

**RECORD OF PROCEEDINGS  
REGULAR COUNCIL MEETING  
MONDAY, NOVEMBER 13, 2023 – 7:00 P.M.  
MAYOR WILLIAM G. KOONS PRESIDING**

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Bell, Berger, Canton, Cavanagh, Galicki, Porter

**OFFICIALS PRESENT:** Fiscal Officer Romanowski, Solicitor Matheney, Engineer Haibach

**VISITOR:** John Buda, Leaview Ln.; Brett Berkobein, Countryside Dr.; Jack Zilly, Maple Springs; Jerry Penick, Countryside Dr.; Brian Morrison, Woodside Dr.; N.D. Howard, Manor Brook Dr.; Elizabeth Gross, Sheerbrook Dr.; Rob Myers, Deerfield Dr.; Rick and Janet Smith, Forest; Carrie Schloss, Hickory Hill Rd.; Jordan Canter, Sugar Bush Ln.; Edith and Walker Todd, Sheerbrook; Amanda and Tim Bencic, Woodside; Kelly Estes, Kimberwick Ct.

The Mayor called the Regular Council meeting to order and led the Pledge of Allegiance. The Fiscal Officer read the roll. **Porter made a motion to approve the October 23, 2023, Regular Council meeting minutes, seconded by Canton. Voice vote – ayes, all. Motion carried.**

**VISITORS:** The Mayor advised that sidewalks, crosswalks, and paths were on the agenda as was the topic of the reappraisals, which would be discussed first. He hoped that Council would not take any action as they had until the end of the month, and it could be addressed at the November 27<sup>th</sup> Council meeting. There was a budget that needed to be approved before considering the reappraisal.

Brian Morrison, Woodside Rd., addressed sidewalks and crosswalks and wondered if there was a safety concern behind the topic. He could see that the crosswalks might be helpful for the people across from the park. Within the last five years, the south side of Bell St. had been widened. He questioned how the sidewalks would impact that. He also questioned who would be paying for the sidewalks. He said typically, in municipalities, sidewalks and maintenance on sidewalks are charged to the property owner. Morrison calculated the project would involve 52,800 square feet of sidewalk at \$9 per square foot and would cost \$475,200 for the project.

The Mayor clarified that the reappraisals would be first discussed. John Buda, Leaview Ln., stated that regarding the property tax, he asked and implored Council to do everything in its power to mitigate the increase in property taxes due to the revaluation. Regarding the sidewalks, he too wondered where the money would come from for the project and who would be paying for it. Additionally, he questioned what the cost would be long-term to include the cost of additional equipment necessary to maintain the sidewalks over time. He also asked how many people would use the sidewalks. Buda could see many benefits but acknowledged the potential expenses.

Rob Myers, Deerfield Dr., said he walks into town and back weekly and is satisfied with using the bike lanes. Regarding the increase in property tax, he asked Council to consider mitigating the increase in taxes. He said the last time the revaluations occurred a several years ago, residents received no notice. His taxes increased \$6,000 that time. He appreciated the County notifying residents that this was happening. He acknowledged the mitigation would be temporary while the State legislature is coming up with a fix. Myers asked that Council consider rolling in this increase in a slow fashion so that residents can plan for cashflow.

Jordan Canter said she had come to Council about crosswalks at Gurney Elementary and the South Russell Village Park. She noted that this was being evaluated in combination with sidewalks and asked that the implementation of crosswalks not be overshadowed and occur sooner rather than later. Furthermore, she would be interested in hearing the feedback from the survey that was conducted.

Amanda Bencic, Woodside Rd., emailed the Mayor about the sidewalk issue about a month ago. She has three children and a large dog, and they like to go on walks. They do not feel safe doing this without sidewalks. A sidewalk along Bell Rd. would encourage exercise and the cost was worth the safety and health benefit. She added that it would increase foot traffic into the village which would benefit businesses. Bencic also encouraged Council to mitigate the property taxes.

Rick Smith, Forest Dr., recalled that a committee had been formed years ago to look for a path from Sun Ridge to Chagrin Falls. They scoped it out, but nothing came of it. However, he thought it was still a good idea. It would connect people to the park and Chagrin Falls Village. Perhaps it would not have to be concrete, but cinders or limestone.

Jerry Penick, representing Country Estates, said they would like Council to consider sidewalks, especially between Spring Rd. and Alderwood, and include a crosswalk to make it safe for children to cross from the Country Estates and The Preserve of Chagrin neighborhoods. They would also like to see sidewalks to get into the South Russell Village area and into Chagrin Falls. Their neighborhood is turning over with more families with children, and it would not be wasted.

Liz Gross, Sheerbrook Dr., was present to support the sidewalks and crosswalks. She has two children who like to ride their bikes in the neighborhood, but it is not safe to ride on Bell Rd. She relayed a story about acquaintances killed while biking and jogging. She realized that money was a factor, but that the value of life was greater than the cost of a sidewalk.

Walker Todd, Sheerbrook, advised that Pepper Pike had the sidewalk issue on the most recent ballot. His understanding was that a compromise was reached and suggested considering an interim solution like hiking trails.

Carrie Schloss, Hickory Hill Rd., rides her daughter on the back of her bike daily to Gurney Elementary Preschool. Riding on Bell Rd. does not feel safe. Cars go much faster than the speed limit and do not give proper space. It will not be safe enough for her daughter to ride a bike to school on her own. She hoped there would be an option to walk or bike to school without being beholden to cars. Connecting the schools in the Chagrin Falls district with bike paths or sidewalks would help kids be more independent in getting to their own activities without a car. Schloss concluded that it would benefit the health and character of the community.

The Mayor said that what the Village would not want would be to split the community. He met with the Mayor of Pepper Pike to discuss the process. This was the first meeting with the community and the Village also had the Engineer look at the costs involved. It would be a systematic process and they would not have sidewalks next spring.

Galicki noted that Morrison quoted a cost of \$475,000 for sidewalks but explained that the Ohio Revised Code (ORC) dictates that municipal corporations construct the sidewalks and assess costs against the lot or landowners. This is a consideration for residents who potentially are in the position of being assessed the costs for constructing the sidewalk. He cautioned that there may be as many

people who are opposed to the assessment and increase in taxes, especially given the current issue with the property revaluations.

A resident asked what the hang up would be with a crosswalk. In building a park across from these communities, it would seem like an attractive nuisance to have kids crossing Bell Rd. A crosswalk does not seem like a big deal with just being painted on the road with some road signs. Galicki explained that the crosswalks are not connected with the sidewalk issue. The Safety Committee has discussed the crosswalks, and plans were being made to go forward pending budget considerations. Galicki referenced the crosswalk on Route 44 near Bass Lake, which is a model the committee had been discussing.

Buda asked if bicycles would be permitted on the sidewalks. The Mayor said this was way beyond what was being discussed at this point.

The Mayor summarized that a request was made to the Village almost a year ago about a crosswalk from Sugar Bush to Gurney. Then there was a request for a crosswalk from Alderwood to the park and one for a sidewalk or crosswalk on East Washington St. for access to the restaurants. The Village has also had requests for sidewalks and paths on Rolling Ridge/Daisy Lane/Woodside/Forest area. Three intersections have been created there over the years and stop signs and a guardrail have been added for traffic that travels through the area. A request has also been made for sidewalks or to increase the path along Bell Rd. to the park. There is currently a 40-inch shoulder on both sides of Bell Rd. A grant was provided from the Northeast Ohio Area Coordinating Agency (NOACA) for possible improvements of pedestrian walkways that the Village was going to tie in with Bell Road East in 2025. The paving of Bell Rd. would be near \$2 million by that time. The Streets and Safety Committees will be considering these items and would like input from the public which can be provided through email.

A resident asked if anyone had explored options under the bipartisan new construction law for local grants for sidewalks or bike lanes. The Mayor acknowledged the probable existence of grant funding but advised the Village was not that far into the process.

Brett Berkbein, Countryside Dr., asked if sidewalks were being considered for both sides of the street. He explained that when the sidewalks were connected from Hickory Hill down Walters, it was assessed over a 10-year period and applied to just the 72 houses down Hickory Hill and Walters. This would be something to consider.

Kelly Estes, 26 Kimberwick Ct., wanted to hear about the survey. She advised that she is a health enthusiast and physician in the community. She is in sports medicine and would like to make the community more active. She supports a pathway for her patients to exercise and for her kids to get safely from her house around the community.

Regarding the property tax assessments, the Mayor commented that on October 17th, the Village was hit by surprise with the assessment. He added that it was about 30% for most people for their property taxes. It was an unvoted tax increase. To alleviate the situation, the county removed two levies. South Russell will receive a \$195,000 increase based on the assessment. The Mayor stated that for every tax dollar paid by residents, the Village gets \$.10, the county gets \$.20, and the schools get 70%. The Village will be looking at different things, but he hoped Council did not make any decisions tonight. He suggested that at the November 27<sup>th</sup> meeting, Council would decide what the Village could do to alleviate the situation. 14% to 15% of residents are on fixed incomes and it hits hard right at holiday time.

A resident said that when he spoke to the county, he was told that the timeframe for the different taxing entities to make decisions about mitigation had to be this week. The Mayor said the Fiscal Officer contacted the county this afternoon and the Village has until the end of the month which is why he wanted to take time before taking action.

Galicki asked the Fiscal Officer to review the central elements discussed at the meeting they attended with the County Budget Commission regarding the leeway the Village has with respect to mitigation. The Fiscal Officer explained that inside millage is 10 mills, which is unvoted and based on property taxes. Then there are levies which are voted. In 1976, housing prices changed so the State Legislature put in a law that stated the dollar amount that is brought in through a levy remains the same as long as it is collected. A levy passed in 1972 would bring in the same dollar amount today that it brought in then. It may have been a 2-mill levy, but over time, residents are paying less because more houses are being built and the values are going up, so the actual millage paid decreases over time. The state addressed and corrected the problem with levies years ago, but they did not correct the property tax piece of it. As property values go up, which is inside millage and unvoted on taxes, the property taxes increase. The County Budget Commission recognized the problem as did the auditors in the State, but there is no fix at the State level. The Geauga County Budget Commission asked entities to look at their levies and consider reducing one or more of the levy collections to offset the windfall so that the taxpayers would be paying the same amount. The legislation before Council would reduce what is collected from the Road and Bridge Levy and would take the money received from the property taxes and shift it over. It would be for one year, and if passed, Council could consider it again next year if the State has not corrected the problem. She acknowledged that the issue came about very quickly and the County must get everything to the State by the end of the month which presents a time constriction. The levy usually brings in about \$239,000 per year and the proposed legislation being considered by Council would reduce it by \$162,000.

Rob Myer said that the State Legislature has a House bill and Senate bill they are working on that are short-term. Longer term, they are putting together a committee to look at how real estate taxes in the State are collected all together because it is an unrealized Capital Gains Tax when you are in a period of high inflation and the housing prices are increasing the way they are. His increase is around 40% and the average in South Russell is between 30% and 40%. However, he did not make 40% more this year just because of that. He appreciated what Council was considering and acknowledged it was a temporary fix to give the State Legislature time to develop a more permanent fix. He also requested that the Village coordinate with the school district. Myer spoke to the district, and they seemed lost and without a plan. Because of the time constraint, it would be good for the Mayor to coordinate with them because they also have the option to do what the Village is considering with taking the money from the windfall and shifting it to a reduced levy collection.

Galicki added that he learned through the meeting with the County Budget Commission that the County Auditor reached out to the local Geauga County school districts, but they seem hesitant to provide any type of tax relief. Galicki explained how to access the Reappraisal Tax Estimator on the Geauga County Auditor's website.

Myer strongly suggested that everyone in attendance as well as their friends and neighbors who feel there should be a temporary abeyance on part of the increases should contact the school district. He recommended calling the district's Treasurer's Office. When he contacted them, he was the only one who had called on the matter. Another resident offered that the Chagrin Falls Board of Education would be meeting Wednesday, November 15, 2023, at 7:00 p.m. at Gurney Elementary School.

The Mayor reiterated that a decision would be made relative to the property tax issue at the November 27<sup>th</sup> Council meeting. He thanked those in attendance and offered that they could leave the meeting.

**MAYOR'S REPORT:** The Mayor reported that there were five new veterans who attended the Veterans Luncheon. He discussed tentative plans for next year's luncheon.

The Mayor discussed grants, the Mason's flagpole donation, an Eagle Scout project with the interurban railway, and the upcoming Ohio Public Works Commission (OPWC) meeting. The Mayor registered the Village with Wreaths Across America and will conduct its ceremony on Saturday, December 16<sup>th</sup> at noon at the South Russell Village Cemetery and the Rarick Cemetery.

The Solicitor addressed Wreaths Across America and stated there is an agreement that needs to be signed where the Village is the location coordinator. The Mayor concurred. The Solicitor explained that there are quite a few responsibilities and a motion from Council would be advised for the agreement. The agreement is 68 pages. Galicki felt Council was unaware of the 68-page agreement to participate with the national program. He questioned why the Village would need to get involved with the program when Council could agree to purchase wreaths, have its own ceremony, and place them on the veterans' graves. This would eliminate the need to go through the extensive process of being area coordinators and 68-page agreement. Ultimately, they would be arriving at the desired end state without the hassle. Bell asked about the duration of the agreement, and the Solicitor said she would check. Canton thought Galicki's idea made a lot of sense, and Porter agreed. Berger suggested taking the two weeks to read the agreement first before making this decision. Porter commented on the length of the agreement in terms of what Council wished to accomplish, and the Solicitor clarified that the actual agreement is about seven pages, but with an extensive handbook of policies and protocol. The signing of the agreement ensures the location coordinator adheres to the policies. She noted that the duration of the agreement is one year. Berger reiterated that he thought they should review the agreement before making a decision. The Mayor said action would be taken November 27<sup>th</sup>.

**FISCAL OFFICER:** The Fiscal Officer distributed her report. Her office had been busy with the Employee Handbook revisions, budget, property revaluation, end of year matters, and preparing for next year. She was still waiting on information for the budget, which needs to be adopted at the November 27<sup>th</sup> meeting. Currently, there is a projected \$1.4 million deficit. The Street Committee recommended reducing the Road Program from \$650,000 to \$350,000 but she asked if the \$180,000 for engineering for Bell Road east was a projected expense for 2024. The Engineer concurred it is. The Fiscal Officer said she was given a new estimate of \$26,700 for the service building roof, but the Properties Committee told her they did not support the roof work, but the Streets Committee does. She said for now she kept the \$25,000 in the budget. Bell asked if the Village would be getting solar panels next year, and Porter said he did not know that it would. The Committee is still at the planning stages, but he advised it had been 30 years since the Service Department roof had been done. The Street Commissioner said the shingles are not falling off and it is not leaking, and they could go another year. Porter said they could plan for the solar the year after in 2025. The Fiscal Officer verified she should take it out, and Bell and Porter concurred.

The Fiscal Officer addressed storm water easements which were estimated at \$10,000 - \$15,000 each. The Engineer and Porter said they were not doing that. The Solicitor's opinion was that they were not necessary. Porter explained that the surveys would not be necessary at \$10,000 - \$15,000 each. They will seek voluntary compliance instead.

The Fiscal Officer said she was unsure whether the \$10,000 - \$15,000 for the easements was in the budget but did not think it was, the committee concurred. Fiscal Officer summarized that \$180,000 would be added for engineering for Bell Rd. east., \$26,700 (\$25,000) would be taken out for the roof. \$140,000 and \$18,000 in engineering for the Bell Rd. east culvert replacement would be included. The Engineer advised there was grant money for this, and the Fiscal Officer verified it was a pass-through grant. The Road Program was reduced to \$350,000, but \$36,000 would have to be added for Engineering. The salt dome is \$680,000 with an additional \$60,000 for engineering.

Berger asked if the wood frame dome was at the end of its useful life. The Street Commissioner said it was shifting. Berger asked if the cement panels under it were replaced, was the dome itself functional. The Street Commissioner did not know the extent of the damage with the shifting. Porter asked the Engineer if it would be possible to remove the dome, replace the base, and then place the dome back on top. The Engineer said it is possible, but it appears that the trusses have pulled apart in a number of places. He did not know that it was possible to salvage the framing of the roof and further investigation would be necessary. Porter suggested budgeting the \$680,000 for the new salt dome while waiting for the Engineer to explore the option of reusing the dome. Council discussed the useful life of the structure. The Engineer added that even if the option of reusing the dome is feasible, there is the matter of finding a contractor willing to undertake this type of work.

Porter advised that the Street Committee agreed to forgo the vehicles it had planned to purchase in 2024, instead moving the purchase to 2025. The Street Commissioner said that the committee was shifting between the one ton to the backhoe. The backhoe would be \$131,000. A \$5,000 repair could be done to it, and it would be functional for two years. The Fiscal Officer said it would reduce the deficit, but reminded Council that there is a fund for large equipment which contains money that can only be spent on large equipment. Taking it out of the budget reduces the overall deficit, but that money cannot be spent on anything else. Porter suggested they could get the one ton with the money.

Berger concluded that the Village would essentially have a \$1 million deficit for 2024. He asked what the cash balances would be at the end of the year. Council agreed that it wanted to have at least \$1 million in available funds for emergencies. For this to happen, the Village would need \$2 million at the end of the year to cover its expenses for next year and keep its \$1 million emergency fund. The Fiscal Officer did not know and explained that she would need to discuss what projects would close out by year end with the Engineer. For example, the repairs to the Central Retention Basin did not look like they would occur before year end. Manor Brook also would not be complete. Additionally, \$40,000 was budgeted for a clock on the corner lot. Berger said to take this out.

Berger advised the budget would be further discussed at the Finance Committee meeting on November 17<sup>th</sup>. If the budget can be approved on November 27<sup>th</sup> and it makes sense, then mitigating some of the tax implications could be addressed then.

The Fiscal Officer explained the legislation concerning the signers for STAR Ohio. Without a Fiscal Auditor, it is necessary to have two signers on the account. The legislation would authorize whoever is on the Finance Committee at the time to be the additional signers. The Solicitor explained that this legislation does not apply to who is authorized to sign checks, which will remain the same. The STAR Ohio legislation is different as to what signatories can and cannot do but have authority to do more than just sign checks. It also corrects the Codified Ordinance section that dealt with the predecessor to STAR Ohio, the Ohio Subdivision Fund, which no longer exists.

The Fiscal Officer stated that the Employee Handbook is currently before Council. There are some minor proofreading issues that need to be corrected, but the goal is to have it adopted by the end of the year.

**FINANCE COMMITTEE:** Berger reported that the State Auditor issued the Village's report for 2022. There were no issues. The Fiscal Officer advised there were no issues, and it was posted on the Auditor's website that day. She offered that Council could meet with the Auditor, and Berger said he saw no need. He encouraged Council to view the results and said they were solid.

Berger discussed the availability of grant money from Geauga County relating to demolition work. Galicki recalled discussion that in exchange for allowing vehicles engaged in the paving of Chillicothe Rd. to park on the remaining hard surface on the corner lot, that they would remove the paving. Berger did not know but was offering the grant money as an option. Galicki asked if a decision was made with the pavement removal, and the Street Commissioner said it was not decided what would be happening with the property. The Mayor said there were only some bricks that would be removed. Galicki replied that there was pavement that was to be removed. The Solicitor clarified it was removing the impervious surfaces. The Mayor said they would leave the lot for a year while they look for grants.

Berger advised that the minutes of the October 23<sup>rd</sup> Finance Committee meeting were distributed.

**SOLICITOR:** The Solicitor reported that the \$75,000 competitive bidding increase went through the last committee meeting with the State and should go into effect early next year. The Engineer noted that small municipalities can save a lot of time and money by not having to go through this process.

**ENGINEER:** The Engineer reported that he is in the process of closing out the Traffic Signal project, which came in at \$240,921, \$372 less than the awarded contract amount. Similarly, the Road Program came in at \$490,020.30, which was \$2,200 under the awarded contract value. Both projects will be closed out this year.

The Engineer said he would have the annual Pavement Condition Index (PCI) rating for the Village roads compiled for the next Streets Committee meeting.

The Mayor asked the Engineer if Mr. Excavator would reseed and remove the erosion control fabrics at Manor Brook this year. The Engineer said that the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency (OEPA) did a final inspection of the project and found issues with the slope of several of the side streams and offered additional funding. A redesign was developed for the lateral stream channels and was sent to OEPA. Subsequently OEPA asked for revisions to the plan, which were submitted. The technical people at OEPA are holding up completion by not providing an approved plan that the Village can execute. Meanwhile, the financial people are asking when the project will be complete.

**STREET COMMITTEE:** The Street Commissioner submitted his month-end report for October. Almost 600 feet of drainage was installed between the South Russell Village Park parking lot, pavilion, and playground.

Cavanagh reported that the flagpole at the south end of the park was dedicated to the memory of David Toole who posthumously funded the project. They are still waiting for the bench and plaques. She thanked the Masons for the donation.

**STREET COMMITTEE:** Bell reported that the committee met on November 3, 2023. Sidewalks were discussed as well as budget items.

Bell provided background information regarding a drainage channel running east to west between Bel Meadow and Chillicothe Rd. that the Village did not clean as it should have over the years. This caused backup into another drainage channel that runs behind 5105 to 5125 Chillicothe Rd. A survey would be needed to determine the rehabilitation of the area. CT estimates this survey would cost \$4,800. The Engineer estimated the survey could be done in a couple of weeks. Porter added that permission had been obtained from the homeowners. Once the survey was complete, the information would be provided to the contractor in order to have the work done by the end of the year. Porter thought there would be money in storm water for it and the Fiscal Officer advised this would be coming from the 2024 budget.

**Bell made a motion allowing the Mayor and Fiscal Officer to enter into a contract with CT consultants in order to run an existing conditions survey between 5105 to 5125 Chillicothe Rd. at a cost of \$4,800, seconded by Porter. Voice vote – ayes, all. Motion carried.**

Bell said the next Streets Committee meeting will be December 1, 2023, at 7:30 a.m. in the Street Commissioner's office.

**Bell made a motion to accept Change Order No. 1 - Final for a final line item adjustment of installed quantities in the amount of a credit of \$6,310.00 from Grade Line, Inc. for the Chillicothe Road Culvert Replacement Project, seconded by Porter. Voice vote – ayes, all. Motion carried.**

**Bell made a motion to authorize payment of Construction Progress Payment Application No. 2- final in the amount of \$11,916.72 to Grade Line, Inc. for the Chillicothe Culvert Replacement Project, seconded by Porter. Voice vote -ayes, all. Motion carried.**

**Bell made a motion to approve the certification of the availability of local funds in the amount of \$300,000 for the Bell Road East Pavement Repair project, seconded by Porter. Voice vote – ayes, all. Motion carried.**

**BUILDING COMMITTEE:** Bell stated the committee met on November 2, 2023. Changes were made to the proposed agreement provided by the current Zoning Inspector. Review of the agreement is pending and will be forwarded to Council for review and discussion.

The next Building Committee meeting will be December 7, 2023, at 8:00 a.m. in the Building Department.

**SAFETY COMMITTEE:** Canton reported that the Safety Committee minutes of the October 5<sup>th</sup> and November 2<sup>nd</sup> meetings were distributed. The next committee meeting will be December 7, 2023, at 9:00 a.m. in the Police Department.

Canton verified that the Solicitor, Police Chief, Chagrin Falls Board of Education, and their legal team looked over the School Safety Officer (SSO) Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The Solicitor concurred and said it is similar to the School Resource Officer (SRO) MOU. The difference in the positions is that the SSO is for crime and violence prevention and liaison with law enforcement. It would be a police officer of the Village. All expenses and costs would be paid by the school district



for the work the officer would do as the SSO for Gurney. The agreement would be effective January 1<sup>st</sup>. There is already an off-duty police officer at Gurney acting as an SSO. Canton relayed that the Chief would like the matter to be voted on that night so he could get started with the interview process.

The Mayor asked if Canton had seen the results of the survey relating to the crosswalk. Canton said no.

**HR COMMITTEE:** Cavanagh reported the committee met on November 2, 2023. Jim Budzik, Mansour Gavin, was present. The changes to the Employee Handbook were distributed, and she encouraged Council to review them. The goal is to repeal the 2017 version, but not throw it away. It was revised to work better for Council and the employees. Berger clarified that the legislation would repeal the previous handbook. The handbook that has been created will now be a live document that upon the motion of Council will be changed from time to time as needed without introducing additional ordinances to amend it. The Solicitor explained that after three readings, it will technically not be repealed, but rather restated.

Cavanagh noted that 100% of the employees got their annual physicals last year. She added that the committee is considering adopting a different evaluation form for employees.

**Cavanagh made a motion to approve payment of the physical exam incentive in the amount of \$250 per employee, seconded by Berger.** Canton asked if it was initially \$100 and noted that the process of increasing it to \$250 worked. **Voice vote – ayes, all. Motion carried.**

**PROPERTIES COMMITTEE:** Cavanagh said that the minutes from the November 2, 2023, Properties Committee meeting were distributed. The salt dome, space for the drone mobile, Canton's clock, and trees planted at Manor Brook were discussed. The committee will be meeting on December 7<sup>th</sup> at 10:00 a.m.

Canton noted a change to Cavanagh's minutes to reflect that it was the vacant lot located at the southeast corner of Bell Rd. and Chillicothe Rd., not the northwest corner.

**PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMITTEE:** Berger distributed minutes from the October 23<sup>rd</sup> Special Public Utilities Committee meeting and the November 3<sup>rd</sup> committee meeting. He acknowledged the presentation from Mike Wise and his son regarding solar panels. The committee was given options to consider for this project and will continue to investigate.

Porter noted that the Street Commissioner's report stated that the conduit from the Service Department building to the traffic light was installed. The Street Commissioner clarified that it was installed underneath the ground but is not done inside the building yet. Porter added that eventually, the conduit will extend under Chillicothe Rd. to the corner lot and eventually to the Cemetery. He asked for the status of the cabling under Chillicothe Rd., and the Street Commissioner explained that Perram Electric said there was plenty of room in the traffic light conduit through which the Village could run its line. This would be done in the spring. Porter reviewed that this would enable the Village to remove the meter and save \$100 per month.

#### **ORDINANCES AND RESOLUTIONS:**

Berger introduced an ordinance amending Section 235.03 of the Codified Ordinances of the Village of South Russell regarding State Treasury Asset Reserve of Ohio (STAR Ohio) Program, the successor to the Ohio Subdivision Fund, designating authorized signatories of STAR Ohio for the Village of South

Russell, and declaring an emergency. Berger made a motion to waive readings, seconded by Galicki. Roll call – ayes, all. Motion carried. Berger made a motion to adopt, seconded by Galicki. Roll call – ayes, all. Motion carried. **ORD 2023-70**

Bell introduced an ordinance authorizing the Mayor to prepare and submit an application for the Village of South Russell to participate in the Ohio Public Works Commission State Capital Improvement and/or Local Transportation Improvement Program(s) for the Bell Road East Pavement Repair Project and to execute contracts as required and declaring an emergency. Bell made a motion to waive readings, seconded by Porter. Roll call – ayes, all. Motion carried. Bell made a motion to adopt, seconded by Porter. Roll call – ayes, all. Motion carried. **ORD 2023-71**

Cavanagh introduced an ordinance approving the updated and restated Employee Handbook to be effective beginning January 1, 2024.

Berger introduced a resolution authorizing to reduce collection of the Village of South Russell's 1.5 Mill Road & Bridge Levy to .5 Mill for 2024 tax collection only, authorizing the Fiscal Officer to deliver a certified copy of this resolution to the County Auditor to ensure the accuracy of the tax rates and values for the 2024 tax collection only, and declaring an emergency.

Porter introduced an ordinance ratifying the permission of the Village to allow Chagrin River Watershed Partners, Inc. to provide further grant reporting administration for an amount not to exceed \$1,249.44 for the 319(h) grant from the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency to the Village of South Russell for the Manor Brook Headwater Stream Restoration Project, authorizing the Mayor to execute the amendment to the contract between the Village and Chagrin River Watershed Partners, Inc., and declaring an emergency. Porter made a motion to waive readings, seconded by Berger. Roll call – ayes, all. Motion carried. Porter made a motion to adopt, seconded by Berger. Roll call – ayes, all. Motion carried. **ORD 2023-72**

Cavanagh introduced an ordinance approving the pay schedule for employees and officials of the Village of South Russell for 2024 only, effective January 1, 2024. Cavanagh made a motion to waive readings, seconded by Berger. Roll call – ayes, all. Motion carried. Cavanagh made a motion to adopt, seconded by Berger. Roll call – ayes, all. Motion carried. **ORD 2023-73**

Canton introduced an ordinance approving the Memorandum of Understanding between the Village of South Russell Police Department and the Chagrin Falls Exempted School District regarding the deployment of a School Safety Officer, authorizing the Mayor and the Police Chief to enter into the Memorandum of Understanding on behalf of the Village and declaring an emergency. Canton made a motion to waive readings, seconded by Berger. Roll call – ayes, all. Motion carried. Canton made a motion to adopt, seconded by Berger. Roll call – ayes, all. Motion carried. **ORD 2023-74**

**BILLS LIST: Berger made a motion to ratify the bills list of October 31, 2023, in the amount of \$311,936.34, seconded by Galicki. Voice vote – ayes, all. Motion carried.**

**NEW/OTHER:** Berger had no new business.

Canton commented on his attendance at the Veterans Luncheon.

Cavanagh received a phone call about the sidewalks from Laura Gorretta who was an emphatic no.

The Fiscal Officer stated she received 13 phone calls from residents regarding the revaluation requesting that Council take action. Additionally, according to the County Auditor's office, more than half the phone calls they received on the topic were from South Russell residents.

Galicki said he was struggling with the reticence on the part of Council to take action today to mitigate the tax burden on the Village residents. The Mayor himself called it an unvoted tax increase. It has been said by the entire county Budget Commission and Auditor that it is unfair and wrong. Galicki believed Council had an obligation to its citizens to try to mitigate this tax increase. He did not understand the need to kick it down the road and also did not understand what more discussion was needed given the sentiments expressed by the residents that appeared today. Cavanagh did not think Council was trying to avoid it, but when compared with what we pay for the schools, which cannot go away, and the mere fact that people move in and can buy an entire house at market price, pay to tear it down, and put something worth a couple of million dollars has happened all over South Russell. Galicki said this was neither here nor there. Cavanagh said it is very much here and raises the taxes. Galicki said that regardless of whether it raises the taxes, the Village is faced with the situation where it is receiving a windfall increase in tax money on the backs of its residents of \$195,000. The issue is that Council has the ability as elected public servants to mitigate that impact with no effect to the Village and no effect to the services because it can take that \$195,000 it will receive from the mandated property revaluation and lower the collections from the levy with a zero wash. He asked what was the issue in terms of not wanting to provide that to the taxpayers.

Berger said he had no problem with mitigating the tax situation, but thought it was irresponsible of Council to move on that specific issue without having a budget for 2024 approved and to understand what the financial situation will be. There is a \$1.5 million deficit for 2024 and he did not know if the Village had the funds to cover it. Until that is resolved, he thought making the decision to mitigate taxes was premature. He asked for two weeks so they would know what their numbers were. They called the county to verify that November 27<sup>th</sup> would be acceptable to them, which it was. It is being done step by step, which is the reason they are not moving today.

Galicki responded that the biggest step that had not been taken was really examining what was being asked in 2024 in terms of the million-dollar deficit and identifying things that were frivolous and not necessarily needed next year. For the first time in decades, the County Commissioners agreed with the Budget Commission recommendation to mitigate the impact on taxpayers, but the Village is reticent to do that because perhaps there is a project that the Village would like to accomplish. Perhaps instead of worrying about the deficit, action should be taken to reduce it but not at the expense of the taxpayers and additional \$195,000 impact.

Porter said action had been taken to reduce the deficit to include cutting the Road Program to \$350,000 and forgoing the replacement of the backhoe, which was about \$500,000. He did not regard a \$350,000 Road Program as adequate based on the massive Road Programs of the last three to four years which brought many of the Village roads up to the 75 PCI goal. This was not frivolous, and Porter did not think the Village did anything frivolous. He further stated that Council is the guardian of the taxpayers' money to the benefit of every single resident. Every resident drives on the roads, has an interest in storm water, salt on the roads in winter, etc. If Galicki can point out a frivolous project, it can be killed. Galicki replied that the job of taking a look at frivolous projects may be more clearly placed at the committee level, and there is enough room for the ability to cut some programs that have been recommended for 2024 or some purchases. He realized that as a Council member who does not

sit on many of these committees, his opinion matters very little. Galicki enjoined Council and members of various committees to look at how they can examine the proposed budget, make cuts, and not put the burden on the taxpayers with additional taxes.

Bell stated he was relieved that they were waiting two weeks. He wanted more time to hear from the citizens whom they represent. A lot of people received the letter from the County Commissioners late last week. Some received the letter from the Auditor's office the next day. With all of these things, there was also an extra step he wanted to take in going to the Auditor's website to see the real dollars that affect them. He wanted time for people to take this step and get back to him with their opinion since Council is the steward of their money and he wondered what their opinion on the matter was.


Porter concluded that \$195,000 divided by 1,400 households is \$150 per household. He was going to go on to the Auditor's website to see what will happen to his taxes which may give him a clearer idea of what it means for him. Perhaps it is a valuation where the more the house is worth, the more you pay.

The Mayor thought this was one of Council's finest moments tonight. There were emotional issues with crosswalks, paths, taxes going through the roof, and it was handled perfectly. Council did not rush and just learned about this October 17<sup>th</sup>. They did not knee jerk react. They took their time, thought, and covered all bases. They had overworked their employees on this issue and did the right thing. The Mayor thought that on November 27<sup>th</sup> there would be people here and they will be happy with whatever they do. He thought they left here happy and confident in Council. Porter added that their citizens approached Council in a civil and practical manner.

Bell complimented the HR Committee, Fiscal Officer, and anyone involved with the redlined Employee Handbook.

Porter congratulated the Mayor, Canton, and Berger on their reelection.

**ADJOURNMENT:** Being that there was no further business before Council, Porter made a motion to adjourn at 9:00 p.m. seconded by Berger. Voice vote – ayes, all. Motion carried.

  
William G. Koons, Mayor

  
Danielle Romanowski, Fiscal Officer

Prepared by Leslie Galicki