

**Village of Mariemont
Special Meeting of Council
August 29, 2022**

Mayor Bill Brown called the meeting to order at 5:31 p.m. with the pledge of allegiance. Present were Mr. Bartlett, Mrs. Brownknight, Ms. Geldbaugh, Dr. Lewis, Mrs. Rankin, and Mr. York. Also present was fiscal officer Richard Ford.

Mayor Brown explained that this Special Meeting of Council was for us to discuss the Ohio Plan Strategic Planning report. Michael Hinnenkamp, of the Ohio Plan Risk Management Resources team, introduced himself. He has worked as executive director of OPRM for about four and a half years. The Village is a member and partial owner of the Ohio Plan. Mr. Hinnenkamp's background is in local government as a former city manager, administrator, and worked in various executive level positions for most of his 35-year career. He met with Mr. Bartlett, Mrs. Rankin, Mr. York, and Mayor Brown about a year and a half ago. He explained that Ohio Plan is a non-profit corporation that was formed in the late 1980s during an insurance crisis. At that time, local governments had a difficult time getting insurance coverage. Ohio, like many states, created legislation to allow public entities to form a pool and pool their risks together and create insurance companies. They are technically risk management. There is difference between insurance and risk management but essentially, they provide coverage. About six years ago they created a separate non-profit entity called Ohio Plan Management Resources designed to provide a variety of services to their members. Among their free services are training and consultations which are fee-based services for help with policy manuals, strategic plans, executive recruiting, etc. The pricing is just to cover costs.

The Village reached out because of concern about funding, losing businesses, etc. Mr. Hinnenkamp believes these problems should be approached comprehensively and the best way to start is to get a lot of input in a strategic planning session which is what happened back in April. The session included just a few Council members and a cross-section of the community which included both residents and business leaders of various ages. One problem with that approach is that they don't understand how the Village operates. Most of the participants came in with a good idea and asked helpful questions on how the Village functions.

The group met on April 30th and they had 11 participants, though some were not able to stay for the whole day. They went through a contextual review, history of the Village, and different structural issues. They talked about what expectations there were and what they hoped to accomplish. Those things are summarized in the report. There was a general sense of making sure the Village continued to move forward. The Village is a wonderful place to live, a wonderful place to raise a family, and has many incredible attributes...how do we preserve that and how do we make sure that in 15-30 years from now it is still thriving and still stable? The other sense that came out in those conversations was making sure that Village Council does something with these recommendations from the group. No one was suggesting that there was an immediate crisis but there was a general sense that there were some things underneath the surface that could be problematic in the near future.

As for the current state in Mariemont, they rated things in a very general sense by a show of hands. The Village's ability to attract residents was above average. However, we are not able to attract the diversity that we would like to see. The ability to attract and retain businesses was ranked low or below

the expectations. Providing services to the residents was above average. The ability to attract elected officials was below average. This is not unique to Mariemont as people in general are not wanting to get involved with local government. The citizens are engaged but not looking to be in charge or exposed. The local economy and the diversity of it was ranked below average. Infrastructure also ranked below; not necessarily the quality but more the funding to maintain the existing infrastructure. The price point for housing was considered below. The desire to have more affordable housing or more housing choices was noted.

Recent accomplishments in the Village were identified: Murray Path, 4th of July fireworks, Taste of Mariemont, new high school (not necessarily a Village issue, but rather something in the community), police & fire services, and the Emery Restaurant. The SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis was conducted with the participants. For that process the room was broken into two sections. One group was labeling strengths, the other side was labeling weaknesses. At some point they switched. The first part was 100% brainstorming. They did the same thing for opportunities and threats. Participants were then given stickers and they placed stickers next to the highest priority. In the report, all of the items are listed out and then 3-5 in each category are listed as the priorities.

Following the SWOT analysis, they conducted the “eulogy exercise” which is designed to reaffirm and provide validation of input gained from the SWOT analysis. During this exercise, the group was asked to think forward 5-10 years and imagine that the Village no longer existed. The team was asked to list the things that were responsible for the death of the Village and what should have been done to prevent its demise. The prioritized list included lack of revenue, lack of economic development, decline of the schools, and lack of safety services. When asked what actions should have been taken to prevent the demise, the participants came up with economic development plan, community engagement, proactive leadership, and a cohesive team (Village Council and staff).

The next part of the session focused on the “why” and “how” statements. A discussion and presentation video by Simon Sinek regarding the Power of Why and the Golden Circle was shown to assist the planning team with articulating the Why Statement (Vision for the Village) and their How Statement (Core Values for the Village). Why and How are two parts of three that make up their “Golden Circle.” It is difficult to start with a group of 11 and come up with a mission statement. We tried to gather some of the concepts (see page 27 of the Strategic Planning Session Report). The action vocabulary that came out of the exercise was lead, plan, coordinate, provide, and preserve. The results of the Why included high quality of life, strong sense of community maintained, community remains friendly and walkable, history and founding vision is preserved, and a diverse residential base is attracted. The group then went on to brainstorm words and phrases that convey the Village’s guiding principles and core values. They came up with sense of community, engagement, walkable, safe, give back, caring for those in need, extended family, inclusive, and business friendly/involvement in the community.

The final component of the day focused on establishing the “What” or “next step” priority actions that form the basis and categories for the development of a detailed Strategic Plan for the Village. The priorities were categorized in three action groups under internal Village government: structure/operations/services, building/grounds, and programs/policies. The action groups under external Village were programs/policies and quality of life. The participants were again grouped into two smaller teams for brainstorming to compose a list of internal and external action steps.

Mr. Hinnenkamp's report concludes with a professional analysis. He finds Mariemont to be an incredible community. It is very unique but there are some things under the surface that are concerning. These challenges are not going to be easy but most of the people in the community don't understand the depth of things like how much it costs to maintain infrastructure, etc. Deferred maintenance of a community is never a good thing because it is almost impossible to catch up and it is only going to get more expensive. Mariemont is not unique in the sense that it is not lacking challenges. All communities have challenges. What is missing is a plan. The finances are not in crisis mode, but they are concerning, especially when looking 3-4 years ahead. In essence, Mariemont is a planner's dream. The community is gorgeous and vibrant. There are people walking and engaged. There is a strong school district. It is desirable. But there is a complacency. It won't always be that way and it easier to address is now than five years from now. The recommendation is to create a more detailed plan. He warned against just addressing one issue because they're all interrelated. They don't all need to be addressed in the same time frame, but we need to be thinking about them comprehensively.

Mr. Hinnenkamp is of the opinion that a statutory form of government does not have many advantages. He thinks it best to address the structure of government. About 80% of the municipalities in Ohio are charter form, which essentially allows municipalities to write their own constitution. Mayor Brown asked if the residents vote on that change. Mr. Hinnenkamp said yes, it requires a vote, and it is not a simple process but it does take about two years before it can be put into place. It allows flexibility to deal with issues rather than having a set structure. Mr. York confirmed that most municipalities started as statutory, but Mariemont just never made the move to change. Mr. Bartlett said there was a recommendation made to Council in 1976 to move to a charter form of government. Charters vary dramatically but most follow a set format. Once it is created and in place, votes are required to make changes. Most charters involve language that it has to be reviewed every five years. Deer Park, not far from Mariemont, recently changed from a statutory city to a charter.

Leadership is another thing to consider. In looking at the structure, the demands on "volunteer" board are so great. Who is going to be there day to day to make sure these things get implemented? In Mariemont, you've always had elected officials willing to do that. Is that the future? The second part is, does the expertise exist? Would bringing a professional manager onboard allow you to have that full-time person who would bring that expertise. It wouldn't mean replacing anybody in this room or your residential groups. But you would have a full-time person working on that 40-60 hours per week. Ms. Geldbaugh interjected that most of this work doesn't require 40-60 hours per week. Mr. Bartlett said there are a lot of things that are not getting done, such as economic development, and that has been reviewed by Council in the past. Mr. Hinnenkamp said the recommendation, as part of this process, is to look at what the pros and cons are and what the job would entail. In the general market right now, and considering the size of Mariemont, the pay range is anywhere between \$125,000-\$175,000. Running this Village, which is a 3-4-million-dollar operation, with volunteers is risky as they could decide to walk out tomorrow. Dr. Lewis argued that the people doing the real work are the Village employees and the Village has a remarkable record of long-term employees. Mrs. Rankin questioned if all of the residents who participated in the strategy session felt 100% comfortable expressing their opinion. She added it might be helpful to get the opinions from various groups, such as the Village employees or people from the school, to get open opinions from different aspects of the community. Mayor Brown noted that he was there, two Council members, the police chief, and the premier property owner of the Village was there and that could tend to be a limiting factor in others voicing their opinions. Mr. Hinnenkamp did not think the participants were holding back, especially when in their smaller groups. Mike Kintner, a resident and participant in

the strategy session, thought Mr. Hinnenkamp did a good job at the planning session. Mr. Kintner doesn't always see strong expertise in various committees and having an administrator could help bring certain expertise where needed. While they may not be an expert in everything, they can provide the guidance and direction and have the ability to access professional expertise. It wouldn't replace this Council. Mr. Hinnenkamp described a city manager as a conductor, and they bring everything together from Council to department heads. They would empower Council, not replace Council. Ms. Geldbaugh is comfortable with the idea of power being taken from the Council but is concerned about power being taken from the employees and department heads. Council members are there to advise and support. She doesn't want to lose the expertise from the employees. Dr. Lewis would have liked to have included department heads in the strategy session. Mr. Hinnenkamp made the point that a good manager would never run anybody off if they're doing a good job. He thinks most staff want strong leadership. He noted that Mariemont does have a unique structure and questioned who the staff reports to.

Mr. York warned that we are getting ahead of ourselves. This was to set a strategic plan for this Village, this was to think about the future and think of who we are and where we are going and that is our decision, not the employees' decision. Clearly, they will be engaged in this process moving forward so what we need to ask now is what are our priorities? What do we do next and how do we do it? If a Village administrator is part of that plan, then we will vet that out but we need to get a vision statement and a strategic plan. We need to work on numbers 1-5 instead of 16-30 and that has been our issue. Going to a charter, that's 10 or 11 and maybe that becomes a longer-term goal. Mr. York went on to say that for us, now, to put the resources and time and talent into doing that, he doesn't see it. Mr. Bartlett noted that we are not deciding that here right now. He thought one of the reasons for this meeting was to allow the three Council members who didn't participate in the session to ask questions and find out about the process. Part of the next steps were to share the findings with all of Council and some of the department heads as well.

Mrs. Brownknight asked Mr. Hinnenkamp to walk through the process to get a comprehensive strategic plan. Typically, a third party is selected to build out a strategic plan which would involve us sending out an RFP. He said it could take 1-2 years, depending on the scope, to develop a 1-5-year plan long term. He did not recommend going beyond five years for a long-term plan. He doesn't recommend breaking up the issues up, but rather have a process that addresses the various issues simultaneously. Mrs. Brownknight asked if it is then business as usual while the comprehensive plan is being crafted. Mr. Hinnenkamp said yes unless something jumps out that requires immediate action. The cost for building out a comprehensive strategic plan could be anywhere from \$15,000-\$50,000 or more. Ohio Plan can do this sort of task, but they don't have mapping capabilities so things like that would be contracted out. Mr. Hinnenkamp recommends hiring someone to coordinate the entire project, but it doesn't mean they have to do each aspect of the project. Specific experts may need to be brought in along the way.

As for next steps, Mrs. Rankin would like to delve into the information gathering part of this and then reconvene. She suggested that the Council members look into how comprehensive plans work, gather more information, formulate better questions, and then sit down together and discuss how to go forward. A Committee of the Whole will meet on Monday, October 3, 2022 at 6 p.m. Mr. Hinnenkamp will draft a sample RFP of what the process would look like and sample proposal of what the comprehensive plan would entail and provide that to Council about a week before the meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 6:53 p.m.

William A. Brown, Mayor

Richard D. Ford, Fiscal Officer