to bring back to Council for further discussion. Mr. Faulkner said when he starts looking into whether we can get into one of these co-op groups, that obviously would affect the price of that too. Mr. Lohr said it would, and that is going to be a challenge. People are going to look at us as a group and say how risky are they, and if we happen to have healthy employees at the time when we do the health questionnaires we're probably going to get in somewhere, but if we happen to be in a time period where we have a lot of claims which happens, then we may have to wait it out. But we will play the long game and make sure we get into a group at some point because there are a lot of long term benefits.

City Manager Goal Setting

He was thinking sometime next month and perhaps it could be done at the Work Session. Mr. Bicknell felt it would be better to do that at an off-Council night because he doesn't want a time constraint of 60 minutes as it needs to be a very open dialogue between Council and the Manager because it needs to be able to flow and not be condensed. Mayor Winkler suggested a Saturday morning. Mr. Lohr said we could also do a 1st or 3rd Tuesday, depending on what works best. Mr. Kilpatrick said what if we start at 5:00 and bought pizza and could just dive into it. They decided on Saturday, September 16th at 9:00 AM though Mr. Kilpatrick has to be somewhere else by 1:00 PM. Tables and chairs in a circle in Council.

Mr. Bicknell said it has now been two years in a row we have not had a retreat. With that being said, he would like to suggest a January retreat as we don't have any committee meetings that month as the first meeting in January is always the reorganization for Council and once they have the goal setting with the City Manager then that's 90 days for the City Manager to be able to take the goal settings and move some things forward. Hopefully have all the staff hired and the new system in place. That way when they have the retreat in January, invite any of the employees that want to come and they've had enough time to get their feet wet as new employees and those director positions are able to have something to provide. Hopefully we can identify that January date next month. Mr. Kilpatrick has travel in January and will try to pin that down and get back to the group with a tentative date to pencil in as soon as possible.

Mr. Lohr stated we were discussing having a strategic planning session in early November maybe on a Saturday with the intent we were going to bring staff to that so do we want to ask employees to two different sessions? *[audio got feedback and was indiscernible]*

Mr. Lohr's last topic is parade candy. For better or worse, he has told the parade organizer, Brian Morris, that we're okay with throwing candy this year. With that said, he has told them we need to be very careful about the kids being around vehicles and he asked them to help clean up with the candy afterwards. He is considering this a trial run. If we have a really big issue and see that kids are not being safe or we have a huge problem with trash pick up afterwards then we can reevaluate it, but every time he talks to someone even back to his interview feedback has always been can we throw candy this year. Mr. Stivers asked if the parade route remains the same. Mr. Lohr said yes, it is staying the same. Mr. Bicknell asked how do we go about conversating about the route as he thinks a new route would be beneficial because 1) we cross over railroad tracks and that's iffy, and 2) the only reason people park mostly on Park because that is where the parking is, if we were to move it through the loop at the school on Jamaica and Fairview and you start and finish where you end, there is plenty of parking and ability to see your kids and 3) it would eliminate shutting down a State Route. He's not sure how that process goes as he's never been part of a reroute of a parade or who all gets involved. Mr. Lohr explained there is a Parade Permit process and from what he understands it was basically a sit down with Brian Morris or whoever was organizing it and ask if anything had changed on it and then Julie would just sign off on it. He feels we can do better. In talking with Chief Rogers yesterday we're thinking at least three months in advance we need to have a sit down with the organizer so we can talk about the parade and about Railroad Days because some of what he is used to with big events is a Fire Chief and Police Chief

being able to look at a drawn layout of an event and can I get my fire engine in there if I need to and can I get an ambulance in there? He thinks they are not accustomed to doing that level of a review and this one kind of crept up on him this year so he's just going to do it this year the way it's been done in the past but next year he wants it to be a little more formal and a little more proactive. Mr. Humphries added there will be two more parades this year which is Powder Puff which is a Saturday morning, and then Homecoming which is a Thursday in September or October managed through the school district. Mr. Bicknell asked if everything was set for Railroad Days because Brian indicated they were playing tag. Mr. Lohr stated he has been able to sit down with him and he knows Brian and both the have connected and set up a meeting after the parade to go over everything safety wise about the fireworks. Mr. Bicknell asked where the fireworks will be set off and Mr. Humphries said his understanding is at the old playground behind Alton Brown School, the most northwest corner of the school property.

Mr. Lohr said he knows this time he just said we're going to do it this way, but there are probably other municipalities that have ordinances on the books on how to deal with parades so if you think it's something that Council and the community would want to weigh in on, we could put together an ordinance and address it that way. Mr. Bicknell said he thinks the issue we had prior to this is that we had a language change to a permit that no one on Council knew about and that caught them off guard. If the City Manager and Chiefs have conversations after say you've had a year's worth of events, and he's always for improving processes, but if they have those conversations, he does not feel it needs an ordinance, but then at the next meeting give an FYI update that these are a couple of things we want to change due to safety concerns so that way if Council is asked by a citizen or an internet warrior decides to hone in on a typing spree that Council is at least aware.

Mr. Bicknell brought up Mr. Lohr's last email regarding Dacraft. He said what was explained to him was not what was actually written. Mr. Lohr said he is piecing together from prior emails and documents that what he is looking at is the approval that Cathy issued, and it says 30 days after the Certificate of Occupancy is issued. The problem with that language is you do your building permit, you finish construction, which could be two years. Mr. Faulkner asked if he had even applied for a permit yet. Mr. Lohr said he'd have to check on that. Mr. Humphries stated from his understanding that he wants to add on to the end where the trailers are but then he also wants to add on to the rear. Mr. Lohr confirmed that is correct. Mr. Bicknell said the problem with all of that is, and he's been a heavy push on this for a long time. He was told that the owner understood there was a date for everything that needed to get him into compliance and that he signed off that by a certain date he would meet each requirement and that he understood there would be consequences afterwards. To his knowledge, we are way past the point where those trailers should have already been gone, and he personally would like us to be issuing violations because he's not going to do anything if we just continue to walk past it and act like it's not there. Mr. Lohr would like to have a conversation with him. He will do a follow up call tomorrow. He had left him a message last week and he stopped by his office and spoke with his operations manager. He will have a conversation with him and say I don't know what's going on with your construction, but we've got to take care of these trailers. He's assuming he is using them for storage. Mr. Kilpatrick stated it is literally the absolute cheapest storage out there. Mr. Bicknell added for a 53' drive-in it's \$1,200 per month to rent them. Mr. Bicknell said he did see though that since Mr. Lohr sent Council the email regarding an interaction he had with him that the sign no longer resides there.

Mr. Lohr stated after that interaction on Friday, it's sort of funny because the other Cris keeps getting blamed for stuff that Chris Lohr is doing. The produce stand owner came in yesterday and proceeded to give Cris Kelly a hard time because she thought it was him but we sat down and talked it over with her. The conversation was I'm sorry – I know you were allowed to do this previously but this is what the code says and he would help her do anything that she can to advertise her business, within the confines of the code. What he mostly encouraged her to do is to talk to the Township and see if it's prohibited over there as I don't have any authority outside of our jurisdiction, and if it works over there then he doesn't have a problem with it. Mr.

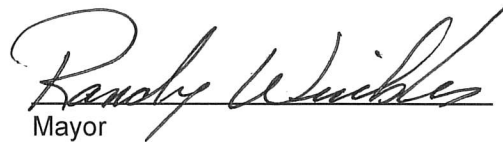
Kilpatrick asked if the township is on the other side of the intersection? Mr. Lohr stated there is one corner which would be southeast that is township. Mr. Humphries asked if the sign was still on the utility pole? Mr. Lohr stated yes, it is and I told them they needed to be taken down by the end of the week. Ms. Kemper stated they are in the township so they do need to have a conversation with the township. She didn't have a problem with the sign being there but it is against our ordinance. Mr. Lohr stated the issue then comes up if she's allowed to do it then why can't everybody else do the same thing, so that's where it becomes problematic.

Adjournment:

With no further business, Council adjourned the meeting by voice vote.

Meeting adjourned at 7:04 p.m.

Date: 8/22/2023


Mayor

Attest: 
Clerk of Council