

**Village of Whitehouse
Village Council Meeting As A
Committee of the Whole
Village Hall, Whitehouse, OH
6:30pm January 9th, 2024**

CALL TO ORDER – ROLL CALL

Meeting called to order at 6:31pm by President of Council Louann Artiaga.

Council Members Present: Dave Riggenschach, Carrie Tuohy, Steve Connelly, Larry Yunker and President of Council Louann Artiaga

Council Members Absent: None

Staff Present: Administrator Jordan Daugherty, Deputy Administrator Joshua Hartbarger, Clerk Nicole Hartbarger, Mayor Richard Bingham

Guests Present: Wendy Gehring, Karen Gerhardinger, Steven Fine, Joseph Bublick and Robert Keogh

Motion by Councilman Dave Riggenschach, seconded by Councilwoman Carrie Tuohy to approve the minutes of the December 5th, 2023 Committee of the Whole meeting. 5 ayes

CITIZEN COMMENTS ON COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE AGENDA ITEMS

Council President Artiaga asked if there were any citizen comments to be made regarding the agenda items. There were none.

GENERAL

Attention to Vacant Council Seat

President Artiaga informed all in attendance that it was time to interview/chat with the applicants for the vacant council seats. She explained that Council will ask for brief explanation of who each applicant is and why they applied. After this brief introduction of each applicant, Council plans to go through a series of questions that were curated.

All three council seat applicants were in attendance: Steven Fine, Joseph Bublick and Robert Keogh. They began with a brief introduction of themselves.

Robert Keogh explained that he started on council in 2015 and sat through the end of 2023; he has also been a Whitehouse resident since 1979. He stated that with a very new council that has just been seated, he feels he could add value with experience of being a previous council member while also having been involved with the Board of Zoning, Economic Development, etc.

Joseph Bublick shared that he was born and raised in the AW area, graduate of Anthony Wayne High School and Bowling Green State University. He then joined the Air Force and spent his time there as an officer before returning to this area to join the Guard Base. Shortly after the move back home he took over his father's construction business, going on 10 years ago now. Bublick stated that he loves being involved in his community and now is a good

time to get even more involved as his children are more grown. He feels joining Council is the next big step in being able to serve his community.

Steven Fine began by sharing that he grew up in the AW area as well, graduating from Anthony Wayne High School. He stated that he wants to serve the community and be helpful. He has over 20 years of experience with government work and is good at communicating and achieving goals. He was recently appointed to the Village Charter Commission and is looking forward to seeing his impact on that committee.

President Artiaga next shared that she will be asking several questions that Council came up with to all three candidates and that each one of them will have time to answer and share their thoughts.

President Artiaga asked the candidates what steps they would take to help resolve any budget issues, keeping in mind that the recent levy that was on the ballot failed.

- Steven Fine: would ask for even better communication so citizens have an understanding on how things are run. He said to keep that line of communication open asking what citizens are hoping for, explaining that no tax increase could mean less services. He shared that now is the time to have more communication with citizens asking what is holding them back on passing the levy; focus on working together to find balanced approach.
- Joseph Bublick: shared that the focus should be on communication and trust – the Village citizens have to understand that council is here to do the best for the Village, we need to build back that trust. He stated that communication is key, but does not know the exact answer to get there but we have to work toward something better.
- Robert Keogh: stated that education to the public as far as what the budget/monetary situation is, is important; they might not fully understand the non-funded mandates and things the village doesn't have control of that show up unexpected and have to be able to handle. He feels that putting information out there as much as possible, all year long, will go a long way toward this education.

President Artiaga mentioned that Council takes up a lot of time, a lot of hours are involved. She asked the candidates if they are willing to do even more by being appointed to additional Boards or Committees as most Council members are.

- Joseph Bublick: shared that he is generally at all community and school related events, willing to continue to support these and add more responsibility. He stated that the Tree Commission or Board of Zoning Appeals would fit well with his past experiences and career background.
- Robert Keogh: stated that he fully understands the amount of time that is involved in Council and the additional committee responsibilities. He shared that he would enjoy continuing in the Economic Development committees and focus, as he has in past years.
- Steven Fine: shared that he is willing to help out and be a part of any committee that is needed but would also like to stay involved in the Village Charter review if possible. He stated that Economic Development would be an interest as well.

President Artiaga stated that one of the big challenges on Council and Village Administration is getting citizens involved. She asked what ideas the candidates might have to increase public participation.

- Steven Fine: shared that enhancing electronic presence would be a great place to start. He believes some things are outdated, not as fresh as they could be, need to keep those up to date. He stated that looking for opportunities for speakers from the Village at local gatherings or events to inform citizens of things going on within the village would be a good way to get in front of citizens.
- Joseph Bublick: stated that meeting people where they are, out in the community, being available, park events, AW sport events can go a long way to help make up for the fact that not a lot of people attend council meetings. He shared that a special table at Cherry Fest, and in general being more often out in the community, would help.
- Rober Keogh: he stated that focusing on education of public as available is imperative; found out with levy committee if people knew and understood more it would be better. He shared that Council members should be approachable, have a want list of seats that need to be filled for committees, etc.

President Artiaga asked the candidates how they feel Council can help to support future growth of the Village, to make the Village a choice for new businesses.

- Joseph Bublick: started by saying we must have correct economic growth, conveyed to town people correctly, we need to be a desirable place for housing and business. He shared that educating people accordingly will go a long way, taxes might be a bit higher, but it helps to keep the village desirable. He said we need to continue to grow or start to have issues.
- Robert Keogh: shared that additional income comes from businesses, we need this to better our budget. He suggested having on hand a better inventory of spaces that are available for economic development and focus on doing a better job of advertising those areas.
- Steven Fine: he started by stating the economic development plan needs to be revisited; where should things change, competitive advantages against other nearby communities, etc. He suggested the Village survey local businesses to see what works and what doesn't, get input from them. He stated from experience, some businesses want to move quickly, obtaining permits, etc. can slow things down; can we have something to offer where it is a quicker set up. He said we need to keep all communications going, not just once a decade plan but to keep ideas fresh and worthwhile. He feels we could go out into other community events to advertise Whitehouse.

Lastly, President Artiaga told the candidates that for the last several years there has been a Council Wishlist at the beginning of the year; this would be for items that can be done during the year that shouldn't cost a lot, fit into the current budget, yet add value to the Village. She has asked the candidates to name a few items they would like to see on this wishlist.

- Steven Fine: he suggested the village do more via Facebook live to keep citizens involved and informed, update/enhance the village website, and focus on communication in general. He also mentioned that in surrounding communities lower electric rates were able to be negotiated on behalf of the citizens. He suggests that this is something the Village should look into to see if they can help negotiate to save residents money.

- Joseph Bublick: he stated he would like to see continued development of city park, it is a gem that we need to keep expounding on. He also shared that beefing up the communication process, offering more electronic information, more flyers, whatever it takes to get the information out there would be a low cost yet valuable update. He wants to get people excited again about the community.
- Robert Keogh: shared he would like to see more involvement and cooperation with the Metroparks, along with update/clean up of ballfields.

President Artiaga asked the Council members if they had any additional questions for the candidates.

Councilman Yunker asked Steven Fine specifically if he applied for the vacancy that came up on Council in the last few years but then chose not to actively run for a council seat during the recent election cycle. Fine responded that yes he applied for the vacancy but did not run during election for a seat; he stated that at that time it was not a good fit for him to run. Councilman Yunker also asked if he is interested in just fulfilling the remainder of the vacant term or if he will plan to run again going forward. Fine responded that he's excited to see how things go for the next term.

Councilman Connelly asked the candidates to share what they think is the single biggest issue that Council should be taking an active role in.

- Robert Keogh: shared that he feels economic development is a big issue that needs more attention as it will help enhance Village income.
- Joseph Bublick: stated that we will have to ask people for more money, and it is a delicate time to ask people for more. He shared that when we do have to ask, we have to make sure we are prepared to show the why. Focus on more communication, more information to prepare for this time.
- Steven Fine: shared that rebuilding the trust of the community and citizens is imperative; without the trust everything else will continue to be difficult. Trust is not as good as it could be, but Council is now in a great position to build that up. He feels that transparency and listening is key; if we can do that, we are in a much better position for all other issues.

CITIZEN COMMENTS

Council President Artiaga asked if there were any general citizen comments to be made. There were none.

OTHER BUSINESS

Council President Artiaga asked for comments on other business from all Committee of the Whole members. There were none.

At 7:01pm, President Artiaga made a motion to enter into executive session to discuss a personnel matter, seconded by Councilman Connelly. 5 ayes

At 7:18pm, President Artiaga made a motion to reconvene the Committee of the Whole meeting, seconded by Councilman Riggensbach. 5 ayes

ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Councilman Riggerbach, seconded by Councilman Connelly to adjourn the meeting at 7:19pm.

Respectfully submitted by Nicole Hartbarger, Clerk of Council