

**Finance Committee Meeting Minutes
March 12, 2026, 3:15 p.m. Village Hall**

PRESENT: Berger, Canton, Porter, and FO

The Finance Committee meeting was called to order on March 12, 2026 @ 3:15 p.m.

The meeting opened with discussion of the Village's current financial status. The Fiscal Officer reported that the Village's cash balance stood at approximately \$1,561,000 in available funds, with a total balance of approximately \$4.3 million as of January 31, 2026. It was noted that this figure reflects a higher balance because the Village has already received the first-half advance of property tax collections, with the second distribution expected in July. Committee members acknowledged that while the balance appears high at present, significant expenditures are anticipated in the coming months that will reduce that balance.

The committee then turned to discussion of the salt barn project, which is expected to be a major capital expenditure during the current fiscal year. Members reported that the project is anticipated to begin in early April once the ground conditions permit construction activity. The engineer has confirmed that a 16-foot relocation of the structure will not create additional costs related to setback requirements, and the vendor has agreed to proceed with the adjustment without the need for a variance. Construction is expected to start in April with an estimated completion sometime before the start of the next winter season. The total project cost remains approximately \$700,000. The committee confirmed that the necessary funds have already been appropriated and are available to cover the project once work begins.

During the salt barn discussion, members also addressed how existing salt supplies will be handled. The plan is to continue using the remaining salt stored in the current dome throughout the remainder of the winter season. Once the new facility is operational, the Village will continue using the remaining salt rather than relocating it. When the dome is emptied—likely sometime in spring of 2027—it will be removed. Members noted that the dome is rated for approximately 2,000 tons of salt, though the Village has typically stored closer to 1,500 tons.

The committee also discussed the annual state salt purchasing contract. The current agreement expires in May, at which point the Village must submit its expected requirements to the state purchasing program. The state then establishes pricing through the state bid process. Historically, Geauga County communities have received some of the lowest salt prices in the state through this system. However, members noted that rising fuel costs could increase prices in the coming year, potentially raising the cost from approximately \$48 per ton to somewhere near \$60 per ton depending on transportation expenses. Despite this possibility, members agreed the state program remains more cost-effective than independently bidding with suppliers.

Attention then shifted to the Bell Road East improvement project, which is expected to be partially funded by an Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) grant. Based on discussions with ODOT, the committee learned that the project may not occur until calendar year 2027 rather than 2026. Although the project cannot be formally awarded until after July 1st of the current

year, the anticipated schedule would allow bidding to occur later in 2026 with construction potentially occurring in spring or early summer of 2027.

One complication discussed was the handling of driveway culverts and aprons associated with the road improvement. Under the ODOT grant guidelines, the state will not reimburse the cost of paving driveway aprons after culverts are installed. While the Village may continue to assist residents with culvert pipe installation, the Village would be responsible for paying the cost of repaving the driveway aprons afterward. Estimates suggest that paving costs could be approximately \$2,000 per driveway. With as many as 50 driveways potentially affected, the Village may need to budget approximately \$100,000 to cover these paving expenses. As a result, the committee agreed that a placeholder of \$100,000 should be added to the Bell Road East project budget to account for this anticipated cost.

Members also discussed planning considerations related to the culvert installations. If ODOT schedules road paving earlier than expected, the Village may need to complete culvert installations in fall 2026 to ensure the work is finished before the contractor begins paving. The Street Commissioner is preparing to contact residents along the corridor to determine which homeowners intend to replace or install culvert pipes so that the Village can estimate the number of driveways involved and plan accordingly.

The committee briefly discussed the possibility of adding bicycle infrastructure to Bell Road East. However, due to geographic constraints—particularly near Paw Paw Lake—members concluded that widening the roadway to accommodate a bike path is not feasible in that area without a separate and costly project, potentially requiring bridge construction. As a result, any future bike path extension would likely require a standalone project on the south side of the roadway and would involve significant costs.

The conversation then shifted to broader levy planning and long-term funding strategies. Members discussed the possibility of placing renewal levies on upcoming ballots. The current strategy would be to place one renewal levy before voters in November and a second renewal in May. The committee also noted that a Fire/EMS levy may need to be considered in May depending on future service funding needs.

A significant portion of the meeting focused on the potential statewide proposal to eliminate property taxes in Ohio, which could have substantial financial implications for municipalities and school districts. Committee members discussed how the Village might respond if such a measure were enacted. Because property taxes are collected in arrears, the Village would likely have approximately one year to develop an alternative revenue strategy if property taxes were eliminated effective December 31, 2026.

Members discussed the possibility of increasing the Village income tax as a replacement funding mechanism. The Village currently imposes a 1.25 percent income tax with a 75 percent credit for taxes paid to other municipalities. One potential option would be to eliminate that credit, which could be done by council without voter approval. Preliminary estimates suggested that maintaining current services solely through income taxes could require increasing the total local

income tax rate to approximately 5 percent. The committee recognized that such a change would be significant and would require careful analysis and public communication.

The committee also acknowledged that property taxes currently fund approximately 70 percent of school district revenue, meaning that any statewide change would require major restructuring of school funding mechanisms as well. Members noted that some school districts already use income taxes as an alternative funding source, though such taxes require voter approval.

During the discussion, members emphasized the importance of preparing an emergency financial plan in the event property taxes are eliminated. One potential approach discussed was temporarily increasing the income tax for a limited period—perhaps two years—while maintaining existing service levels and determining long-term adjustments. Members agreed that residents would likely ask questions about the Village's financial reserves and the need for levies, making it important to clearly explain the Village's upcoming obligations and financial commitments.

The Fiscal Officer confirmed that the electronic check deposit system is now operational and functioning effectively. Since implementing the system, staff have only needed to visit the bank once or twice when handling cash deposits, representing a significant improvement in efficiency.

The committee then discussed the Treasury Investment Board. Members questioned whether the board remains necessary given the limited number of investment options available to municipalities under Ohio law. Current investment vehicles include STAR Ohio, Huntington accounts, and managed investments through Meeder. Members noted that the Finance Committee already reviews investment activity regularly and works with professional investment advisors, raising the question of whether the additional oversight body provides meaningful value.

The Fiscal Officer explained that the board had originally been created after the departure of a previous fiscal Auditor to provide additional oversight of Village investments. However, under current ORC the Fiscal Officer can make investment decisions with advice from the Mayor, Solicitor, and the Chair of the Finance Committee. Several members expressed support for abolishing the Treasury Investment Board and transferring its responsibilities to the Finance Committee. Draft legislation addressing this change is currently being prepared by the Village solicitor and will be reviewed once available.

The committee next reviewed reserve and restricted funds. At present, the Village maintains a large equipment reserve fund, which is expected to be used in the near future to purchase a new service vehicle. A recommendation to purchase a new truck is anticipated from the Street Committee. Members noted that replacing one of the Village's larger snowplow trucks now costs approximately \$250,000, highlighting the importance of maintaining a regular replacement schedule for major equipment.

Income tax revenue was also reviewed. As of the end of February 2026, the Village had received approximately \$591,000 in income tax revenue compared with \$529,000 during the same period in 2025, an increase of roughly \$60,000. Annual income tax receipts have steadily increased in

recent years, with approximately \$3.06 million collected in 2025 compared with \$2.6 million in 2024. Members noted that while current revenue trends are positive, income tax receipts declined sharply during the 2008–2009 recession, underscoring the importance of cautious financial planning.

The committee then discussed development of the Village’s five-year financial plan. Major components of the plan include personnel costs, equipment replacement schedules, and maintenance or replacement of municipal facilities. Salaries are expected to increase annually, likely in the range of two to four percent. Equipment replacement planning will focus heavily on snowplow and service vehicles, which represent major capital costs for the Village. Members emphasized that reliable snow removal equipment remains essential because winter road maintenance is one of the Village’s primary responsibilities.

Facilities planning also remains a significant consideration. One project currently under discussion is the potential expansion of the existing police station at an estimated cost of approximately \$140,000. However, some members noted that the Village should carefully consider whether such an addition makes sense if a completely new facility might eventually be required. Given the uncertainty surrounding property tax revenues, the committee agreed that large capital projects should be evaluated cautiously.

The committee also discussed the Bell Road West bicycle path concept. One proposal would involve re-striping the roadway to shift vehicle lanes toward the north side and create a designated bicycle lane on the south side without constructing a separate paved path. The estimated cost for restriping is approximately \$25,000. Additional costs would include installing pedestrian crossings at Spring Drive and Gurman Road, each estimated at approximately \$34,000. In total, the restriping concept could cost roughly \$100,000. Members suggested implementing this approach as a pilot project to evaluate its effectiveness before committing to a more expensive multi-million-dollar bike path project.

Finally, the committee discussed potential improvements to the Building Department’s permitting system. Staff are evaluating new software that would allow residents to submit applications, upload drawings, and pay fees online, potentially including credit card payments. The proposed system would cost approximately \$17,000 if purchased before the end of March, plus approximately \$7,000 for implementation and customization of the Village’s zoning code and permit procedures. Committee members expressed support for the concept, noting that the system could significantly improve efficiency and streamline the permitting process.

With no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 4:17 p.m.