



Finance Committee Agenda

June 7, 2022 at 2:30 PM

Finance Committee

Tom Muething, Chair
Bob Rosen
Ben Hunt

Staff Liason

Scot Lahrmer, Village Manager

MINUTES

1. Approval of minutes: May 17, 2022

TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

1. Discuss Village fee policy and practices

ADJOURNMENT

Finance Committee Minutes
May 17, 2022

Attendees: Bob Rosen (Committee Member), Ben Hunt (Committee Member), Scot Lahrmer, Kathy Harcourt, and Tom Muething (Committee Chair).

The meeting was called to order at 4:45 p.m. The minutes from the meeting of May 3, 2022 were reviewed and approved after Mr. Hunt corrected the misspelling of Mr. Lahrmer's name at the end of the minutes.

Mr. Lahrmer reviewed the April, 2022 financials noting revenues for the year to date of \$2.9 million in 2022 compared to \$2.2 million last year. Expenditures year to date in 2022 were \$1.9 million and expenditures were a similar level in 2021. The unencumbered General Fund balance was \$6.4 million as of the end of April. Income tax revenues were \$1.1 million in April 2022 which is a record level for the Village.

Mr. Lahrmer then reviewed with the Committee the Hamilton County Auditor's valuation of property in the Village over the past 10 years noting the 13% increase in the last year but relatively flat levels over the remaining period.

Mr. Lahrmer reviewed the tax budget with the committee noting that this is an annual requirement that we send to the Auditor's office. It is required to justify our next year's property taxes. It is broadly based on the 2021 budget with a 2% increase. The Village's main budgeting exercise for 2022 will occur in the 3rd/4th quarters. Mr. Hunt moved to recommend to Council the approval of the tax budget. This motion was seconded by Mr. Rosen and was approved unanimously.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Tom Muething

**To: Tom Muething, Finance Committee Chair
Bob Rosen, Finance Committee member
Ben Hunt, Finance Committee member**

From: Scot F. Lahrmer, Village Manager

Date: June 1, 2022

Re: Fee for non-residents using Amberley Green

At the May 9 Council meeting, it was requested staff conduct an overview of our policy regarding fees charged by the Village. This memo is intended to set the stage for that discussion.

This topic was first broached in 2012, when the Public Buildings and Parks Committee proposed a non-resident fee for parking at Amberley Green. Ordinance 2014-04 was originally proposed to charge non-residents for a parking sticker. The rationale was to have non-residents pay their share of the costs for maintaining Amberley Green. There was also concern about safety and knowing who was at Amberley Green. Some visitors to the property were also parking on adjacent streets and residents were asking for “no parking” signs to be erected on their streets to prevent parking. Also, crossing over Ridge Road to access Amberley Green was considered a safety concern.

After deliberation among the Committee and consultation with our Law Director Kevin Frank and Risk Manager, Michael Fishel, the Public Buildings and Parks Committee concurred the non-resident fee should not be pursued. Implementing a parking fee from an insurance perspective, would necessitate the Village purchase garage keeper’s liability coverage. There are two components to this coverage: a) liability arising out of parking operations, excluding damage to the lessees’ automobiles, and b) physical damage coverage for damage to the lessees’ cars. Risk Manager Michael Fishel advised he did not know what the cost of obtaining this coverage would be, however, in all likelihood, it will exceed the revenues the Village is likely to generate.

In addition, with accepting the We Thrive \$27,000 grant, one of the conditions was opening our facilities to non-residents.

This issue arose again in 2019 when the Public Buildings and Parks Committee was discussing dogs at Amberley Green. Concern had been expressed about non-residents using the property and perhaps a fee should be charged. The Committee ultimately decided not to pursue a fee as the administrative burden to collect fees will far exceed revenue derived and it would necessitate the purchase of additional insurance for Village liability. Apart from Hamilton County Parks, admittance fees for parks are rare. For example, the City of Cincinnati operates and maintains French Park in Amberley Village but does not charge a fee to utilize the park. Lastly, the administrative burden to collect fees will far exceed revenue derived.

Regarding fees being charged, the Village's policy has been to not charge fees. Part of this stems from having limited staff to collect fees and the premise that we should not "nickel and dime" our residents. The best example is the Village does not charge a fee for residents seeking a variance to our zoning code for example, if they want to exceed the height of a fence requirement, have their garage doors face the street or build within the setbacks, the Village does not charge a fee at all. This item was broached most recently in 2018 when the Planning Commission and Law Committee recommended not instituting a fee. Most communities will charge a fee to go before their Zoning Board of Appeals typically \$75-100. Likewise, the Village does not charge a fee for a zoning certificate to have a storage shed installed, a fence erected or a room addition. Most communities will charge a fee for the certificate in the range of \$30-50. Similarly, the Village does not charge fees for new construction.

The Village's ballfields are an area where fees could be charged however, the Village does not charge, nor do we schedule the fields. Our arrangement is with our two local schools, Pleasant Ridge Montessori (PRM) and Nativity. Through these two entities, a scheduler has been assigned, who volunteers for both organizations. Currently an Amberley resident organizes Nativity baseball and works with the PRM coordinator along with the JCC. Soccer coordination at the schools are separate volunteers.

Some communities charge a fee while others do not. Indian Hill and Pierce Township do not charge a fee for renting of their facilities whereas Lebanon has a contract with a youth baseball and softball organization, which has first rights to the fields and pay a yearly contract rate. If others want to use the fields, they pay the \$45 fee per game. Other communities like Madeira charge \$10 per player per season for organized recreation sports program. Wyoming has an hourly rate for residents and nonresidents where Fairfield charges \$12 per hour. Once again, fees related to ballfields are typical however, due to the arrangements of scheduling fields, the Village does not charge a fee and the Village shouldn't get in the business of scheduling fields.

Fees that the Village does charge, are limited. Use of the tennis courts requires the purchase of a \$70 pass for 2 years. The Village has an alarm system and charges \$180 per year. The Community Garden has a \$50 fee per year. The Village charges a \$10 fee for a home occupancy permit. The Village has fees associated with Mayor's Court but for the most part, charging fees has not been part of our policy.

To charge fees or not is tied more to the fiscal policy of an individual municipality. Budget crises over the years have forced some local governments across the country to seek increased fees in lieu of increased taxes. Municipalities are obligated to honor service commitments to residents, build and maintain our infrastructure while yet meeting their financial obligations. But local governments are also required to balance their budgets every year and one option is to start charging user fees. Often times, municipalities are charging fees to people who use different services instead of having to raise taxes. The discussion on whether to charge fees can be wagered on both sides of the issue but Amberley has typically not charged fees to our residents.

Also, we have found that when residents pay a fee they want/expect better service and facilities. Such as the tennis courts, as through the years the Village has had several residents complain that we charge them to use the courts, yet the courts are not maintained to their standards. The Village maintains the courts the best we can, but the pine needles and other debris fall daily, and cracks seem to pop up overnight. I can see a similar issue if the Village charges for the ballfields. Users may expect the Village to put material down to dry wet areas, striping the fields, and placing bases daily during the season.

Once again, this memo is intended merely to provide background for our discussion.