

Community Betterment Committee
January 25, 2016

Present: Committee Members Buxton, LeJeune and Sovinski; Council Members Clausen, Fleck, and Scott; Mayor Hazel; Law Director Moore; Safety-Service Director Hitchcock; Auditor Strawn; Kevin Sandler, WCSM; and Bill Kincaid, The Daily Standard.

CM Buxton called the meeting to order at 6:06 pm.

Director Hitchcock reported the City owned Hierholzer Street property is not plotted, therefore would need to be sold as one lot. Mayor Hazel stated the purchaser of the property could subdivide the lot, if desired. Director Hitchcock explained that the lot would need to be put up for public sale. CM Clausen asked if the trailer park owners could buy the property and expand the trailer court. Director Hitchcock responded, yes. CM Sovinski stated the property is set up for 3 building lots because the utilities are already there, therefore they are essentially developed lots. Director Hitchcock reported the value is set at \$37,500. CM Scott asked if a portion of land across the street could also be sold. Administration stated they would not have a problem selling that portion off. Director Hitchcock stated there are plans on the north side of Hierholzer that shows a cul-de-sac. CM Sovinski explained the north property has primary access off of North Street. Mayor Hazel stated if there is a potential for the City to build something here, we should keep it. CM LeJeune proposed to be sufficient with time and energy, the initial south property should be sold. Until a recreation area is expanded for drone usage, the City should be cautious of selling off property. Mayor Hazel stated 1.1 acres should initially be sold and the sale of the other land could be approached at a later date. CM LeJeune stated since the utilities are set up, Administration should take it to public auction twice at this price, if necessary. CM LeJeune made a recommendation to bring an Ordinance to Council authorizing the sale of this property, seconded by Sovinski. The recommendation passed with a roll call vote 3-0 Aye.

Police Chief Wale stated this next discussion has nothing to do with the House of Hope, which he fully supports. He reported that the common pleas court judges from Auglaize, Mercer and Van Wert Counties held a meeting for discussion of a half-way house. This is a facility to bring persons transitioning from prison back into society. Typically people can come and go as they please. The State would contract with a nonprofit organization for staffing and operation of the facility. They would need to have existing real estate and have a preference of locating in Celina or St Marys. The State would pay the organization \$60.00 per day per inmate. They would need to house a minimum of 30 to 35 inmates in order to make a profit. Mercer County last year brought back 17 people from prison, which is well below what is needed to keep the facility in operation. They would need to expand to further counties to keep the facility populated. His concerns are these people would stay in the area. Every halfway house in the State of Ohio has drugs in the facility. The judges want this to give them an alternative to sending people to prison and the State of Ohio wants to see a reduction in the prison populations. He believes these people need some kind of assistance, but his job is to look out for the safety and welfare of the citizens of Celina. We need to help our own. He believes the 100 plus people that this would bring to Celina needs to reach out to their own communities for assistance. He will continue to attend meetings and state Celina's opposition to this.

Mayor Hazel stated Mercer County has done well economically. This is a contracted facility and any problems as a result of the facility would have to be handled by the local police department. In 2015, there was a Celina man in a halfway house in Lima that overdosed, which proves there are drugs in the houses.

CM Sovinski stated the community cannot be made any better by this proposal. A halfway house requires employment, and the county has one of the lowest unemployment rates. There would not be

a lot of jobs available to them. He does not believe what is being proposed fits well with what Celina has to offer.

CM LeJeune stated initially he was skeptical of how successful the House of Hope would be. This home is faith based and not a mandate of the State. Celina has a drug problem already. Over 300 men between the ages of 18 to 60 are permanently disabled. Our initial obligation is to our current problems. There would be an increase in drug problems and the State would not provide more policing assistance. It would be Celina's responsibility to bear the burden of the additional problems this would bring.

Chief Wale reported if this not accepted on the local level (i.e. Mayor and Council) it would not be put here. Once the State decides to move it will go fast. If it is located in St. Marys, Celina will still get spillover problems.

CM Clausen stated there has been success with the House of Hope and Foundations. Mayor Hazel stated putting drug users in jail does not solve the problem. Halfway houses offer a potential benefit to give them a chance, but he does not believe it would be beneficial to the community. The larger employers have positions unfilled because they do not have applicants passing the drug tests.

CM Fleck stated the Council has a duty to be informed about this and make a statement to oppose.

CM Scott stated he is not against these people getting assistance and getting a second chance. He asked what the City of Celina would get to do this. Chief Wale replied nothing. He stated bringing people in from other Counties will not be good for Celina. Financially the facility would not be sustained to limit the residents to only the three counties, therefore residents would be brought from other counties.

CM LeJeune stated he fully supports the House of Hope for women and the future home for men. However, this new proposal seems to be an unfunded mandate. The City's obligation to its residents is their safety, which this would impair. It seems that this would be better served in their own communities.

President King stated there is a better way. If a contractor comes in, they will pump the numbers to increase their profit. The House of Hope is not being run for a profit.

CM Scott stated this group probably echoes other towns who have also been approached.

CM Sovinski made a motion to send a message that the Celina City Council would be opposed to any program and should discourage the decision to take action to put a halfway house in Celina, seconded by CM LeJeune. Motion was passed by a roll call vote 3-0 Aye.

CM Buxton adjourned the meeting at 6:57 pm.

Submitted by Joan S. Wurster, Clerk of Council