DUBLIN CITY COUNCIL
WORK SESSION
SEPTEMBER 8, 2026

Minutes

Mayor Amorose Groomes called the Tuesday, September 8, 2026 work session to order at 6:00 p.m.

Council members present: Ms. Alutto, Mayor Amorose Groomes, Vice Mayor De Rosa, Ms. Johnson, Mr. Keeler, Ms. Kramb and Dr. Lam.

Staff present: Ms. O'Callaghan, Mr. Barker, Mr. Gracia, Mr. Rubino, Ms. Hunter, Ms. Murray, Mr. Urbancsik, Ms. LeRoy, Ms. Rauch, Mr. Hoyt, Ms. Willis, Mr. Phillabaum, Mr. Gracia, Mr. Ament, Mr. Brown, Mr. Hammersmith, Mr. Earman, Ms. Weisenauer, Mr. Fridley and Mr. Hartmann.

Mr. Keeler led the Pledge of Allegiance.

2027 Operating Budget and 2027-2031 CIP - II

City Manager Megan O'Callaghan introduced the topic and explained that this was the second work session in the annual budget process. She said staff had carefully documented Council feedback from the first session and had prepared comprehensive written follow-up responses that were included in the packet. She stated that staff would ask at the end of the meeting whether Council had any remaining questions on those follow-up items. She noted that Council had requested a deeper review of revenues, debt capacity, debt-funded projects, and Tax Increment Financing, and staff had therefore repurposed this work session away from the originally planned utility enterprise fund discussion in order to focus more fully on the City financial picture. She noted that outside advisers from Baker Tilly Municipal Advisors and Meeder Public Funds were present, along with Scott Dring from Visit Dublin Ohio, and described the evening presentation as a detailed inside look at City finances.

Mr. Rubino reviewed the agenda for the work session. He stated that the presentation would connect revenue, budget management, debt practices, investment earnings, liquidity management, economic vitality, capital investment, and forecasting into a broader financial strategy. He reviewed the overall budget calendar, noting that this was the second work session, that another work session on utilities remained scheduled for the following week, that the operating-budget-focused work session would occur on September 21, and that staff intended to keep to the previously established schedule by bringing the proposed budget forward for first reading at the October 12 Council meeting. He also framed the discussion in relation to Council goals, especially Metro Center revitalization, economic development in the West Innovation District, and creation of a premier athletic and recreation campus.

Revenue Overview

Mr. Rubino began with a high-level review of City revenue on an all-funds basis. He explained that more than 60 percent of total City revenue is derived from general operations and capital-related sources and that income tax remains the dominant recurring revenue source, constituting approximately 57 percent of all-funds revenue in the 2026 budget. He said the presentation would divide revenue into two broad categories, tax revenue and non-tax revenue, because that framework aligns with how the City and its bond reporting obligations examine available resources. Tax revenue included income tax, hotel/motel tax, property taxes, mental health tax, and TIF service payments. Non-tax revenue included grants, intergovernmental receipts, charges for services, licenses and permits, investment earnings, miscellaneous revenues, interest income, special assessments, and financing sources.

He summarized several key themes. He said the City benefits from a diverse revenue structure, that revenue growth supports both present operations and long-term investment, and that consistent and predictable revenue supports service quality while allowing the City to remain fiscally responsible.

Ms. Murray then reviewed the major tax sources in more detail. Income tax was described as the City's primary revenue source, generated by the 2 percent income tax on residents, businesses, and workers in Dublin. Historical collections showed steady growth, with only a modest decline during the COVID period followed by rebound. She stated that the 2027-2031 forecast assumed 3 percent annual growth based on actual collection trends rather than budget assumptions, reaching approximately $140 million by 2031. She also noted that income tax is monitored monthly and typically spikes in April, June, and September due to filing cycles and extensions.

Hotel/motel tax was summarized next. Ms. Murray explained that 75 percent of the tax imposed on transient lodging accommodations is available for restricted tourism-related expenditures. Historical collections had generally increased, again with a COVID-era decline followed by recovery. Staff forecast approximately 4 percent annual growth, reaching about $5.3 million by 2031.

Property tax revenue includes voted and unvoted millage and public utility property tax receipts from Franklin, Delaware, and Union Counties. Ms. Murray noted that the unvoted millage allocation had varied over time depending on Council policy and that the current dedication of 1.75 mills to the Capital Improvements Fund would return under the proposed plan to a split between Parkland and Capital Improvements. A 2 percent annual growth rate was assumed in the forecast, with triennial update fluctuations, reaching roughly $7.5 million by 2031.

TIF revenues were described as restricted revenues generated within designated districts to support growth-related infrastructure. Ms. Murray noted that these revenues can fluctuate significantly depending on the timing of district creation, development, and infrastructure completion. Approximately $19.3 million in service payments was expected in 2025, with a temporary peak followed by decline as districts expire. She forecasted a general 1 percent growth assumption within existing districts but emphasized that the total forecast declined over time because of expirations and only included currently adopted TIFs, not any future TIF districts.

Mr. Urbancsik presented non-tax revenues. He emphasized that although taxes dominate the City revenue profile, non-tax sources remain important for diversification and stability.

Intergovernmental revenue is money received from the State of Ohio, counties, and other public agencies to support transportation, public safety, capital improvements, and other services. Mr. Urbancsik explained that the 2025 increase was heavily influenced by a Franklin County permissive fee distribution related to the Rings and Cara roads intersection improvement project. The forecast included known partner funding in the proposed CIP plus a 1 percent baseline growth assumption.

Grant revenues are highly variable because they depend on both project timing and award success. Mr. Urbancsik cited 2022 as a large grant year due to COVID relief reimbursements, ARPA funding, roadway development funding, and project-specific grants. The forecast incorporated known grant-supported CIP projects, including Blazer Parkway shared-use path, East and West Bridge Street improvements, and the Emerald Connector over Interstate 270.

Charges for services include recreation programs, pool admissions, dispatching services, facility rentals, and other fee-based activities. Mr. Urbancsik noted that these revenues help offset service delivery costs and are reviewed annually through cost studies and the budget process. The forecast assumed continued participation and included projected SportsOhio-related revenue.

Fines, licenses, and permits include Mayor's Court fines, building permits, inspections, plan reviews, and other regulatory fees. Because these revenues are difficult to project, staff used a conservative flat forecast of approximately $4.4 million annually.

Interest income is a major recent growth area due to higher yields and available cash balances. Historical earnings had reached about $7.5 million by the end of the previous year. Mr. Urbancsik said the forecast assumed current holdings would be maintained to maturity and reinvested at an average rate of approximately 3.5 percent.

Special assessments, including Property Assessed Clean Energy programs, were explained as offsetting revenues and expenditures with minimal net financial impact to the City.

Miscellaneous revenues, including reimbursements, donations, sales, settlements, and refunds, were shown to fluctuate considerably from year to year. Mr. Urbancsik cited significant 2023 developer contributions and real estate sale proceeds as reasons for prior volatility. The forecast normalized this category with modest growth.

Financing sources were described as primarily debt proceeds and other financing used for capital projects and thus not recurring operating revenue.

Mr. Urbancsik concluded the revenue section by stating that tax revenues provide the recurring foundation of the City financial model, while non-tax sources and financing support operations and major capital timing. He also explained the City fee cost-recovery framework, noting that full cost recovery is not always the objective and that some services intentionally receive subsidies because they provide broad community benefit or advance Council policy priorities. He said the estimated subsidy for selected fee-supported services was approximately $13 million to $14 million and that the fee forecast assumed average growth of 2.5 percent, with proposed fee changes to be discussed at the next Council meeting.

Council Discussion on Revenue Assumptions and Risks

Vice Mayor De Rosa thanked staff for producing a substantial amount of work in a short time, especially across a holiday period. She stated that her principal concern remained the City's revenue forecast methodology. She observed that, except for TIFs, most forecasts assumed steady flat growth patterns and said she wanted more rigor behind the reasons for those assumptions. She asked for a clearer understanding of the City's three biggest revenue risks, the City's revenue opportunities, and what would happen under different scenarios. She also expressed concern that if revenues were forecast at approximately 3 percent while expenditures, particularly salaries, would likely grow faster, then the City would be forecasting itself behind its expenditure base over time. She emphasized that her question was not whether the City was presently at risk, but whether the long-term structure was sustainable if the City also intended to increase its debt load. She asked that analysis be tied not only to historical trends but also to the risk profile and opportunity profile of major employers, even if employers were not identified by name publicly.

Mr. Rubino responded by explaining the methodology staff had used. He said finance staff had increasingly begun using the City's enterprise artificial intelligence tools to help analyze data and produce projections, but that forecasting still required structured data, prior-year comparisons, and human judgment. He described the forecasts as projections rather than predictions and said staff attempted to use trend-informed assumptions where those assumptions were practical, while keeping some categories flat where growth rates were too uncertain. He added that later in the presentation staff would show the relationship between revenue growth and expenditure growth in a way that illustrated why the City still retained a structural advantage in the operating forecast despite expenditure assumptions that might exceed some revenue assumptions.

Vice Mayor De Rosa replied that she understood the City had historically built conservatism into its budgeting through utilization assumptions and reserve practices, but she reiterated that she was pressing specifically on the revenue side, especially on the implications of taking on significant debt. Mr. Keeler said he believed part of the answer lay in whether the Council priority projects would be additive to revenues. He said that if Metro Center, the West Innovation District, and the park initiatives were not expected to generate additive revenue, then it would be fair to question why they had been adopted as Council goals. Vice Mayor De Rosa responded that the issue was not whether the projects would have value, but how much value and in what timeframe. She stated that Council needed quantitative guidance.

Mr. Rubino agreed that the presentation would later address economic development, early infrastructure investment, and how those investments support revenue growth. He also acknowledged that Dublin relies heavily on income tax and that more than 90 percent of that income tax comes from businesses and employees located in Dublin, making the composition and resilience of the employer base especially important.

Mayor Amorose Groomes asked to revisit the revenue composition pie chart and walked through the major revenue categories. She observed that some of the largest components, including TIF revenue and charges for services, were either projected to decline or were cost-recovery driven. She questioned whether that meant income tax would need to make up a very substantial share of future growth. Mr. Rubino replied that income tax and charges for services were indeed key drivers, though the City also had some ability to influence charges for services through policy decisions and future TIF revenue through strategic development and new districts.

Debt Overview and Debt Capacity

Mr. Rubino transitioned into the debt portion of the presentation. He reviewed current outstanding principal by debt type and said the majority of City debt has historically been associated with infrastructure. He described the City's debt management approach as conservative, emphasizing that the City generally applies debt proceeds to priority infrastructure needs, uses established structuring practices, and seeks to avoid large concentrations of principal coming due over short periods of time.

He reviewed debt issuance history, noting a major 2015 issuance tied to early Bridge Park investments and a substantial 2024 issuance associated with land acquisition. He said the City had only issued short-term land-acquisition debt in 2026 and had no current plans for additional debt issuance that year, but that the proposed 2027-2031 CIP contemplated both short-term and long-term debt. He also emphasized the benefit of the City structuring practices, including shorter amortization periods and significant principal reduction within ten years, which help free up future capacity.

Mr. Rubino reviewed the City debt policy, explaining that 25 percent of income tax is allocated to capital, with 60 percent of that capital allocation available to support debt service and 40 percent intended for cash-funded pay-as-you-go projects. Based on the prior year numbers, he said approximately $17.7 million of annual capacity would be available under policy to support debt service, though that does not mean all of it must be used. He presented a capacity illustration showing that the City would have substantial theoretical capacity under current policy, but again emphasized that actual use remains discretionary and project driven.

He also reviewed CIP funding sources, showing that roughly one-third of the current proposed CIP was supported by debt. When debt proceeds were removed from the CIP funding mix, the total five-year plan fell substantially, from approximately $425 million to less than $290 million. He stated that while the City had the option not to issue proposed debt, doing so would significantly reduce the number of projects the City could undertake within the five-year window and would likely limit progress on Council goals. He said staff had forecast CIP funding sources by year and highlighted that approximately $137 million in new borrowing was contemplated over the five-year period, with a somewhat larger total shown in one summary table because it also included prior-year bond proceeds still available for use.

Mr. Rubino then reviewed the factors that affect debt limits, including legal debt limitations, operating capacity to support annual debt service, comparable debt burdens relative to peers, and credit risk. He said Baker Tilly would present an independent review of the proposed debt funding plan and debt sensitivity analysis.

Baker Tilly Municipal Advisors Debt Analysis

Brian Cooper and Tom Ricchiuto of Baker Tilly then addressed Council. They explained that they receive the full CIP from City finance staff, review the nature and useful life of proposed projects, and then recommend financing structures accordingly. Mr. Cooper summarized the proposed debt funding plan by year, starting with approximately $37 million in 2027, including income tax-backed, sewer-backed, and general-fund-related borrowing. He said projects with shorter useful lives, such as sports-facility-related items, should be amortized more quickly, while infrastructure such as utility systems can support longer amortization. He emphasized that shorter amortization is generally better for the City financially because it reduces total cost and pays down principal faster, though it creates higher immediate annual debt service.

Mr. Rubino briefly interjected to connect the proposed debt totals to Council goals. He said approximately $31.5 million in proposed debt-funded projects were associated with Metro Center revitalization, $6 million with the premier athletic and recreation campus, and roughly $52 million of the $63 million West Innovation District total was identified as debt-funded. Additional debt-funded items not directly tied to those goals included DCRC improvements, Hard Road rehabilitation, kayak livery improvements, and sewer projects.

Mr. Cooper then reviewed Baker Tilly debt capacity charts. One chart showed annual debt service layering over the CIP period, with athletic facility improvements represented separately due to their short-term structure. Another chart compared total existing and proposed debt service to available revenues, including income tax, sewer revenue, and TIF-related resources, showing that debt service comes relatively close to available revenue during the heaviest capital years but separates over time as revenues grow and debt amortizes.

A second chart showed the City self-imposed policy threshold, which Baker Tilly translated into a maximum target of 15 percent of income tax collections being used for debt service. Under the proposed borrowing plan, debt service usage would rise to approximately 14.22 percent of income tax near the end of the CIP period, remaining below but close to the policy ceiling.

Mr. Cooper then discussed recession sensitivity. He explained that if the City completed a major capital plan and then experienced a recession in which income tax collections fell by 10 percent, the debt payments themselves would not change. What would change would be the City's flexibility, because the fixed debt payments would consume a larger share of available resources, thereby pressuring both annual capital spending and operations. He said such sensitivities can be modeled in many ways, but the core concept remains the same: debt is a fixed wall, while revenues can move.

He then discussed rating agency perspectives. He said debt is only one component of credit evaluation, and that management quality, overall financial performance, reserves, liquidity, and local economic strength are all also important. He noted that Dublin scores highly in those categories. He reviewed the prior-year discussion in which Fitch had identified approximately $50 million of new net debt as a pressure point from a ratings perspective, while other agencies were higher. Mr. Ricchiuto added that these figures are dynamic rather than static and that several factors had improved over the prior year, including higher income tax collections, the absence of major new issuance in the prior 12 months, continued principal amortization, and improved pension-related metrics. He said that, at least from Moody's perspective, the practical pressure point had likely increased by approximately $40 million over the prior year, though not necessarily uniformly across all agencies.

Mr. Cooper then addressed the general question of how much debt is too much. He said there is no single universal number, but the first task with any new unvoted debt is to identify a revenue source for repayment. He said the City does this as standard practice, whether through sewer revenues, TIF service payments, or income tax allocations. He described Council's role fundamentally as allocating resources among three main buckets: operations, capital, and debt. As debt consumes more resources, it naturally pinches the other two. He said that under declining revenues, the City would be forced to make choices, and he emphasized the importance of planning and management capacity in those moments.

Mr. Rubino then added that the City had recently fully paid off the remaining taxable note associated with the SportsOhio acquisition and was also examining accelerated paydown of short-term manuscript debt and the West Innovation District land-acquisition note, where possible, to free up capacity and reduce future pressure.

Vice Mayor De Rosa asked Baker Tilly for their candid thoughts about recession risk and market conditions. Mr. Ricchiuto responded that no one has a crystal ball, but said market pressures existed, especially related to high oil prices, Middle East conflict, inflation risk, and the possibility of Federal Reserve rate hikes in the coming months. He said he did not consider a recession highly likely in the next twelve months, but also did not consider the probability negligible. Mr. Cooper added that Central Ohio had historically fared better than many other regions, including during the Great Recession, though it had not been immune. He described Central Ohio as the strongest metropolitan area in Ohio and said that if one were looking for refuge during economic difficulty, Dublin and Central Ohio would be a favorable place to be.

Investments and Liquidity Management

Mr. Rubino next introduced Meeder Public Funds representatives Jim McCourt and Scott Gruber to discuss investments, the interest-rate environment, and liquidity. He explained that staff intentionally paired the debt and investment discussions to show both sides of City financial management, since interest rates affect both borrowing costs and investment returns.

Mr. McCourt began by saying that in periods of low rates, debt advisers tend to be favored, while in periods of high rates, investment advisers are appreciated more. He described how expectations had shifted since early 2026. After rate cuts at the end of 2024 and 2025, the market had initially expected further cuts in 2026. However, inflation pressures related in part to conflict involving Iran and higher oil prices had pushed the market to consider the possibility of one or two Federal Reserve rate increases instead. Mr. McCourt said he was somewhat skeptical that the Federal Reserve would in fact raise rates, but noted that the market had priced that possibility into the yield curve. He emphasized that for a public portfolio such as Dublin's, this environment offered an attractive chance to continue building longer-term yields, which in the City's case means investments out to a maximum of five years.

He reviewed historical rate context, noting that from the 2008 financial crisis through roughly 2021, short-term rates were extremely low and investment income opportunities were limited. Since the post-pandemic inflation surge and resulting Federal Reserve tightening cycle, portfolios like Dublin's had regained the ability to lock in significantly higher yields.

Turning to the City portfolio specifically, he said Meeder managed approximately $135 million in securities and also monitored the City Star Ohio balance. He described Star Ohio as the City's main liquidity reserve and said discussions with city staff often revolve around determining the right balance between maintaining enough liquidity for daily operations and moving excess liquidity into longer-term securities to increase stable earnings. He reviewed the maturity distribution and asset allocation, noting that the city policy had previously been revised to allow a broader range of asset classes, thereby permitting improved yield opportunities beyond the narrower limits of the Ohio Revised Code. He reported that the portfolio weighted average maturity was approximately 2.6 years and the weighted average yield to maturity was approximately 4.17 percent.

He also noted that shorter-maturity holdings were rolling off at lower average yields than what the market currently offered, meaning that reinvestment in the present environment was still increasing the portfolio overall earnings capacity. Mr. Gruber added that despite negative headlines about markets, the shape of the yield curve and the City policy changes have positioned the City portfolio well, with performance better than expected at the beginning of the year.

Mr. McCourt then reviewed the cyclical pattern of investable assets between the securities portfolio and Star Ohio. He said the City liquidity needs shift throughout the year based on cash inflows, debt service schedules, and expenditure timing, and that these changes drive decisions about when to reinvest or pull back. He concluded with realized and projected investment income. Historical earnings have risen sharply in recent years. Based on current holdings alone, Meeder projected approximately $5.7 million in realized cash-basis income for 2026 from the portion of the portfolio it manages. Looking forward, because only currently held securities were included in the simple forward projections, the charts could look as if income declined, but he said that was not how he would actually expect the portfolio to perform. He instead estimated that with reinvestments and relatively stable balances, annual earnings in the next several years would likely remain in roughly the $5.4 million to $6 million range, depending on rates and balances.

Mr. Rubino reiterated that the reason for grouping debt and investments together was to show the relationship among interest rates, asset management, liability management, and liquidity.

Mr. Rubino presented several internal liquidity-management slides, including analyses from 3+1, a firm the City uses to evaluate total liquidity across bank balances, Star Ohio, and investment portfolios. He explained that one chart showed total City liquidity and another removed debt proceeds and bond ancillary accounts to show what he considered truer liquidity. He described the maturity distribution of liquid funds and said that these tools help guide day-to-day, monthly, and annual cash management decisions.

Mr. Keeler asked whether the approximately $218 million shown could be understood as a rainy-day fund. Mr. Rubino replied that he would not characterize the full amount that way because most of those dollars already had designated uses, obligations, or liens against them, whether from budgets, contracts, debt service, or other assigned purposes. He said the more accurate analogy would be a safety valve or pool of available resources managed across different maturities and liquidity buckets. He identified the general fund reserve policy as the main source of rainy-day-like protection, explaining that the City's current 50 percent general fund reserve translated to approximately $70 million in general fund balance, physically housed within some combination of investment accounts, Star Ohio, and bank balances. If the City needed to deploy some of that reserve for strategic investment or unexpected expenditure, the liquidity management process is designed so the City could do so without having to liquidate investments at disadvantageous times.

Mayor Amorose Groomes added that during COVID the City revenues proved relatively resilient because of the nature of the local employer base and the ability of many residents and workers to continue working remotely at comparatively high wages. Dr. Lam asked for clarification around cash-on-hand concepts and whether the question related to how long the City could continue operating if inflows suddenly stopped. Mr. Rubino explained the hierarchy of available cash, starting with bank accounts, then Star Ohio, then the investment portfolios, which would either need to mature or be sold. He also noted that the City had recently used more than $5 million of general fund reserve toward a land acquisition without needing to sell securities, which he said illustrated effective liquidity planning.

Hotel/Motel Tax and Tourism-Related Revenues

Staff reviewed the history of the hotel/motel tax, beginning with its adoption in 1987, the addition of expenditure parameters in 1990, the adoption of a formal grant policy and the additional 10 percent Visit Dublin allocation in 2017, and the COVID-era general fund support transfers in 2021 and 2022 that replenished the fund by about $2 million. Staff again showed the historical revenue pattern and the 4 percent annual growth assumption, with revenue reaching approximately $5.3 million by 2031. Staff also noted that the number of hotels in Dublin had remained relatively stable at around 18 since approximately 2004 and emphasized that revenue depends not just on hotel count but on occupancy, room rates, and event activity.

Mayor Amorose Groomes asked whether the hotel count shown included all hotels or only those fully participating in tax contributions to the City. Staff replied that it represented the total number of hotels in the City. Mr. Rubino and the Mayor then noted that several hotels were subject to economic development agreements that affect how some hotel/motel tax revenue is handled.

Scott Dring then addressed Council. He said hotel/motel tax continued to thrive and reported that year-to-date collections were up nearly 8.5 percent over the prior year. He said June 2026 had been the largest bed-tax month in City history, up 35 percent from the previous June, due in part to the Memorial Tournament occurring in June and other events such as archery. Turning to SportsOhio, he reported that the first Nike Cup tournament to utilize that side of the road had generated a 35 percent increase in total hotel room nights associated with the event because of the community's expanded field capacity. He said the community was very excited not only about the SportsOhio acquisition but also about the potential for future turf fields and that such fields would relieve pressure on local sports organizations and businesses.

Mr. Dring stated that competing facilities were closely watching Dublin and that places such as Cedar Point Sports Center and facilities in Warren County were nervous about what Dublin might do because Central Ohio has lacked a comparable complex. He said trade show response and industry buzz had been strong, and he described the partnership with Sports Facilities Companies (SFC) as very positive and collaborative.

He discussed the practical benefits of turf. Turf would create more playable dates, eliminate prolonged winter shutdowns, improve reliability for tournaments in wet conditions, and better protect the City investment in SportsOhio by increasing utilization. He also spoke about local resident benefits, saying that approximately 10,000 Dublin youth were currently participating in sports and that a facility of this kind would serve as a major amenity for residents as well as a tourism driver. He cited earlier Hunden analysis projecting approximately 38,000 new room nights and more than $33 million in direct and indirect spending in the first year of a larger turf-based plan, while also calling sports travel comparatively recession resistant because families tend to continue traveling for youth sports even in more difficult economic environments. He added that Dublin was already losing some business, including a major archery event moving to Grand Park, because other facilities had better field access and flexibility.

Council Discussion on Turf Fields, Sports Ohio, and Business Planning

Vice Mayor De Rosa thanked Mr. Dring. She said her concern remained the lack of a current business plan that tied the proposed investment to a current expenditure-and-return framework. She said the issue was not whether turf was beneficial, but that the City should be able to present taxpayers with a current plan showing what investment level would produce what result, even if not every amenity benefit could be monetized. She referenced notes indicating that such a business plan remained to be developed and asked when one could be produced. Mr. Dring replied that such a plan might be better developed through SFC or collaboratively, though he pointed to the Hunden study as containing a pro forma. Staff acknowledged that prior studies existed but that a current integrated business-plan-style presentation had not yet been finalized.

Vice Mayor De Rosa stressed that she was seeking clarity. She said that because the SportsOhio and larger park initiative represented the City's first major public-private partnership of this kind, she believed Council had a responsibility to show the public what the City was investing and what it expected in return, including any non-monetary benefits Council was willing to recognize as policy value. Dr. Lam noted that prior market studies and planning documents had concluded that turf would be financially beneficial, and he suggested that those studies could help form part of the current analysis. Mayor Amorose Groomes added that while earlier studies did address some elements, they did not fully account for all long-term maintenance and replacement costs in an annualized manner.

Mr. Keeler stated that the broader goals had already been adopted and that Council had already done substantial front-end diligence before setting Metro Center, the West Innovation District, and the park as major goals. He said the current question was how to allocate debt and cash to accomplish those goals rather than whether they should exist. He compared the discussion to residential mortgage borrowing and said the City had diverse revenues, significant assets, and the capacity to take prudent risks. He stated that SportsOhio had already been a significant risk, but one undertaken because Council believed there was opportunity.

Vice Mayor De Rosa responded that her point was not whether to proceed at all, but how fast, in what sequence, and at what scale. She said the City had previously had similar detailed policy discussions around recreation center fees, cost recovery, and capital reinvestment and that the same discipline should apply here.

Mr. Rubino later clarified the SportsOhio management agreement. He explained that the City owns the facility and pays SFC a base management fee of $20,000 per month. SFC may share in food and beverage revenue and sponsorship or advertising revenue, but not in the City program-fee revenue. He emphasized that the City upside comes first through program fees and field use, while SFC benefits only from specific contractually limited categories. He also reviewed the operating arrangement, noting that SFC provides management and staffing while the City funds operations through the budget and jointly plans capital needs.

Mr. Rubino then reported that Sports Ohio was on track in 2026 to have program revenue exceed operating expenditures by roughly $100,000, similar to the prior year, and said staff believed that positive differential could grow over time as programming and outside contracts expanded. He also said the proposed 2027 budget would place SportsOhio operations into a separate fund, similar to pools and the recreation center, in order to make revenue and expenditure tracking clearer.

Mayor Amorose Groomes asked specifically about maintenance and grounds upkeep, saying that from her recent observation the property did not yet appear at the standard the City would want to showcase. Mr. Rubino said day-to-day maintenance was generally being handled through SFC operations, while larger issues could cross into capital maintenance. Ms. O'Callaghan added that the pace of improvements was entirely in the City control and depended on how much was allocated in the operating and capital budgets. She said the proposed plan included approximately $1 million for capital maintenance items to be determined in collaboration with SFC and staff, and that safety cameras, landscaping, and other site improvements were already underway.

Ms. Kramb asked for clarification about the location and purpose of the proposed $6 million turf field investment. Ms. O'Callaghan explained that the debt-funded turf fields would be on the Darree Fields side, west of Cosgray Road and on the north side of the park, as the first phase of implementing the larger park vision, and not directly on the SportsOhio side. Ms. Kramb expressed concern about spending $6 million if the fields were only to support recreational soccer and said that if Council had to choose among projects, she would personally prioritize some other capital items over the turf fields. Ms. O'Callaghan replied that turf had been recommended in the Parks and Recreation Master Plan, the Hunden study, and the park vision work, and that staff had viewed implementation in 2027 and 2028 as a reasonable first phase, though the schedule was fully open for Council discussion.

Ms. Alutto said she was generally comfortable beginning the turf work as shown in the CIP because she believed it was needed for the community and could support future marketing and programming, but she also agreed that Council needed a broader strategic discussion about how the entire sports complex concept would function over time, including Darree Fields, SportsOhio, SFC, City programming, and revenue expectations. She suggested that discussion might be appropriate in 2027 if more time was needed. Mayor Amorose Groomes said she did not object to the initial $6 million in 2027 but thought Council could revisit later-year spending once a clearer framework had been developed.

Ms. Johnson said it appeared to her that the initial $6 million should be understood primarily as a community investment rather than as a direct major tournament generator, because six fields alone would not bring in another Nike Cup. She did acknowledge that leasing and local use would still provide value. Mayor Amorose Groomes agreed that the point was clear.

TIF Funding and Advance Repayments

Staff next returned to TIFs to address follow-up questions from the prior work session. Staff explained that during the life of a TIF district, incremental revenues are dedicated to district development and infrastructure. The City currently had more than 40 active TIFs generating about $19.3 million in service payments in 2025. A map was shown to illustrate the concentration of districts across the city. Historical service payment charts showed that a relatively small number of districts, including Perimeter West, Tuller, Tartan West, and West Innovation, generated a large share of total TIF revenue over time.

Mr. Rubino then explained the order of operations for TIF fund use in the CIP. First, TIF revenues are committed to debt service. Next, they are used for repayment of advances made previously from the general fund or capital funds. Finally, a small percentage is reserved for county auditor fees. Staff said that while TIF funds may show sizable carryover balances in annual financial statements, much of that carryover is already committed to future debt service and advance repayments, leaving a smaller truly uncommitted amount available for acceleration or new use.

Mr. Rubino reviewed the history of TIF advances, beginning with a 1998 general fund advance for Rings Road design. Advances peaked in the 2013-2016 period to jump-start Bridge Street, Tuller, and West Innovation. As of the end of 2025, approximately $43 million was due back to the general fund and approximately $38 million was due back to the Capital Improvements Fund across multiple TIF districts. Those repayments were projected to continue through the life of the districts, with an acceleration in the 2027-2031 period, especially back to the general fund, which staff indicated helps support a balanced operating picture. He concluded that TIFs had been a proven economic development tool, but that near-term service payments were largely committed, making future new TIFs an important variable for additional flexibility.

Economic Development, Infrastructure Readiness, and Revenue Generation

Mr. Gracia presented on economic development. He said the purpose of this section was to connect the financial decisions under discussion with the City's largest revenue source, income tax, and to explain how infrastructure readiness has become central to economic competitiveness. He framed the three large Council goals as part of a broader strategic effort to create distinctive development nodes and maintain Dublin's competitive advantage relative to peer communities.

Mr. Gracia referred to a series of strategic plans adopted in recent years, including the strategic framework, Envision Dublin, Newmark analyses, and the West Innovation District implementation work. He said a recurring outside-consultant message had been that proactive infrastructure planning and investment are the critical enablers of economic development. He emphasized that although quality of life remains important, modern site selection increasingly hinges on infrastructure readiness, utility certainty, shovel-ready sites, zoning clarity, speed to market, and risk reduction. He said those were the gaps that consultants had identified in Dublin's position, especially in the West Innovation District.

He described current market dynamics using information from 1 Columbus and regional partners. He said much of the current project pipeline is in manufacturing and automotive-related sectors, with office and headquarters expansions comprising a smaller share. Historically, Dublin had not competed well for many of those manufacturing-related opportunities because it lacked sufficiently ready sites. He said that is precisely why the City's recent land acquisition, zoning changes, and infrastructure planning in the West Innovation District matter. The key issue, he said, is not whether there is interest, but whether the City can answer site selectors who ask when utilities will be available, whether roads and public infrastructure will be in place, whether land is properly zoned, and how quickly projects can proceed.

Mr. Gracia said this was different from the conditions of 16 years earlier, when the area was first being discussed under the old Economic Advancement Zone concept. Mayor Amorose Groomes observed that the City had been trying to make the West Innovation District work for a very long time, and that despite years of discussion, it had not yet yielded the financial success that other City initiatives had. She asked about his level of optimism that the City was now actually approaching a breakthrough. Mr. Gracia responded that the environment had changed meaningfully because of broader momentum throughout the northwest quadrant of the Columbus region, and Ms. O'Callaghan added that the City had not previously completed the necessary code changes or moved infrastructure forward, which is why projects such as University Boulevard were being proposed now.

Mr. Gracia reviewed generalized regional pipeline data, showing the types of building sizes and acreage currently being sought in the market. He said many site searches are in ranges that Dublin could potentially accommodate if it prepared the sites. He repeated that Dublin's advantage has historically been its willingness to plan and invest ahead of the curve and said that other communities often admire the degree to which Dublin proactively prepares for transformational projects.

West Innovation District Revenue Scenario

Vice Mayor De Rosa asked about the projected $29.4 million in new West Innovation District revenue over ten years. Mr. Rubino said that question led directly into the next section of the presentation. He explained that because Council had asked at the previous work session how much new revenue would be needed to justify approximately $52 million of infrastructure investment in the West Innovation District, staff had prepared a simplified illustrative scenario.

He emphasized that the scenario was not intended as a precise forecast but as a set of assumptions designed to establish the scale of development needed. The model assumed a ten-year buildout, property value of roughly $250,000 per developed acre, new non-school TIF agreements, about 1,000 new employees over ten years, average wages beginning around $100,000 and rising 3 percent annually, and a 90 percent net income tax collection rate after incentives. Mr. Rubino also noted that he had intentionally moderated the assumptions after discussion with Mr. Gracia to keep the scenario realistic.

Under that assumption set, staff estimated roughly $29.4 million of new cumulative revenue over ten years, primarily from TIF service payments and income tax withholding alone, excluding any apportioned business net profit. Full buildout under the scenario would represent approximately $550 million in new value and about 1,000 jobs, with annual withholding in the final year reaching roughly $2.3 million. Mr. Rubino said that under this model the new revenues would begin covering full debt service on the related borrowing around year seven or eight and would then continue generating net positive results. Vice Mayor De Rosa said this type of analysis was helpful, even if preliminary, because it provided a frame of reference that allowed Council to evaluate whether the assumptions felt realistic and whether the potential return justified the infrastructure strategy. She also noted that future economic development agreements and additional infrastructure would likely need to be layered in over time, and Mr. Rubino acknowledged that a more expansive twenty- or twenty-five-year model could incorporate those factors in greater detail.

Five-Year Forecast and Operating Outlook

Mr. Urbancsik then presented a general fund revenue and expenditure forecast. He explained that the general fund showed substantial reliance on tax revenues, especially income tax, and that the forecast continued to assume average revenue growth of around 3 percent. Expenditure assumptions included approximately 4 percent growth in personnel costs and 3 to 5 percent growth for contractual services, supplies, and other charges. Based on those assumptions and on actual historical patterns, the forecast still showed positive net operating results over the five-year period, with revenues exceeding expenditures.

Mr. Rubino elaborated that this was intended as a planning-level forecast rather than the proposed operating budget itself. He said a key objective was to show that under reasonable assumptions, recurring revenues still slightly exceeded recurring expenditures over time. He attributed this in part to the City's longstanding structural budgeting practices, including conservative revenue estimates and the fact that actual expenditures typically underutilize adopted appropriations. He also noted that Council retains discretion each year over what is truly necessary or discretionary in the budget and said that if economic conditions worsened, staff would not propose the same assumptions as in a more stable period. He also showed that under the forecast, the general fund balance remained above 60 percent, thus staying within policy. He then contrasted the general fund outlook with all-funds forecasting, explaining that all-funds numbers behave differently because many non-general-fund revenues are legally or practically meant to be spent down rather than accumulated, such as bond proceeds or project-specific grants.

Public Safety Funding Overview and Closing Discussion

Mr. Rubino briefly addressed a supplemental topic from the prior work session: how to better present the City's full investment in public safety. He said that the revised 2026 budget included about $26 million and the proposed 2027 budget about $26.7 million in what staff considered public-safety-related expenditures. He noted that the direct operating picture is easier to identify than the capital side, where some broader capital projects may also have public safety implications. He said staff believed it could bring forward a supplemental budget report each year showing the City's total public safety investment and comparing it with dedicated public safety revenues. He suggested that this could also strengthen the City's ability to demonstrate to state policymakers that specific public safety revenue sources do not fully cover the City's actual public safety investment.

Mayor Amorose Groomes asked whether staff had looked at peer-city public safety spending as a percentage of budget, especially given that Dublin does not operate its own fire and EMS department. Mr. Rubino said that operating-budget comparisons could be gathered and that in his prior city experience, police and fire often consumed well over half of operating budgets. He said staff could bring back some peer comparisons.

Mr. Rubino closed with a review of Council-goal-linked CIP projects and prior studies supporting them. He summarized the total projects associated with each strategic goal and noted again that University Boulevard supports not only the West Innovation District but also the premier athletic and recreation campus by improving transportation access and enabling future park reconfiguration.

Council turned to final discussion about comfort level with the proposed debt strategy and potential sequencing changes.

Vice Mayor De Rosa asked whether staff had examined phasing or resequencing alternatives for major projects, such as doing part of University Boulevard in one year and part later, or similarly adjusting timing for SportsOhio- or turf-related expenditures. She said her concern was that the City's self-imposed debt policy threshold was being closely approached in the out years and that earlier major initiatives had begun from a much lower debt base than the City now has. She reiterated that her goal was not to eliminate projects, but to preserve greater distance from the policy ceiling so Council would retain more levers if the economy weakened. She asked for some options that would show whether phasing could reduce the peak.

Mr. Rubino replied that from a pure financial standpoint, stretching or phasing projects can reduce the pace of debt uptake, though engineering feasibility and development timing need to be considered first. Ms. O'Callaghan then said it would help staff substantially if Council could provide a target debt tolerance, such as a desired percentage ceiling lower than the formal 15 percent policy limit, because that would allow staff to return with specific recommended options. Vice Mayor De Rosa said she was less focused on a single number than on avoiding the period where the City comes close to the policy line. Ms. Alutto said that what would be most useful would be options showing which projects in years four and five could be moved further out and how much that would pull the debt utilization line downward. She added that the City should not assume no recession over the entire period and that preserving flexibility had value in itself.

Ms. O'Callaghan asked whether a target of approximately 12 percent would make Council more comfortable, simply to give staff a working direction. Mayor Amorose Groomes said that having more separation from the line would preserve capacity if an unexpected opportunity arose in the future. Ms. Kramb said she remained supportive of the West Innovation District projects because the WID implementation strategy had clearly prioritized infrastructure relationships there, but she was less persuaded that all Metro Center projects in the five-year plan were equally critical in the near term. She specifically questioned whether items such as the Blazer Parkway to Metro Place connection, Shier-Rings over Interstate 270 design, and the kayak launch project were essential within the current five-year window, suggesting that some of those could potentially move out of the plan without undermining the highest-priority Metro Center objectives, such as stormwater, sewer, and the catalytic site frontage improvements.

Ms. O'Callaghan agreed that this was useful feedback and said staff had been trying to balance recommendations from multiple adopted plans while also responding to Council having clearly made Metro Center a top priority. Ms. Alutto said it might be useful for staff to come back with some difficulty-priority type options so Council could weigh which projects truly needed to remain within the current five years. Mayor Amorose Groomes remarked that with the Emerald Connector still unfunded, it could be difficult to contemplate another large bridge project on the horizon and suggested that some debt-related items could indeed be pushed back. She said that sort of adjustment could be a significant help.

At the conclusion of discussion, Mayor Amorose Groomes asked whether Council had said what it wanted to say for the evening and whether staff had the feedback needed to continue making progress. Staff indicated yes. Mayor Amorose Groomes thanked staff for the volume and quality of work prepared for the session.

There being no further business for discussion, the meeting was adjourned at 9:25 p.m.

Presiding Officer – Mayor

Clerk of Council