

**Finance Committee Meeting Minutes
December 11, 2025, 3:15 p.m. Village Hall**

Present: Chairman Canton, Council Member Porter, Fiscal Officer Romanowski, Solicitor Matheney, Chief Rizzo

The meeting was called to order at 3:17 pm

Overview and Financial Context

The Finance Committee engaged in discussion regarding the Village's near- and long-term financial obligations and the increasing pressure these obligations are placing on existing resources. Members expressed concern that, given the scale of upcoming expenditures—including Fire and EMS costs, major road and infrastructure projects, and the proposed Bell Road shared-use path—the Village may need to consider new revenue sources, potentially including future tax levies.

It was emphasized that while current cash balances appear stable, this is largely due to the timing of projects rather than a reduction in commitments. Several large projects have been delayed or are pending, meaning expenditures are expected to accelerate in the coming year rather than diminish.

Bell Road Shared-Use Path – Status and Concerns

Committee members voiced concern that significant funds have already been spent on engineering and planning without a formal Council decision to proceed with construction. Past expenditures were reviewed, including multiple engineering contracts, none of which are covered by the anticipated grant funding.

The Committee discussed the lack of a clear “go/no-go” decision point and questioned when Council should formally determine whether the project will move forward, rather than continuing to incur planning expenses indefinitely. Members noted that this uncertainty creates financial risk, particularly in light of other major capital needs.

Bell Road Trails

The Safe Bicycle & Pedestrian Transport (SBPT) Committee's recommendation to locate the path on the south side of Bell Road was reviewed. While this option carries a higher estimated construction cost—approximately \$1.8 million, likely exceeding \$2 million when fully realized—it was repeatedly characterized as the safer alternative.

Key safety considerations included:

- Fewer road crossings for pedestrians and cyclists.
- Reduced exposure to traffic compared to a north-side alignment, which would require multiple crossings.
- The ability for users to park at the park and access the entire path without crossing Bell Road.

Engineering implications were discussed, particularly near the cemetery and existing steps. Options such as retaining walls, barrier curbs, step modifications, and realignment of the path closer to the roadway for short sections were reviewed. While these adjustments present design challenges, the consensus was that even with these constraints, the south-side alignment would be safer than current conditions where pedestrians are forced onto the roadway.

The Committee reviewed the financial structure of the project:

- An estimated \$800,000 grant would apply only to construction.
- All engineering, legal, and administrative costs are excluded from grant eligibility.
- Even with grant funding, the Village would likely be responsible for at least \$1 million in local funds.

Given the funding gap, the Committee discussed whether a voter-approved levy should be pursued. Members generally agreed that if the project is to move forward, residents should have a direct voice on whether they are willing to fund it.

Key points included:

- A levy could be structured as a short-term levy (e.g., five years or less) specifically for the path and its maintenance.
- It is preferable to seek voter approval before construction begins, rather than after committing funds.
- The November general election was viewed as more favorable than a primary election due to higher voter turnout.

The Committee discussed statutory timelines, noting that levy legislation would need to be initiated months in advance, including certification by the County Auditor and formal Council action.

The Committee discussed next steps and recommended that:

1. Council formally accept or reject SBPT's south-side recommendation early in January, after new Council members are seated.
2. If Council approves moving forward, it should simultaneously begin discussing financing options, including whether to place a levy on the November ballot.
3. The issue should be introduced at an upcoming special meeting to give Council adequate time to consider the implications before formal action is considered.

The Committee stressed that continuing to spend money without a definitive decision is unsustainable and underscored that transparency, fiscal responsibility, and public input should guide the next steps.

Broader Capital Planning and Financial Pressures

Other significant upcoming projects:

- Salt barn construction
- Hazelwood project (with partial grant funding but substantial local cost)
- Bell Road East and future Bell Road West improvements
- Stormwater projects
- Deferred paving and parking lot work

Members emphasized that these cumulative obligations leave insufficient reserves to absorb the cost of the shared-use path without additional revenue.

Contracts, Purchasing, and Internal Controls

The Committee discussed concerns regarding purchasing practices, particularly the lack of consistent price comparisons for non-bid purchases. While Ohio law clearly defines thresholds for competitive bidding, members noted that:

- Informal quote practices are not always being followed.
- Council has, at times, approved expenditures without reviewing comparative pricing.
- This creates accountability and transparency concerns.

There was discussion about potentially codifying a clearer quote or comparison process for contracts below the statutory bidding threshold, while avoiding conflict with existing ordinances and state law. The Committee agreed this issue should be revisited in more depth at future meetings.

Additional Items

Updates were provided on:

- Engineering fee proposals related to Bell Road East and the third-party review cost of \$32,000.
- Electronic deposit and banking software - waiting for review and approval from ADP

- Ongoing and upcoming utility and infrastructure coordination meetings.

Meeting adjourned at 4:00 PM