On Tuesday, April 25, 2023, the Council for the Village of Monroeville held a work session at 6:15 PM, in Council Chambers, to discuss whatever business came before them.

Present were: Mayor Melissa Fries-Seip; Council Members: Chris Raftery, Sue Rogers, Craig Franklin, Joe Galea, Sam Wiley and Bob Whitacre; Administrator Tom Gray; Administrative Specialist Heather Alicea; Administrative Assistant Ann Beck; Chief Gary Lyons; and Lieutenant Troy Kimball.

Chris Raftery opened the meeting. Sue provided everyone copies of a wage range proposal that she and Bonnie Beck had worked on earlier in the week. Tom provided copies of the plans to everyone for the downtown parking lot and downtown streetscape. The parking lot would create an additional 24 spaces downtown. The sidewalk plan profile doesn’t necessarily depict the total streetscape. Neal will provide an updated drawing with some of the buildings and surrounding features. The parking lot fits in nicely with the old lot. It gives the additional parking spaces and provides another keystone for the downtown area. Our next step in this would be to engage PDG Kleinfelder to do some core drilling and testing. Probably two or three bore holes on that site to determine what is below ground. Based on that outcome, then a preliminary cost estimate can be brought forward. Then we will have some idea on what they are working with to determine an approach to funding. Tom said the American Legion is interested in helping put this lot in, which is something Tom has been speaking with Dick Palmer about since Council first started planning for downtown revitalization. Tom believes that in speaking with Dick, the Village has an opportunity to get into this possibly using some of our local resources, as we did with tearing down the old police department building, and maybe some even beyond that, and get this underway with nominal costs being borne by the Village. He doesn’t know what the costs might be, but the asphalt and the ornate items that go into making it aesthetically pleasing to the community will have costs. Sam said the plans showed the only access to the parking lot is off the alley. Tom said that is correct. The process of trying to go to ODOT to get an ingress and egress cannot be accomplished. Joe said signage can be placed on Route 20 showing where parking is. Tom agreed and said signage could be placed on Manchester as well. Joe said the entryway being in the alley would be safer for those using the parking lot than pulling out onto Route 20. Tom said when the parking lot is done, the section of sidewalk from Manchester up into the core of the Village would be done as part of this project. The sidewalk portion of the downtown would have to stay separate; it cannot be bundled and be cost affordable. Joe asked if there is a possibility to make a permeable surface for the asphalt. Tom said we can run it by the civil engineers, and he is all for that instead of trying to shed the water into the river. Tom feels this will be a very nice addition. The next step would be to get a quote from Kleinfelder as to what the cost is for core sampling, and then come back to Council, hopefully by the next regular Council meeting. Chris asked if that will determine unstable soil and Tom confirmed. He isn’t certain as to what depth the cores would go, but he thinks at least 10-12 feet. Sam said he doesn’t think the former Commercial House basement went any farther down than that. The Mayor asked how much the boring costs will be. Tom said he doesn’t have a figure yet, but in the neighborhood of around $5000-$7000. Joe asked for the width of the parking spots. Tom said he knows they are standard size parking spots. Chris asked when the drawing will be ready that shows the rendering of the buildings with the parking lot improvements. Tom said another two weeks. Tom said this is great, this could be a spot for the Village Flea, for food trucks, parking, etc. Wall packs can be put in for lighting.

The Mayor asked about the bench that had been placed at the corner of Monroe and Route 20. Heather verified that Bonnie hopes to stop in by the end of the week, as she has the plans on her desk for the landscaping that Marie Bischoff is helping with. The Shae Tree Committee had their tree planting event over the weekend and it went well.

Sam asked if Tom has met the new mechanic from Miracle Muffler and Tom said no. Sam said he seems like a nice gentleman and Sam feels the business will be a nice addition to the Village.

The Mayor asked Chief if he had anything to add to the work session. Chief stated he needs officers and we need to get a pay rate to attract those officers. Chief said he has had one application and it doesn’t meet their standards. Officer Curtis Silvers hasn’t provided Chief with a termination date yet. He had his physical and his drug screen testing and Chief has removed him from the schedule effective the first week of May. He has been typically working 2-3 days a week to fill the gaps and once he leaves, the PD will be using overtime to fill the gaps. Craig said the police academy class at Ehove is getting close to graduation. Chief said they have six graduates, four are already spoken for and they are going to go to places that pay more. Chief has talked to another police department that has a civil service list and they are going to take some people off their list. Chief convinced them to contact those people and see if they are interested in applying here, but Chief feels we need to be more competitive and we are not currently competitive. People are going to look at our starting wage and look some other place for employment. Sam asked how the body cams are working out. Chief said they are still waiting for the second group to come in. Sue asked Chief how do we compare now, in regards to the proposal she provided tonight. Chief said it’s close. Sue said she understands that and to keep in mind that we are a small Village. Joe asked Chief if the murder suspect was extradited yet. Chief confirmed he was extradited that day. Sam asked Chief how far off is Council in regards to the wages. Chief said there was talk about a $5.00 an hour increase and that would be a good start and be more competitive. That would put the starting wage at $23.80. Chief believes Willard is the most comparable and their starting wage is $24.50, but they pick up 10% of the officer’s pension. Norwalk is $29.00, the Sheriff is around $25-$26, and Bellevue is a little bit higher than Willard. Chief said while we are still going to be below them, it’s better than comparing $18.80 an hour to what they are making. He wishes it could be done another way, but that’s the labor market right now. Chris said it’s better to compare it to the small municipalities than places like Avon or Westlake. Chief said more people will want to stay in this area, which is what we want to attract anyway. He thinks it would be a good start towards getting us close to where we need to be. He did an outline and if this doesn’t work, Council may want to consider a $3000-$5000 sign on bonus, with a five-year commitment, with the bonus being paid out per year. There is a lot that can be done here financially, it’s just a question on if the money is available. The Mayor advised that Chief shared with her the scheduling difficulties he is having right now and she will let him share that with everyone here a little bit. The Mayor said that we, as a Village, tell employees they can’t take a vacation if that puts them into overtime and that means people will lose their vacation time. Chief said that affects training too. Officer Meyer has a very valuable training coming up and the only way it will be covered is with overtime. The part-timers are either working overtime or working another shift. The alternative is that we don’t have part-time staff as they wouldn’t be working for us. A lot of time, the part-timers are already working overtime somewhere else and if they work for us as well, they are then working 6-7 days a week. If we can get the wage up higher, they will know there is some financial benefit. Heather advised she’d like to add something to that. She said she understands there needs to be an attractive wage in order to draw applicants in, but we’re not the only Village facing this. Heather said she and Bonnie recently reached out to local surrounding municipalities to see if they were offering a higher wage and/or a sign-on bonus in order to attract job candidates. Those municipalities verified they aren’t offering a higher wage or sign-on bonus and they also verified they are facing the same hiring crisis that we are. Heather asked Council to remember that overtime is also occurring in the Water/Wastewater Department. We’ve lost Alex Hoyt and Isaiah Scheid in Water/Wastewater, as well as Kadon Martin and Dustin Crabtree in the Street Department. Although we do need to be able to hire people and want them to apply here, we also need to do something to retain the employees that we have. If we don’t get the wage ranges addressed, there is no point in making an attractive wage package for those who aren’t even working here yet. You have to be able to retain staff, as well as hire new employees. Heather said she doesn’t understand how our budget would support a $5 per hour increase across the board or a huge sign-on bonus, and also be able to address wage ranges at the same time. Gary interrupted and said he totally disagrees with everything Heather just said. Heather said that is fine, they can agree to disagree. Heather said she understands that police applicants are going through their steps at the academies and deserve a reasonable wage upon hire, but we also need to be able to pay for things that the Village needs, and retain the staff that the Village currently employs, instead of constant turnover. We have Don Clark and Wes Brewer who are frequently working overtime as well. Don Clark’s vacation time pay-out just had to be addressed at a recent Council meeting, since he rarely has time to take vacation. Heather advised she would like Council to keep all of this in mind. Chief said he understands the challenges, but the MPD is the only department that works 24/7 and they can’t put a closed sign in the window. If at some point in time the Village says they can’t afford the police department, that is certainly Council’s option. Chief thinks the citizens want a 24/7 police department, and he thinks there is funding available to fill the gaps. He agreed that employees that we have need to be taken care of, but needs Council to attract applicants for the police department. Chief said $18.80 is not working and he doesn’t even think $23.80 will work. Chief said in his opinion, the MPD needs to be addressed first. Heather advised that maybe the departments cane come together as a team and come up with a plan on attracting applicants. Perhaps a hiring fair can be done, school visits at Ehove and other job fairs, maybe a sidewalk sign can be placed out front that advertises the job postings. If we could come together and work on it, that would benefit everyone. Craig said Attica doesn’t have a police department, Seneca County PD covers Attica. Bob said that will affect response time and the Mayor agreed. Joe said if that happens here, kiss traffic enforcement goodbye and Chief said you can kiss Gatso goodbye as well. Sue asked if there are any retired officers who may want to come back and work. Heather said that would be similar to Wakeman, as they use reserve officers. Chief said he wishes he could find someone, but he knows there are issues at Wakeman, they were paying for their selections. Chris said the proposal that Sue and Bonnie created needs researched and Chris would like to schedule a date to discuss this further. There is a regular Council meeting 5/9/23. It was decided to hold a finance meeting on 5/4/23 at 6:00 PM. Joe said he is in support of both paying a wage to hire people and paying current employees whatever our revenue can afford. Sue reminded everyone that all departments here are facing a hiring crisis and we want to be able to keep all of our departments, it’s happening everywhere, in all jobs, all over the country. Joe and Bob agreed. Chris said the sooner we address this the better. Discussion regarding changing the tax rate to 2% or reducing the tax credit. Council asked Heather to reach out to Jim Barney to see if that can be done through reciprocity. Chief said Willard is putting this on their ballot in May in order to pay for fire and police officers.

There being no other business to come before them, the meeting adjourned at 7:00 PM.

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Heather Alicea, Administrative Specialist