

**RECORD OF PROCEEDINGS
REGULAR COUNCIL MEETING
TUESDAY, JANUARY 20, 2026– 7:00 P.M.
MAYOR WILLIAM G. KOONS PRESIDING**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Berger, Canton, Cavanagh, and Rensel

MEMBERS ABSENT: Alexander, Bell

OFFICIALS PRESENT: Fiscal Officer Romanowski, Police Chief Rizzo, Solicitor Matheney

VISITORS: Friends, family and colleagues of Sergeant Nick Divita; Gary Dole, Maple Hill Dr.; John Buda, Leaview Ln .

The Mayor called the Regular Council meeting to order and led the Pledge of Allegiance. The Fiscal Officer read the roll. **Cavanagh made a motion to approve the minutes of the January 5, 2026, Regular Council Meeting, seconded by Canton. Voice vote – ayes, all. Motion carried.**

VISITOR: The Chief stated that Sgt. Divita has been in law enforcement for over 21 years and with the South Russell Police Department since 2013. He spoke exceptionally of Sgt. Divita and recommended him for promotion to Lieutenant. The Mayor appointed Divita as Lieutenant of the South Russell Police Department. **Canton made a motion to recommend Sgt. Nick Divita to the vacant Lieutenant position of the Village of South Russell Police Department, seconded by Berger. Voice vote – ayes all. Motion carried.** The Mayor administered the oath to Divita.

MAYOR’S REPORT: The Mayor presented financial data from Chagrin Valley Dispatch (CVD). The Village is scheduled to pay approximately \$56,163 to CVD. Other municipalities will be joining CVD, making a slight change in February to \$55,450. The only controversy is the administrative costs. Berger addressed the matter of the administrative costs being equally divided between all the entities, in particular in the case of the Village where only fire dispatch is used. The Mayor provided a history of CVD, concluding that by the end of this year, it will have one central location in Valley View. He addressed refunds the Village received through the years but noted that prices should instead have been going up. Berger noted that this was not an apples-to-apples comparison. In 2024 the Village paid approximately \$59,000 for both fire and police service and now is paying approximately \$56,000 just for fire. Berger indicated the Village is paying the same for half the services. The Mayor concurred. Berger asked again why Chagrin Valley Fire Department (CVFD) can’t be dispatched by Geauga Safety so that the Village does not have this recurring cost. The Chief explained that it is a complex matter involving several factors including two systems that lack compatibility and dispatch channel ownership. Berger would like to have a meeting with CVFD and CVD to discuss these issues. The Mayor proposed having this addressed at the February 17th Council meeting.

The Mayor reported on several meetings/webinars he attended or planned to attend. He asked the Fiscal Officer to provide a presentation on March 16th to Council to explain what Meeder Investments does for the Village. He said he would be explaining the Village’s relationship with HAZMAT at the February 5th Council meeting and the Chagrin River Watershed Partners (CRWP) on March 2nd. He asked the Chief to do the same for the Valley Enforcement Group (VEG) at the February 17th Council meeting.

FISCAL OFFICER REPORT: The Village received all the bidding documents from Verdantas for the Hemlock Rd. Culvert Replacement Project. The Village belongs to Northeast Ohio City Council Association (NOCCA) costing \$400 per year, and the membership needed to be evaluated before renewing it this year. Cavanagh didn't feel it suited the Village and felt the Village could waive the membership. The Fiscal Officer stated that there are six pieces of legislation on the agenda and only four Council members are present. In order to waive readings to adopt the legislation, five members are needed. Thus, at the current meeting, legislation can be introduced, but no action can be taken. Among the legislation was the purchase of a Police Cruiser and a number of agreements, and she asked if Council would consider having two special meetings to do the second and third readings. After discussion, it was determined the legislation would be addressed at the next Council meeting on February 5th.

FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT: Berger reported that the Finance Committee meeting was canceled due to inclement weather, but it would be rescheduled. He further reported that checks were signed and the Payment Listing was verified.

SOLICITOR REPORT: The Solicitor had nothing to report but suggested that until the legislation was passed pertaining to the change in the agenda, the two new committees should be addressed under New/Other Business.

STREETS COMMITTEE REPORT: Berger made a motion that Council accept the bid to replace the Service Department garage doors from Door Works Construction in the amount of \$27,954.00 and authorize the Mayor, Fiscal Officer, and the Street Commissioner to proceed with the necessary work, seconded by Cavanagh. Voice vote – ayes all. Motion carried.

A request will be made to increase the budget for salt expenses by \$12,000. The current rate paid by the Village is \$48 a ton under the state program. In comparison, the current market price is more than \$300 per ton. The Village continues to receive deliveries.

BUILDING COMMITTEE REPORT: Cavanagh reported that the Building Committee is scheduled to meet on January 21st at 5:30 pm. Cavanagh indicated this is not an acceptable time to meet and going forward will not make a practice of it. The main concern is making sure the software program is working suitably for the department. Cavanagh addressed directives from the county regarding septic inspections. The state mandates inspection every five years, and the Village requires every three years. The Fiscal Officer stated the county will be attending the February 5th Council meeting to discuss these new policies.

POLICE CHIEF REPORT: The Chief submitted his month-end report. He received two quotes for the Village phone system. ADP verified that the Village could do a VPM for an on-premises phone system similar to what the Village currently has. The first quote is for \$16,000 with ongoing support for the first five years costing \$1,395 per year. The second quote from Warwick, the current provider, is \$25,000-\$30,000 with a \$3,000 annual fee. The Chief stated that down the road the Village should consider upgrading internet service. Berger suggested putting this on the Admin/Tech Committee agenda.

SAFETY COMMITTEE REPORT: Canton addressed the appointment of the representative to CVFD Advisory Committee. He noted that Bell, as former Chair of Safety had been appointed last year, but that he was now the Chair of Safety. The Solicitor reminded Council that for this position, the Mayor must appoint the representative and Council confirms. Furthermore, Chris Bell was

appointed as representative to CVFD Advisory Committee in November or December 2025, but it was not in his capacity as Chairman of the Safety Committee. If the Mayor wanted to change the representative, he could do so. Canton verified that even though Bell is no longer on the Safety Committee, he can still be the representative, and the Solicitor concurred. There was discussion about how often the Advisory Committee meets. Canton also verified it was the responsibility of the Chair of Safety to be in contact with the CVFD Chief. The Solicitor was uncertain and suggested referring to the list of committee responsibilities.

Canton made a motion to acknowledge the retirement resignation of Sgt. Svoboda effective March 3, 2026, seconded by Cavanagh. Voice vote – ayes all. Motion carried.

Canton reported that the committee met on January 10th at 10:00 am at Village Hall. Discussion included internet upgrade, staffing, 2026 projects including the phone systems, Chillicothe Road traffic study, body worn cameras and in-car camera upgrade. As Safety Committee Chair, Canton advised that he requested financials for the last three years from CVFD Chief Zupan on January 7th. Zupan forwarded Canton's request to Assistant Chief Vedder and Canton is still waiting for a response.

HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE REPORT: Berger stated that the HR committee met on January 10th and indicated a need for a part-time administrative employee. **Berger made a motion to authorize the Fiscal Officer to place advertisement as necessary for part-time, potentially full-time Administrative Assistant, seconded by Cavanagh.** Mayor relayed information from the Ohio Municipal League Conference about a part-time finance director. He wanted to take a load off the Fiscal Officer and the Street Commissioner. **Voice vote – ayes all. Motion carried.**

Berger provided Council with a draft document that formalizes how employees should act and be aware of relative to the chain of command. **Berger made a motion to accept the motion of the Chain of Command, seconded by Cavanagh. Voice vote – ayes all. Motion carried.**

PROPERTIES COMMITTEE REPORT: Cavanagh stated that the committee met on January 19th and the minutes were distributed. She reported that the Christmas lights will be coming down and the Christmas decorations were a success. There was discussion about what to do with the southeast corner lot and the committee would like community input. She suggested including a questionnaire in the upcoming newsletter. The Mayor suggested seeing what other municipalities have.

Cavanagh addressed parking for the Farmer's Market and concluded that it seems to be adequate. The goal is to not have parking near the police vehicles. The Chief clarified that the goal is to prevent people from driving over the new conduit between the buildings or through the trees.

Regarding the park restroom stacks, the Street Commissioner was in contact with the vendor, which indicated they would straighten the stacks next time they are in the area. Cavanagh wanted specific dates. Additionally, one of the park restroom doors was damaged. Cavanagh explained that the doors were kept open for the plow drivers. One of the doors iced, appeared to have been forced open, and is now bent. The Street Commissioner believed it could be repaired in house. The doors should be locked to keep them safe. The Chief advised that the doors are on a timer and lock at night. The Mayor suggested turning out the light and putting cones in front of it to prevent use at night.

There was ongoing discussion of installation of the bocce ball court in the park.

A Trash Day date was discussed. Cavanagh was in contact with the Department on Aging and found the Village was not on the schedule. The Street Commissioner thought that the Village could handle the Senior Trash pickup without the assistance of county personnel and equipment. The Fiscal Officer questioned who would schedule the Senior Trash pickups if the Department on Aging were eliminated and the Village opted to run it on its own. The Mayor proposed having Trash Day the first week of May.

Cavanagh addressed fallen trees and fence repairs needed at Rarick Cemetery.

Properties will meet on February 16th at 3:15 p.m.

The Mayor stated that he sent a letter to the Cotesworth's thanking them for allowing the Village to have access to their property.

PARKS COMMITTEE: Cavanagh had nothing to report. She asked for the status of the correction of signs in the park, and the Mayor said it had not been done, and that some needed to be moved and some replaced due to inaccuracies. The Mayor said he hoped to have a park burn this year.

PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMITTEE REPORT: Berger advised that the committee met on January 13th. The Hemlock Culvert Project detour is up. When it is completed, the Village needs to deliver the invoice to Russell Township for the 50% it agreed to pay of the remainder after the grant. **Berger made a motion that Council approve Council members Berger and Canton, as committee members of Finance and Public Utilities, to deliver to Russell Township the invoice and supporting documentation for the Hemlock Road project as soon as made available by the Fiscal Officer, seconded by Cavanagh. Voice vote – ayes all. Motion carried.**

According to Berger, the Hazelwood storm water project was discussed with the Engineer, who will be preparing to go out to bid. Due to Ohio Public Works Commission (OPWC) grant requirements, the bid opening cannot occur before July 1, 2026. The goal is to hopefully have the project begin in the fall of 2026, covered up for the winter, and then do a full re-paving of the road in the spring of 2027. This project would go a long way towards tying the storm water issues in that area to the culvert work the Village is doing on Hemlock right now. The ultimate goal is to work from the far end of the Village with Hemlock towards Hazelwood and then Fernwood and Maple Ridge directing the water north into Russell Township.

Berger explained that there is still an active Erosion Special Improvement District (ESID) program in Geauga County, although there are no active projects in the Village. Mark Porter has been the Vice President of that group in Geauga County and is still willing to continue to serve as such. **Berger made a motion that council approve the appointment of Mark Porter as a citizen member of Public Utilities Committee, for the term remaining January 1, 2026, through December 31, 2026, seconded by Cavanagh. Voice vote – ayes all. Motion carried.**

The CRWP quote for the MS4 Report was discussed. Berger was in contact with Geauga Water and Soil regarding its ability to do the MS4 report, and he is waiting for a response. He wanted to defer action on the CRWP quote until he has the Geauga Water and Soil information.

All the paperwork is completed for Sugar Bush for the pond dredging, and CMG is the contractor. Work will begin once the weather breaks. However, the Village does not have the license agreement signed by the Sugar Bush HOA representative. Berger will contact the representative to get this completed.

There was a discussion regarding the solar panels at the Police Department and the snow buildup problem. The Chief received a quote of approximately \$3,900 to install a metal barrier plate at the base of the solar panels to prevent the snow from avalanching off the roof. Berger asked that this matter be discussed at the next Public Utilities Committee meeting. Berger thought \$3,900 sounded like a big number and the Chief added that a lot of money had already been spent on heating wires to melt the snow on the panels. Additionally, the solar panels are creating radio interference despite installing filters. The panels are causing department issues. He did not know if the Village was benefitting from a discounted electric bill. He concluded that there were a lot of unknown expenses with the panels.

There was a recommendation to discuss a Village-wide trash service. This matter has been discussed several times in the past with no consensus. Berger was provided with information and documentation of the past discussions, which he will review.

ORDINANCES AND RESOLUTIONS

Cavanagh introduced an ordinance amending the order of business on the agenda for Regular Council meetings in section 220.04(a) of the Village of South Russell's Codified Ordinances and declaring an emergency.

Canton introduced an ordinance approving the purchase of a 2026 Ford Police Interceptor Utility Hybrid Vehicle from Montrose Ford for the total sum of \$44,730, authorizing the Mayor and Fiscal Officer to execute necessary documents for such purchase, and declaring an emergency.

Canton introduced an ordinance approving the Service Agreement between the Village of South Russell and Uniti Solutions for upgrade to the internet service for the Village of South Russell Police Department in the amount of \$3,552, authorizing the Police Chief to execute the service agreement on behalf of the Village, and declaring an emergency.

Canton introduced an ordinance approving the customer agreement between the Village of South Russell and Motorola Solutions, Inc. for in-car mobile videos and necessary software to operate such in-car mobile videos for the Village of South Russell Police Department in the amount of \$52,514.55, authorizing the Police Chief to execute the customer agreement on behalf of the Village, and declaring an emergency.

Cavanagh introduced an ordinance authorizing the Fiscal Officer to apply for and accept NOPEC grant funds for the 2026 Community Event Sponsorship Program on behalf of the Village of South Russell and declaring an emergency.

Berger introduced an ordinance approving the Master Authorization for Treasury Management Services Agreement Between the Village of South Russell and the Huntington National Bank for check deposit capture services for the Village of South Russell, authorizing the Fiscal Officer to execute the agreement on behalf of the Village, and declaring an emergency.

PAYMENTS LISTING

Berger made a motion to ratify the payment listing dated 1/15/2026 to 1/16/2026 in the amount of \$152,327.65, seconded by Cavanagh. Voice vote – ayes all. Motion carried.

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

The Mayor addressed the invoice for the CRWP 2026 membership, and Berger suggested first referring this for discussion to the Public Utilities Committee.

Canton made a motion to approve the donation of \$500 to the 2026 Chagrin Falls after Prom Parent Committee, seconded by Cavanagh. Voice vote – ayes all. Motion carried.

Cavanagh made a motion to approve the Forfeiture Hearing for February 5, 2026, at 7:00 p.m., seconded by Canton. Voice vote – ayes all. Motion carried. The Fiscal Officer explained that this pertains to a homeowner and contractor in Paw Paw Lake where both the homeowner and contractor are appealing for the forfeiture of the construction deposit.

SAFE BICYCLE & PEDESTRIAN TRANSPORT COMMITTEE: Rensel stated the committee met on January 17th. Discussion included a proposal of how many voting members and/or residents should be on the committee to include quorum questions if members are added to the committee. The Fiscal Officer explained that with three on the committee, a quorum is two. If two residents were added, the quorum would be three if there were five members. The committee also discussed utilizing the structure of the Parks Committee for voting rules; possibly readvertising for a third-party reviewer since there was only one bid; and exploration of trail funding other than a levy. Rensel also offered to inquire with Chagrin Schools about the rules for students walking/biking to Gurney Elementary. It was her understanding that this was not allowed, and the Mayor stated that he hoped they would continue this policy because it was too dangerous. Rensel also addressed communication with residents and asked for a section in the newsletter. The Fiscal Officer stated that there is a section on the homepage of the website that links all the committee minutes and information for the committee. The Mayor proposed passing out a flyer with a survey about the corner lot, path, etc. to residents who attend Trash Day.

The Fiscal Officer addressed previous discussion by the committee about the potential of putting a levy on the ballot for the bike trail. The deadline to have it on the primary ballot would be February 4, 2026. The Village would have to get a certification of the mills first from the County Auditor, and she did not feel the deadline could be met. The deadline for the general election in fall would be August 5, 2026. There are already two renewal levies on the ballot this fall, the operating levy and the road and bridge levy. They expire at the end of this year. The Village has historically placed levies on the ballot a year early because if they do not pass, the Village has two more opportunities to put it before the voters. If Council chose to put a trail levy on the ballot, that would be three levies.

The Fiscal Officer also informed Council that with the third-party reviewer, the announcement had to be advertised three times at a rate of \$825 per ad. The Solicitor confirmed that it would be necessary to run the ads again if the Committee wished to seek more applicants. She stated that the Village should notify Structurepoint that the Village will not be evaluating them or negotiating a contract if this is the committee's intention. The Mayor said he would call the Structurepoint representative. From discussions at the previous Council meeting, she thought there would be a recommendation of the committee for consideration and a decision by Council. Rensel explained that there was interest in exploring other advertising avenues. The Fiscal Officer noted that to do this, the Village would still have to bear the expense of running the ads again. The Mayor again asked about contacting Structurepoint, and the Solicitor advised that the committee should first make a recommendation to Council and allow Council to direct the notification to Structurepoint. The Mayor concluded that he would call the representative tomorrow and let her know the Village would be in touch.

ADMINISTRATION/TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE: Berger reported that the committee held its first meeting on January 10th. The committee will meet on the second Monday of each month at 6:30 a.m. One of the major issues is with ADP, the county cybersecurity. While they do a great job of keeping the Village safe, some of the rules are very cumbersome and difficult to manage. Their response time is not as efficient as the Village needs. Berger has had some email discussions with Frank Antenucci and the committee will schedule a meeting with Antenucci and Geauga County Auditor Chuck Walder to address and resolve some of the difficulties.

The committee also discussed the designated safety officer position to include ensuring training is completed and developing some policies for the Employee Handbook.

Berger stated at the last council meeting, Council was addressed by Mrs. Kimball who asked for a response. After consulting with the Village’s Solicitor, a letter of response was drafted and distributed to Council. **Berger made a motion that the Mayor and President pro tem be authorized by Council to sign a letter of response on behalf of the Village to Mrs. Kelly Kimball and after Council’s vote to approve this action the Mayor will read the letter into the record, seconded by Canton. Voice vote – ayes all. Motion carried.**

Mayor Koons read the following into the record:

“Dear Kelly, with respect to your comments made at the January 5th Council meeting please know that the Village which includes all Elected officials, employees and agents considers the matter involving your husband’s former employment with the Village closed. The matter was litigated in Federal Court, and the Federal Court decided the matter in favor of the Village and the parties entered into a binding settlement agreement and released of all claims resolving in full and releasing all claims related to the matter including any claims you might have as your husband’s heir. A copy of the settlement agreement and release of all claims is enclosed for your reference. The Village intends to continue to abide by the settlement agreement and release of all claims and as a result the Village will not entertain any further comments regarding this matter. Sincerely, William Koons, Mayor; Christopher Berger, Pro Tem President. Enclosure.”

Regarding setting a date for Trash Day, Cavanagh stated that due to availability, she and Bell would be unable to meet, and she wanted to get Council’s interest in having Trash Day on May 1st.

The Mayor stated that a letter was received from Andy Hitchcock, a resident, about the path.

ADJOURNMENT: Being that there was no further business before Council, Cavanagh made a motion to adjourn at 8:41 p.m., seconded by Canton. Voice vote – ayes, all. Motion carried.


William G. Koons, Mayor


Daniell Romanowski, Fiscal Officer

Prepared by: Christy Troyer