

June 22, 2007



Life outside the lines.

## Information Items

### 1. Downtown Trash Can Replacement

At the last Committee meeting, I mentioned that Main Street has been working with Gene Roberts to investigate options to replace the current home-made wooden trash cans that have been in use downtown for about 30 years. In the course of those 30 years these cans have been damaged, burned, broken and repaired many times. At this point, the cans have exceeded their service life and have become a high maintenance item that many of the merchants complain look bad and reflect poorly on both the city and their business.



Without a capital budget to replace the 17 wooden cans, Gene has been working with a small committee of downtown merchants and Main Street representatives to see what could be done collaboratively. Everyone on the committee agreed that the old cans served a good purpose but it was time to modernize the look and function of the cans. After reviewing the various types of cans available today, the group agreed upon the same trash can that is currently used on Kent State campus.



The Victor Stanley trash can (picture on the right) is an attractive fluted-steel can that is one of the most commonly used cans in downtowns all across the country (including downtown Ravenna).

The Main Street organization surveyed the locations of the current cans and talked to the area merchants to see if they felt more cans were needed and where those should be placed. Based on that information, Main Street presented Gene and I with a proposal to purchase a total of 55 new Victor Stanley cans. The cost for the cans will run close to \$50,000, of which the city will pay 1/3 (\$15,000) and Main Street will pick up the costs for the rest. Main Street is hoping to solicit business sponsors to buy-back the cost of as many cans as possible, but they are fronting all of the cash for the new cans.

At nearly \$1,000 a piece, this collaboration enables the city to get 55 new cans at the price of 15 cans. We consider this a great deal for the city and I agreed to contribute the city share upon delivery of the new cans.

At this point, Main Street has put the order in and the company expects to ship the cans in late July. Later this summer, Main Street will also be purchasing (at their cost) cigarette disposal containers for downtown as well.

This is the kind of leveraging of resources that we were hoping participation in Main Street would make possible.



## 2. Riverbend New Home Driveway Variance

This week Jennifer Barone, Development Engineer, forwarded to my attention a request from a new homeowner in Riverbend (1401 Rustic Bridge) to authorize two new driveway entrances – one off of Riverbend Blvd. and one off of Rustic Bridge. Our code requires a 50' separation between a driveway and the nearest street intersection, and because this proposed site plan will not conform to that standard, it requires a variance. The Planning and Engineering staff support granting the variance, so I have approved it and I wanted to advise Council of this variance for information purposes. (attachment).



## 3. Summit Street Incubator Tenants

Mike Weddle advised me that one of our more successful tenants, Liquid Learning, is making a decision to downsize and allow its employees to work from home via the internet. As a result, they will be vacating their incubator space. Interestingly, 6 months earlier they were looking to double their number of employees and had explored working with us to move into the double suite at the other end of the building. This switch is an interesting insight into the volatile nature of entrepreneurial business. The President/CEO of Liquid Learning reports that from a profit perspective they are doing better than ever – proving that bigger is not always better. Mike is planning on shifting one of the existing tenants into the Liquid Learning space and then bidding out the availability of the double suite. I understand that there is one interested business already. We'll look to bring you a proposed new tenant at our July 11<sup>th</sup> Committee meeting.



## 4. AT&T Project Lightspeed New Service Ready in Kent

I was notified this week that the installation of the new AT&T network is ready to be "turned on" and be fully operational for areas in Kent where the service upgrades have been completed. You may recall that we signed a video competition agreement granting AT&T the authority to upgrade their network so that they could compete with the cable companies for video services. Part of AT&T's pitch was that Kent customers deserve a choice for video services and that's exactly what they have sought to provide. AT&T argues that competition should improve services and reduce the ability of cable to unilaterally drive up their cable service costs. As you know, there have been some concerns over the visual impact of the boxes AT&T installed, but hopefully the new services will benefit Kent customers and make the boxes worthwhile.



## 5. Outstanding Utility Bills

Council had requested information concerning the extent of outstanding utility bills that go uncollected, typically as tenants move out of rental properties. Gathering this information required some editing and report writing using our main frame computer system (AS400) and with the computer specialist position held vacant for the last year we've had some trouble figuring out how to pull that data out of our database. However, Barb reports that she has been successful and the data indicates that over the last 6 years we lost approximately \$20,000 each year in unpaid utility bills. While that is not an insubstantial amount, it's important to understand that this is spread over nearly 300 customers which means each unpaid bill is around \$75. We do routine bill collection efforts through letter writing, water shut-off, etc. but given the nature of our large rental clientele final collections remains a challenge. The question we face is does it make sense to spend a couple hundred dollars to try to collect \$75 dollars? Bill collection agencies could be employed but previously Council has been reticent to have bill collectors act on the city's behalf. For perspective, when you look at the loss as a percentage of total revenues it is only about ¼ of 1% which is a comparatively small amount.