



Village of Westfield Center

Newsletter

January 2024

Village Finance

For the past two years, my newsletters to residents have included updates regarding the financial situation of the Village since the onset of the COVID 19 pandemic. Specific newsletters including this topic were sent in February 2022, June 2022, March 2023, and June 2023. They followed the progression of Village income tax collections, actions taken by the Village Council to manage our finances in a fiscally responsible manner, and the potential need for an income tax increase in the future.

The situation has evolved to 2024 as follows:

- Annual tax collections have settled in at about one million, still four hundred thousand short of pre-Covid collections.
- Our carryover balance for contingencies is being maintained and we have severely curtailed our spending over the past year. Capital project expenditures for 2023 were held to \$19,654 plus \$46,833 for street maintenance. A number of planned projects were either omitted from our five-year operating plan or postponed to future years. The Village remains in a sound financial position at the present time; nonetheless, we continue to evaluate our financial needs long-term in light of postponement of equipment and infrastructure improvements, and expected cost increases in fire and EMS services.
- The Westfield Fire District continues to need additional money for capital expenditures and operations. Westfield Township's 2.5 mill operating levy for the Fire District failed in the November 2023 election.

The Finance Committee of the Village Council met again on January 2, 2024, to discuss the present and future financial needs of the Village. The following was decided:

- An income tax increase cannot be considered until we know what our obligation will be to the Westfield Fire District when a new fire levy is passed. We currently pay \$158,000 per year to the Fire District from Village income tax collections. If, for example, a 2.5 mill additional levy is passed by Westfield Township, our annual cost for fire and EMS protection would increase by approximately \$212,000, or roughly \$370,000 in total.

- The Finance Committee approved planned expenditures of \$296,441 for essential capital projects this year. We have grant funding requests pending which could lower this number by \$81,310. These projects include the following:
 - A replacement clarifier, and new paving, at the Wastewater Treatment Plant.
 - A replacement police cruiser, and updated police radios.
 - Re-lining of underground sewer pipes along Greenwich Road east of the park circle. This would complete the last high-priority phase of sewer re-lining in the Village, which has been an ongoing project over the past several years.
 - Engineering fees for the Greenwich Road sidewalk slope improvement project.
 - Mower replacement in the Village Street Department.
 - Crosswalk re-painting.
 - Computer replacements in the Village Hall office, and other miscellaneous capital expenses.

Grant funding has played a significant role in the funding of capital projects over the past several years. The Village will continue to pursue grants for all eligible projects and acquisitions with the assistance of our engineering partner, OHM Advisors. For your information and interest, the following chart chronicles various Village projects which happened with the help of grant money.

		PROJECT COST	LOCAL SHARE	GRANT AMOUNT	GRANT SOURCE
2017	N LEROY PARK PHASE I	\$296,922	\$264,604	\$32,318	NATUREWORKS
2018	N LEROY PARK PHASE 2	\$328,682	\$196,182	\$132,500	ST CAPITAL \$100,000; ODNR \$32,500
2019	N LEROY TRAIL CONNECTOR	\$133,278	\$26,688	\$106,590	RTP
2020	ZOOM ROOM	\$20,471	\$0	\$20,471	CORONAVIRUS
2021	HYDROVAC	\$103,046	\$45,930	\$57,116	CORONAVIRUS
2021	S LEROY CULVERT	\$68,990	\$42,084	\$26,906	OPWC
2022	SEWER PLANT DRIVE	\$63,275	\$1,524	\$61,751	ARPA
2023	SEWER CAMERA	\$74,300	\$12,056	\$62,244	ARPA
2023	WESTFIELD WOODS	\$1,400,000	\$0	\$1,400,000	CLEAN OHIO & LWCF
		\$2,488,964	\$589,068	\$1,899,896	

44 Acres of Village Parkland

Before late December, the Village had a 39-acre park on North Leroy Road, eight acres of open space near the water tower off Virginia Drive, the two-acre park circle, and one acre behind Village Hall. In December 2023 a deal was closed for the Village to acquire, at no cost, the 44 acres between Grant Drive and Westfield Road from Highland Drive to the present park. This new parkland is passive in that it cannot be developed and will remain intact. The present park will continue to be open to activity and future development. This 44-acre increase now gives the Village 83 acres of parkland off North Leroy Road and Westfield Road.

The newspaper attached article appeared in the Medina County Gazette in late December, and it chronicles the story of DeDee O’Neil and the Western Reserve Land Conservancy which made the acquisition of the new parkland a success for the Village.

I hope that all residents are as pleased as I am to have this additional 44 acres of land adjoining the present park designated as parkland. This acquisition is the most extraordinary Village event in memory. It speaks to the continued efforts of our Village Council, and our Village employees, and their dedication to helping make the Village of Westfield Center the special place that it is.

If you have questions or comments for myself or any member of the Village Council on these or other topics, our contact information is available on the village website at www.westfieldcenter.org. Please also consider attending Village Council meetings, held the first Tuesday of each month at 7:00 p.m. at Village Hall, to stay informed on these and other issues affecting the village.

Sincerely,

Thomas Horwedel, Mayor

THE GAZETTE

Westfield Center closes deal on 44 acres of passive parkland

Patrick Rhonemus

Dec 30, 2023 5:00 AM

WESTFIELD CENTER — The village recently acquired 44 acres of land adjacent to Westfield Center Village Park.

The land was purchased from Diane “DeDee” O’Neil, who had previously donated more than 200 acres of land to the Medina County Park District in 2022. Westfield Center Mayor Tom Horwedel said that O’Neil’s attitude toward land was always about people who wanted land to stay in a natural state and be enjoyed by generations to come.

Horwedel said the land is between Grant Street and North Westfield Road and connects to the existing Westfield Center Village Park. With the addition of 44 acres, the park now has a total of 83 acres, but Horwedel said that the land will be conserved. He said that through a partnership with the Western Reserve Land Conservancy, they were able to secure two grants that helped fund the project.

“They looked at this and thought that this was a pretty good piece of property to put into conservancy, in other words, strictly for a passive park and no development,” Horwedel said. “And so, they approached her, and then they approached us on if we were interested in taking it on.”

Collected income tax is down because of people working from home, Horwedel said, meaning there wasn't enough money to buy the property. Western Reserve Land Conservancy Southeast Field Director Jacob Pries helped the village acquire two grants that amounted to roughly \$1.4 million.

“We used two grant funding sources to acquire the property,” Pries said. “One is called the Clean Ohio Conservation Fund. That fund is operated through the Ohio Public Works Commission; it’s a huge fund for the state of Ohio in regard to conservation. A lot of conservation work is done because of that fund. We were really excited to receive funding through that.”

Pries said that the Clean Ohio Conservation Fund covered three-fourths of the project.

“The second grant that we received is actually a federal grant called the Land and Water Conservation Fund, which is a fund that’s dedicated to public access, recreation and things of that nature,” he said. “It’s another huge grant for the entire country to secure public access and really do some great conservation in regard to recreation.”

Pries said that it was a real win for Westfield Center to secure both federal and state money for this project.

“The grant funding source, at its core, will conserve the property and the natural resource values contained therein, while allowing for public access and public access improvements for passive park use,” he said. “Things like trails, picnic tables and pavilions. It will be a really nice piece to add to the already existing park to the north and allow for some passive park use on the property.”

“We wound up getting the 44 acres as passive parkland, which is attached to our present parkland,” Horwedel said. “The present parkland can be developed with ball fields and stuff like that, but this new park piece from the conservancy is strictly passive parkland. It’s very limited what you could do, like walking trails. Stuff like that, and develop it in a natural way.”

The park committee is working on plans for what will be done to the 44 acres, but Horwedel is excited about the opportunity this poses.

“It’s really exciting for a little village like us, with about 1,100 people, to pick up all this great parkland,” he said.

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