

Properties Committee Meeting

May 11, 2026, 9:00 a.m., Village Hall

Present: Chairwoman Ruth Cavanagh, Council Members Canton and Rensel, Mayor Koons and Street Commissioner Young

Visitors: Charlotte Brett and Valerie Mariola

Cavanagh called the Properties Committee meeting to order at approximately 9:00 a.m. After confirming attendance, the committee addressed administrative matters. A motion was made and seconded to approve the previous meeting minutes. The motion passed unanimously.

Public Participation and General Discussion

The Chair invited visitors and residents to raise any concerns or topics of interest throughout the meeting as discussions progressed through the agenda. Valerie Mariola and Charlotte Brett indicated particular interest in the cemetery discussion scheduled later in the meeting.

Village Hall Sewer Connection Repair

The committee discussed ongoing sewer line issues affecting Village Hall.

Street Commissioner explained that the sewer line experiences intermittent blockages caused by several underlying issues:

- A low or “valley” section in the pipe that slows wastewater flow.
- A transition area where older piping connects to plastic piping.
- Interior pipe scaling and rough surfaces that catch debris.

These combined conditions create repeated clogging problems. The committee acknowledged that the infrastructure dates back to approximately 1978–1979, when the building was relocated, making the system nearly 50 years old.

Quotes Received

Three contractor proposals were reviewed:

- Varcelli Landscaping – approximately \$11,984
- CMG – approximately \$14,000
- Geauga Septic – approximately \$16,200

Discussion focused on whether all proposals included full sidewalk replacement after trenching work. One proposal appeared to suggest repositioning existing sidewalk sections rather than complete replacement. Committee members agreed that clarification would be required before making a final decision. The committee agreed to discuss the proposals further at the upcoming Council meeting before selecting a contractor. The urgency of the repair was emphasized

because sewer service disruptions could require temporary accommodations for building occupants.

Miller-Dodson Long-Term Facilities Report

The committee discussed the Miller-Dodson facilities assessment report and long-term capital planning.

Overview of Report

The Miller-Dodson report was commissioned at a cost of approximately \$15,000 and provides:

- Long-range facility maintenance planning
- Estimated life expectancy of Village infrastructure
- Reserve funding recommendations
- Forecasted repair and replacement schedules

Members discussed the report's recommendation that the Village establish a structured reserve funding strategy for future maintenance and replacement costs. Discussion centered around the report's estimate that:

- The Village could spend approximately \$10 million over 40 years on maintenance and replacement of facilities.
- Recommended annual reserve contributions begin around \$274,000 and increase over time.

Specific figures reviewed included:

- Prior recommendation: approximately \$274,000 annually
- Current recommendation: approximately \$290,000 annually
- 2027 suggested reserve contribution: approximately \$308,178

Members discussed the importance of establishing reserve funding rather than waiting for emergency repairs.

Canton referenced experience from homeowners' associations and condominium reserve funds, emphasizing that reserve planning is considered best practice even if estimates may ultimately prove conservative.

Concerns About Report Accuracy

Committee members identified several items in the report that appeared inaccurate or outdated, including:

- The salt storage structure being assigned an additional 25-year life despite plans for eventual demolition.

- Police vehicle replacement estimates being significantly lower than actual current costs.
- Garage door replacement estimates that underestimated actual replacement costs.

Despite these discrepancies, members agreed the report still provided useful planning guidance.

Five-Year Planning Discussion

The committee discussed developing structured five-year planning processes for Village properties and infrastructure. Members agreed that each committee should participate in long-term planning and reserve budgeting.

Police Department Building Maintenance

Power Washing

The Police Chief requested that the building be power washed.

Street Commissioner confirmed the work would be completed when weather conditions permit. The committee agreed that power washing should not be performed during cold temperatures.

Police Department Bathroom Expansion

The committee discussed a proposed project to connect the newer drone garage structure to the police building. Reasons for the project included:

- Allowing officers to move between buildings during winter without going outside.
- Accommodating increased staffing and additional female officers.
- Improving restroom accessibility and capacity.

The committee generally agreed the project appeared necessary.

Village Landscaping and Weed Control

Street Commissioner provided an update on landscaping maintenance.

Weed Treatment Program

The Village selectively sprayed weeds in Village beds, park beds, and stone and mulch areas. The process involves selective spraying, waiting approximately two weeks, and pulling remaining weeds manually. Young explained this method reduces regrowth and ongoing maintenance needs.

Several participants discussed concerns regarding herbicide use, particularly Roundup.

Key discussion points included:

- Some residents strongly oppose chemical weed treatment.
- The Village only performs limited spot spraying.
- Treatments are generally confined to stone or mulch beds rather than pedestrian areas.
- Certain invasive species are extremely difficult to control without herbicides.

Participants discussed examples of invasive plants such as lesser celandine and poison ivy.

Park Meeting Scheduling

The committee discussed scheduling a future parks meeting.

Because one committee member's availability depends on the Cleveland Browns football schedule, the committee agreed to wait until the Browns schedule is released before finalizing dates. Committee members also discussed reserving Sundays in September for park-related events and activities.

Tree City USA Program Discussion

The committee briefly discussed participation in the Tree City USA program.

Discussion points included:

- The program is associated with the National Forest Service.
- Participation may provide grant opportunities and assistance with invasive species management.
- The program may support hazardous tree removal along roadways.

Members agreed additional review of the program would be worthwhile.

Rarick Cemetery Restoration and Cleanup

The largest portion of the meeting focused on restoration work planned for Rarick Cemetery. Street Commissioner outlined a proposed restoration plan that includes:

- Removing debris along fence lines
- Cleaning headstones
- Repairing broken stones using epoxy products
- Replacing fencing
- Filling settled ground areas with topsoil and seed

Young explained that cleaning products under consideration are designed specifically for historic cemetery preservation and would not damage stone surfaces. The intended work sequence would be to clean stones and allow them to dry, remove debris and vegetation, replace fencing, repair stones, and restore ground surfaces.

Property Access and Easements

The committee discussed access to the cemetery through neighboring properties.

Permission has been obtained from adjacent property owners for access during restoration work.

Discussion Regarding Cemetery Preservation Methods

Visitors raised concerns regarding cemetery cleaning methods.

Valerie Mariola referenced cemetery policies posted on the Village website and questioned whether spraying or chemical treatments were being used on headstones.

Committee members clarified:

- No herbicides are being sprayed on headstones.
- Cleaning methods are intended to follow historic cemetery preservation standards.
- The cleaning products are specifically designed for cemetery restoration.
- No abrasive scrubbing or damaging techniques are planned.

The committee agreed that additional information regarding cleaning products and methods should be prepared for presentation at a future Council meeting.

The committee discussed budgeting for restoration work and agreed the project would provide both historical preservation and positive public relations benefits. Committee members emphasized the importance of respectfully preserving the approximately 150 historic burials at the cemetery.

Septic System Cleaning Ordinance Discussion

The committee conducted a lengthy discussion regarding the Village septic tank cleaning ordinance. Current Village ordinance requires septic systems to be cleaned every three years.

Committee members reviewed the history behind the ordinance:

- Earlier ordinances required cleaning every two years.
- The stricter requirement originated after serious septic failures in the Bellwood area caused sewage problems and odors.
- Failures became particularly problematic during nearby residential development.

The Village ultimately moved from a two-year requirement to the current three-year requirement.

County Health Department Comparison

The committee discussed whether the Village should align with Geauga Public Health standards, which generally recommend septic cleaning every five years.

Opinions expressed included:

- Some members supported adopting the county's five-year standard.
- Others favored a more cautious approach because of the Village's older septic systems.
- A compromise suggestion of four years was also discussed.

Enforcement and Compliance Issues

The committee discussed concerns regarding enforcement and inspection reliability to include:

- Septic contractors complete condition reports.
- Contractors may hesitate to report failing systems because they risk losing customers.
- Gauga Public Health is expected to assume greater responsibility for compliance tracking and notifications.
- The Village's current tracking system has experienced delays due to computer system issues.

Members noted that state grant programs may exist to help residents pay for septic inspections or maintenance if financial hardship exists.

While no formal recommendation was finalized during the meeting, discussion leaned toward eventually aligning more closely with county standards while continuing to monitor impacts on older systems.

Cemetery Budget Review

The committee reviewed cemetery-related budget lines and discussed adjustments for upcoming work.

Wage and Maintenance Increases

The committee discussed increasing cemetery wages and maintenance funding to accommodate restoration work. Discussion included:

- Increasing cemetery wages from approximately \$4,500 to approximately \$6,000.
- Increasing supply and maintenance budgets for:
 - Concrete
 - Stone repair materials
 - Cleaning supplies
 - Fencing
 - Topsoil and seed

The committee agreed additional funding would likely be necessary due to restoration and fence replacement work. Members confirmed that sections of fencing at the cemetery are significantly deteriorated and require replacement.

Cemetery Gate and Tree Replacement

The committee discussed ongoing repairs related to a vehicle accident at the South Russell Village Cemetery entrance.

A contractor originally underestimated the cost of gate replacement by quoting approximately \$5,000 before realizing the actual cost exceeded \$14,000. The contractor agreed to honor the original quoted price despite the mistake. Installation work was reportedly underway during the meeting.

The accident also damaged one of the cemetery entrance maple trees. The committee agreed that replacing the tree would improve the cemetery entrance appearance and considered a sugar maple as the preferred replacement.

Village Entrance Sign Replacement

The committee reviewed progress on replacement of Village entrance sign supports. Existing wooden posts are being replaced with steel supports because the wood posts continue to rot and fail. The new design will use four-inch steel posts, retain a similar visual appearance, and improve durability and maintenance. The fabricated sign poles were being produced by a local contractor who has performed work for the Village for many years. Sign locations are near the Lantern of Chagrin Valley, Bell Road East, and Snyder Road. Members discussed prior color corrections to the signs and the importance of maintaining attractive “gateway” entrances into the Village.

Parks and Playground Discussion

The committee discussed parks, playgrounds, and future recreation improvements. The Mayor reported receiving feedback from residents regarding the park and playground. He explained that common themes included requests for more equipment designed for younger children, interest in nature-based playground features, and requests for additional swings and toddler equipment. Committee members noted that the existing playground was originally designed using input from elementary-aged children.

The Mayor reported discussions with a park foundation regarding potential grant opportunities for nature-based play equipment, smaller children’s play areas, and additional park enhancements. Members referenced playground examples in Chester Township, Chagrin Falls, and Holbrook Hollow.

Pavilion Improvements

The committee discussed the possibility of adding garage-style enclosure doors to the park pavilion to:

- Reduce wind exposure
- Improve year-round usability

- Improve acoustics during events
- Keep birds from nesting inside

Members noted similar improvements had been successful at other facilities.

Village Garden and Beautification Discussion

The committee discussed the condition of landscaping and decorative areas around Village Hall.

Topics included:

- Deteriorating landscaping beds
- Possibility of repainting and improving decorative structures
- Potential collaboration with local garden clubs
- Sponsorships for hanging flower baskets and beautification projects

The Dogwood Garden Club was specifically mentioned as a possible community partner.

Bike Path and Pathway Discussion

The committee discussed public reactions to proposed bike paths and pedestrian pathways. Members noted that some residents oppose spending significant money on pathway projects while others support pathways for safety and connectivity. Committee members emphasized that the Village is actively pursuing grants, current concepts focus primarily on connecting schools and parks, and concept drawings circulated publicly were only preliminary illustrations.

The committee noted that the bike path issue had received a first reading and would continue through the legislative process before appearing on the November ballot.

Scheduling of Future Meetings

The committee discussed establishing a regular meeting schedule. A consensus was reached to hold Properties Committee meetings on the second Monday of each month at 9:00 a.m. unless otherwise adjusted

The next meeting was scheduled for June 8, 2026

Time: 9:00 a.m.

Location: Village Hall

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at approximately 10:14 a.m.