

**RECORD OF PROCEEDING
REGULAR COUNCIL MEETING
MONDAY, OCTOBER 13, 2025 – 7:00 P.M.
MAYOR WILLIAM G. KOONS PRESIDING**

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

OFFICIALS PRESENT: Police Chief Rizzo, Solicitor Matheney, Engineer Haibach, Administrative Assistant Galicki

VISITORS: Cherie Hattenbach, Woodside Dr.; Cathy Hattenbach, Laurelbrook Dr.; Stephen Peplin, Laurelbrook Dr.; Mark Vedder, CVFD; Kelly Kimball, Lakeview Ln.; Thomas Collins, Fairfax Dr.; Todd Dietzel, Forest Dr.; Geoff Glazer, Bell Rd.; Jim Brosius, Southwyck; Mark and Suzanne Svette, Kimberwick Ct.; Peter Asmar, Ridgecrest Dr.; Meredith Sonby, Sheerbrook Dr.; Leah Wallenhorst, Sheerbrook Dr.; Todd Lyle, Bell Rd.; Madison Monroe, Fernwood Dr.; Kaley Richard, CVT; Bob and Rosemary Patno, Foxhall Dr.; Meg Nelson, Reserve Tr.; Zach Flaiz, Sheerbrook Dr.; Jim Flaiz, Sheerbrook Dr.; Joe Franzese, Wolfpen Dr.; Nicole and Jeremy Bond, Bell Rd.; Jo and Bob Royer, Manor Brook Dr.; Misha Alexander, Chillicothe Rd.; Elizabeth Galicki, Westover Dr.; Bill Partain, Maple Hill Dr.; Jennifer and Ryan Bradley, Royal Oak Dr.; Michael Cannon, Manor Brook Dr.; Al and Kathy Catani, Champion Ln.; Alison Skok, W. Bel Meadow Ln.; Jimmy Leffler, Bell Rd.; Todd and Kristen Brackett, Potomac Dr.; Jeff Poprik, Sheerbrook Dr.; David Allen, Sheerbrook Dr., John Wahl

The Mayor called the Regular Council meeting to order and led the Pledge of Allegiance. The Administrative Assistant read the roll. **Porter made a motion to approve the minutes of the September 22, 2025, Special Council meeting**, seconded by Canton. Voice vote – ayes, all. Motion carried. Porter made a motion to approve the **minutes of the September 22, 2025, Regular Council meeting**, seconded by Cavanagh. Voice vote – ayes, all. Motion carried.

VISITORS: The Mayor distributed the agenda and a brief history of fire and EMS to the visitors.

Misha Alexander stated she is a candidate for South Russell Village Council. She addressed switching fire and EMS contracting and expressed concern about trying to negotiate a new contract with less than three months left in the year. She further stated that it seemed very reckless to make a decision like this at the last minute, and it seemed that it was primarily focused on immediate financial concerns. There are legitimate financial concerns with budgeting a proposed 12% year-over-year increase and there had been plenty of time to look at that prior to the point of having to make a decision. If the Village is considering contracting with a different township, she hoped there would be transparency in presenting to the residents the reasons other than the immediate costs there would be to switch contracts as far as quality service. Safety is the most important thing, and the priority should be providing the safest emergency responses to the community. She wanted to make sure this discussion was happening and not just as an immediate financial decision.

Todd Lyle explained that in August, he heard that the conglomerate of communities had all agreed to the 12% increase that is occurring. That is a 12 % increase for the next three years. He pointed out the increased costs, adding that ultimately, fiscal responsibility is only as good as the community that supports that fiscal responsibility. Lyle was concerned that at the 11th hour, the Village did not have a contract. Both his mother and father were rescued by the Chagrin Valley Fire Department (CVFD) and the responders are members of this community. This is not about financing, but about community and continuity. He admonished Council for this not being taken care of when the Mayor said it was agreed to in kind. It is a fiscal issue but also an ethical commitment that they made. He appreciated fiscal responsibility, but it is about continuity in the community. If there is a fire in downtown Chagrin Falls and there is a mutual response, what happens when there is an issue out on Chillicothe Rd. and Kinsman Rd.? Residents need to be able to rely on their emergency services. Fiscal responsibility is an issue, but you can't have that if you do not have a community. The members of the CVFD are also members of the community. Lyle asked Council to put the matter to rest. Fiscal Responsibility is only good if there is community to back it up. Lyle asked Mayor and Council to close the book on this matter. There are greater problems currently than worrying about whether or not someone will come for his mom tonight.

Geoff Glazer said until this year, he had never had to call an ambulance. However, due to a serious medical problem, he has had to call four different times in the last five months. He could not say enough about the professionalism, capabilities, and kindness of CVFD. They arrived at his home within two to three minutes each time when time is of the essence. He understood that costs had gone up, but there is no price on life, safety, and community. He urged Council to stick with what had worked for 100 years.

Thomas Collins explained that he was speaking from a standpoint of previously being a paramedic with CVFD and Russell Township before going on to practice emergency medicine and serving as the Medical Director for Cleveland EMS and Cleveland Fire for 26 years. When he thinks of this topic in terms of his family and community, he thinks about it with a lot of expertise, insight, and experience. He took exception with the indignity of the discussion at the last Council meeting by some of the Council members who portrayed the CVFD as being less than transparent. The Village is so fortunate to have excellent fire departments, both CVFD and Russell Township, with dedicated people. The tone of the discussion was trying to make one look like it was out for itself and not for the community. CVFD has a reputation throughout the region. Its members go on to be part of departments all over the state and bring that talent and expertise back home. The two departments are different, with Russell Township being postured for more of a rural response and CVFD for a more suburban response. This is evident in their staffing and equipment and how often they must turn the equipment over. Collins requested that Council support the CVFD contract. He understood the increased expense and explained the department's expenses are also out of their control due to private equity buying the fire and ambulance manufacturers. He further requested Council to call for a vote tonight to solve this once and for all. Collins acknowledged that there are more important things to worry about, but it was important to show a sign of support and confidence in the CVFD and to settle the matter tonight.

Libby Galicki shared a story about her experience in support of CVFD. She described how 10 years ago, she was a junior in high school preparing for prom and thinking about colleges. She had gotten her license and was learning to drive a stick shift with her mom around the neighborhood. She returned home to find her dad sitting in the kitchen looking scared and saying he thought he was

having a heart attack and needed to go to the hospital. Her mom called 911. She cried and thought of the possibility of losing her dad before prom, graduating from high school, graduating from college, and before he was able to see the strong woman she had become today because of him. Within seconds, Dr. Collins was at her dad's side providing care. Shortly after she saw the red lights flashing through the windows and ambulance pulling into the driveway. Skilled paramedics were able to quickly determine where the blockage was, provide emergency medications, notify the hospital, which all significantly decreasing the time from the 911 call to the emergency catheterization, vastly increasing her dad's survivability. She now realizes she has the CVFD First Responder Program to thank for her dad's life and for allowing her father to be out of the hospital just days after a major heart attack to see her off to her first prom. No other surrounding community has this program. Galicki stated she was in favor of keeping CVFD for EMS and Fire Services in South Russell. You never think you need 911 until it is your worst possible day. 10 years ago, moments after calling 911, Dr. Collins was in her home, and this was because of the resources CVFD has. Not only was the ambulance there promptly, but it was there with staff with unmatched professionalism and familiarity due to the close-knit community which they are also a part of. Firefighter paramedics such as herself, Jeremy Bond, Lt. Ryan Bradley, Lt. David Allen, and Lt. Marty Walenhorst who are all present are also members of the South Russell community.

Mike Cannon, Police Chief and Village Administrator for Hunting Valley, is familiar with city fire and police departments including CVFD and Russell Fire Department. After the last meeting, Cannon was under the impression that there was a group agreement among the CVFD participating entities about the contract. Furthermore, Hunting Valley subsequently passed legislation for the CVFD contract last month. That being said, if South Russell leaves, the other communities face increases. He is a South Russell resident and understands the reasons fiscally to consider moving to another department. Two weeks ago, there was a tragic fire in Hunting Valley involving 11 fire departments. Ten years ago, when he came to Hunting Valley, Cannon said he met with the Russell Fire Chief to see if Pepper Pike or Russell would be a better fit than CVFD and was told to take a look at response times. Ultimately, they went with CVFD with auto-responses with Pepper Pike and Russell. They stuck with CVFD because he felt they were the best fit professionally. He wanted the same as a resident of South Russell. He expressed support for CVFD and thought it would be a mistake to leave because if Russell was on a fire call, they would have to call CVFD anyway.

The Mayor said as a point of clarification, the six communities that form the CVFD are Bentleyville, Chagrin Falls, Chagrin Falls Township, Hunting Valley, Moreland Hills, and South Russell. The meeting Cannon referenced occurred in August where these communities met and verbally agreed to the contract with Cannon representing Hunting Valley.

Larry Morrow has been a resident of South Russell for 11 years. He relayed an incident that occurred five or six years ago with his wife who was gravely ill. CVFD was called by a neighbor who had come over to help. They responded quickly, as did Police Chief Rizzo, and Morrow said there was wonderment within him for the great community in which he lives and all those who work to make it so. He stated that he came to the meeting to say thank you. If he was on the radio talking to a half million people today, he would say thank you, again.

Todd Dietzel said he was speaking on behalf of himself, Amy, and Avery Dietzel. He has been a law enforcement officer for 33 years and is currently the Chief of Police of the Village of Moreland Hills, which is served by the great CVFD. He also attended the meeting where he heard there was an

agreement that the contract would be voted on with the three 12's. He wanted to know what had happened since then. He asked what one's word is worth. He thought there was a dollar amount being put on lives, which was a dangerous thing. As a resident, he was willing to pay more to get the service CVFD provides. Five or six years ago on New Year's Eve, there was a windstorm. He and his family returned home to see lights flashing and his house filled with smoke. A branch had knocked a negative off the transformer. CVFD arrived within five minutes. Had there been a delay, he had no doubt a fire would have started in his home, and he would not still be living in Village of South Russell. He asked whether there was a dollar amount that should be put on people's lives. What he has heard from Council is that they are willing to do that. He did not think this was the right course of action. Dietzel continued to say that the will of the people is that they want to stay with CVFD. Dietzel noted that Canton asked people to attend, and now they are there. He wanted to know what would happen after those present said what they had to say. He thanked Council and concluded that the residents wanted to stay with CVFD. He has worked with three different agencies in the past 33 years, and the men and women of CVFD are more dedicated than any of them. Their staff work for CVFD, Lakewood, Cleveland Heights, etc. and bring that talent and expertise to the Chagrin Valley. Additionally, some live in the Village. He urged Council to keep CVFD.

Steve Peplin said he is a businessman and has built a prosperous business not by being the low-cost bidder, but being the best supplier. Something like emergency services, dental care, and parachutes are things that should not be looked at for price only but also for quality. The current arrangements seem to be working well. It should not be a quantifiable decision, but a decision based on qualifications and not the low bidder.

Cathy Hattenbach believed both CVFD and Russell Fire Department were good departments and felt fortunate to have amazing first responders. Her concern with Russell is that their volume is around 800 and CVFD is around 1,500. If they picked up South Russell, they would need a 50% increase in people, apparatus, engines, etc. It is not possible to hire and train people in three months. CVFD knows where the Village streets are, and they know the people. There is not an adequate amount of time for Russell to put together a qualified bid, which they deserve. She did not think this was fair to Russell or any of the other participating communities which will have to absorb the costs if South Russell were to leave CVFD. She pointed out that if Council wished to go out for bids, they have three years to do so.

Jim Flaiz has lived in the Village for over 35 years. He addressed the process because he thought the way this had been handled was bordering on dereliction. First, he referred to the timeline provided by the Mayor as it included some of the time Flaiz served on Council. In 1978, the Village switched to Russell Fire Department but then went back to Chagrin Falls in 1979. This was a famous story told to him by the old timers when he was on Council. CVFD is part of the South Russell community, and the community is part of them. If the Village went back to Russell Fire Department, it would be subjecting itself to another political subdivision's fire department. It is Russell's fire department and not South Russell's as CVFD is. In 1978, the Russell Township Trustees, for whatever reason, decided to terminate the fire contract, which occurred at midnight. No notice was provided to the Village. The Mayor at the time was up at the Russell fire station in his pajamas at night asking what would happen if a fire call came in and the contract had been terminated. The Fire Chief had no answer other than the Trustees terminated it. The mayor went down to CVFD and they told him that if there was a call that night, they would take care of it and would work out the details later. CVFD gave Council the

price in June. The tax budget is to be publicly advertised and then the Budget Commission hears the budget in August. The Village's budget is due to the state September 1st. Through the budgeting process, these decisions should have already been made. He pointed out that it was now October and the Village did not have a price from Russell. Furthermore, this is not a bidding process. Flaiz explained that Porter, Canton, and Berger went to Russell Township on October 2nd with less than 90 days left before the expiration of the contract, and gave them what CVFD quoted, to see if they could beat it and give them a price. They said they would but still have not. There are only four regular Council meetings left this year. There should be three readings for the ordinances, which then take 30 days to take effect unless it is by emergency. This is not how to handle an EMS/Fire contract, but this is the corner Council has backed itself into. It is mid-October and there is insufficient time to properly evaluate. They all get paid to do a job and have not done it. If they want to do this, it is their prerogative, but it should have been done in July and not the middle to end of October, which is wrong.

The Mayor had a correction and said that when he was sent to Russell Township to ask for a bid, in the email to them, he included the price CVFD was asking. He did not know why he provided it, but he told Russell what CVFD was asking, not the three Council members. This was in September that he did that.

Jimmy Leffler echoed what had been said about process and how they had gotten to this point. As background, from 2001 until 2018, he was a member of CVFD and still works in the field in a neighboring city. In speaking about fiscal responsibility, right now the Village is getting a value of the Kansas City Royals for the New York Yankees. In the community where he works, there are a few more people per shift, and the budget is \$10,000,000. He's guessing CVFD is not running a \$10,000,000 budget. The Village is getting firefighters who work for Lakewood, Shaker Heights, Beachwood, Cleveland Heights, who are highly valuable and highly skilled people who go on six to eight thousand calls per year. This is in a community that is running 2,000 calls with only 4 people and doing it well. He only left the department for family reasons. The Village is getting people who are highly skilled paramedics and firefighters who are not just training with CVFD but with all their full-time departments. There are members of various specialty teams, and the Village is getting some of the most highly skilled part-time volunteer members for their department. So, if they want to think about fiscal responsibility, the cost of a firetruck when he left CVFD in 2018 was between \$500,000 and \$600,000. It is now \$1.2 million for a fire truck. The cost of a ladder truck is \$1.5 million. He stressed the value that the Village is receiving for the cost.

The Mayor said as a point of clarification, CVFD is a \$2.4 million operation. Chief Vedder confirmed this was the proposal.

Mark Vedder wanted to address some statements that were made about Russell's proposal, which is unknown at this point, being less than CVFD. Russell's current per capita cost is \$222 per person while CVFD is \$152 per person. By the end of 2028, with the total contract increases and the ambulance billing included, CVFD's per capita will come up to \$222 per person. He could not imagine that Russell would offer South Russell a lower per capita than what it charges its own residents and found it implausible that the Russell proposal would be less.

Bob Royer noted that one of the reasons he is alive today is because of the CVFD which has picked him up three times. He spent a lot of time in the Navy, and as a result has a number of health issues. CVFD provides quality care and the ability to make a difference. The most valuable things in life are

yourself, loved ones, and home. The Village has excellent care in those departments. To go someplace else regardless of the cost is jumping in the fire which makes no sense.

Joe Franzese said he is an architect and has been in buildings that have suffered fire damage. Often, he has heard, 'if they had only been here a few minutes sooner,' lives would not have been lost and people displaced. Minutes matter. Eventually, he will have a heart attack and would rather not have his wife wondering if and when the guys are going to show up so he can go out with the lights on rather than with a sheet over his face.

Alison Skok thought it was a fair statement to say that the majority of Council have held a newborn. Imagine that baby turning blue and going limp in your arms. She did not want to worry about how long it would take for someone to come to her home for her children. Skok asked Council to consider this.

Bill Partain has been a resident of South Russell for 23 years. He served on the CVFD from 2000 to 2012 and has been around the hospital emergency community for the majority of his adult career. The reason that there are such high-quality paramedics and professional firefighters is because of the leadership of Chief Vedder and Chief Zupan. They have been vetted tenfold, and he thought it was an insult that they must defend the organization over however many hundreds of thousands of dollars. He would happily pay more money. They are all paying more money for everything they are doing right now. As a resident, he is willing to pay more money because they are getting a service that is of a much higher quality than a lot of the surrounding communities. He knows this because he has worked there and knows the people who work there. If they are looking to cut costs or pinch pennies, look at some of the Village services like free trash pickup. Cut those things so the residents can keep this high-quality fire service.

Canton stated that in September, he asked for the residents' input and here they are. He thanked the residents for attending and those who spoke. Canton taught government and economics for 30 years and felt this was a grand example of civics in action. There was no question in his mind that the fire and EMS service is fantastic. He indicated that the residents trust Council with their money and it would not be prudent if they did not at least look. They were all shocked by the increase and felt it was necessary to look for alternatives. In this democratic republic, the residents are the boss and Council works for them. Canton emphasized that this is the residents' money. He explained that he was at the meeting where members of each participating community were present, one of whom was vehemently opposed to the 12%, 12%, 12%, but eventually they all agreed to it. However, they were an advisory board which does not vote. Council votes and the residents gave Council the job of looking out for their money. The Village had not yet received a proposal, but when it does, he is going to suggest that a Special Council meeting be held, to which he will invite everybody present. They will not be signing a contract with anyone at 3:00 a.m. They will let it be known, and they will all study it and debate the pros and cons and work it out like a community. Canton guaranteed it will happen that way.

Collins asked if there was anything prohibiting Council from calling for a vote tonight. The Mayor said no but said he did not have three votes to pass it. Bell asked the Mayor not to speak for the Council members. Collins verified that legally, they did not have to wait for the return of information from any other municipality. They have a proposal in front of them from CVFD and are all hearing very clearly the will of the community that elected Council and entrusted them to help take care of the

residents. He asked Council to call for a vote tonight. Another participant seconded the request. This participant asked where Council's ethics are. They give a commitment and then renege on it. Canton reiterated that the advisory board gave the commitment, but it is up to Council to decide, and Council does not have to agree with the advisory board. Canton suspected there was a miscommunication. He was at the meeting, and they agreed, but they had to go back to their councils or trustees to vote on the matter. The Mayor stated that Cannon and Dietzel were both there. On August 13th, there was a presentation and the third meeting with CVFD. Six communities were there. Dietzel represented the Mayor of Moreland Hills, Cannon represented Hunting Valley, Kathy Hale for Bentleyville, Bill Tomko for Chagrin, and John Finley for Chagrin Falls Township, and the Mayor. The six of them agreed that they would accept the yearly 12% increase, and then they would take this back to get approved. That's where they are now.

Collins understood that Council may not be ready for a vote but thought Council could read the room and know how important this is to the residents. He thought this matter was a no brainer and respected that Council may not be ready but wanted to know if there was anything preventing them from calling for a vote tonight. The Mayor said no, that all that was needed was a motion. Collins asked if any of the Council members were ready to make a motion.

Bell shared his thoughts of CVFD, recalling when he attended Safety Town as a kindergartner, while he was in school, and at Blossom time as a part of the community. As an adult, he sees them in the community and sees them supporting the schools. He shared an event from when he was 14 and his mother fell down the stairs. He was too young to drive, and having the CVFD ambulance come gave him the comfort he needed as a 14-year-old boy who did not know how to be a man yet. He relayed another event with his wife two years ago when she had a medical emergency and CVFD responded quickly. Bell concluded that when he thinks of CVFD, he thinks of a lot more than just dollars and cents. Council has heard from the people a lot through social media, emails, and at this meeting and he **felt comfortable moving forward with a motion to accept the CVFD contract tonight, seconded by Cavanagh.** Canton asked for a roll call vote. The Mayor clarified that Bell was referring to the 2026 through 2028 contract. Porter said that for him, it was an issue of three factors, equipment, qualifications, and costs. When the Village received the information about the increase in early July, they were not pleased. In 2025, the Village was paying about \$532,000 and in 2028 it will be paying over \$200,000 more. That is the kind of increase that he could not swallow or go along with. It is Council's duty to see if there is an alternative. It was very important to hear from the residents. As Flaiz pointed out, the Village does not have a proposal from Russell and do not know for sure what they would do or whether they would ask for more money than CVFD. But with an increase of that magnitude, in a Village with a \$3,000,000 budget, it would be derelict not to find alternatives if there are any. The last thing anyone present wants to see is a levy in a couple of years for a fire district to fund this increase. Everyone says they will pay for it, but there are 75 people present and 3,200 voters in this Village. Those present are unanimous in what they are telling Council, and he has no problem with the outstanding service CVFD provides. He added that CVFD responded to calls for both of his parents who lived in Hunting Valley. They were on the ball. Russell is three miles away and CVFD is about the same. When the Council members went to the Trustees in Russell, they wanted to hear the Trustee's proposal because that 12% increase every year for three years will not break the back of the Village, but it is an awful lot of money to demand six months before the contract expires. In August and September, they talked about it. The Mayor and Council members went to Russell to see if there is an alternative. Porter noted that everyone present says there isn't one because CVFD is the best of

all time. He thought they were, but they would be derelict in their duty to just spend the residents' money to keep this going without knowing for sure what is going on otherwise.

Berger offered there was additional information that perhaps they were not aware of. In 2024, South Russell received \$135,000 reimbursement from EMS calls. In the current proposal over three years, it will be phased out. That is in addition to the 12% increase. The amount of the ambulance billing varies from year to year but is an additional expense that the residents will have to bear. A second component is that CVFD is dispatched by Chagrin Valley Dispatch (CVD). For fire service alone, it is a cost to the Village of about \$60,000 per year. If the Village were to use a fire service from Geauga County, they would be dispatched by the Geauga County Sheriff's Office (GCSO), which would cost the Village nothing since residents already pay for it in their taxes. Adding \$60,000 to \$135,000 is an additional \$200,000 per year in cost. He does not disagree with the quality of service that has been provided, but if he looks at \$200,000 more to the contract and \$200,000 additional costs, that is an additional \$400,000 per year, which is double what the Village is currently paying. It would be a dereliction of duty if they did not ask if there were alternatives. The Village could receive a much better offer but still stay with CVFD. But he thought it was important to ask the question before committing the Village to the increase in costs over the next three years and beyond. If a proposal is not received, the choice is easy. Porter added that the contract with CVFD does not expire until December 31st, so it is not like they were in crisis mode tonight. He thought that asking the questions and getting the answers is worthwhile to find out if they can compare apples to apples and not just go with what the Village has because they all know it is good and everyone is familiar with it for the last 50 years.

Jeremy Bond said that considering Council's need to be fiscally responsible, he respected that because it is the residents' money and not Council's, and the residents elected them. He asked that they obtain a proposal for free police services from Geauga County, because residents pay for it in taxes. The police budget is over \$2,000,000. If Council wants to save some money, pick the budget. It would pay for fire services. Canton responded that previously, there were Council members who wanted to close the Building Department. He and Berger fought this and kept the Building Department because they knew the homes in South Russell were getting older and people would be remodeling their homes. Furthermore, they could not depend on the Geauga County Building Department which did not have the manpower. Canton said that he and everyone in the room loves the Police Department, but when addressing the matter of the Building Department, Canton asked the same question about using the Sheriff's Department instead of the Police Department. Canton questioned what it would be like without the Village's Police Department and questioned whether the Sheriff's Department would be able to keep residents safe. They kept the Police Department because they knew the residents wanted to keep it and it made sense.

Hattenbach asked if Russell Fire Department had the manpower to take care of South Russell. The Mayor said that they don't know. Hattenbach thought they did with the number of calls Russell responds to and how many CVFD takes care of. She concluded that they do not currently have the manpower to take care of South Russell, and she doubted that they would be able to have it by December 1st.

Canton suggested that during the roll call vote, each Council member would express why they voted the way they did. The Mayor said no, that they would vote and then move on. The Solicitor made a technical amendment in that the contract provided to the Village requires some revisions. **Bell**

amended the motion to state, “pending revisions as suggested by the Solicitor.” Porter asked what revisions, and the Solicitor advised that the contract the Village has still refers to the reimbursement from two to three years ago with the building renovations. Vedder explained that a clean document was provided by CVFD to the Village, and the Solicitor stated she had not seen it yet. The Mayor said he did not have one here right now. Porter questioned whether they were going to vote on a contract they had not seen. The Solicitor said she had only seen the one that did not strike out the language regarding the reimbursement for the renovations. Porter did not think they should vote on it before seeing the final version. Cavanagh noted that it was well publicized that these corrections would be going away. Vedder reiterated that he provided a contract containing all the corrections the Solicitor recommended. The Solicitor asked if this was in the last couple of weeks, and Vedder said yes. Although she did not have it in front of her, the Solicitor took Chief Vedder’s word for it. The Mayor told Porter that the corrections consisted of capitalizing a word and scratching out the wording from the fundraising. **Roll call – ayes, Bell, Canton, Cavanagh. Nays – Porter and Berger. Galicki recused himself since his daughter’s employment with CVFD precluded him from discussion or voting on the matter as it was construed to be a conflict of interest. The Mayor stated that the contract passed 3 to 2.**

The Mayor acknowledged the work of the Chagrin Valley Times reporter on this subject. At 8:11 p.m., the Mayor called for a 10-minute break.

Council reconvened at 8:23 p.m.

MAYOR’S REPORT: The Mayor distributed his report. The Mayor attended the Geauga Soil and Water annual meeting. Regarding the trail, people from the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) and the Northeast Ohio Area Coordinating Agency (NOACA) are concerned about the government pulling money. They stressed to him to get going on the project in the event they pull the money in 2026. He thought they needed to provide clarification for Verdantas about what they wanted to be done on the path and asked Bell to look at that. The Mayor attended the Ohio Municipal League Conference, the details of which are in his report.

For clarification on the Mayor’s report, Berger asked about the wording in the section regarding the Village paying for the creation of the path through the park. The Engineer explained that this was discussed in the Finance Committee meeting and the cost of this would be \$100,000. Although he was willing to work with the Streets Department to do this work, it would probably be best to contract it out.

FISCAL OFFICER: The Fiscal Officer’s report was distributed.

FINANCE COMMITTEE: Canton stated that the committee met on October 7th, and the minutes were distributed. He referenced the Fiscal Officer’s report and advised that the cash balance is \$4,587,493.57 which is an increase of \$1,270,804 from last year. Notable revenues for September include Income Tax in the amount of \$150,318.40 gross, reimbursement in the amount of \$24,308 for the School Safety Officer (SSO), PEP Safety Grant in the amount of \$1,000 for mulch, Cemetery lots in the amount of \$2,000, and interest of \$14,210.96. Notable expenses for September included Inspection Services, in the amount of \$3,525, bank fees of \$102.62, large salt truck upfitting in the amount of \$36,000, and salt building pay application #1 of \$59,892.

Canton made a motion to acknowledge receipt and review of the October 13, 2025, Credit Card Report, seconded by Porter. Voice vote – ayes, all. Motion carried.

Canton made a motion to authorize the Mayor’s signature of the Verdantas Work Order for the Trail Planning Task 1 to develop a refined phase 1 & 2 trail layout along Bell Road with a refined cost estimate with a budget amount of \$7,000, seconded by Cavanagh. Voice vote – ayes, Galicki, Porter, Bell, Canton, and Cavanagh. Nay, Berger.

Porter suggested Friday, November 21, 2025, at 3:15 for the next Finance Committee meeting.

SOLICITOR: The Solicitor referenced the motion made for the CVFD contract and said that technically speaking, it should have been by legislation, which is an ordinance. It is an agreement that requires signatures, terms and conditions, as well as monetary obligations. She recommended repealing the motion since technically it is annulled even though there were three yes votes and two no votes. Technically, it requires four affirmative votes to pass. In any event, since it is an agreement, it still must be handled by ordinance. It can be on first reading, or they could waive readings if there were five affirmative votes in order to pass the actual ordinance. The Mayor suggested doing it as the first reading of the ordinance during Ordinances and Resolutions. The Solicitor advised that they should still repeal the motion because they will be fixing it by ordinance.

ENGINEER: The Engineer reported that the Road Program was well on its way to completion. The leveling course is down on Countryside Dr., and it is awaiting the final surface course. The only two items to address are the monument box castings, which need to be brought up to grade so that they are flush with the finished pavement. These are survey monuments. The final course should be applied at the end of this week or early next week according to Specialized Construction. The Engineer thought they had done a fantastic job, and it is still within budget.

At the Finance Committee meeting, the Engineer presented the Hazelwood Storm Sewer and Roadway Paving project. He submitted an application that he thought was strong but for which he did not anticipate getting funding. However, the Village did receive it. The estimate for the project is \$700,000. Approval was secured for a \$300,000 grant and a \$50,000, 0% interest loan. 50% of the project is offset by funding and the remaining \$350,000 comes from the Village’s cash reserves. The Engineer would leave it to Council to determine whether it wants to spend the money for it and move forward. If this is the case, a contract cannot be awarded until after July 1, 2026. Construction would start in late summer or early fall of 2026 with road paving in spring of 2027. The Engineer stated that the storm sewer on Hazelwood Dr. is atrocious, and he would want to design it in such a way to tie in all the streets with rear yard drainage problems. It would provide a place for the excess water to go if those communities could get together and decide to either reestablish rear yard swales or some other means of stormwater conveyance. Currently, even if this were to be done, there is no receiving facility for the water. The Hazelwood stormwater project would be an outlet for that. Cavanagh clarified that the area in question starts at the top of the hill on Fernwood. She was glad the Engineer got money to do this, and the Engineer pointed out that it also requires a \$350,000 commitment from the Village. Porter was uncertain whether this had been budgeted, and the Engineer did not think it had since it was just a preliminary application. The Mayor said they will find a way.

A preconstruction meeting was held with CMG Contracting for the construction of the new salt storage facility. The Building Inspector raised the issue of the need for variances for size and height of the building. Although he did not perceive an issue, it was important to go through the proper channels.

The Engineer is working with the Solicitor to develop the approval process roadmap. The Contractor was looking to break ground in a week or two but noted the need for the approvals. The goal is to get things done expeditiously to enable groundbreaking and construction. There was discussion about the Planning Commission (PC) and Board of Zoning Appeals (BZA) meeting schedules and deadlines. The Solicitor was unaware of the need for variances and noted that it would potentially have to wait until the November BZA meeting unless a special meeting is arranged. The Engineer respectfully pushed for a special meeting since there is concrete to pour before winter happens. Notice requirements for BZA were discussed. The Mayor stated BZA would discuss a special meeting at the upcoming meeting on Wednesday. Porter surmised this meant construction would not occur until next year, and the Engineer responded that if all the permitting was obtained, it could be built before December. Concrete can be poured down to 30 degrees and he was reluctant to permit it below this temperature. Galicki asked if it was the Engineer's position that the contractor should use special heating blankets if the temperature was questionable, and the Engineer concurred adding that once it starts getting closer to 30 degrees, some special measures must be taken. He would not take the risk, however, of pouring concrete when the temperatures are close to zero. Cavanagh thought these factors could increase costs, and the Engineer did not think so because the contractor owned the heating blankets. They will cross that bridge if they get to it.

The Mayor provided the names of three engineering firms that are interested in serving as a third-party reviewer. They are Hess and Associates, Newbury; Baker Company, which has done trail work; and American Structure Point, whom the Mayor met at the OML Conference. The Engineer explained that this is a new NOACA/ODOT requirement. In the past, ODOT provided the third-party nonbiased reviewer of the plans, but they no longer do this and the Village must secure an ODOT prequalified engineering firm that is not Verdantas to look at the plans generated by the Village to make sure they meet all of ODOT's requirements before ODOT will look at them. Bell noted that a separate proposal for a third-party reviewer will also be required for the path. The Engineer concurred since they have different qualifications. He added that the Request for Proposal (RFP) advertisement needs to run for three weeks.

STREET COMMITTEE: Cavanagh made a motion to approve posting of South Russell Public Service Announcement – Bell Road East Paving with the cutoff date of a three week period as determined by the Engineer and distributed to the following sources: (1) Design-build firms, including contractors or other entities that seek to perform the work as a design-build firm; (2) Architect, landscape architect, engineer, and surveyor associations; (3) The news media; (4) Any publications or other public media, including electronic media, seconded by Galicki. Voice vote – ayes, all. Motion carried.

Cavanagh reported that the Streets Committee met on October 7th and discussed the salt structure with the contractor. Regarding the Road Program, Cavanagh concurred that Countryside Dr. is looking good.

Bell addressed Safe Bicycle and Pedestrian Transport Committee (SBPT) matters. Regarding the requirement for a third-party consultant, it was Bell's understanding that to move forward with scoping, the third-party consultant was needed. **Bell made a motion for the Mayor, Fiscal Officer, and Engineer to move forward with a request for an RFP for a third-party architectural consulting firm for the pedestrian pathway along Bell Rd., seconded by Galicki.** The Solicitor advised that this would be similar to the Public Service Announcement that is going out for Bell Rd.

east paving. **Bell amended his motion to be a motion to approve posting of South Russell Public Service Announcement – Bell Road pedestrian pathway with the cutoff date of a three week period as determined by the Engineer and distributed to the following sources: (1) Design-build firms, including contractors or other entities that seek to perform the work as a design-build firm; (2) Architect, landscape architect, engineer, and surveyor associations; (3) The news media; (4) Any publications or other public media, including electronic media, seconded by Galicki. Voice vote – ayes, Galicki, Porter, Bell, Canton, Cavanagh. Nay, Berger. Motion carried.**

Bell asked the Engineer if Verdantas required clarification for the scoping for specifically where the Village wants the path, and the Engineer said no, but they need some direction. Bell indicated that the committee passed a motion for Verdantas to design a path on the south side of Bell from Spring Dr. to Chillicothe Rd. Council may want to consider altering this to Alderwood since the path in the park will be addressed by the Village. Porter said he would leave it, they can design the path. Bell explained that they would want to include the crosswalks now. The committee is saying this but realizes if the north side comes back as being more feasible, they will move forward with that. Cavanagh verified it was Spring Dr. to Chillicothe Rd. and Bell concurred. Porter added, “to the corner lot.” Galicki thought the discussion with the committee was that they would investigate both sides of the street for due diligence. Bell concurred. After the engineering work and scoping of the project, there will be an answer. Bell shared that the committee thought it was necessary to identify one side in order for Verdantas to move forward. The Engineer said they could advertise for an RFP for a review consultant and have someone ready that has the qualification to review the plan set even though the Village does not have a plan set yet for them to review. **Bell made a motion that Verdantas be instructed to design and provide a cost estimate for a five-foot asphalt path from Spring Dr. to Chillicothe, Verdantas to provide pros and cons for the location of the path including in the design would be a crosswalk at Bell Rd. and Chillicothe Rd. and Spring Dr.** Porter asked whether a side was being specified, and Bell said no, that they can look at both. Galicki asked if the 5-foot width was being specified, and Bell said the committee was okay with this width. Porter said that it was the committee’s recommendation for it to be on the south side only, and if that did not turn out to be feasible, then check the north side. Bell concurred and explained that the committee was under the impression that the side had to be specified for the engineering firm, but it does not. Cavanagh commented that adding crosswalks at Bell and Chillicothe was a lot. Bell verified the motion was for scoping. The Mayor concurred and said it would be scoping it out between Alderwood to Chillicothe. Porter pointed out that the motion was for Spring Dr. to Chillicothe Rd. Bell concurred so that they could see how this looked with the scoping. They could then move forward with the build process separately. **Voice vote – Galicki, Porter, Bell, Canton, and Cavanagh. Nay, Berger.**

Bell addressed the Chief’s suggestion of going forward with a crosswalk to Gurney now rather than waiting for a pathway. This would be outside the scope of the trail. **Bell made a motion to have the Engineer explore building a crosswalk to Gurney School from Sugar Bush to the sidewalk in front of Gurney School, seconded by Galicki. Voice vote – ayes, all. Motion carried.**

BUILDING COMMITTEE: Cavanagh stated that the committee met on October 9, 2025, and reported that the Building Department Administrative Assistant and part-time Administrative Assistant are much happier with the iWorQ software since getting a different instructor.

It was unsettling to Cavanagh to learn that the new salt structure did not meet zoning. It is a big deal and requires PC, BZA, and the Architectural Review Board (ARB). Cavanagh noted that a neighboring municipality has a blanket resolution where they can put up whatever building is necessary for their municipality. She asked the Solicitor if it would behoove the Village to do something like this. The Solicitor said Council could pass an ordinance that Village projects on Village property do not have to follow the process of zoning or building. She would not recommend this. The law states that the townships and political subdivisions must make a reasonable effort to comply with their zoning. Previously, the practice was for the Village to follow the zoning process, which may entail going through PC, BZA, and ARB.

Cavanagh asked the Mayor to encourage a special meeting of BZA. She explained that the Village has committed to receiving 1,500 tons of salt no later than April 30th of next year.

Cavanagh proposed November 13th for the next committee meeting at 8:00 a.m.

Porter clarified that approval for the salt structure would be sought from PC, ARB, and then go to BZA. Cavanagh concurred. The Solicitor said it does not have to follow that order, and it is only because of the timing of the regular meetings. The board schedules were discussed.

POLICE CHIEF: The Chief submitted his month-end report as well as the reconstruction report of the unfortunate accident in Kensington Green in June.

SAFETY COMMITTEE: Bell reported that the Village's Halloween is Friday, October 31st from 6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m. The next committee meeting will be Thursday, October 16th at 8:00 a.m.

HR COMMITTEE: Bell reported that the Village received the rates for medical and there was no increase. They were advised to charge a nominal fee to the employees, and the committee recommended \$1 annually. **Bell made a motion to approve the renewal of the current Medical Mutual health insurance for Village employees and charge employees \$1.00 per year for coverage, seconded by Berger. Voice vote – ayes, all. Motion carried.**

Regarding the Vehicle Use Policy, Berger advised that the policy was edited according to the comments that were previously made. **Berger made a motion to adopt the Vehicle Use Policy to be included in the handbook, seconded by Cavanagh. Voice vote – ayes, all. Motion carried.** Cavanagh thanked Berger for all the time he put into developing the policy.

Bell stated that the Village does not officially have an off-hours schedule policy. There was an assumed policy through the Streets Department that if they were called in on the weekends, they would get a minimum 1.25 hours, and time actually worked if it surpassed the 1.25 hours. The committee drafted a policy after conducting a joint Streets/HR Committee meeting. **Bell made a motion to approve the off-hour schedule policy retroactive to January 1, 2025, seconded by Berger. Voice vote – ayes, all. Motion carried.**

Bell explained that an adjustment was being made to the Employee Handbook Overtime section for emergency callouts. Currently, only the Department Heads can make such a call, and the Mayor is being added to this for emergency callouts. **Bell made a motion to amend and replace the first sentence of the third paragraph of the Overtime Section in the Employee Handbook to include the mayor in addition to the department head as a person who may determine a public disturbance an emergency for public health and safety for the purposes of a “call-out” with the**

following – A "call-out" is when an employee is called to come in to work unexpectedly, such as storm damage, snow plowing, or a public disturbance that is determined by the department head or Mayor to be an emergency for public health and safety, seconded by Berger. Voice vote – ayes, all. Motion carried.

Bell stated that there was an issue with four-hour callouts on September 20th and 21st for an employee. With the confusion of not having an official policy, the committee wanted to retroactively pay the employee for the hours he worked. **Bell made a motion to approve two 4-hour callouts for September 20th & 21st for Service Department employee to remove trash and clean the park restroom and to direct the Fiscal Officer to compensate the employee at the overtime rate, seconded by Cavanagh. Voice vote – ayes, Porter, Bell, Berger, Canton, and Cavanagh. Nay, Galicki. Motion carried.**

PROPERTIES COMMITTEE: Berger advised that the Properties Committee will be meeting on Thursday, October 23rd at 9:00 a.m. The minutes of the last meeting were distributed.

PARKS COMMITTEE: Berger stated that the minutes of the September 29th committee meeting were distributed. The Fall Festival went well, and the committee will have a follow-up meeting to recap and discuss changes for 2026. Cavanagh thought this was the best Fall Festival with which she had been involved. Canton congratulated Berger, Cavanagh, and the Parks Committee. Cavanagh recognized Kruse family for the cider display and Craig Sirna for the free loan of his tractor and wagons for the hayrides.

PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMITTEE: Porter reported that the Public Utilities Committee met, and the minutes were distributed. He noted that the bids were opened for the Hemlock Culvert Replacement project and CMG is the low bidder. He thought the work would be done by the end of the year if possible. The next Public Utilities meeting will take place on Friday, November 21st at 4:15 p.m.

The Sugar Bush dredging issue will be discussed at the first meeting in November.

Porter made a motion to approve Disbursement Request #1 for the Hemlock Road Culvert Project in the amount of \$3,406.70 to Verdantas LLC and authorizing the Fiscal Officer and Mayor to sign the certificate, seconded by Canton. Voice vote – ayes, all. Motion carried.

The Hazelwood Storm Sewer Project will be discussed at the next committee meeting.

Porter made a motion to award the bid from CMG Contracting for the Hemlock Road Culvert Replacement project in the amount of \$97,650 subject to an acceptable agreement between CMG Contracting and the Village of South Russell, seconded by Cavanagh. Voice vote – ayes, all. Motion carried. Cavanagh recommended notifying the public about the road closure when it occurs.

ORDINANCES AND RESOLUTIONS:

Cavanagh introduced an ordinance approving the service agreement with Gallagher Architects, Inc. for building plans examination services effective January 1, 2026, authorizing the Mayor to execute the agreement on behalf of the Village of South Russell and declaring an emergency. Cavanagh made a motion to waive readings, seconded by Porter. Roll call – ayes, all. Motion carried. Cavanagh made a motion to adopt, seconded by Porter. Roll call – ayes, all. Motion carried. **ORD 2025-58.**

Porter introduced an ordinance approving the Technical Services Proposal from the Chagrin River Watershed Partners to provide ordinance and stormwater management program update to the Village in an amount not to exceed \$5,104.00, authorizing the Mayor to execute the proposal on behalf of the Village and declaring an emergency. Porter made a motion to waive readings, seconded by Bell. Roll call – ayes, all. Motion carried. Porter made a motion to adopt, seconded by Cavanagh. Roll call – ayes, all. Motion carried. **ORD 2025-59**

Bell introduced a resolution authorizing the adoption and implementation of the Cybersecurity Program Policies of the Geauga County Automatic Data Processing Board and declaring an emergency. Bell made a motion to waive readings, seconded by Galicki. Roll call – ayes, all. Motion carried. Bell made a motion to adopt, seconded by Galicki. Roll call – ayes, all. Motion carried. **RES 2025-60**

Porter stated that it was necessary to correct the situation with the motion regarding the CVFD. The Solicitor advised that Council needs to repeal it and then do it by ordinance because of the amount of money involved and the signatures required. The motion will be replaced by an ordinance. The Solicitor stated that technically, it did not have to be repealed because the motion was a nullity since it did not get the four votes it needed. Porter did not want to leave a nullity out there, and the Solicitor said it was fine for him to repeal. Porter provided a first reading of an ordinance approving the contract between the Chagrin Valley Fire Department and Village of South Russell for fire protection and emergency medical services agreement for years 2026 through 2028.

Porter made a motion considered earlier with regard to the EMS/Fire contractor between the Village of South Russell and Chagrin Falls Volunteer Fire Department be repealed because it did not receive the affirmative votes of four Council members, seconded by Bell. Bell clarified that this is a technicality to make it an ordinance rather than a motion. The Solicitor said it is technically, but four Council members are needed to pass it. Galicki asked if there should be any extraordinary effort to inform the public because it could be perceived as an end around. Porter said it should not be perceived as an end around because they are enacting an ordinance for going into an agreement with CVFD for 2026 through 2028. Replacing the motion with an ordinance actually allows the Village, because of the amount of money involved, to make the contract as it was done earlier but in a different form. The Solicitor advised that it is not just about the amount of money, but because it is an agreement which requires an ordinance. An ordinance requires three readings and in order to waive three readings, three fourths of Council are necessary. Porter observed this would be five out of six, and there is one member who cannot vote so it must be unanimous to waive readings. Cavanagh asked if they wanted to try it. The Mayor asked them to hang on and recapped that an ordinance had been proposed and there was a first reading. They are eliminating the motion made earlier, and Porter added that they still needed to vote on the motion. **Voice vote – ayes, Porter, Bell, Canton, and Cavanagh. Galicki recused himself and Berger abstained. Motion carried.**

BILLS LIST

Canton made a motion to ratify the bills list of September 29, 2025, in the amount of \$56,993.12, seconded by Porter. Voice vote – ayes, all. Motion carried. Canton made a motion to ratify the bills list of October 7, 2025, in the amount of \$25,686, seconded by Cavanagh. Voice vote – ayes, all. Motion carried.

NEW/OTHER: Porter, Berger, and Canton had no new business.

Galicki addressed House Bill 331 which was discussed at the OML Conference. He explained that it calls out that a county government can basically disestablish a Village if it does not provide at least five of ten articulated services. Some are Police, Fire, and snow plowing. The Village has no problem meeting it, but he recommended Council become be aware of it. There are many Villages in Ohio that are struggling to provide things like police or fire services or even snow plowing. This empowers county governments to disestablish the village if they are having problems providing essential services. The other issue is the effort to weaken home rule throughout the state. Most of the House Legislators have no municipal government experience. They have township experience and the vast majority of the representatives in the Ohio House and Senate have township experience, but limited village and city experience within the state government including the Village's two State Representatives.

Bell reminded Council that he would not be at the October 27th meeting.

Cavanagh went through the Rarick Cemetery because there had been discussion that it would be a good place for the SBPT Committee to meet and go up there. She strongly stated that the cemetery is not in shape for a stopping place. It needs work and when the Street Commissioner returns, she has a list ready. That being said, it is very beautiful and peaceful.

ADJOURNMENT: Being that there was no further business before Council Porter made a motion to adjourn at 9:20 p.m., seconded by Canton. Voice vote – ayes, all. Motion carried.



William G. Koons, Mayor



Danielle Romanowski, Fiscal Officer

Prepared by Leslie Galicki