



July 17, 2020

Members of Council:

The Community Relations Commission ("CRC") has had numerous individual interactions with the protestors and other members of the Worthington community in recent weeks. In line with our charge, we submit the following feedback, observations, and recommendations to City Council regarding the city's response to the Black Lives Matters protests occurring in our city:

- **Community members feel communication from the City is lacking.**
  - Community members are reporting that they are not feeling heard by the city, stating that communications feel one directional. There is a sense that the City is not listening, only disseminating information. However, residents are reporting dissatisfaction with the manner in which information is being disseminated. Residents feel that the website is not as user-friendly as it could be, making it difficult to find information that is relevant to them.
  - While there is work happening behind the scenes (planning listening session, conversations with Kirwan), there is no outward communication about these activities. As a result, community members are reporting feeling unheard. Many are reading the road closures as the city's **only** response to these persistent protests, which it seems is only exacerbating the issue. The city may be taking action behind the scenes, but this has not been communicated to the protestors; instead, a string of unplanned conversations with city and school district officials ill-equipped to discuss these issues has transpired, further eroding public trust and contributing to the anger and frustration that the protestors feel.
  - **Recommendation:** Expedite, to the extent possible, the community listening session process because community members currently feel there is no outlet for their voices.
  - **Recommendation:** Release a statement indicating what current plans are in the works. In this statement, be honest and transparent about where the city is (i.e. *"We want to make certain we get this right, so we have been taking some time to educate ourselves on these issues and engage professionals who can help us conduct structured conversations with the community and a comprehensive review of cities policies and procedures. These activities are currently in planning stages and we are engaging [list the professional/organizations you are engaging] to assist us in this work. We ask for your patience as we try to make sure we do this right and we look forward to learning together."*)
  - **Recommendation:** Conduct a critical review of city communication policies and procedures to ensure they are relevant for current technological platforms and accessible to all residents regardless of age or technological ability.
- **The level of police presence during the protests is felt to be excessive.**
  - Protestors feel as if **police are not present to protect them.**
  - Much larger protests in Columbus have required less road closures, while similarly a funeral procession in almost any municipality only requires two or so law enforcement vehicles.
  - Protesters have reported that police have ignored protesting community members when approached for discussion or, in some instances, to report potential incidents. Specifically, this is the claim that the young protestors made after the incident with the Ace Hardware

truck on June 20th. Additionally, a live feed from last Saturday's protest shows a Worthington police officer ignoring residents trying to report an assault, repeatedly. We condemn this behavior and believe that Worthington police officers have a sworn duty to protect and investigate all complaints, even when those complaints are coming from residents who are protesting police violence.

- Residents from various political affiliations and viewpoints are complaining about the road closures. This include residents who are in support of and those who are opposed to the protests. Residents from all sides have expressed concern about the cost that the policing of the protests are imposing on the city as well as concern about police from multiple other jurisdictions coming to assist during these protests. Members of the CRC have attended nearly every protest that has been held and we have never seen more than 60 or so peaceful protesters. There is no reason to so excessively police such small, peaceful protests.
- **Recommendation:** Limit road closures to within 1,000 feet of where the protesters actually are at any given time. This could be accomplished with two police officers on bikes stationed at either end of the marchers. This would ensure that only effected roads are close and avoid the contention that excessive road closures are causing on *all* Worthington residents and businesses, whether they are in support of the protests or not.
- **Recommendation:** Do not evoke our shared service agreement for small protests, such as the ones occurring in our community recently.
- **Recommendation:** Conduct a critical review of the city and Worthington Police Department's response to these protests, including all directive given to officers who are on duty during protests.
- **Activities of the Worthington Police Department have had a chilling effect on the exercise of free speech in Worthington.**
  - Chief Ware admitted that his officers were collecting the license plate information of all individuals parked at TWHS during the protests. The Chief insisted that those plates would not be run unless there was a reason. However, protestors have reported surveillance of their residences after police have logged their license plates at the high school prior to protests. CRC members have heard from multiple sources that Worthington police are conducting slow drive bys of protesters homes, watching them if they are outside. If true, this is wildly unacceptable behavior. It is intimidation and residents who are experiencing this are reporting feeling that their first amendment rights are being violated. The CRC condemns such intimidating behavior from all public entities and believes such behavior cannot be acceptable in the city of Worthington.
  - Communications from the Police Department via the City have reminded protestors that they may be criminally liable in the future, should the City choose to charge them. Worthington is the only suburb experiencing persistent protests, and we believe this is because of our response to these protests. For example, after the Ace Hardware incident, there were three weeknights of protests in solidarity and support of the young people **who have no voice in the City**. Since then, there have been nearly weekly protests. These protesters have made clear **they will continue until the city takes action**. Exposing them to the constant specter of criminal liability while exercising their First Amendment free speech rights is not an effective method to encourage continued dialogue.
  - **Recommendation:** Conduct a critical review of the city and Worthington Police Department's response to these protests, including all directive given to officers who are on duty during protests.
  - **Recommendation:** Make clear that the city **will not** press charges against peaceful protesters. Pressing charges against the protesters will not help us move forward and will likely only lead to additional protests.

These are the concerns that members of our community have expressed to members of the Community Relations Commission throughout this past month of unrest. While there remains numerous other issues of structural racism to address, we believe the miscommunications, disenfranchisement, and fear being caused by the actions of the City required immediate action in

order to alleviate these numerous concerns. We look forward to continuing this dialogue and examining additional concrete actions Worthington can take to become central Ohio's leading anti-racist community.

We believe Worthington is stronger when all of its community members feel safe, can be heard, and can take part in the political process. We hope that Council supports the above recommendations and moves to further the goal of a stronger, more united Worthington.

Sincerely,

Tom Burns

Angela Courtwright Mahaffey, Vice-Chair

Meg Kane

Shawna LaRue Moraille

Nick Linkenhoker

Beth Mirmelstein

Eddie Pauline, Chair

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