

**RECORD OF PROCEEDINGS
REGULAR COUNCIL MEETING
MONDAY, JANUARY 5, 2026– 7:00 P.M.
MAYOR WILLIAM G. KOONS PRESIDING**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Alexander, Bell, Berger, Canton, Cavanagh, and Rensel

OFFICIALS PRESENT: Fiscal Officer Romanowski, Police Chief Rizzo, Street Commissioner Young, Solicitor Matheney, Engineer Haibach

VISITORS: Kelly, Asher, and Eric Kimball, Lakeview Lane; Emma MacNiven, Mapleleaf; John Buda, Leaview Lane; Chris Smith, Fox Lane; Kaley Richard, C.V.T.; and Gary Dole, Maple Hill

The Mayor called the Regular Council meeting to order and led the Pledge of Allegiance. The Fiscal Officer read the roll. **Canton made a motion to approve the minutes of the December 8, 2025, Regular Council meeting, seconded by Cavanagh. Voice vote -ayes, all. Motion carried. Cavanagh made a motion to approve the minutes of the December 29, 2025, Special Council meeting, seconded by Berger. Voice vote – ayes, all. Motion carried.**

VISITOR: Kelly Kimball, a longtime South Russell resident and retired firefighter, addressed Council to demand accountability, action, and an apology for a January 28, 2023, incident that she said caused lasting emotional harm to her and her family. Ms. Kimball urged the new Council to confront past issues, stop protecting systems over people, and restore trust through a sincere apology. The Mayor responded that Council would take her remarks under advisement and respond later.

MAYOR’S REPORT: The Mayor provided the annual “State of the Village” report (Attachment 1) summarizing key items and highlighting community statistics. The Mayor stated that he looked forward to working with the 2026 Council to do what was best for the residents. He was disappointed that Council passed a resolution that contained statements based on a lack of firsthand knowledge and he hoped everyone was ready to move on.

The Mayor reported on Building Department staffing and permit activity. While software issues persist, new homes, restaurants, and office developments are underway. The Mayor expressed satisfaction with the department’s overall direction.

The Mayor discussed the Streets Department’s progress since hiring the Street Commissioner, noting the difficulty of the transition due to personal circumstances and long-standing resistance to change. According to the Mayor, the Street Commissioner brought significant experience and successfully transformed four employees into a cohesive, dedicated team. The department, which had seen little change since the 1990s, is responsible for snowplowing and ongoing infrastructure work, with needed improvements now underway. The Mayor praised the overall appearance of the Village, and the success of the Christmas decorations. He also addressed the contributions of Geauga Soil and Water with resolving a longstanding issue in the Village. He expressed concern about the workload placed on the Engineer and Street Commissioner, suggesting the need for

part-time administrative assistance one day per week. Additionally, according to his report, the department faces approximately 40 outstanding items that must be prioritized.

Regarding the Police Department, the Mayor was happy with Safety and added that police staffing is getting up to the level it needs to be. There are currently 11 full-time employees and 5 part-time employees whom the Chief continues to turn into a team. On the Mayor's wish list for the Police Department is connecting the building to the drone garage, to include bathrooms.

The Mayor addressed the Finance Department, stating that there were no issues identified through the state audit. He further relayed that although the County Budget Commission questions why the Village is not spending its money fast enough, he takes this as a compliment. The Mayor indicated that the Finance Department tends to be abused and wants to make improvements this year by limiting last-minute demands that create stress and long hours for the department staff. He acknowledged the contributions of Meeder Investments and the Finance Committee. The Mayor indicated that taxes were raised 9 years ago but have been lowered twice. He felt the Village is in great shape financially but also has some big projects coming.

At the conclusion of the Mayor's report, Berger asked if the Mayor had a response to Council's questions about Chagrin Valley Dispatch (CVD) which were asked at the 12-29-2025 Council meeting. The Mayor said he did not have any answers for Council, but they would be provided by the CVD Finance Director, Andrew Becker, on next Wednesday afternoon. The Chief provided a response provided by CVD director Nick DiCicco. Apparently, what the Village was previously provided by Becker were two estimates. They lowballed the estimates, and after they figured out the finances in the third quarter, CVD determined the final figure of \$55,510. It was off approximately \$4,500. Berger noted that this was nearly a 16% increase over last year. The Chief explained that last year, the Village was still paying for Fire and Police dispatch. In reality, it would be a 6% increase from the previous estimate. Berger asked the Mayor if he attended the CVD meeting on August 20, 2025, and the Mayor responded that he would say he was sure he did. Berger asked if there was a vote to approve the appropriations for 2026 at that meeting, and the Mayor said he did not know but he would assume so. Berger explained that he had obtained the meeting minutes and asked the Mayor if he holds a position with CVD on the board, and the Mayor said yes, that he represents South Russell. Berger asked if the Mayor was the Recording Secretary for CVD, and the Mayor said no. Berger noted that CVD documentation listed the Mayor as such. The Mayor clarified he is the Secretary of the Executive Committee. Berger stated that on August 20th, a budget was approved by CVD that included all the costs for the Village, and yet, Council did not hear about it until the Chief brought it to Council's attention two weeks ago. He wanted to know why this was. The Mayor said he didn't know, it was just the normal business procedure that CVD determines the cost. He never thought to bring it to Council. Bell clarified that the Mayor did not think to bring a cost increase that would affect the Village to Council's attention. He observed that this occurred about the time the Village was considering the Chagrin Valley Fire Department (CVFD) contract.

In an effort to better understand, Berger clarified that the Mayor represented the Village at the CVD meeting where a cost increase was presented which required Council approval. This

occurred on August 20th and it is now January 5th. The contract has been in effect since January 1st, and Council has not approved it. How can that be? Bell asked the Mayor if he had a response, and the Mayor said not at this time. Bell further stated that it is Council's job to hold the Mayor accountable, and he never has a response for Council. The meeting was in August, and it is now January 5th. He stated the Mayor was avoiding the question on purpose. The Mayor said he was not.

Berger advised that the contract needed to be amended since the original contract with CVD was for police and fire dispatch. It is now for fire only and the Village is committed to spending \$55,000 with no options because it must have CVD in order to have CVFD. The Chief relayed that DiCicco indicated there was no contract with CVD, but rather a membership agreement from when the Village originally joined. There is no need to sign a new contract for fire dispatching only at this point. Berger pointed out that the membership agreement included police dispatch, which the Village no longer uses. He believed it should be amended. Berger suggested discussing with CVFD the cost/implication of developing a system where CVFD could be dispatched by Geauga County, which would cost the Village nothing. Even if the Village had to spend \$25,000 to come up with a solution, it would be \$30,000 ahead and would be \$55,000 to \$60,000 ahead the next year without having CVD. However, homework had not been done because no one was told what was happening from August 20th until this date. Berger stated the Mayor was mad at Council for passing a resolution of no trust/no confidence on December 29th and noted this issue could be added to the pile. Bell felt the Village was not being represented thoroughly with CVD and concluded that the Mayor should not be the representative. The Mayor indicated he probably should have communicated the increase to Council but said it was something they rolled through year after year. Berger referenced the October 13th Mayor's report where he said he attended the meeting and discussed the four new communities that were joining CVD. However, there was no comment regarding the approval of the increased costs.

Alexander wanted more oversight by the Finance or Safety Committees over how to save costs with CVD. She noted that through signing new members, inheriting equipment, and consolidation, the Village would have expected CVD's costs to go down. She wanted to set some guidelines so that there is specific reporting on the financials. The Mayor and Alexander suggested having the Finance Director from CVD come to a Regular Council meeting to explain how the costs are determined. Technical and logistical issues surrounding the current inability for Geauga County to dispatch CVFD were discussed. The deadline to opt out of CVD for the following year is July 1st, otherwise the Village must continue to pay as they did for police because they opted out after the July date. The Chief stated he would reach out to CVD and CVFD to begin discussions. Mayor will attempt to have CVD's Finance Director attend a Council meeting in February.

The Mayor reported there needed to be an appointment of the Street Commissioner for 2026. **Cavanagh made a motion to appoint Tim Young as Street Commissioner for 2026, seconded by Canton. Voice vote – ayes all. Motion carried.**

COUNCIL ORGANIZATION: The Mayor reported the need for an adjustment to the Council meeting calendar for holiday closures. Berger noted that the Village offices are closed on the following scheduled Council meeting dates: January 19 (MLK Day), February 16 (Presidents' Day), and September 7 (Labor Day). **Cavanagh made a motion to move Council meetings from those dates to the following Tuesdays: Tuesday, January 20, 2026; Tuesday, February 17, 2026; and Tuesday, September 8, 2026, seconded by Bell. Voice vote – ayes all. Motion carried.**

Canton made a motion to nominate Councilman Christopher Berger for the position of President Pro Tem of South Russell Council, seconded by Cavanagh. Voice vote – ayes all. Motion carried.

Berger made a motion to appoint Council members to the following committees:

<u>Committee</u>	<u>Chair</u>	<u>Members</u>
Properties	Cavanagh	Canton, Rensel
Human Resources	Berger	Bell, Rensel
Finance	Canton	Berger, Alexander
Streets	Bell	Rensel, Berger
Safety	Canton	Cavanagh, Alexander
Public Utilities	Berger	Cavanagh, Rensel
Building	Cavanagh	Canton, Alexander
Bike Safety	Bell	Rensel, Alexander
Admin & Technology	Berger	Alexander, Bell

seconded by Cavanagh. Voice vote – ayes all. Motion carried.

Berger made a motion to nominate Ruth Cavanagh as Council's representative to the Planning Commission, seconded by Bell. Voice vote – ayes all. Motion carried.

Cavanagh made a motion to acknowledge receipt and review of Council rules, seconded by Canton. Berger noted that the Council Rules had not yet been updated in the Codified Ordinances for actions taken in November 2025. The Solicitor further explained that the November legislation was passed by emergency which meant it went into effect immediately with the exception of the meeting date changing January 1, 2026. Cavanagh amended **the motion to adopt the rules in the Codified Ordinances on the publisher's website with the exception of the ordinances passed 2025-73 and 2025-72, seconded by Berger. Voice vote – ayes all. Motion carried.**

Cavanagh made a motion to set Trick-or-Treat for October 31, 2026, from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m., seconded by Berger. Voice vote – ayes all. Motion carried.

No Motion was made to hold the Veterans' Breakfast, Yard Sale, and Trash Day. They were referred to the Admin Committee for scheduling and planning. Cavanagh explained that the Village is already on the calendar for the Department on Aging for the Senior Trash Pick Up, the dates for which were previously emailed to the Street Commissioner. Possible dates for Trash Day and the Yard Sale would be April 25th and April 18th respectively. The Veterans' Breakfast

would be November 9, 2026, at 9:00 a.m. at the Sleepy Rooster. The details of these events will be further discussed by the committee.

The Fiscal Officer reminded Council that Ohio law requires elected officials to complete three hours of Public Records Training per term. Bell indicated Council members should complete the training individually. Officials agreed to do their own training and provide certificates of completion to the Fiscal Officer for audit compliance.

FISCAL OFFICER REPORT: The Fiscal Officer reported that UAN software is functioning well; the budget and purchase orders for 2026 are in progress. December bank reconciliation was not complete as of the meeting date. Council requested the Fiscal Officer confirm whether UAN offers a Building Department software equivalent.

FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT: Canton reported that the Finance Committee met on December 11, 2025, and the minutes were distributed. Checks were signed December 29th and January 5th and cross-checked. The next Finance Committee meeting will be in January.

SOLICITOR REPORT: The Solicitor reported that the Council agenda order in Rule 220.04 should be amended to include the two new standing committees, Bike & Pedestrian Safety and Admin & Technology. The Mayor requested a revised agenda structure for the January 20th meeting.

ENGINEER REPORT: Regarding Bell Road East Paving, Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) is hosting a virtual scoping/kickoff meeting on January 12, 2026. The Engineer will be attending. Regarding the salt storage building, the Engineer received a third plan revision from CMG late in December. Previously, there were some struggles with design and footer size requirements. These elements were reigned in, and now the project is in alignment with the original scope and budget. The revised plan set should be submitted to the Building Department for review and approval this week. The project timeline for CMG includes footers/excavation in February/March (weather dependent), building erection in April, concrete pad completion in late May, with target completion end of May 2026. The Hemlock Culvert Project is anticipated to be a two-week project and will begin January 12, 2026. The completion date is January 30th which is within the OPWC allowance for spending the money. Detour planning and resident notification were discussed.

STREET COMMISSIONER REPORT: The Street Commissioner reported he was out of the office for most of December. The department's focus was on snow operations, planting three pine trees on the corner, and organizing the garage. To date, 260 tons of salt have been spread, and 500 tons of salt are on order. The cemetery gates are in the works to be replaced. The Chief reported a check was received from the driver's insurance company for payment of the gates.

STREET COMMITTEE REPORT: Cavanagh reported that the Street Committee met on December 11, 2025. The minutes were distributed. Berger asked for the status of the Service Department garage doors. The Street Commissioner said that the contractor that provided the lowest bid stopped in and said he would review the quote to ensure it was accurate. There was a discrepancy in the type of glass specified for the doors and the hinges would be upgraded. The

Fiscal Officer asked whether these changes would change the quote of \$27,954. The Street Commissioner said it would. She asked if the Street Commissioner knew how much the difference would be and the Street Commissioner said the contractor came out today and gave them that. However, the Street Commissioner did not have today's new quote, which the contractor assured him would be minimal for the glass. Berger advised that Council will not be meeting again until January 20th and will need to approve the quote. The Street Commissioner suggested giving a not to exceed amount, which Bell advised against doing. The updated quote is expected prior to the January 20th meeting for Council approval. One door remains non-operational with temporary workarounds. Cavanagh indicated she wanted the doors painted green, but the Mayor favored white to match the accents on the building and campus.

BUILDING COMMITTEE REPORT: Cavanagh advised that the Building Committee met on December 18, 2025. Key topics included software performance issues and need for replacement; fee structure review including re-inspection costs; discussion of accepting credit cards for safety and convenience; and online permit applications.

POLICE CHIEF REPORT: The Chief reported a safety concern involving snow sliding off solar panels on the south side of the Police Department building, nearly striking staff. Snow release also affects vehicle exits due to buildup and freezing. The Chief will attempt to obtain reliable data regarding system energy output. The department has had solar panels operating for a year.

SAFETY COMMITTEE REPORT: Bell stated that the Safety Committee met December 29, 2025, for a candidate interview. There was no additional report.

HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE REPORT: Bell had nothing to report.

PROPERTIES COMMITTEE REPORT: Berger reported that the Properties Committee met December 18, 2025, and the minutes were distributed. The holiday lighting program was a success although it was costly. The plan should be reviewed for 2026.

PARK COMMITTEE APPOINTMENT: Berger made a motion to untable the motion for the appointment Greg Studen to the Park Committee for a four-year term (1/1/2026–12/31/2029), seconded by Cavanagh. Voice vote – ayes, all. The motion was untabled.

Berger made a motion to appoint Greg Studen to the Park Committee for a four-year term beginning 1-1-2026 and expiring 12-31-2026, seconded by Cavanagh. Voice vote – ayes all. Motion carried.

PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMITTEE REPORT: Canton reported that the minutes of the December 11, 2025, Public Utilities Committee meeting were distributed. He had no additional report.

ORDINANCES AND RESOLUTIONS

Cavanagh introduced a resolution expressing the intent to sell personal property not needed by the public for use by internet auction through GovDeals and/or eBay and declaring an emergency. 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. **RES 2026-01**

Bell introduced an ordinance amending Section 220.02 of the Village of South Russell's Codified Ordinances to provide that Public Record Policy is found at Appendix B of the Village's Employee Handbook and declaring an emergency. Bell made a motion to waive readings, seconded by Cavanagh. Roll call - ayes all. Motion carried. Bell made a motion to adopt, seconded by Cavanagh. Roll call – ayes, all. Motion carried. **ORD 2026-02**

PAYMENTS LISTING

Canton made a motion to ratify the payment listing dated December 15, 2025, in the amount of \$112,811.51, seconded by Cavanagh. Voice vote – ayes all. Motion carried.

Canton made a motion to ratify the payment listing dated December 31, 2025, in the amount of \$59,847.00, seconded by Cavanagh. Voice vote – ayes all. Motion carried.

NEW & OTHER BUSINESS: Canton and Cavanagh had no new business.

Council discussed moving the February 2, 2026, meeting due to the absence of two Council members on that date. **Berger made the motion to move the February 2, 2026, Council meeting to February 5, 2026, seconded by Rensel. Voice vote – ayes all. Motion carried.**

Bell made a motion for Councilwoman Cavanagh to be excused for the February 5, 2026, and March 2, 2026, Council meetings, seconded by Berger. Voice vote – ayes, all. Motion carried.

Alexander recommended the streaming and recording of all standing committee meetings on YouTube as well as holding all committee meetings in Village Hall to make it easier for the public and press to attend. The Mayor noted these were good ideas and suggested Alexander come up with five pointers about this to bring to the first meeting of the Administrative/Technology Committee for consideration. Cavanagh offered that there might be logistical issues with having all the committee meetings in Village Hall.

Alexander also raised the issue of public trash and recycling pickup. She thought the matter should be referred to the Public Utilities Committee and was aware the Village had explored this topic in the past. However, she wanted to see if there could be cost savings to households if the Village were to organize trash and recycling pickup. She proposed getting quotes from several different companies. Bell asked if Alexander was proposing that the Village pay for the service and handle the billing or asking that there be one contract throughout the Village with one provider? Alexander thought it would be investigated as a contract for the Village or look at different options. There are other villages that have trash and recycling set up through the village. She was interested in having the Public Utilities Committee explore potential cost savings if the Village were to facilitate it. Cavanagh pointed out that it would become problematic if residents failed to pay their bills. Bell shared that Chagrin Falls privatized trash pickup and suggested examining that system as an example. Cavanagh also noted that three to four other trash haulers would be put out of business if the Village were to pick one for over

1,200 homes. Bell explained that some homeowners' associations (HOAs) have their own contracts, which should also be considered. Berger recalled that this was looked at by Public Utilities five years ago and basically the findings were that there was no agreement on a particular vendor. The Fiscal Officer and Mayor recalled another past exploration of the issue that involved large emotional meetings. Berger agreed that it would be worth investigating. The Fiscal Officer offered to provide past research files to the committee.

The Fiscal Officer requested that with two grants associated with the Bell Rd. east paving project and strict deadlines, the Solicitor be asked to attend the associated meetings. **Cavanagh made a motion to approve that the Solicitor attend the Bell Rd. east paving meetings to ensure requirements, deadlines, and legalities are understood, seconded by Alexander. Voice vote – ayes, all. Motion carried.**

Bell requested to be excused from the January 20th meeting. Berger made a motion to excuse Bell from the January 20, 2026, Council meeting. Voice vote – ayes all. Motion carried.


Berger discussed exploring Christmas tree collection and chipping on the first two Saturdays in January 2027.


Rensel suggested development of a standardized committee reporting format for consistent tracking and deadlines.

Council discussed initial committee meeting dates and times. The following was decided:

Human Resources: January 8, 2026 – 7:30 a.m.
Admin & Technology: January 10, 2026 – 9:00 a.m.
Safety: January 10, 2026 – 10:00 a.m.
Streets: January 13, 2026 – 5:30 p.m.
Public Utilities: January 13, 2026 – 6:30 p.m.
Finance: January 15, 2026 – 5:30 p.m.
Bike/Pedestrian Safety: January 17, 2026 – 10:00 a.m.
Properties: January 19, 2026 – 3:15 p.m.
Building: January 21, 2026 – 5:30 p.m.

ADJOURNMENT: Being that there was no further business before Council, Cavanagh made a Motion to adjourn at 8:55 p.m., seconded by Canton. Voice vote – ayes, all. Motion carried.


William G. Koons, Mayor


Danielle Romanowski, Fiscal Officer