

STREETS, BUILDINGS & GROUNDS COMMITTEE MINUTES
OF NOVEMBER 18, 2019

Municipal Council of the City of Vermilion
Municipal Complex, 685 Decatur Street, Vermilion, Ohio 44089

In Attendance: *Vermilion City Council: Steve Herron, President of Council; Monica Stark, Council at Large; John Gabriel, Ward One; Frank Loucka, Ward Two; Steve Holovacs, Ward Three; Barb Brady, Ward Four; Brian Holmes, Ward Five*

Administration: Jim Forthofer, Mayor; Tony Valerius, Service Director; Police Chief, Chris Hartung; Chris Howard, City Engineer; Amy Hendricks, Finance Director

Call to Order: Frank Loucka, Chairman, RESOLVED THAT this Streets, Buildings, & Grounds Committee comprised of the committee of the whole does now come to order.

TOPIC ONE: **Sunnyside Road Railroad Crossing Closure (Presented by Resident Jim Machkoff)**

S. Herron explained that Mr. Machkoff addressed City Council at their last meeting to propose a solution to an issue regarding the railroad and the amount of noise they make when they blow their horns. He said the city investigated this and noted that Mayor Forthofer would address this issue further.

Mayor Forthofer said he received a phone call from Mr. Machkoff on October 18 regarding a proposal to create a quiet zone on Vermilion Road by closing Sunnyside Road. He had said the railroad would be receptive to supporting the work to create the quiet zone if Sunnyside Road was closed. He also received a phone call on the same day from Matt Deitrich, Executive Director of the Ohio Rail Development Commission. He advised him they would need to conduct a quiet zone program through the Ohio Rail Development Committee and the Vermilion Road crossing would require a quad gate and loop sensor with an estimated cost between \$200,000 - \$400,000. ODOT could help with the cost if Sunnyside Road is closed permanently. Upon review of the impact this closing would have on Sunnyside, Mayor Forthofer said he drove around from the south side of Sunnyside to the north side of Sunnyside and measured 5.45 miles in this loop. There is also a low clearance area at the Claus Road Underpass which is 11' 10". He said it would be difficult for some commercial trucks. He said the West River Road overpass is 12' and they have had some legendary crunches there. He asked the city engineer to investigate the traffic counts on Sunnyside Road and there is about 700 – 1,200 cars per day traveling this road. He said Vermilion Road has 2,000 cars per day and Baumhart has 8,000 cars per day. Also, there is a high residential concentration on Sunnyside (Shady Lake and Roanoke) who would travel south but would be unable to if Sunnyside was closed.

Mayor Forthofer conveyed that Mr. Deitrich said they maintain an Ohio Hazardous Crossing Ranking that is ranked upon the density of population and the number of accidents that have happened on those crossings. In fact, Sunnyside Road ranks 470 out of 5,734 crossings. The Ohio Rail Development Commission is a State Agency and not part of the railroad and Mr. Dietrich assured him there is no target list of closings. They just help gather the data to help communities do what they want to do. They steadfastly respect the rights of the municipalities.

He said to close the Sunnyside Road crossing it would mean there is no north-south corridor between Highbridge and Baumhart Road. It would have impact on first responder capabilities. The city celebrated the opening of Highbridge Road. With Liberty Avenue N.E. this is the economic development target and Sunnyside Road is an avenue too. The Claus Road detour would be impractical for some commercial trucks.

T. Valerius conveyed that ODOT classifies Sunnyside as a “major collector” which makes it available for MPO funding. Last year the city received some MPO funding for repaving a mile section of Sunnyside Road that was on both sides of the tracks. If the city closed the crossing, then he has a feeling they would retract this funding.

Mayor Forthofer said his recommendation is to not pursue the closing of the Sunnyside Road crossing.

Keith Sergeant of 790 Sunnyside Road feels the closing would impact him because he does get on Route 2 off Jerusalem Road. He understands where they are coming from but questioned if there were other alternatives as it seems extreme to close the road if there are other things, they can do to eliminate the noise. J. Gabriel said a fundraiser between \$200,000 - \$400,000 would do the job. K. Sergeant said to keep Sunnyside open but not have the train noise, they would have to do the same thing on Vermilion Road and Sunnyside. His vote was to keep it open.

B. Holmes said this was just a suggestion from Mr. Machkoff and the State Agency has no hit list and Sunnyside is not on the list, so Council just gave this resident an opportunity to speak and give his input. He said this being his ward hits hard because he uses it daily on a personal level and as a first responder, so this would impair him from getting to where he needs to go, so he would absolutely be against the closing of Sunnyside Road.

B. Brady said they had looked at another possibility years ago by putting barriers down the middle of the road on Main Street and West River. However, they couldn't do this because of the width of the road. She didn't know if these would be options to look at on Sunnyside Road.

S. Herron thanked Jim Machkoff for addressing this to council. He appreciates the fact that he brought this before Council in trying to solve problems, even if they don't move forward on this with regards to the safety issue and the number of citizens involved.

Jim Machkoff said he only made this proposal to Council for Council to do whatever they choose. He lives at the end of one of the canals and the sound comes down the water. Either way, it's up to the Council and the Mayor to decide what they want to do, and he has no ill-feelings about it one way or the other. He said it is quite a chunk of money they are trying to throw at the city. S. Herron said nothing was free though.

Tom Ruh of 2835 Shady Lake Drive said he has been a resident at this address since 1973 and they do hear train noise and engine noise. He feels they are hearing a noise concern hidden behind a questionable safety concern and they would like to see this crossing remain open.

F. Loucka said there is another method by which there is a stationary whistle (direction whistle), so it's directed only to the road. According to their projection, it greatly reduces the area that the trains are heard, and they're controlled. It's an automatic stationary whistle. He would like to do some research on this and come back to the committee to see what the feasibility might be.

J. Gabriel said he works near the tracks every day and appreciates J. Machkoff's point of view, but he doesn't want to trade roads for this. It seems unfair they would have to trade a road to get what the people would expect when using their property without having their minds blown out by a train horn. He was all for doing research to lessen the train noise in the community.

TOPIC TWO: Fire House I Plans

Mayor Forthofer brought the Fire House drawings for council to review. The drawings are still a work in progress. He said the drawings that have surfaced recently on Facebook are the original drawings from when they originally proposed the Fire House, but these aren't the most current plans.

TOPIC THREE: Cell Phone/Dead Zone Update

Mayor Forthofer said he has been talking with Verizon Wireless about the possibility of improving the city's dead zone. Through some examinations by the administration, they concluded the dead zone is significant (2.5-mile area of no coverage to bad cell phone reception) which includes about 3,000 of the city's population (1/3 of the total population of Vermilion). He has been sending a lot of correspondence to Verizon to be the squeaky wheel. His main line to them is the importance of restoring reliable communication and this dead zone cannot be overstated. It's no exaggeration to say that the lack of basic communication compromises public safety, and directly impacts the city's economic development. He got as far as the engineering department as he wanted to get up to the executives in Ohio Verizon.

He said nobody hates Facebook more than he does, but it did turn out useful in this effort. He put up a post asking residents of Vermilion to tell the City about their cell phone experience in the area. They received 264 posts, all of which reinforced what they already know. To travel east of the bridge or west of Baumhart Road, people start

running into dead zone areas, all the way to Hilltop and further on. He downloaded and printed the responses and sent them to Verizon and last week on November 12, Verizon asked for a meeting and the engineers came in with some business representatives to meet with the City's IT department and Sgt. Reising from the Police Department, and they came up with a plan in writing. They said the Vice President of Verizon Ohio has put the city's dead zone (Vermilion on the Lake) in the top 10 zones to be corrected in Ohio. Their first step in 2020 is to put a co locate booster on the macro tower which is on Overlook and Liberty Avenue (located behind Nick's Auto Body and not too far from Fire Station #2). The real estate department is negotiating with the tower owner to co locate this booster. This apparently was attempted in 2015 and they got building permits and secured the rights to do this, and then it dropped for some reason. In 2020, they hope to conclude the deal to put the booster on the monopole which should greatly improve the reception in this whole area. Plan B if they can't reach an agreement on this monopole will be to install five or six small cells along Liberty, which will basically have the same affect. However, they must secure the property and build this themselves or attach them to existing structures. This wouldn't be able to get done until 2021. He said Verizon has pledged to call him every month to update him. In addition, they will immediately revive the 2015 plan to locate small cells and boosters on city property. They are thinking about putting some on top of City Hall and the navigational aid to help boost the area. They did a drive around and measured how bad it is and agreed it's bad, but some of it can be improved through existing technology.

M. Stark thanked the Mayor for all the work he has done as it will greatly improve the life of the community.

Chairman Frank Loucka adjourned the meeting after no further discussion came before the committee.

Next meeting: December 9, 2019 @ 7:00 p.m.

Gwen Fisher, Certified Municipal Clerk
