



City of Ashtabula

Ashtabula City Council

Community Development/Economic Development/Parks & Recreation Committee Meeting

Tuesday, April 11, 2023 at 4:00 PM

4717 Main Avenue, Ashtabula, OH 44004

Minutes

Opening of Committee Meeting

Call to Order

The meeting of the Ashtabula City Council Community Development/ Economic Development/ Parks & Recreation Committee was called to order at 4:00 p.m. by Committee Vice Chair Jodi Mills.

Roll Call

Members Present: Vice Chair Ward 4 Councilor Jodi Mills, Member Council President John Roskovics

Absent: Chair Ward 5 Councilor Jane Haines-DiGiacomo

Officers Present: City Manager James Timonere, Clerk of Council McKenzie Burgan

Parks & Recreation Board Members Present: None

Visitors: Rick Coblitz from ADDA

Sunshine Law Certification

A quorum was established as defined by the Ashtabula City Council Rules of Order. The meeting met the requirements of the Ohio Sunshine Laws Open Meetings Act.

Welcome and Acknowledgement of Visitors

Vice Chair Jodi Mills welcomed Rick Coblitz as a visitor from ADDA and our two special guest speakers, Kara Norman and Jamie Baker.

Special Guest Presentation

Kara Norman with the Food Trucks

Kara Norman works with the Ashtabula Mobile Food Network as the Project Coordinator. She is Ashtabula born and raised. She got into the restaurant industry when she was about 17 in high school with her first job being at Applebees as a server. She said she wanted to get out of the food industry and get a regular 9 to 5 job but that ended up not being for her. She is now extra passionate about the hospitality industry, especially in our area. She started working with the Ashtabula Mobile Food Network about a year and a half ago. Her position started off as part-time but is now full-time. The Ashtabula Mobile Food Network, also called AMFN, is a nonprofit organization that focuses on the guidance and development of local food entrepreneurs. Due to the number of summer events and tourists we have in our area, wineries, and three shifts at factories, Ashtabula is a great place for food trucks. This is where food trucks are able to shine, as they are nontraditional. The food and beverage industry is risky, but the correct steps need to be taken and when it is developed and maintained correctly, this industry can be profitable and also brings a variety of fun foods to the area. Flexibility is always her number one selling point, along with the hours and ability to change your menu without as much pushback as you would see at a brick-and-mortar restaurant. It is a way to

dip your toe into the industry as an entrepreneur with lower startup and operating costs which hopefully leads to more success. Food trucks are a great place to start and also a great way to add an extra stream of income, marketing, and even catering if you have a brick-and-mortar business. Food trucks can be part-time, full-time, or seasonal. Kara mentioned she has one individual who will be using their food truck as their retirement plan. The main goal of the Ashtabula Mobile Food Network is to provide easy access to resources throughout North East Ohio for existing and potential mobile food operators. They are looking to create a turn-key process for upcoming entrepreneurs as well as individuals that are looking to book these food trucks for their events. Food trucks for events can be thought of as catering brought to you with not just the food but also the kitchen. This past year and a half has consisted of a lot of research on local ordinances to make sure people are being guided in the correct and legal way. They have partnered up with LBCA, Kent State University Ashtabula, and Ashtabula Downtown Development Association. They are working on a process to make things easier for everyone for the events and a continuous and consistent location and time for where the food trucks will be. This will not only allow individuals to know where and when the food trucks will be there but also provides consistent profits for the food truck owners. They are working on getting all the food truck owners on the app Street Food Finder. This app allows you to follow the trucks and know where their upcoming bookings are and also reach out to them. Kara stated they do a lot of networking within their own network but also with other small business owners. AMFN offers assistance through this whole process from building your business plan all the way to the end. They offer resources in education and training, mentoring, and financing. They are working on the AMFN branded education material for easy access and checklists for entrepreneurs. Kara is ServSafe certified and would like to become a proctor. She has also worked with the Health Department. They also work with NEO Fund and their "Starting and Growing a New Business" course. This course is six weeks long and you go through and build your business plan. You get a textbook, PowerPoints, and Excel templates, and the instructor, Larry Polena, as a mentor. This six-week course costs \$100. Once you complete that course, you are still able to reach out to Larry or anyone else in the AMFN organization with any questions. Kara stated they guide them through the financial process as well and this has been the scariest part for everyone she has worked with this far. They work with Brad Blair of the Ashtabula Capital Access Program, who has a ton of banking experience, to figure out what an individual needs before they go to the bank to ask for funding. She stated this is a fun and exciting process when individuals genuinely care about what they are doing. She stated all the corporations and organizations she works with all have the common goal of economic development and helping people own their businesses. She shared some testimonials on how the Ashtabula Mobile Truck Network has positively impacted their businesses and lives. Kara stated she likes how she is able to help different parts of the hospitality industry. Their focus moving forward is to continue to build their branded education and bring in resources and get some more experienced people to come in and share their experiences and keep them on their toes. She would also like to continue the collaboration with locations for consistency and to make sure they keep rolling.

Member John Roskovics asked Kara how many food trucks there are now in Ashtabula County and what is the price to get a food truck. Kara stated prices start at about \$30,000 on the low end. \$50,000 is a good starting point. They have about four to five food trucks in their network currently. Once everyone is on the Street Food Finder app, she will have more information available, such as the number of bookings, cancelations, etc. She is working with three clients now to get them food trucks.

Vice Chair Jodi Mills asked if the Street Food Finder was an app and Kara said yes. Mrs. Mills asked if they could download the app and know where the food trucks are at. Kara said yes and it shows you a map, the type of food the trucks offer, and any upcoming events they have booked. Kara stated this app started in Columbus, so they are a local organization that put this technology together. Mrs. Mills asked if there is one type of food that is the most popular for these food trucks.

Kara said BBQ trucks are the most popular by far. Mrs. Mills asked what the biggest expense would be for someone starting out. Kara said the initial cost of getting your mobile food unit. Permits are mostly annual, so those are not too bad once you get going and keep everything nice. She said the initial cost of the unit and getting all of your equipment and becoming ServSafe certified would be the most expensive. Mrs. Mills asked if there is a way we will know the food trucks are part of the AMFN network and know they have the stamp of approval and know the Health Department has been there. Kara said she is pricing out magnets to put on the food trucks. The first batch she ordered a sample of were too small. She is hoping by summer they will have the magnets to put on the trucks.

Member John Roskovics mentioned that the only food trucks they had when they were kids was the guy pedaling and ringing the bell down the street and they would get ice cream. Kara said those are welcome too. They help with carts, trailers, and trucks. Mrs. Mills also mentioned having Mr. Meeds Popcorn and Hot Dogs.

Member John Roskovics asked how the food trucks for businesses that also have brick-and-mortar buildings are received. Kara said they are received well and that now everyone is realizing the value of the food trucks. She stated that it is nice when you know a restaurant and now you can have them at your own party in food truck form. Mrs. Mills said one is a grab-and-go and the other is a sit-down location so they are two totally separate things.

Vice Chair Mills said it sounds like a lot of times because we do live in the snow belt, people have other things they are doing as well to sustain themselves. Kara said it all depends. Some people go out all winter, while others do other things to sustain themselves during the winter. Mr. Roskovics and Mrs. Mills said thank you to Kara and they would love to have her back in the future.

Jamie Baker with Ashtabula Hustles: Made on Main

Jamie Baker introduced herself. She is an urban planner and she has done initiatives like this throughout Cleveland and in the bay area in California. She moved to Ashtabula about a year and a half ago to be closer to her mom. She started the Made on Main project in January. They are recruiting makers for Main Ave in Ashtabula. They have \$100,000 available for three to five makers who will win in a pitch competition. Their project goals are to fuel Ashtabula entrepreneurs to launch, scale up, and succeed and to revitalize Main Ave., and also promote Ashtabula County. She explained that makers are defined by a few things, such as that their revenue is not reliant on foot traffic. So when they were studying what was going on on Main Ave., they saw that there was not a lot of foot traffic. So, selling tacos would not be a great business option because you could sell a taco to everyone that walked down the street and you still would not be able to pay your rent. Makers make something and distribute it and also sell it retail, locally, regionally, and even nationally. Scaling up makers is really viable because their market is not solely dependent on our local economy. She said makers enjoy all kinds of pursuits such as engineering, additive manufacturing, craft work, clothing products, and culinary arts. Their project timeline has been conducting research that was done from October to December. In January, they put the program together. In February, they launched the program publicly with a website and social media. Applications are due May 1st. They have received 20 applications. In late summer they will have their pitch day. The pitch day completion will be for the top ten finalists who will come in and present their idea to a panel which will then choose the three to five who receive a share of the \$100,000 prize. Finding makers has been the biggest challenge, as the kinds of people they want have their heads down and are making or doing something and are not employed in a traditional setting. The pitch competition has been a way to recruit makers in all kinds of areas, not just here in Ashtabula, because it is a way to attract attention and create a buzz. When you have some money available, people tend to pay attention. One of the things they are looking at doing is getting a cluster of people with similar needs and then being able to help them with some of their logistical issues.

Member John Roskovics asked where on Main are they looking to put these entrepreneurs. Jamie stated they were going to be between Park and Park. Mr. Roskovics asked if the business owner who makes railings would go into a storefront. Jamie said for an applicant like that what they need is a showroom as the things he does make vibrations and noise and he may not want to be somewhere where a neighbor may not appreciate that. They could also use the showroom to sell some of the smaller items they create. The storefronts can also be used as pop-ups or seasonal stores. She said about 367 million dollars were spent in the county in 2021 and she said there was something like 1.6 million visitors as well. They are looking at a cluster of businesses that could be a draw to tourists. Jamie stated that some of the most successful businesses in Cleveland were makers who were able to scale up and sell nationally. Mr. Roskovics said that it was exciting to hear they have received 20 applications and with them picking only three to five, maybe next year they can do this again. Jamie stated there are plenty of vacancies and plenty of interests and that some of the businesses may just need another year or two to get everything together to be able to pay rent, as most of the applicants are making in their homes. She stated her dream was to find some clusters of activities that you can then scale up. So far, they have three clusters, one being culinary arts, another being small manufacturing, and the last being filling the gap of there not being a lot of family-oriented activities to do here. With the family-oriented activities cluster, perhaps one of them alone cannot quite independently make it but if they have an interest in working together, that may become viable. Jamie stated she is hoping for another 20 applications. Her goal was to have 40 to 50 applications and to find 10 rental spaces that they could pre-vet so the businesses know what they are getting into when they walk in the door as far as the needs to build out the interior and if there is a space to suit them.

Vice Chair Jodi Mills asked if once they all get situated is there different help to help sustain the businesses. Jamie said that one of the things that helps activate any street, is popup events and she is hoping to work with ADDA and others or even maybe do some individual popup events that are maker specific. They will also continue to need to be surrounded by business planning support and business growth support, which NEO Fund is great at doing and providing. They are also collaborating with SCORE, which is a national nonprofit. They offer free business support and what is neat about them is their reach is not just local. She stated anyone who has applied so far are able to sign up for the NEO Fund business classes, which is a six-week program, and then they are also able to bounce ideas off of her and if she does not have an answer, she will find someone who does. Mrs. Mills asked if there seemed to be a shift since the pandemic and how people would order items online. Jamie said a couple of things happened with COVID. They had a shift in consumer habits and these shifts resulted in everyone getting everything in a cardboard box. Another shift that came with this was everyone getting tired of everyone having the exact same things and people not having individuality. People like the individuality of purchases where they can see the person who made it, and touch something that someone handmade. That is the consumer end of it, but from the street presence end, people no longer want to walk in and out of a bunch of little shops, at least not enough to make it profitable to sustain those businesses that they want to have there. However, what can make it profitable is having a shop that looks like it is open for business but someone is in the back making stuff and not just sitting there waiting for a customer to walk in the door instead they are busy creating and marketing and when someone walks in, that is revenue icing. She said part of what she wanted to model this off of is the Delmar Maker District in St. Louis. The man who created Square created this in a makers' space in San Jose, CA called Tech Shop, which has since closed. The gentleman who made Square is from St. Louis and he wanted this opportunity for this to exist in his hometown so he created the Delmar Maker District which is now 10+ years in. They have an amazing facility and there is no reason we cannot have that here. Just because that situation originated by a multi-millionaire, he does not put his money in it to throw it away, he expects each piece of equipment to be self-sustaining and the holistic district to be self-sustaining. He probably has to bail it out every once in a while, they purchased these pieces of equipment that can cost half

a million dollars and is very specialized for makers to use. In order to get to use these machines, people have to take a class which they have to pay for, and learn the etiquette of the workplace which they also have to pay for, but then they can manufacture and make what they want to make and make money off of the items. If you look on their website you will see all these pieces of equipment working, which makes it so their economy can grow locally because they have provided that access. One of the things is that the math has to make sense, it cannot be just a dream or a good idea. That's why sprinkling a few seeds is a good way to get it started, because then you can see what is the strongest cluster and look at what kind of investments make sense for businesses. She said she is not sure what is going to happen next, she is just tasked with building this airplane while they fly it and if it works well they may see more of it.

Vice Chair Jodi Mills said that as Kara was saying, some of the food trucks will go by one business which has made their business grow so if these are sprinkled in between some of these sustained businesses downtown already, someone will stop at one and then maybe stop at another. Kara said they all work together. Mrs. Mills said maybe this meeting will bring some more applications in since they have until May first. Jamie said if anyone is listening and interested in applying, the application takes about a minute or two to fill out and there are no losers. If you apply, they will find some way to add value to their business and stick with them as their business grows. Jamie said these projects tend to be catalytic. She knows a lot of people want to see coffee shops and restaurants and this is a way to start getting a foothold, so there is then a demand for things like that to come. Mr. Roskovics said this was very exciting and Mrs. Mills agreed, saying it all makes sense. Mr. Roskovics said he has great nostalgia for Main Ave but realizes it will not be what it used to be and hopes this will work. Mrs. Mills said it is a change and everything is a little bit different now.

Visitor Rick Coblitz stated ADDA has worked with both Kara and Jamie and support and will help them the best they can.

City Manager's Report

City Manager Timonere stated they had started doing some cleanup in the parks. They have primarily gotten to the baseball fields at Smith Field and Nappi. They have Lakeside Junior High and Saint John High School both using Smith Field and Nappi Field for practice and games. He said hopefully they can get some games in before we see some more snow next week. He mentioned that Smith Field is getting a lot of work this year. One thing they had talked about doing was upgrading the restrooms and having them open for events. They had a plumber go in there that day and the fixtures are very old and all need replaced, a backflow is needed, and some valving and piping also need to be redone. The cost would be about \$8,000 and they do feel they need to go ahead with this. One of the reasons the dog park spigot was not working was because of some of the plumbing in the restroom building. They will be able to isolate these two lines, so if there ever is an issue, they can isolate that line from the rest of the restroom. They did receive the grant for new buoys for Walnut Beach. These will be delivered sometime this spring/summer. The final details are being worked out with ODNr. Mr. Timonere said he got this grant about 8-10 years ago and some of those buoys may be in Canada now or deteriorated over time. He believes they requested seven buoys and these will designate the swim area where boats cannot go which makes it safer for the beachgoers. It also defines the area where the lifeguards are guarding the beach. Mr. Timonere said he met with some representatives of the My Neighborhood Collaborative about Kadon Park and doing some things there for them as they kick off their grow season.

Vice Chair Jodi Mills asked, with the parks getting cleaned up are they dumping the trash at the parks now too? Mr. Timonere said yes.

Member John Roskovics said he remembered that, about 4 to 5 years ago, the council approved medical marijuana for use in the City of Ashtabula. Mr. Timonere said it was not for use in the City of Ashtabula. Rather, they modified the zoning so that a dispensary could be located in certain areas within the city. Mr. Roskovics stated he saw that day a dispensary opened up in Saybrook. He stated he did not believe Saybrook approved anything and asked where he lost track. Mr. Timonere said he did not believe the communities had to approve it. He thinks the communities had to say no to them or designate in their zoning where a dispensary could be located. Mr. Timonere said it is still up to the State of Ohio whether they issue those licenses and they are issued to addresses, not a business. The organization has to apply for a license with the address of the property they have already acquired. Along with the application for a license, you have to send to the state the address that you are asking for the license and it has to be an allowable use within the zoning. Mr. Timonere said he completed about 8-10 letters just stating that a particular address was acceptable to the city. He is unsure how the state does its choosing. He believes there are still one or two licenses open within our region. It is possible other licenses will come along but he is unsure if they will put them as close to this current dispensary. Mr. Roskovics stated he remembers when they approved it that the dispensary couldn't be by a school, church, etc., so when the license was awarded to Saybrook he thought back to when they had to go through all of these steps. He stated he just wanted everything in Ashtabula. Mr. Timonere said there is a lot of traffic out there and it is in a plaza that is always busy, but the city has good locations too, with similar traffic. Mr. Roskovics said we even had choices close to the medical facilities which, to him, made sense, with it being medical marijuana.

Parks & Recreation Committee Report

April Meeting Minutes

Since there was no one present from the Parks and Recreation Board, Vice Chair Jodi Mills reported on their April meeting. She stated they discussed the mats for Walnut Beach which would be for folks that may have a disability and would be ADA accessible. Mr. Timonere said the mats are not ordered yet but they have determined they need about 100 feet. They did reach out to ODNR about this and they recommended about 50 feet back from the water line, so that is estimated to be about 100 feet. He stated they would be ordering two fifty-foot mats that are five feet wide and they are around \$2,200 a piece for a total of around \$4,400. Mrs. Mills stated these will be nice as they will provide better access for all. She also stated when she was at the beach earlier that week when it was a bit chilly, there were people down there getting ready for the season. She stated the Parks Board spoke about the new sign for Walnut Beach and that this is being worked on. Mr. Timonere stated the permits for the electric installation are going in and they did work out an agreement with the Hubbard House for the meter to be located on their building so they do not have to have a pole with a meter sticking out of the ground. The electrical line will be run underground. The electrician is working with the sign company, the Illuminating Company, and with the Hubbard House to coordinate all of this. Mrs. Mills said that will look nice. She also said Mr. Timonere's assistant, Brenda, is awesome as she is working on the Bands on the Beach schedule. These bands will be at the beach on Thursdays. Mrs. Mills asked if Mr. Timonere knew what the first Thursday would be for these events. Mr. Timonere said he did not know but does know it is in June. They will get the schedule out, there is one band they are waiting on and as soon as that is confirmed they will get it out. He said Ms. Sanders also was able to get sponsors for these events so there are no park funds coming out for this and all will be covered by the donors which is greatly appreciated. Kara asked if there will be food options. Mr. Timonere said they have invited food trucks in the past but they are a little sensitive because the concession stand is there, but if they start getting big crowds then they will need more than just the concession stand.

Unfinished Business

Ashtabula Annual City Clean Up

Vice Chair Jodi Mills stated that the City Clean Up would be Saturday, April 22nd. Everyone will meet at the City Hall in the back at 8:30 a.m. and will clean from 9:00 a.m. to noon. She also

mentioned that Youth Leadership is working on a Walnut Beach Clean Up, so we will encourage folks to help with that. This will be on Saturday, May 20th from 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. with lunch provided there afterward. Mrs. Mills said she had a lot of people asking her if we were going to clean up the beach with the City Clean Up and we are not, but we will be helping out at the Beach Clean Up on May 20th.

New Business

None.

Next Meeting

The next meeting will be on May 9, 2023, at 4:00 p.m.

The next meeting will be on May 9th in the Council Chambers and Rick Coblitz from the Ashtabula Downtown Development Association will be the guest. Mrs. Mills said we are excited to hear what is happening with the ADDA and what events they have.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 4:59 PM by Vice Chair Jodi Mills.

Attested By: McKenzie Burgan, Clerk of Council