

**RECORD OF PROCEEDINGS  
REGULAR COUNCIL MEETING  
MONDAY, MAY 18, 2026– 7:00 P.M.  
MAYOR WILLIAM G. KOONS PRESIDING**

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Bell, Berger, Canton, Cavanagh, Rensel, Porter

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

**VISITORS:** Donna Baumann, Bell Rd.; Brian Morrison, Woodside Dr., Sara Kaseler, Alderwood Tr.; Allyson Dean, Bell Rd.; Ralfe Silc, Daisy Ln.; Mary and Tom Mulcahy, Morningside Dr., Joe Piannecki, Paw Paw Lake Rd.

The Mayor called the Regular Council meeting to order on Monday, May 18, 2026, and led the Pledge of Allegiance. The Fiscal Officer read the roll. Council reviewed the minutes from the May 1, 2026, Special Council meeting. Rensel requested a correction on page two regarding language that stated the Geauga Park Foundation had “expressed an interest in partnering” on trails. She clarified that only preliminary discussions had taken place and requested the wording instead reflect that the Geauga Park Foundation had past experience partnering on multi-use trails. Council agreed to the correction. **Canton made a motion to approve as amended, seconded by Cavanagh. Voice vote – ayes, all. Motion carried. Council then reviewed the minutes from the May 4, 2026, Regular Council meeting. Cavanagh made a motion to approve the minutes, seconded by Rensel. Voice vote – ayes, all. Motion carried.**

**VISITORS:** Brian Morrison, Woodside Dr., addressed Council regarding the proposed trail project and questioned the basis for moving forward with the proposal. He asked whether any law enforcement or accident data existed showing deaths or injuries that justified construction of the trail. He also questioned projected usage, asking how many residents or children would realistically use the path. Morrison raised concerns regarding funding and taxation, noting that property taxes had significantly increased during his years living in the Village. He referenced the prior purchase of the Muggleton property, which had utilized grants and budgeted funds without imposing additional taxes. He questioned whether residents would ultimately face approximately \$200 per year in additional taxes and whether future levies would be required to maintain the trail after construction.

Berger responded that Council had not approved construction of the trail but rather had authorized engineering work to determine what a potential path would look like. He stated that the Finance Committee had discussed whether existing Village resources could fund the project and concluded they could not. He explained that grants would continue to be explored, but that a levy represented the fallback option should additional funding not materialize. He noted the timing issue associated with placing a levy on the November ballot, explaining that the Village needed to provide information to the county by the first week of August. Berger further explained that if a levy were approved but ultimately not needed because outside funding became available or the project did not proceed, Council could vote not to collect the levy. He cited a prior example involving the Road and Bridge Levy where Council deferred collection because the funds were not needed.

Morrison questioned why Council would move forward with planning if the Village did not have sufficient funds to complete the project. Berger reiterated that the purpose of the discussions was to ensure the Village would be prepared financially should Council ultimately approve the project. Discussion also included estimated project costs. Council explained that the Engineer estimated the south-side route at approximately \$1.8 million and the north-side route at approximately \$1.4 million. Berger clarified that an existing Northeast Ohio Area Coordinating Agency (NOACA) grant would provide approximately \$800,000 toward construction, leaving roughly \$1 million as the estimated Village responsibility. Council members also discussed the history of the project, noting that it originated as a citizen-led initiative and had been under discussion for approximately two years. Residents had completed surveys, and the Safe Bicycle and Pedestrian Transport Committee had been meeting regularly to review concepts and options.

Donna Peters Baumann, Bell Rd., spoke in support of the trail proposal. She described significant increase in traffic and speeding along Bell Road over the years and stated that she regularly observes runners, bicyclists, children, and families using the roadway despite the lack of dedicated pedestrian space. Baumann emphasized concerns regarding safety, particularly involving children traveling near Bell Road and students walking between Gurney Elementary and the park. She stated that the Village was growing and traffic volumes were increasing due to development and changing travel patterns. She told Council that she believed it was only a matter of time before someone was seriously injured and stated that if the project cost residents approximately \$200 per year in taxes, she would support the expenditure if it improved safety and potentially prevented a fatal accident.

Allyson Dean, Bell Rd., expressed opposition to the current sidewalk and path proposals. She stated that the various concepts would significantly alter the character of the Village by removing mature trees, affecting historic areas such as cemeteries, and introducing retaining walls and pavement into front yards. Dean raised concerns regarding the long-term maintenance burden associated with the path and questioned who would be responsible for snow removal, maintenance, and additional equipment costs. She noted that the Village Service Department already operates with a small staff. She further explained that many homeowners would lose landscaping, privacy, flower beds, and mailboxes if the project proceeded. Dean proposed a potential alternative involving widening the roadway and restriping lanes to create additional shoulder space rather than constructing a separate path. She suggested such an approach could improve safety, while preserving more of the Village's rural character.

Bell responded that the Street Committee was already reviewing the possibility of a "road diet," which would involve narrowing vehicle lanes and widening shoulder areas. He explained that Bell Road was already scheduled for resurfacing work and that the committee intended to review engineering specifications and roadway dimensions during an upcoming Streets Committee meeting.

Sarah Kaseler, Alderwood Tr., expressed concern regarding high traffic speeds on Bell Road and questioned whether young children would realistically use a path adjacent to a busy roadway. She stated that she believed the path would not be heavily used and described it as a "path to nowhere" because it would only serve portions of the Village.

Council discussed proposed NOACA planning allocation in future years that could potentially connect portions of the Village to Chagrin Falls, though Council clarified that such discussions remained preliminary and no funding secured.

Ralfe Silc, Daisy Ln., stated opposition to the path and expressed concern that additional sidewalks and urban-style infrastructure would gradually alter the Village's rural identity.

Tom and Mary Mulcahy of Morningside Dr. questioned the level of anticipated usage and whether families would realistically walk long distances to the park rather than driving. Mr. Mulcahy also expressed support for considering roadway restriping instead of constructing a separate path.

Canton asked the Chief about accident statistics involving pedestrians and bicyclists over his 28 years with the Village. The Chief reported there had been no pedestrian or jogger fatalities involving vehicles and two bicycle-related incidents. This did not occur on Bell Road.

Joe Piannecki, Paw Paw Lake Rd., questioned how bicyclists and pedestrians could safely share a five-foot-wide path and stated that many residents east of State Route 306 would likely never use the proposed facility. He expressed concern that all Village residents would bear the financial burden for a project serving only a portion of the community.

Rensel spoke in support of providing safe walking options for residents, describing instances in which she had observed families, elderly residents, and parents with strollers walking on Bell Road without adequate space.

Additional comments addressed property impacts, safety concerns, long-term maintenance obligations, and questions regarding future phases and funding.

The Mayor thanked residents for attending and stated that Council appreciated hearing differing viewpoints before making any decisions.

**MAYOR'S REPORT:** The Mayor recognized Bob and Joanne Royer for their service as Honorary First Responders over the past eleven (11) years. He noted that this would be their final year in the role and referenced their recognition by the Police Chief during the Jaycees Distinguished Service Award ceremony. The Mayor announced that related ceremonies would take place on Wednesday evening beginning with fife and drum presentations at 4:30 p.m. followed by formal ceremonies at 5:00 p.m.

The Mayor also discussed cleaning services for Village facilities. He stated that the current cleaning provider informed him that commercial cleaning companies had quoted significantly higher rates than what the Village currently pays. The Mayor stated that the cleaner hoped June 7<sup>th</sup> would be his final day.

Council discussed several America 250<sup>th</sup> planning events, including historical programming and a possible campout at the park. Questions were raised regarding the Village's no-camping policy and whether exceptions would be necessary. The Mayor indicated the concept remained in the planning stages and additional details would be brought forward later.

**FISCAL OFFICER REPORT:** The Fiscal Officer reminded officials that tax budget worksheets were due the previous Tuesday and requested submissions by the end of the week so preparation of the tax budget could proceed.

She also reported that the Village website was currently ADA compliant, placing the Village ahead of upcoming compliance requirements.

The Fiscal Officer distributed the membership disclosure list for elected officials and employees, and requested they review the lists for completeness and notify her of any changes and/or corrections.

She additionally advised Council that Payment Application #4 for the salt building project had been received from CMG Construction in the amount of \$120,000 late that afternoon. Because the Village was transitioning to a summer meeting schedule, she requested Council consider conditional approval pending review by Verdantas so the contractor would not experience an extended delay in payment.

Council members complimented the updated website appearance and discussed future improvements to the homepage layout and navigation.

The Mayor asked what additional assistance would help during the budget process. The Fiscal Officer stated more than just relating to budget, but overall improved communication between committees and department heads would be helpful so that the proper course of action could be taken. Some matters require a simple motion, others require legislation. Better communication would help ensure proper preparation was made in advance of Council meetings.

**FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT:** Berger reported that the Finance Committee met on May 7, 2026.

He distributed draft letters addressed to the Village's State Representative and Senator requesting assistance with what he described as an indemnification clause loophole affecting municipalities. Council members discussed language revisions to the letters. **Berger made a motion to authorize the mayor to sign on behalf of the Village the two letters to Representative Demetriou and Senator Roegner.** Porter recommended a change in verbiage to the letter by stating, "please finish the job" instead of "you should finish the job," and adding "municipalities to be covered under 307.901." Porter seconded the motion as amended. Voice vote – ayes, all. Motion carried.

**SOLICITOR REPORT:** The Solicitor had nothing to report.

**STREET COMMITTEE REPORT:** Bell announced that the Streets Committee would hold a special meeting on May 21, 2026, at 5:30 p.m. at Village Hall to discuss budget worksheets, a possible road diet proposal, and truck bid openings.

Council then discussed concerns identified by Building Inspector Dave Hocevar regarding aspects of the salt building construction project, specifically involving anchor bolts and other structural issues. Cavanagh stated that Hocevar had consulted structural engineer Bill Gallagher to review the work. Council debated whether Payment Application #4 should be paid before receiving

written confirmation from the structural engineer. Regarding Payment Application #4, **Porter made a motion that upon receipt of a report from the structural engineer formerly with Verdantas as to the sufficiency of the repair done for the anchor bolts to the salt line for the contract with CMG, seconded by Cavanagh. Voice vote – ayes, all. Motion carried.**

**Bell made a motion to approve salt building Payment Application #3 in the amount of \$235,259.84, seconded by Berger. Voice vote – ayes, all. Motion carried.**

Council briefly discussed whether a structural engineer should continue overseeing portions of the project as construction neared completion.

**BUILDING COMMITTEE REPORT:** Cavanagh reported that the Building Committee met on May 11, 2026. Discussion included the salt building project and concerns regarding construction deficiencies identified by Building Inspector Dave Hocesvar. She reported that staff continue to learn the new software system, though the system was not yet fully online. The committee also discussed the anticipated June 1<sup>st</sup> start date for the new hire in the Building Department. Additional discussion involved high grass enforcement and budget review matters.

**POLICE CHIEF REPORT:** The Chief reported that all planned 2026 projects have been completed, including installation of the new phone system. He announced upcoming events including Gurney Bike to School on May 21<sup>st</sup> and the Cops and Kids Fishing Event on May 31<sup>st</sup>. The Chief also explained improvements to the Council chamber audio system, noting that microphones had been adjusted to better capture public comments throughout the seating area.

**SAFETY COMMITTEE REPORT:** Canton reported that the Safety Committee met on May 13, 2026, at the police station. The committee reviewed ongoing projects, including the body-worn camera grant. The Chief explained that the Village would receive \$15,000 but that budget adjustments were still being finalized before reimbursement paperwork could be completed. The committee also reviewed upcoming community events including the Helmet Smart Program, the third-grade seatbelt program, Gurney Bike to School, and the Cops and Kids Fishing Event. The committee further discussed police staffing and the proposed police station building addition.

**HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE REPORT:** Berger reported that the HR Committee met that morning and proposed June 8, 2026, at 8:00 a.m. for the next meeting.

The committee discussed the need to locate alternative cleaning services as the current provider prepared for retirement. **Berger made a motion to authorize the Fiscal Officer to place an ad for cleaning services, seconded by Cavanagh. Voice vote – ayes, all. Motion carried.** Cavanagh thanked the current cleaner, Tim, for his years of service and professionalism.

Berger also explained that employees would be asked to update job descriptions to better reflect on the actual responsibilities being performed.

He distributed a proposed HR resolution regarding an annual employee recognition event and indicated further discussion would occur later.

**PROPERTIES COMMITTEE REPORT:** Cavanagh reported that the Properties Committee met on May 11, 2026. The committee discussed Geauga Public Health's proposed septic inspection program, which would require septic systems to be serviced every five years. Council members

reviewed whether South Russell should continue its current three-year requirement or align with the county standard. Cavanagh stated that the county process could reduce administrative burdens on Village staff. Canton explained the historical reasons behind the Village's earlier three-year ordinance, which originated from septic failures affecting a subdivision on the northeast side of town. The Mayor suggested the Solicitor prepare proposed ordinance changes for Council to review at a future meeting.

The committee also discussed maintenance issues involving Village Hall doors and garage brickwork.

Council then reviewed three proposals for repairs to the Village Hall sewer line. Cavanagh summarized the bids which consisted of Varcelli Landscaping at \$11,984, CMG Construction at \$14,000, and Geauga Septic at \$16,200. **The Committee recommended Geauga Septic based on prior experience and confidence in the company's work. Cavanagh made a motion to hire Geauga Septic at \$16,200 to repair the hall sewer, seconded by Canton. Voice vote – ayes, all. Motion carried.**

Council additionally discussed a proposal to potentially relocate Building Department administrative offices into Village Hall and renovate portions of the basement area. Berger distributed a quote totaling approximately \$23,000 for painting, carpeting, and ceiling tile replacement. Discussion also addressed the need to preserve adequate workspace for building plans and permit review functions.

**PARK COMMITTEE:** Cavanagh reported that the Parks Committee was in the process of scheduling its next meeting. Discussion included planning for the Fall Festival, bounce houses, cider making, and other related annual activities.

Berger additionally shared that a resident had pledged an initial \$25,000 donation toward toddler-oriented playground equipment if the Parks Committee wished to pursue such improvements.

**PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMITTEE REPORT:** Porter reported that the Public Utilities Committee met on April 30, 2026, and discussed multiple infrastructure issues.

He reported a culvert issue on Maple Hill Drive involving blocked stormwater drainage. The Street Commissioner requested authorization to replace culvert pipe while residents would remain responsible for paving. **Porter made a motion that starting at 92 Maple Hill, ditch north, 100 Maple Hill, 104 Maple Hill, two places, for a pipe that would cost about \$500. I would suggest that this be coming out of the stormwater budget, and that the Street Commissioner be authorized, along with the Mayor and Fiscal Officer, to make necessary arrangements to do this job, seconded by Berger. Voice vote – ayes, all. Motion carried.**

Porter also stated that the committee planned to meet with Russell Township Trustees on July 16<sup>th</sup> to discuss cost sharing related to the Hemlock Culvert Replacement Project.

The Mayor further noted flooding concerns involving Maple Hill, Silver Springs, and Paw Paw Lake areas due to stormwater runoff and ice jams during the winter.

**SAFE BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN TRANSPORT COMMITTEE REPORT:** Bell announced that the Safe Bicycle and Pedestrian Transport Committee was tentatively scheduled to meet on June 5, 2026.

Rensel reported that she had contacted the Geauga Park Foundation regarding possible grant opportunities and additional funding sources for pedestrian path projects.

Bell asked whether Council would consider sending the pending levy ordinance back to committee to allow more time to seek outside funding before requesting a million-dollar levy from residents.

The Solicitor advised Council regarding ballot deadlines and noted that failure to certify the levy by August 5<sup>th</sup> would delay any ballot issue until at least May 2027.

Council members discussed the possibility that additional grants could reduce the amount ultimately required from taxpayers. The Fiscal Officer cautioned that NOACA funding might not remain available indefinitely. Rensel stated that public discussion remained valuable and that resident input was still being gathered. Council ultimately agreed to continue discussion at future meetings.

**ADMINISTRATIVE TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE:** Berger reported that the Administration and Technology Committee met that morning and proposed the next meeting for June 8, 2026, at 7:00 a.m. Additionally, Berger suggested July 18, 2026, as a tentative Council retreat date.

The Fiscal Officer and Police Chief were scheduled to meet with the website designer to review progress on the new Village website.

Berger also highlighted successful use of technology during Trash Day, where approximately 120 resident survey responses were collected relative to development of the Village campus corner properties.

**ORDINANCES AND RESOLUTIONS:**

Berger provided a third reading of an ordinance amending Section 235.02 of the Village of South Russell's Codified Ordinances to eliminate the Treasury Investment Board, adopt investment procedures in accordance with the Ohio Revised Code, and declaring an emergency. Berger made a motion to adopt, seconded by Porter. Roll call – ayes, all. Motion carried. **ORD 2026-41**

**Bell Berger** provided a second reading of an ordinance declaring it necessary to levy a tax in excess of the ten-mill limitation and declaring an emergency.

**PAYMENTS REGISTER:** Berger made a motion to ratify the payment registers of May 8, 2026, in the amount of \$21,690.19 and May 18, 2026, in the amount of \$298,280.15, seconded by Cavanagh. Voice vote – ayes, all. Motion carried.

**NEW & OTHER BUSINESS:** Cavanagh, Porter, Rensel, and Berger had no new business.

Council discussed July 18, 2026, as a tentative date for the annual Council retreat, subject to final confirmation of member availability.

Bell inquired whether letters had been sent to Bell Rd. residents regarding culvert issues related to future paving work.

Canton announced that the next Safety Committee meeting would take place June 26, 2026, at 9:00 a.m.


**At 8:53 p.m., Berger made a motion to enter into executive session in compliance with Ohio Revised Code, section 121.22 (G)(1) for the employment of a public employee in inviting the Mayor, Fiscal Officer, and Solicitor, seconded by Porter. Roll call – ayes, all. Motion carried.**

**Council reconvened at 9:07 p.m. Berger made a motion to hire a new Building Department Administrative Assistant pending successful completion of pre-employment testing, seconded by Cavanagh. Voice vote – ayes, all. Motion carried.**

**At 9:08 p.m., Berger made a motion to enter into executive session in compliance with Ohio Revised Code, section 121.22 (G)(1) for the employment of a public employee in inviting just the Solicitor and the Mayor, seconded by Bell. Roll call – ayes, all. Motion carried.**

Council reconvened at 9:47 p.m.

**ADJOURNMENT:** Being that there was no further business before Council, Cavanagh made a motion to adjourn at 9:47 p.m., seconded by Bell. Voice vote – ayes, all. Motion carried.

  
William G. Koons, Mayor

  
Danielle Romanowski, Fiscal Officer

Prepared by: Leslie Galicki