

Tipp City, Ohio
Council Goals and Policy Direction
Report Date: February 2022

On February 11, 2022, Tipp City Council members along with the City Manager, Clerk of Council, and Department Directors convened to establish strategic priorities for the City for the next two years and beyond. The session was facilitated by Jane Dockery, a consultant with Systematic Solutions, Inc.

Participants:

Council Members

- Kathryn Huffman, President
- Mike McFarland, Mayor
- Greg Enslen
- Ryan Liddy
- Joanna Pittenger
- Robert Schwab
- Douglas Slagel

Senior Staff

- Tim Eggleston, City Manager
- John Green, Finance Director
- Greg Adkins, Chief of Police
- Eric Mack, Director of Municipal Services
- Matt Spring, Community Development Director
- Cameron Haller, Chief of the Fire & EMS Department
- Janice Bates, Executive Secretary to City Manager/Clerk of Council

In preparation for the planning session, a simple survey was distributed to City Council members and Staff leadership. A list of potential City priorities was developed from the survey results and was used as a discussion guide for the Council retreat. This report summarizes the strategic and policy guidance provided to Staff by Council according to the following categories:

- Fire and Emergency Services
- Economic, Business, and Residential Development
- Infrastructure and Utilities
- Communications
- Fiscal Stability and Staffing

Fire & Emergency Services

Background: There is a national shortage of firefighters (both paid and voluntary firefighters) for multiple reasons. One reason is the workforce shortage. Other reasons include: the position is demanding and dangerous; the training has become more demanding, even for volunteer firefighters; the rising cost of obtaining certifications; a drop in interest in public service; and a decline in available part-time candidates which increases demand and competition for firefighters. On top of these trends, the Affordable Care Act (ACA) requires employers to offer health insurance to employees working at least 30 hours per week (or 130 hours per month). This policy creates challenges to retaining part-time firefighters.

Furthermore, increases in call volume impact the length of time a volunteer firefighter needs to dedicate on a given day. In Tipp City, the call volume is up 28 percent from the previous year and it is not uncommon to have six runs per day. As a result, volunteer firefighters are in the position of leaving their regular job to volunteer a half or full day, whereas in the past they might have volunteered for a couple

of hours. Not surprisingly, employers are less supportive of workers leaving to volunteer. Within the City itself, some City staff members serve as volunteer firefighters, but at times they cannot leave the job site to respond to an emergency. All of these trends result in difficulties meeting national standards for staffing and response times.

The Fire and EMS Services department is pursuing a SAFER grant: The Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response Grant (SAFER) was created by FEMA to provide funding directly to fire departments and volunteer firefighter interest organizations to help them increase or maintain the number of trained, "front line" firefighters available in their communities. The goal of SAFER is to enhance the local fire departments' abilities to comply with national staffing, response and operational standards.

Priorities:

- Request that the voters approve a reallocation of 0.2% from the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) to the City's general fund to stabilize Fire Department funding. If this reallocation is not approved, then Staff need to identify funding cuts.
- Tipp City has submitted a SAFER grant application. If the SAFER grant is funded, it will provide funding relief for 3-5 years to the Fire Department, which will enable the necessary time period for planning for the future of Tipp City fire services.
- In the April-May 2022 time frame, the City will establish a committee to study the options for fire services in the future. Key aspects for study are the form of government that should manage fire services and the funding options.

Economic, Business, and Residential Development

Background: Tipp City has several advantages that promote economic development such as a low income-tax rate, tax incentives for businesses, the municipal-owned electric service, right-of-way access, and a proactive staff who understand regulations and standards to reduce development costs. On the other hand, the City does not have plentiful land allocated for industrial development. Recognizing that industrial development produces the highest multiplier effects for communities, identifying land for such development is a priority. Conversely, the City contains sufficient land for commercial development, but some commercial sites have challenges, especially in terms of property maintenance, and the City has had to take legal action against some property owners. Vacant buildings cost a community due to impacts on property values, lost tax revenue, increases in police/fire calls and code enforcement services, and potential hazards to the public and public safety first-responders.

Residential development is another important aspect, and it must strike a balance with the cost of providing services to the development, such as roads, water, wastewater, stormwater, fire protection, among others. To promote Tipp City to developers, the City uses social media and has "Open for Business" billboards on I-75 and U.S. Route 35. The City also cultivates relationships with the Dayton Development Coalition, the Ohio Economic Development Association, and other development arms.

Priorities:

- Empower the Planning Board to conduct the five-year comprehensive plan review in 2022.
- Consider establishing a committee to discuss “big picture” economic development with Miami County and Monroe Township in order to avoid piecemeal development.
- Regularly revisit the City’s annexation policy.
 - Challenges include how to extend water and sewer given existing constraints; and how to calculate revenue and near-term and long-term cost impacts of developments.
- Research the role of the Community Improvement Corporation (CIC) in assisting the City with property maintenance issues.
- Continue to enforce City property maintenance codes, taking legal action when necessary to ensure public quality of life and safety.
- Consider implementing a Vacant Building Registration Program that would require owners of, or persons in control of, vacant commercial and industrial buildings to register the buildings with the City and pay an annual fee. This program would allow the City to keep track of vacant buildings, ensure they are maintained in a safe condition, and recover a portion of their disproportionate costs to the community. The program’s ultimate goal would be to encourage private-sector efforts to actively market, renovate and fill vacant buildings.
- Purchase the data necessary to attract and retain commercial development.
- Determine how to improve the Uptown area by replicating the impact that the Downtown Partnership has had in Downtown Tipp City.

Infrastructure and Utilities

Background: The water and sewer systems in Tipp City are nearing capacity, primarily due to the developments on the west side of the City. Tipp City’s west side is home to two major employers, Abbott Laboratories and the Meijer Distribution Center, which are at capacity for sanitary sewer and each have plans to increase production (Abbott’s new expansion is factored into the forecast that indicates the City is reaching maximum capacity but Meijer’s expansion is not). City Staff provided an estimate of \$16 million to address near term demand, as well as an estimate of \$2 million for a new water tower in west Tipp City. Staff members are pursuing a grant to help meet the City’s shorter-term needs, seeking a \$4.6 million federal grant to add capacity to sewer lines. However, long-term upgrades are also needed at the City’s sewer plant which are estimated to cost \$40 million over a 20+ year time horizon. The west side of the City has limited access to utilities because there are only three access points under I-75. Therefore, Tipp City staff are evaluating alternatives for addressing near-term sewer issues.

Priorities:

- Staff will arrange discussions with neighboring communities to research alternatives for addressing some near-term sewer system issues.
- Going forward, Council noted the importance of Staff providing estimates of utility and other infrastructure investment costs in relation to economic development options as they are posed.

Communications

Background: This section addresses communications (1) among Council members, (2) between Council and Staff, and (3) with the public. Whenever a council changes, it is important to reestablish communication expectations. Tipp City has five new Council members, and therefore the retreat was an excellent opportunity to review communication expectations between Council and Staff, and council member to council member. The City's Director of Law reviewed the legal implications of Council-to-Council communications. The Law Director advised no discussion of city business among any number of Council members outside of an open meeting. Council members also used the retreat as an opportunity to share their communication expectations of Staff members and shared some practical recommendations for improving open meetings.

Council and Staff members recognize citizen participation as an asset, and it is valued and encouraged. National research in 2021 shows that many historical indicators of civic health—including membership in community groups and religious affiliation, trust in one's government and fellow Americans, and civic education—continue to decline.¹ Still, the past year saw historic levels of civic engagement through protest and voting in the face of unprecedented challenges.² Local governments have an opportunity and a responsibility to improve the quality and quantity of civic engagement, given their uniquely close connections to their citizens. Fortunately, there are more tools and models than ever before to do so, such as citizen engagement platforms and social media.

Priorities:

- Improve communications to enhance open meetings. Council members request that there be minimal situations where there is a study session immediately followed by a vote. Council members prefer to have time to study and reflect before a vote.
- For highly important sessions, like budget sessions and reviews of the capital improvement plan, Council members would like to receive established goals for such sessions as well as information about how the detailed staff presentations align to those goals. Council members would also like to receive the budget binder as well as the staff notes (with rationale) in advance of budget sessions.
 - Staff will develop a quality improvement project identifying one department to work closely with Council as a pilot demonstration on how to make improvements to budget meetings. Lessons learned will then be used by all departments wherever possible.
- City departments have written emergency plans to ensure continuity of operations during disasters. Council members would like direction about their role in an emergency situation in order to assure continuity of government operations. Maintaining the ability of the City Council to continue as the City's legislature is essential for the City to efficiently and effectively recover after a disaster.
- Council and City Staff members aim to continuously improve communications with the Public. City Staff will continue to make regular posts to Facebook and to the City's website to ensure it is up to date. The website should make it easy to find hyperlinks to a community calendar of events. Staff will research and report to Council other viable options to engage the public. One opportunity in Tipp City is citizen involvement in parks planning.

¹ https://millercenter.org/sites/default/files/2021-09/civic_health_index_2021.pdf

² Ibid

Fiscal Stability and Staffing

Background: Tipp City department heads work diligently to maintain reduced operating expenses wherever possible. The General Fund has operated with an annual surplus for at least the past fifteen years (net of short-term advances for capital improvement projects). Since 2006, approx. \$3.7 million has been added to the General Fund balance. In City government, any fund balance which is not appropriated in the following year's budget for specific expenditures and which is not designated or reserved for specific purposes serves as a general operating reserve. Determining an adequate level of unreserved general fund balance is one of the more difficult questions policy makers and finance professionals confront. For Tipp City, the challenge is to develop the appropriate equilibrium between the City's cash balance and its staffing and other needs.

Council members also inquired about the City's succession plan, given that in 5 to 10 years a substantial turnover of department directors is expected. Succession planning is the means by which an organization prepares for and replaces directors and other key employees who leave their positions. It includes processes such as how the organization identifies and recruits its successors, how it manages transitions from one executive to another, and how it develops successors. Succession planning can also involve identifying high-potential employees and including them in training and development for future management roles. The need for a succession plan points to a gap in that the City does not employ a human resource (HR) manager who would lead the succession plan's development and would provide leadership in relation to conduct and compliance standards, which have become ever more complex.

Priorities:

- Continue steps to manage the City's finances and to properly sustain fiscal stewardship and stability.
- Develop a strategy to establish general fund balance policies. One approach is to use comparative data for Tipp City and a benchmark group or groups to obtain guidance on how much fund balance to maintain.³ Assuming basic liquidity needs are met, the target fund balance range itself is less important than the fact that the community has a policy based on reason, which identifies the size of balance that is right for Tipp City, and then periodically gives it conscious review.
- Council Members would like Staff to select reasonable staffing benchmarks and compare them to City staffing levels as part of the budgeting process.
- Council asked Staff members to develop an analysis including options and their consequences for better meeting the HR needs of the City.
- Council also directed Staff to present approaches for conducting a salary and job description analysis.

³ http://www.ipspr.sc.edu/publication/Municipal_Reserves.htm. Data in this report suggests that municipal fund balances typically ranges from 20-50% in South Carolina, and much higher in North Carolina.