

A work session of the Council of the City of Blue Ash, Ohio, was held on October 27, 2005. Vice Mayor Jack Buckman called the meeting to order in Council Chambers at 7:00 PM.

OPENING CEREMONIES

Vice Mayor Buckman led those assembled in the Pledge of Allegiance.

ROLL CALL

MEMBERS PRESENT: Vice Mayor Robert Buckman, Councilman Lee Czerwonka, Councilman Henry Stacey, Councilwoman Stephanie Stoller, Councilman James Sumner, and Councilman Mark Weber

MEMBER ABSENT: Mayor Rick Bryan

Councilman Sumner moved, Councilman Stacey seconded to excuse Mayor Bryan from the meeting. A voice vote was taken. All members present voted yes. Motion carried.

ALSO PRESENT: City Manager Marvin Thompson, Clerk of Council Jamie Eifert, Deputy Clerk of Council Sue Bennett, Assistant City Manager David Waltz, Treasurer/Administrative Services Director James Pfeffer, Parks & Recreation Director Chuck Funk, Service Director Dennis Albrinck, Technology Officer Dan Klapp, Recreation/Sports Superintendent Kathy Swensen, Recreation Leader Brian Kruse, members of the part-time Recreation staff, and interested citizens

Topic 1: Preliminary Plans for Expansion of Recreation Center

City Manager Marvin Thompson commented that both potential future projects being discussed this evening were part of the CIP process. When the citizen survey was done, both projects were on it and both ranked very high by citizens, especially a Recreation Center expansion. Parks & Recreation Director Chuck Funk and Architect Dick Thomas will present preliminary plans for both projects, with the goal of tonight's meeting being to learn from Council if the Administration is headed on the right track. Both projects would be great additions to the City's recreation facilities. Something will eventually have to be done with the Clubhouse as the existing 26+ year facility is aging. The Administration would like to eventually replace that facility to match the national level of the Golf Course.

Parks & Recreation Director Chuck Funk reiterated that the Clubhouse does have some structural issues. He and his department have received lots of feedback from citizens related to the need to expand the facilities.

Architect Dick Thomas reviewed the plans. The plans show a renovated fitness center to include space for new cardio equipment as well as a renovated lobby area. A second entrance is being proposed towards the south. Expansions would occur on the existing ground level, as well as the addition of a second level. An elevated running track, 1/10 of a mile in length (one of the largest in the area), is also shown elevated above, and enclosed from, the existing newer gym through the proposed new addition. A two-story climbing wall is also shown.

The possibility of adding an indoor pool facility, including a children's pool has been considered; however, that addition is not recommended at this time. The plans do allow this possibility in the future.

The proposed additions were estimated to cost between \$2.1 and \$2.3 million about a year ago. Today, those costs would be approximately 5% to 8.5% higher.

In addressing a question from Councilman Weber, Mr. Thomas explained that there would be a period of time when use of the main existing gym may be impacted, and that this work would be timed carefully to minimize that impact. Once construction is done, full use of the main gym would resume. The elevated running track would not impact use of that gym. Construction period would be estimated to be eight to ten months.

In addressing a question from Councilman Czerwonka, Mr. Funk commented that additional meeting space is not included, mostly because of the potential of other projects which would address those needs (i.e., Performing Arts Center and Golf Clubhouse).

In addressing a question from Councilwoman Stoller, Mr. Funk explained that the approximate existing space for the current fitness center would be utilized as a larger lobby area. A portion of that space would also be used for future recreational use.

In addressing a question from Councilman Sumner, Mr. Funk explained that the current game room is not as busy as the staff would like. They are considering moving that to the front area, and offering more activities. The existing game room is about 300 square feet, and the proposal is to increase it to 2,000 square feet and make it into more of a family fun area. A sauna, whirlpool/spa area would be placed where the game room is now. The hot tub would be able to accommodate about 8 to 12 people.

In addressing a question from Councilman Stacey, Mr. Funk explained that the new fitness center, about 7,500 to 8,000 square feet, is approximately three times the size of the existing fitness center. The new center would be very competitive with others in the area (commercial and otherwise), and there should be no need for future expansion. The plans show the removal of one racquetball court, with that space utilized for additional office space to accommodate fitness staff, etc.

In addressing a question from Councilman Czerwonka, Mr. Funk explained that the air-handling portion of the project is a costly component. He explained that the air handling system in the existing newer gym is oversized; however, changes would still have to be made with the additional uses.

Councilman Sumner encouraged the Administration to take advantage of this time to consider the need for additional public meeting space, perhaps in the area where the existing fitness center is now.

In addressing a question from Councilman Sumner, it was estimated that current utilization of the center is about 80% residents. The fitness staff in attendance added that an average of 350 persons per day visit the fitness center, and 80% to 85% of those are residents.

Topic 2: Preliminary Plans for Golf Course Clubhouse Expansion

Mr. Thomas explained that the current building is aging, and there is need for improvements. The plans show a shift of the main entrance towards Plainfield (to the east). The existing clubhouse can remain in use while the new one is being constructed. The plans also show additional parking, and the new clubhouse to be “angled” to take advantage of the beautiful views of the course. A pond is also shown, which would be visible from Cooper and Plainfield.

A pro shop is shown, approximately twice the size of the existing shop. The walls that face the course are largely glass panels to take advantage of the light and the views. A deck is shown along the rear and side of the clubhouse.

A large dining area is shown, able to accommodate 130 to 140. Off the large dining area (able to be separated or included as a part of that dining area) is a smaller banquet room. A catering kitchen is also included. A “drive through” will be available for golfer/golf cart use. The total seating capacity of all dining areas, including the deck space, is approximately 300. Also on the main level, separate men’s and women’s locker rooms, office space, a bar, a fireplace, a vestibule area, and restroom facilities are shown.

The building is raised slightly from grade to allow access to a lower level, where spaces for 84 golf carts are shown, in addition to maintenance areas, mechanicals, and storage. It would be possible to add in the lower level a golf practice range. The lower and upper levels

include approximately 11,000 square feet each, for a total of 20,000 to 22,000 square total for both levels. The new facility would be approximately 2½ times the size of the existing facility.

In addressing a question from Councilman Sumner regarding access to the separate banquet area, it was explained that access to that area should be reviewed.

In addressing a question from Councilman Czerwonka, Mr. Funk explained that the current revenues of the course cover approximately 90% of its operating (not including capital) expenses. It is his estimate that the additional functions available with the new course, including the potential for substantially increased revenues, would allow it to be closer to operating as a self-sufficient operation. Wedding receptions and other large gatherings would be definite possibilities for this new facility.

In addressing a question from Councilman Stacey, Mr. Funk explained that they wanted to enhance not only the views of the course, but also the view of the facility from Cooper and Plainfield.

In addressing a question from Councilwoman Stoller, it was estimated that the depth of the deck, at its smallest, is about eight to ten feet. It was believed that this would not block the beautiful view of the course for those inside. The possibility may exist to be able to tier the deck to enhance the view from within.

Councilman Sumner suggested that they create the opportunity for winter sports given the new facility, particularly using the pond for ice skating and using any excavated soil to create a sledding hill.

Mr. Thomas explained that the costs for a new clubhouse facility when first proposed last year were approximately \$4.2 million. Approximate cost today would be between \$4 and \$4.5 million, including furnishings.

City Manager Thompson explained that the purpose of presenting these preliminary plans tonight are to gather Council's thoughts as to whether the Administration is "on the right track" with these ideas. All six Council members present agreed that they liked the plans and that the Administration is headed in the right direction.

Mr. Thompson commented that the next issue to address is when could these projects be initiated, from a financial standpoint. The Administration will be looking at long-term revenues and expenses and will give Council those opinions in the near future. Mr. Thompson commented that these projects would not be proposed in the 2006 Budget as there are several non-discretionary portions of the CIP that must be addressed.

In addressing questions from Council regarding a proposed Performing Arts Center (PAC), Mr. Thompson commented that further review has continued and it appears that the financials (especially revenues associated with naming rights, etc.) may appear even more favorable than originally thought.

In addressing a question from Councilwoman Stoller, Mr. Thompson commented that it is looking more favorable from a financial viewpoint if the City would build the facility, vs. the previously considered private/public venture. Much of this is due to the property tax implications.

Councilman Sumner spoke briefly regarding his continued involvement in the northeast branch of the Greater Cincinnati Travel & Convention Bureau.

In addressing a question from Councilman Weber, Mr. Funk explained that he could generate a pro-forma on the proposed projects within the next 60 to 90 days, and later in the meeting it was mentioned that perhaps this would be a good subject for a January work session. Councilman Weber commented that the idea of the clubhouse being a multi-functional facility (i.e., banquet center, expanded restaurant, etc.) would be even more highly ranked by citizens, as compared to it being only a golf clubhouse facility.

In addressing a question from Councilman Czerwonka, Mr. Thompson commented that simultaneous construction of a Recreation Center addition and a Golf Clubhouse would probably not result in cost savings.

Though Councilman Sumner admitted that he is very excited with the prospect of these two projects, he encouraged the Administration to be cognizant of the 60/40 Charter requirement and the need to keep operating costs relatively low.

Councilman Stacey complimented the staff and the Architect on the presentation this evening. Councilpersons Czerwonka and Stoller agreed that the plans look excellent. Councilwoman Stoller added that a frequent comment from her constituency is that the Recreation Center fitness area is too small.

Councilman Buckman asked about the former Holiday Fest event held in December at the Square. Mr. Thompson and Mr. Funk explained that the event was not attracting enough people, and there was often competition with other events in the area that were believed to be affecting attendance at this event, in addition to sometimes harsh weather conditions. Councilman Sumner commented that once the event lost the element of the school children, attendance dropped sharply.

Councilman Sumner commented it is likely he would not be able to attend the December 1st swearing in ceremony.

ADJOURNMENT

All items on the agenda having been acted upon, Councilwoman Stoller moved, Councilman Stacey seconded to adjourn the meeting. A voice vote was taken. All members voted yes. The Council meeting was adjourned at approximately 8:16 PM.

Robert J. Buckman, Jr., Vice Mayor

Jamie K. Eifert, Clerk of Council

MINUTES WRITTEN BY:

Susan K. Bennett, Deputy Clerk of Council