

South Clinton Street's sidewalk on council's radar

By TODD HELBERG
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A project occasionally on Defiance City Council's table, but never acted upon, may be moving closer to a concrete plan.

During its meeting Tuesday night, council discussed ways to fund construction of a wider, slightly relocated sidewalk on South Clinton Street, between Riverside Cemetery and Power Dam Road. That followed an update on the city's \$9 million water plant upgrade (see related story Page A1) and the latest news on construction of a new traffic roundabout at Ottawa and Cleveland avenues (see related story below).

According to city officials, the sidewalk's improvement will cost \$250,000 — significantly less than

the \$400,000 rough estimate that had been discussed by council in the past. (Some city councilmen want to move the narrow sidewalk back from the road as a safety improvement.)

Finance Director John Lehner mentioned the possible funding options, which include at least partially assessing the 40 properties on the east side of Clinton Street where the sidewalk is located.

Lehner suggested a possible split between city funds and property assessments in funding the project, where landowners might each pay \$2,000 over 10 years. He also noted that the city could pay the entire cost, but he cautioned that council first set a policy for how sidewalk projects are covered as there may be others within the city.

At-large Councilman Steve

Waxler offered one reason for the city paying the cost: some believe the problem with the sidewalk's close proximity to South Clinton was caused through the years when the street was paved.

This was the Ohio Department of Transportation's fault, suggested Mayor Mike McCann, but Waxler protested, saying "you can't tell me that we had no clue they were covering the sidewalk every time they widened that road. ... My opinion is we pay for the sidewalk and get it done."

Both Ward 1 Councilman Steve Corbitt and Ward 3 Councilman Josh Mast see the sidewalk's improvement as a quality-of-life matter. Corbitt said he saw no difference between improving the city's parks and this sidewalk — "that's all quality of life to make it a better place to live. I might be inclined to just foot the bill on

this one."

At-large Councilman Joe Euseste showed interest in moving quickly on possible changes to the city code that might govern sidewalk projects generally, but McCann wished to slow things down a bit, saying "you got to give us some time."

He complimented Euseste for suggesting that a town hall meeting be convened involving the affected property owners, and said a project could be budgeted in 2022.

No council members objected to the project, with only the question of funding at issue. But Lehner said an assessment project would require a lengthier process with public hearings and legislation, as opposed to the city funding the sidewalk's construction entirely.

"... there are numerous require-

ments we would have to go through," said Lehner in reference to a project involving private property assessments. "There won't be legislation coming in the next few weeks. Regardless of the town hall there has to be public hearings with regard to the assessment, there's calculations that have to be done, we've got to come up with a fair way to equitably allocate the assessment, if we go that route. ... there's some pretty strict hoops you have to go through to do an assessment like this."

If the city proceeds with a project, the sidewalk would be located about 12 feet off South Clinton's pavement, according to Sprow, the same distance next to Riverside Cemetery. McCann said if the sidewalk would go back further it would begin impacting trees.

Senior Day at the fair



Photo courtesy of Amy Francis

The Defiance County Fair held its annual "Senior Day" Wednesday at the senior citizens/veterans pavilion at the county fairgrounds in Hicksville. Despite warm temperatures, a decent number

of senior citizens turned out for the day, which included musical entertainment, a free lunch and bingo. Here is a view from one side of the pavilion.

Walmart worker pleads guilty in gift card thefts

WHEELING, W.Va. (AP) — A Walmart worker in West Virginia has admitted to a federal charge related to the theft of \$124,000 in gift cards over a five-month period.

Kenneth Werkau of Clarington, Ohio, pleaded guilty Tuesday in federal court in

Wheeling to a wire fraud charge.

Prosecutors said Werkau stole and activated the gift cards from September 2019 through January 2020 while employed as an associate at a Walmart in Moundsville.

Werkau, 63, face up to 20 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine at sentencing.

City's latest traffic roundabout reportedly 'tracking on schedule'

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Construction of Defiance's latest traffic roundabout is well underway and remains on schedule to open this fall, but final completion may be a few months off.

That was the news delivered by Defiance City Engineer Melinda Sprow during city council's meeting Tuesday night. Council also discussed replacing a narrow South Clinton Street sidewalk (see related story above) and received an update on the city's water treatment plant upgrade (see related story Page A1).

Sprow noted progress by contractor Vernon Nagel, Inc., Napoleon, in constructing a traffic roundabout at Ottawa and Cleveland avenues — the third one in the city. She reported that the contractor has until the end of October to finish the project.

While Nagel is "tracking on schedule," temporary lighting will have to be installed when the roundabout opens as a delay in the delivery of permanent light poles is expected, according to Sprow. The temporary setup may be needed for 2-3 months, she indicated.

At-large Councilman Joe Euseste asked about the roundabout's "center decor," a reference to a presentation previously made by Defiance High School students for constructing improvements that welcome visitors to Defiance. McCann said these proposals were made for the middle of the roundabout at Jefferson and Palmer avenues, and may be part of the 2022 budget process.

"We chose not to do Ottawa because we don't think we can really put anything in the middle other than the required signs," said McCann. "But you'll hear more about Palmer and Jefferson come budget time."

Speaking of street-related work, council approved an emergency ordinance allowing application for a \$275,000 Ohio Public Works Commission grant for improvement of Ginter Road, between Jefferson Avenue and Carter Road.

According to City Law Director Sean O'Donnell, the project would be undertaken with Defiance Township as the street is divided between the city and the township. Sprow told council that township trustees have passed a resolution supporting the project.

She said the estimated project cost is \$550,000 with the amount not covered by the grant (\$275,000) split between the city and township.

If the project comes to fruition, the street would be rebuilt through a cement stabilization process in which its base is churned up and reconstituted, according to Sprow. This would be followed with paving.

As part of the proposal, a multi-use path would be built along the road, noted Sprow, with the project not occurring until 2023.

Ward 1 Councilman Steve Corbitt called the rebuild "much needed," adding that "I look forward to supporting it."

Earlier, he thanked Sprow and the city for fixing some "bad holes" on Ginter Road (as a temporary measure).

In other business Tuesday, council:

- passed an emergency ordinance allowing the purchase of property at 631 Riverside Ave. with state and federal emergency management funds. The cost is \$52,000. The goal is to eliminate residences in the river floodplain.

- approved an emergency ordinance allowing the purchase of property at 731 Riverside Ave. with state and federal emergency management funds. The cost is \$105,000, and is higher than the above property because it contains two additional parcels by the Auglaize River, according to O'Donnell.

- approved an annual resolution accepting the amounts and rates determined by the county's budget commission and authorizing the necessary tax levies. This concerns tax collection rates for existing levies approved by voters.

- approved a motion scheduling a special meeting at 5 p.m. on Sept. 7 in the city service building to receive a presentation from consultant Jason Hammon on potential uses for the former 1918 school building at 629 Arabella St.

- learned from Leonard that the city spent \$16,517 to purchase equipment for the proposed Bronson Park path.

- was informed by McCann that police and fire reminded motorists to slow down for the reopening of school. He complimented safety service personnel on their efforts.

- met in executive session to discuss the purchase of property and application for economic development assistance.

NOTICE TO CUSTOMERS CHRISTI WATER SYSTEM, INC. PUCO CASE NO. 20-1428-WW-AIR

LEGAL NOTICE

The Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (Commission) has scheduled a local public hearing in Case No. 20-1428-WW-AIR, In the Matter of the Application of Christi Water System, Inc. for an Increase in Rates and Charges. This local hearing is scheduled for the purpose of providing an opportunity to interested members of the public to testify in this proceeding. The local hearing will be held at the following time and location: September 1, 2021, at 6:00 p.m., at the Northtowne Mall, 1500 North Clinton Street, Defiance, Ohio 43512. Consistent with CDC Guidelines and the May 17, 2021 Ohio Department of Health Order, unless otherwise specified by the facility, individuals who are not fully vaccinated should continue to wear a face covering and socially distance. Please contact the legal department at 614-466-6843 to ask any questions or request accommodations related to health protocols.

By its application, Christi Water System, Inc. (Christi) seeks a rate and charge increase under a new, consolidated rate structure. According to a Commission staff analysis, under the rates and terms proposed by Christi, a customer using 400 cubic feet (c.f.) of water would see a bill increase of approximately 70 percent. The current rates include base rates established in Case No. 09-569-WW-AIR and purchase water rate last updated in Case No. 15-423-WW-PWA, respectively.

The staff of the Commission recommends the proposed rate structure be rejected and recommends an increase over current revenue of 35.8 percent. Under the staff developed rates, a customer using 400 c.f. of water would see a bill increase of approximately 34.6 percent.

The major issues raised in this case are:

- The rate structure and tariff language.
- The determination of revenues and operating expenses.

Further information may be obtained by contacting the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio, 180 East Broad Street, Columbus, Ohio 43215-3793, the Commission's hotline at 1-800-686-7826, or the PUCO website at <http://www.puco.ohio.gov>.

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