

**RECORD OF PROCEEDINGS
TAX BUDGET HEARING
REGULAR COUNCIL MEETING
MONDAY, JUNE 15, 2026 – 7:00 P.M.
MAYOR WILLIAM G. KOONS PRESIDING**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Berger, Bell, Cavanagh, Porter, and Rensel

MEMBERS ABSENT: Canton

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

VISITORS: Landa Mandau, Chillicothe Rd.; Tom Randu, Woodside Rd.; Suzanne Moloney, Waverly Ln., Anthony & Tracy Gerbino-Bell Rd., Anastasia Nicholas, Chagrin Valley Times; Sarah Kaseler, Alderwood Tr.; Merilee Marshall, Bell Rd., Leah Johns, Bell Rd., Elsie Tarczy, Sheerbrook Dr.; Janice Hill, E. Belmeadow Ln.; Muffi Sherwin, Holly Ln.; Katherine Malmquist, Louise Dr.; David Rust, Forest Dr.; Ralfe Silc, Daisy Ln.

2027 Tax Budget Hearing

The Mayor led with the Pledge of Allegiance, after which Council began the 2027 Tax Budget Hearing. The Fiscal Officer read the roll. Canton was absent. Berger presented the proposed 2027 tax budget by fund as follows: General Fund revenues, \$1,670,799, with estimated expenses of \$1,786,560; Safety Fund revenues, \$1,782,013, with expenses of \$2,005,875; Operating Fund revenues, \$642,404, with expenses of \$619,456; Road and Bridge Fund revenues, \$247,197, with expenses of \$4,500; Special Revenue Fund revenues, \$3,566,645, with expenses of \$3,753,350; And Capital Project Fund revenues \$2,159,700, with expenses of \$2,427,389. The Mayor noted that the Village raised taxes in 2017, has not raised taxes since that time, and has lowered taxes twice since 2017.

Porter made a motion to adjourn the Tax Budget hearing, seconded by Cavanagh. Voice vote – ayes, all. Motion carried.

Regular Council Meeting

Following the Tax Budget hearing, Council moved into the Regular Council meeting. The Mayor called the Regular Council meeting to order. Council reviewed the minutes of May 18, 2026. A correction was made in the ordinance section to reflect that Berger, not Bell provided the second reading of the ordinance declaring it necessary to levy a tax in excess of the ten-mill limitation. A second comment was raised by Rensel regarding the discussion regarding bicycle incidents on Bell Road. It was indicated that over the years, bike incidents occurred on Bell Road at Snyder and 306 at Market Express. The Fiscal Officer explained that the May 18th minutes reflected what was said at that meeting, and the current clarification would be included in these minutes. **Cavanagh made a**

motion to approve the minutes as amended, seconded by Rensel. Voice vote – ayes, all. Motion carried.

VISITORS:

Muffi Sherwin, Holly Ln., stated that the group had been working with the Village for about a year to have a bocce court placed in the park. Sherwin reported that permission had been obtained from the Western Reserve Land Conservancy (WRLC) because of guidelines governing how far activities may extend into the field. She said several possible placements had been evaluated and marked, and that the area had been observed through snow, melting snow, rain, and flooding. The group selected an area that remained relatively dry in all weather, and the Street Commissioner also saw the location. Sherwin stated that other communities have bocce courts, that a court would bring neighbors together for spontaneous activities, and that there is a Chagrin-area league using Bentleyville and Chagrin courts. She asked that tax dollars fund the court and said there had been discussion about the Service Department staff performing some work to keep costs down.

The Properties Committee reported that the Finance Committee had allotted \$8,000 for the project, with the hope that the Village could finish it in-house. The Parks Committee looked at the location and orientation, including whether players would face the sun, and preferred a north-south orientation.

Cavanagh made a motion to approve the building of a Bocce Ball Court at South Russell Park oriented from south to north, north to south, with an amount not to exceed \$8,000, seconded by Rensel. Voice vote – ayes, all. Motion carried.

Suzanne Maloney, president of the Emerald Lakes HOA, addressed Council with Jennifer Donnellan regarding a vacant home at 111 Waverly Ln. Maloney stated that the neighborhood has been struggling with the property for nine years, since the owners took possession of the foreclosed home in June 2017. She reported that she, on behalf of the HOA, and the next-door neighbor had sent multiple letters, and that they had spoken with the Building Department. She described seven notices, complaints, or letters in 2021, along with a police visit and incident report. The 2021 issues included a boat, a 55-gallon drum, a 12-foot trampoline in the front yard, an unregistered vehicle in the driveway, in-ground pool violations involving an unsecured pool, a dead ash tree in the front yard, and an air-conditioning unit holding up a basketball hoop.

Maloney stated that the residents stopped living at the home sometime in 2021 and that in 2022 there were six additional violations, notices, or letters, including a dead tree and driveway debris. She said that in 2024 a neighbor wrote to the Village stating that the property had been abandoned for three years and raised safety concerns about the pool, drum, and cleanup. Maloney described multiple visits in 2024 and 2025, including a conversation with a worker named Jorge who was working on the pool. She said that after a letter from the Village, the ash tree was removed. She further reported that as of one hour before the meeting, the pool was covered but the gates were not secure, there was a 10-by-20-foot pile of trash in the backyard, miscellaneous debris against the house, an unregistered trailer and 55-gallon drum in the driveway, a microwave and AC unit still holding up the basketball hoop, and a gas light at the end of the driveway leaning at approximately 20 degrees.

Maloney asked whether the Village had an ordinance addressing vacant properties and urged Council to consider adopting one if not. Donnellan added that the owners pay their taxes and mow the lawn,

but that is about all. Council recalled prior Building Committee involvement and stated that the Building Inspector would visit the property the following day, write a letter, cite the owners, and threaten court action. The Solicitor stated that there are ordinances regarding abandoned and damaged facilities but that the matter would require further review, and that the issue was a code enforcement matter. Council stated that the Building Committee would review the situation at its next meeting and report back before the July 13th meeting if possible. A question was also raised as to whether condemnation proceedings could be initiated. The Solicitor responded that she did not know and would need to review the file and the citation history. Discussion also noted that if the home were uninhabitable, condemnation could be easier.

Several residents addressed Council regarding the proposed walking path or pathway along Bell Road. Elsie Tarczy, Sheerbrook Dr., stated that she had serious concerns about the proposal, which she understood would start around Chillicothe Rd. to Bell Rd. She objected to the Northeast Ohio Area Coordinating Agency (NOACA) funds being used for walking paths rather than roads and bridges, stating that the path would not serve most of the Village because residents on the other side of Chillicothe Rd. would have to drive to access it. She questioned how much Gurney School children would use it and objected to using Village funds to take up portions of residents' properties. Additionally, Tarczy opposed putting a levy on the ballot. She also asked who would maintain the path and thanked Council for keeping taxes low.

David Rust, Forest Dr., thanked Council for its service and echoed Tarczy's concerns. He said he appreciated Council keeping expenses and taxes down, noting that the first mail he received after moving to Chagrin Falls involved a property levy increase. He said he appreciated the bike path work that had been done previously and opposed the proposed new path.

Katherine Malmquist, Louise Dr., said she believed the path was beyond what the Village needed. She described South Russell as rural and stated that people can walk and bike on the sides of the road if careful. She said she leads hikes for the Cleveland Hiking Club along Bell Road and Washington Street and argued that a sidewalk would take ten feet beyond the road and destroy bushes, trees, fences, gardens, and yard edges. She also said that if the Village were to extend the path farther east on Bell Road, it would encounter major gas lines. She urged Council to preserve the rural character of the Village. She also noted that she had recently observed bobolinks and approximately twelve other bird species in the park and urged Council not to burn or mow the area too early. She suggested consulting with someone knowledgeable about wildlife. Council responded that it had a connection with the Audubon Society.

Ralfe Silc, Daisy Ln., objected to spending what she described as a million dollars on a pathway, characterizing it as unneeded and a waste of money. She asked Council to state its reasons for the proposal and said she had not heard that a feasibility study had been conducted or that anyone had monitored the pedestrian, bicycle, and traffic safety conditions along the road. She stated that she intended to continue opposing the initiative.

Merilee Marshall, Bell Rd., stated that she is in the zone of the proposed path and had questions now that she understood the path might be on her side of the street. She was concerned about whether she would lose a split rail fence shared by several properties. She said she would benefit from being able to walk to Village Hall, the farmers market, and the park, and that she and a neighbor had walked to the meeting that evening while vehicles drove toward the center line to avoid them.

Janice Hill, East Belmeadow Ln., stated that she moved back to South Russell twelve years ago from Denver, grew up in South Russell, and chose a home in the Village because of its rural feeling. She agreed with Malmquist and asked why the Village would urbanize a beautiful setting.

Leah Johns, Bell Rd., stated that she moved to South Russell a year ago and has three boys who often walk on Bell Road to reach Chagrin Lakes, where their grandparents live. She said she supported a sidewalk on the south side of Bell for safety and ease of walking to the park, noting there are many children in her area who would benefit. She asked how the sidewalk would affect the historical cemetery on the south side of Bell Rd. and whether it would affect a rare tamarack tree on her property. Cavanagh responded that the cemetery would remain as is and would not be touched. Additional questions were raised about the stairs at the cemetery and how the sidewalk would be routed. Cavanagh also noted that a neighbor had previously come before the Properties Committee to raise concerns about the recently installed fence.

Tom Radu, Woodside Rd., stated that his in-laws built on the eastern end of Bell Road in 1946 when it was a dirt road, that his wife has lived in South Russell her entire life, and that he and his wife have lived there for 37 years. He opposed the pathway because of the shortness of the route, the number of affected people in that area, and the fact that it would not benefit most South Russell residents, who would nevertheless pay for it. He also emphasized fiscal responsibility and noted that property taxes now exceed what his mortgage payment had been.

Anthony Gerbino, Bell Rd., stated that he recently moved from Florida and values the rural character of South Russell. His first question upon hearing the pathway proposal was why it was being pursued, whether there had been an accident or safety concerns prompted it, and whether the project was proactive, constructive, or reactive. He opposed the proposal because his questions had not been answered.

Council responded with background on the Pedestrian and Bike Path Committee, which was formed approximately 1 ½ to 2 years earlier. A survey had been conducted which invited residents to state whether they would support a pathway of some kind. Originally, the path was described as a bike path/pedestrian path. Approximately 360 responses were received, with the vast majority in favor. Council stated that some residents support the proposal and others do not. It was explained that the current proposal had been narrowed from a bike path to a five-foot path, possibly dirt or asphalt, from Spring Drive to Chillicothe Rd. on the south side, and that a wider path would be needed if it were to serve as a bike path. It was stated that the project was estimated at \$1.8 million, with \$800,000 from NOACA and approximately \$1 million to be raised from another source. Council had been considering placing the question on the ballot for residents to decide. Council also described earlier efforts in the 1990's and 2012 to investigate development of a path, as well as the Mayor's 2020 vision for 2030 and a special mayoral task force, which evolved into the Safe Bicycle and Pedestrian Transport Committee which has worked on the issue for about a year and a half.

Additional discussion clarified that the current concept was not a bike path as some residents understood that term. Malmquist asked that facts about path width and bike use be put in writing. Tarczy asked about the survey response rate relative to roughly 1,400 households.

Berger explained government fund accounting to address public questions about the Village budget. He said that unlike a household budget, Village money is divided into more than twenty funds, with money allocated to each and expenses tracked against each. He explained that budget increases or

decreases in a particular fund reflect expenses that changed or were moved between years, not unused money available for any purpose. He cited the Bell Road East project as an example, explaining that a \$1 million decrease was due to the project moving from 2026 to 2027, and that the money would be allocated for 2027 when the project occurs. He stated that the Village does not have an extra million dollars for the path, that the current estimate is \$1.8 million, that an \$800,000 NOACA grant is available, and that the remaining \$1 million would have to come from private donations, other grants, or resident tax dollars through a levy if residents choose that route. Further discussion touched on road re-striping and narrowing travel lanes to widen shoulders, and the Chief stated that bicyclists have the right to ride in the roadway lane.

MAYOR'S REPORT: The Mayor requested support for the appointment of James Haas as an alternate to the Architectural Review Board (ARB). The Mayor said Mr. Haas came to the Village five or six years ago, offered to help as an architect, attended meetings to meet the ARB and observe how it operates, and was considered a good fit by the Board.

During discussion, the Solicitor and Council questioned whether the Codified Ordinances provided for alternates to the ARB. The Solicitor stated that the ARB consists of three members appointed by the Mayor and confirmed by Council, and that unlike the Planning Commission or Board of Zoning Appeals, the code did not appear to contain alternate-member language for the ARB. The motion was withdrawn, and Council agreed that the Building Committee would work with the Solicitor to determine whether an ordinance should be prepared for the July meeting to add one or two alternates. It was noted that architects can be hard to find and that two alternates might create a better bench.

The Mayor next requested appointment of Tanner Payne as an alternate to the Planning Commission. It was stated that Mr. Payne had been attending Planning Commission meetings, had been helpful at the previous meeting. He had originally applied for the open Council seat while also expressing interest in serving in another capacity if not appointed to Council.

Cavanagh made a motion to appoint Tanner Payne as an alternate for Planning Commission, seconded by Porter. Voice vote – ayes, all. Motion carried.

The Mayor distributed a tentative proposal for a future park event involving a campout and meal, stating that it had not yet gone through the normal process and would come through the Park and Properties Committees before the July Council meeting.

FISCAL OFFICER: The Fiscal Officer reported that the new Building Department Administrative Assistant started on June 1st and is doing very well. She said she had heard positive feedback, that the employee is picking up tasks well, and that the employee has a good vision for the future.

The Fiscal Officer also reported that she had worked on the Tax Budget, which the Finance Committee would present for approval that evening so that it could be filed by the July deadline.

FINANCE COMMITTEE: Berger reported that it met on June 11th, with draft minutes included in the packet, and that the next proposed meeting was Thursday, July 23rd at 9:00 a.m.

The committee presented a motion to change a budget line-item description from the Mayor's Discretionary Fund to the Village Emergency line item. Berger stated that he believed the change was consistent with the intended purpose of the account when it was created. **Berger made a motion that Council approve the change in the line-item description from Mayor's Discretionary line item to Emergency line item, seconded by Porter. Voice vote – ayes, all. Motion carried.**

The committee then discussed levies. Berger said the path levy had been discussed by residents earlier in the meeting and would continue to be discussed. He also reported that the Finance Committee looked ahead to increases in the costs of Fire/EMS and Chagrin Valley Dispatch (CVD). He stated that from 2025 to 2028, the increase is expected to be approximately \$500,000 per year, raising the question of whether the Village has the financial capability to absorb the increase. No decision had been made, but the committee discussed placing a levy on the May 2027 ballot to raise \$500,000 per year to cover at least the increase in those service costs. He noted that the increase doubles the cost of fire and EMS services under the three-year contract signed in October 2025. A question was asked about how CVD increases were forecasted, and Berger responded that he used an 8% annual placeholder until 2027 numbers are known, likely in late August or early September.

Berger made a motion to approve the 2027 tax budget as previously read in the tax budget hearing, seconded by Porter. Voice vote – ayes, all. Motion carried.

SOLICITOR: The Solicitor had nothing to report.

ENGINEER: The Engineer reported on the bidding process for the 2026 road program. A bid opening had been expected the previous Friday, but because of questions from plan holders regarding driveway apron restoration details, particularly along Bell Road East and the protocol for replacements, the Engineer issued a clarification and extended the bid opening by one week. The new bid opening was set for Monday, June 22nd at noon. The Engineer explained that when residents replace driveway culverts and aprons on streets scheduled for repaving, the Village policy has been that residents buy the pipe, the Village installs it, and, if the road is being paved that year, the Village also performs the asphalt repair over the culvert to encourage replacement. Because Bell Road East is being paved next year as an ODOT project, the same convenience could not be included in the ODOT project because ODOT will not go beyond the edge of pavement. Therefore, extra driveway repair quantities were included in the current road program budget. The Engineer explained that the detail needed to be redrawn because Bell Road East driveway apron repairs and culvert repairs would be done in advance of paving, and the repair areas are larger because many Bell Road ditches are farther from the edge of pavement.

Council then asked about the salt structure. The Engineer explained that Verdantas prepared a design brief identifying the desired type of salt storage building, approximate location, and size, and then quotes were obtained from design-build companies. The Building Inspector and the Street Commissioner raised concerns that the contractor constructed top-of-wall section differed from the plan, specifically in how the wood-framed roof structure and trusses attach to the concrete wall. CMG acknowledged that it had not left anchor bolts sticking up out of the concrete as it should have and proposed using drilled mechanical anchors instead. Several site meetings were held, including with

the structural engineer and design team. The consensus, pending a full structural report, was that the anchor bolts resist wind force and are sufficient to tie the trusses and roof to the concrete wall. It was reported that Lewin and Associates and Bill Gallagher both provided reports or opinions concurring that the approach would be acceptable, and that the contractor would incur roughly \$500 in additional costs and would complete additional small items. Council asked whether Verdantas should review the matter as a third check. The Engineer said he would not contradict the structural engineers or architectural consultants but could ask structural engineers in his office to review the reports. Council asked that the Lewin and Gallagher reports be forwarded to the Engineer and requested an update before the July Council meeting. The Mayor said the Village would get another review.

STREET COMMISSIONER: The Street Commissioner reported that the department had been busy with ditch work and ensuring drainage was flowing correctly, as well as restoration work. He also reported on maintenance in the park and Trash Day work done in May, stating that the layout kept pedestrians away from large equipment, there were no near misses or issues, and he considered it a huge success.

Council asked about the Rarick Cemetery fence and cleanup. The Street Commissioner stated that the work was on the schedule but then there were issues with obtaining the signed waiver from the resident adjacent to the cemetery property. She was concerned that the waiver appeared to make the Village not responsible for potential damage to her car, well, driveway, yard, piping, or other property while accessing the cemetery. She supported the project but wanted language protecting her from damage caused by the Village. The resident also requested that no work occur until after late June or early July. Fence quotes were gathered, with two quotes ranging from about \$5,000 to \$6,300 and a third quote pending. Council discussed modifying the waiver, asking the Solicitor to draft appropriate language. Council also discussed whether to survey the cemetery, identify property boundaries, and determine the location of graves before cleanup. It was noted that a company in South Russell has experience identifying graves in cemeteries through ground-penetrating radar or similar work. Council asked for a quote, discussed the possibility of sounding or surveying the cemetery, and acknowledged that cleanup would be needed before survey or grave-identification work could be completed safely. The Street Commissioner also described a collapsed retaining wall near the southwest corner of the cemetery that had slid toward the adjacent property. Council directed that the waiver issue be addressed first, followed by cleanup, consideration of survey and grave-identification work, and then fence installation.

STREET COMMITTEE: The Street Committee reported that it held a special meeting on May 21st, primarily to discuss the tax budget worksheet. The committee also discussed the Service Department truck bid. No bids were received, so the committee will consider whether to proceed through Sourcewell or state bid pricing, or whether to seek bids again. The committee also discussed the road diet but did not yet have an estimate for removing existing striping and re-striping. The regular meeting had been cancelled because of committee absences, and the chair would send possible meeting dates through the Fiscal Officer.

BUILDING COMMITTEE: The Building Committee met on June 8th. They discussed the salt structure discrepancies identified by the Building Inspector and others, which, as of the Council meeting date, appeared to have been mostly resolved. The committee discussed engaging Bill Gallagher as a structural engineer because the Building Inspector thought it was necessary, and a bill may be forthcoming unless the work was gratis. A group meeting on June 9th included Village personnel and representatives from the contractor's side, and the issues were addressed. CMG employed Isaac Lewin as structural engineer, and the committee was reassured that the Building Inspector considered Lewin an excellent structural engineer whose opinion he would trust.

The committee also reported that the new Building Department employee appears to be working out well, and Council was encouraged to meet her if they had not already done so. The committee discussed septic language, specifically the county's five-year enforcement cycle compared with the Village's previous 3-year septic tank cleaning requirement. It was stated that maintaining a three-year program would require purchasing a computer program at a cost of about \$10,000. The Building Committee chair stated that while the Building Inspector believed the 3-year requirement was worthwhile, the county is doing the same work, and a 5-year program removes one task from the Village. The Mayor was asked whether there is a penalty for ignoring septic tank cleaning under the county program, and he believed there is a consequence, likely a fine, though he did not want to state it definitively. The committee noted that the Village has 293 septic tanks, with the rest of the Village on sewers, mostly east of Sunridge and east of Paw-Paw as described during discussion. The next Building Committee meeting was set for Monday, July 13th at 8:00 a.m. at the Building Department office.

POLICE CHIEF: The Police Chief submitted the month-end report and had nothing further to report. In response to questions regarding reuse of issued gear, the Chief explained that police body armor is personally fitted. He said the panels can sometimes be reused if the fit is close and the armor is not very old, with the panels moving into a new carrier. He explained that the outer carrier is removable and washable, while inner Kevlar panels must be wiped with Lysol spray or wipes. Council acknowledged that the equipment is expensive.

SAFETY COMMITTEE: A Safety Committee meeting is scheduled for Friday, June 26th at 8:00 a.m. at the Police Department. The Chief will be looking for applicants, including two full-time openings and another part-time applicant. The committee noted that the loss of two full-time officers to another employer, together with another retirement, had been a significant hit, though one replacement had been obtained. Council stated that acceptance of officer resignations would occur later in the meeting.

HUMAN RESOURCE COMMITTEE: The Human Resources (HR) Committee reported that it met and that draft minutes were in the packet. The committee is asking employees to update their job descriptions, with feedback expected in the next thirty days or so, after which the committee will review and update the descriptions. The committee also discussed the Safety Compliance Officer role, including who should fill it. No decision had been made, but the committee discussed whether the Police Lieutenant might be the appropriate person. The committee will need to prepare a job description, duties, authority, and related details and expects to provide it to Council in July.

The committee presented a proposed employee recognition policy. Berger explained that the policy would provide for an annual event to celebrate and promote all Village employees and recognize employees or elected officials who recently retired. Because the proposed June date could not be met,

a luncheon at Tavern 6 on Friday, October 2nd was suggested. Council discussed whether the event should include employees, families, guests, and residents; whether inviting all residents could exceed the budget; and whether the policy was related to a prior food ordinance or was simply a policy to add to the Village's policies. Council agreed to continue discussion in July. The next HR Committee meeting was proposed for Monday, July 20th at 8:00 a.m.

After the HR report, the Mayor raised concerns about what he viewed as inequality in support provided to employees, particularly the Street Department. He explained that he had been talking for a while about what he felt to be an inequality in the way that employees are treated. He stated that most of the employees sit in a nice chair in an air-conditioned office. They seldom get dirty. They seldom are in danger. They have standard hours. They know when they are working and when they are off. The Street Department employees many times are on their feet and sometimes their feet are six feet in the ground or maybe 20 feet in the air. They get dirty. They have issues with safety. They're on call 24-7-365. The Mayor continued that when we are sitting in our homes and the snowplow goes down the street on Christmas Day, the drivers are out away from their families and we are at home. Furthermore, on Saturdays and Sundays the Streets Department employees are expected to come back to the Village to clean the pavilion, pick up the garbage, and clean the bathroom. Eight hours of clerical staff time is provided for the Building Department, eight hours for the Finance Department, and 16 hours for the Police Department. No administrative support is provided for the Street Department. The Mayor indicated that starting the week of June 2nd, he wanted the Fiscal Officer to provide two hours of clerical staff for the Street Department followed by four hours the week of June 29th, six hours the week of July 6th, and eight hours the week of July 13th, all subsequent hours. The Mayor stated that this was an issue that needed to be addressed. He added that it is unfair. The employees feel they're second class and this can help solve that issue.

Bell responded that one year earlier, Council hired an additional full-time laborer after being told it would give the Street Commissioner more time for paperwork and administrative work. A year has passed, an additional laborer was hired, but it has not changed the situation with the administrative work in the department. Now, the Mayor is telling Council there is an inequality, yet there is a full time addition to the department. Bell thought the Mayor was providing a false narrative. The Mayor is making it sound like the Service Department employees are not appreciated and secondly that there is a need for administrative help. However, a full-time employee was provided to the department a year ago. The Fiscal Officer stated that she had reached out to the Street Commissioner several times to offer her help in assessing the Street Commissioner's administrative needs but received no response.

The Mayor stated that this should be done by Friday, and the Fiscal Officer responded that the Street Commissioner would have to sit down with her to show her what he needs. The Mayor asked if this was done with other people and asked if there was a standard he should know. The Fiscal Officer explained that the part-time Administrative Assistant works for the Police Chief and herself. She has been tasked to cross train in the Building Department because of staff shortages. Although assigned to help in the Finance Department, she primarily has worked in the Building Department for this reason. The Mayor directed the Fiscal Officer and the Street Commissioner get together and get it solved.

Porter noted that the Police Department is also on call 24-7, and they have had occasions where they have had to respond to mutual aid and other things. It would be inaccurate to say that the Street Department only does this, although he knew that the Chief cannot drive a snowplow, but the Street Commissioner can and does and that the call-outs are more common with the Street Department. He concluded that he did not think anyone had more admiration for the Street Department than Council. Porter understood what the Mayor was saying, and if the Street Commissioner would benefit from some admin support, he was sure the Fiscal Officer would be able to assist with that along with the Chief. In his mind, the Mayor is the executive and if he wants the employees to do this or that without an increase in pay or responsibilities, then he thought he should. Bell noted that Council would prefer that the managers manage rather than a part-time elected official. Porter responded that indeed, but there was an opportunity to provide some added support where it might be needed. Bell reiterated that Council approved the hiring of a full-time Service Department employee last year to solve this issue, and Council is now having the same discussion, yet there is another full-time employee. The issue has come back to the same spot.

Porter agreed, and added that perhaps a new approach was needed, which he viewed as being the Mayor's directive to provide assistance through Admin. However, Bell did not see that this was a viable solution, adding that the Street Commissioner, who has been given ample opportunities by the Fiscal Officer and Police Chief to learn administrative functions, take the opportunity to do so. Council had been discussing this matter ad nauseum for a year and a half. Porter concluded that perhaps it was a good time for the Street and Fiscal Officer to arrange to address the matter. Bell stated that he hoped this would work because he never wanted to have this discussion again and Porter agreed.

PROPERTIES COMMITTEE: The Properties Committee reported that it met on June 8th. Council first returned to the CMG payment issue related to the salt structure. During discussion, it was noted that there is a retention against the contract totaling approximately \$28,000 on a project exceeding \$700,000, and that other incomplete items such as the floor and path could also be held. Council discussed the legal obligation to pay under the contract if the contractor had completed satisfactorily with that point.

Cavanagh made a motion to approve the Salt Building Payment #4 in the amount of \$120,000 to CMG, seconded by Porter. Voice vote – ayes -Cavanagh, Porter, Bell, Rensel. Nay - Berger. Motion carried.

The committee reported that the Welcome to South Russell signs were progressing. The foundations were complete, signposts had arrived, and the Village crew needed to paint and install them. The Street Commissioner said the crew was scheduled to work on and finish the project during the week, and Council discussed the need to ensure metal posts have breakaway features if required. The committee also reported that bricks between the garage were falling apart, that materials were available, and that a Village employee would work on brick repair on rainy days.

The committee discussed whether more parking is needed for the Farmers' Market, especially regarding the southeast corner. Some neighbors who attended the Farmers' Market frequently reported parking concerns, while the Mayor believed there was enough parking. Council discussed whether booth locations could move farther east after the salt structure work is complete, whether the salt dome removal would create future space, and whether short-term signs could direct additional

parking behind the police station. The Chief preferred maintaining the existing traffic block to avoid vehicles driving through too quickly and wanted any police-station parking clearly delineated so it would not interfere with police operations. The Solicitor suggested that the Farmers' Market provide a revised plan because the existing agreement is specific about parking and booth locations. Council agreed to start with an additional parking sign directing vehicles to available parking facilities and to ask the Farmers' Market for a revised plan. Council wanted a firmer plan for the July meeting and noted that several Farmers' Markets would occur before then.

The committee also reported on a Planning Commission meeting held June 11th regarding the Gulf station proposal to upgrade lighting and change the brand look from blue and white to substantial orange. The matter was tabled because the Planning Commission was concerned about possible glare issues, particularly based on prior complaints from the Fox Run neighborhood. Planning Commission members were assigned to visit a Huntsburg station with a similar design at night to observe lighting conditions before the July Planning Commission meeting.

PARKS COMMITTEE: The Committee met at the end of May. Fall Fest planning was underway. Libby Sharkey contacted Flower Entertainment, and Greg Gamm contacted A1 Limo. Arrangements still need to be made with the school, for parking and shuttle transportation from Gurney School to the park. The Street Commissioner reminded the committee about hay wagons, and the plan was to use one tractor with two connected wagons for rides through the woods.

The committee discussed Patrick Gibney's completed project, which included butterfly bush plantings, coneflowers, and mulch. Cavanagh said the placement and work were excellent and that Mr. Gibney had been a joy to work with, but she felt the planting looked sparse and wanted to discuss adding something low growing to make it fuller without using plants such as pachysandra or ivy that might spread out of control.

The committee discussed playground improvements for toddlers, noting that \$25,000 may be available to improve the playground at the park. The committee and Mayor had walked the playground and identified the northwest corner of the playground as a possible area for baby swings and more equipment suitable for very young children. Council agreed that the committee was not yet ready for a motion because it did not know exactly what equipment would be purchased or what the layout would be. The Street Commissioner reported that he had contacted a playground company, which happened to be the original installer, and that the company would work on a 25-by-25-foot, five-and-under themed play area and provide 3D renderings while keeping the same general look and theme as the existing playground.

The committee followed up with comments about mowing and burning the park meadow. It was stated that the conservation easement requires mowing after August 1st. The Mayor said a South Park burn had been authorized for later, but there was concern there might not be enough material to burn. Paul Pira from the Geauga County Parks could look at the area in October, after the Fall Festival and after bobolinks are gone. The Village may compare the burned area with the unburned area a year later to evaluate results.

Cavanagh made a motion to approve the Fall Festival date for Sunday, September 20, 2026, from 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m., with no rain date, seconded by Berger. Voice vote – ayes, all. Motion carried.

Cavanagh also reported on a potential butterfly release. Judy Harvey had contacted the Cavanagh and was interested in doing the event. She planned to meet with Ms. Harvey and Kelly Jarzombek, who had been willing to help with a butterfly release several years earlier. The committee discussed pairing the butterfly release with the ice cream bike ride, possibly on Saturday, August 22nd, because children would be available.

The previously approved bocce ball court was noted. The Parks Committee indicated that many people had spent time looking at the proposal, that the committee supported it, and that members thought it would be a wonderful addition with little downside.

A question was raised about lighting so the court could be used after dawn or dusk. Council responded that lighting had not been reviewed and noted that the park closes at dusk. Sarah Gabriel added that the court would be a great way to keep the community together, that Chagrin's league has grown, and that bocce has become a popular summer activity. The Mayor suggested that the committee work with the Street Commissioner, who already had a design, and begin scheduling the work.

PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMITTEE: The Public Utilities Committee reported that the previously scheduled meeting was canceled due to member absences. The committee hoped to meet immediately after the Streets Committee meeting in July. Committee members plan to attend the Russell Township Trustees meeting on July 16th at 6:00 p.m. to present paperwork showing expenditures for the Hemlock Road Culvert Replacement project and Russell Township's prior interest in splitting the bill, estimated at approximately \$30,000.

The Engineer reported that the Hazelwood project survey was in progress. He sent an email indicating that the Village might need to assist with opening existing inlet basins or locating certain items, but he was waiting for clarification from the surveyors about which inlets were problematic. Preliminary design work had begun even though the survey was not fully complete. The Engineer also reported that for the Hemlock Road Culvert Replacement project, CMG replaced the defective roadway concrete and cleaned out the upstream inlet, grouting everything around it.

He anticipated a full preliminary plan set for the Hazelwood project sometime in August, with possible September bidding, and said underground work could feasibly be done in the fall and winter, with road, grass, and drainage restoration in the spring.

Council complimented the Engineer for handling Hazelwood and keeping resident Bill Stone informed. Council also noted that work on Maple Hill had drawn attention from residents on Silver Springs because water flows from there down to Paw Paw Lake, and Council wanted to keep an eye on that situation and possibly add it to a future agenda.

SAFE BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN TRANSPORT COMMITTEE: The Committee met on June 5th. Rensel invited the Foundation for Geauga Parks to attend. The committee found the meeting informational and learned that the Foundation could be a partner to help identify grant opportunities for pedestrian initiatives, including a path; serve as a nonprofit partner; coordinate fundraising; and potentially act as fiscal sponsor for grant opportunities if needed. The Foundation was not offering to provide the full amount of money needed but could direct the Village to appropriate contacts and guide the Village through grant opportunities. Committee members stated that the Foundation has done trails near Geauga Hospital and in other communities and has staff experienced in state, local,

and federal grants and grant writing. It was also noted that the Foundation works beyond the park system within Geauga County.

Council again discussed the Bell Road path issues raised by residents. Cavanagh stated strong opposition to placing any path on the cemetery side and preferred the north side of Bell if the project moves forward. Council noted that many neighbors seemed opposed, with cost being a major issue, and asked about ballot placement; the ordinance was up for a third reading. The Engineer was asked for more detailed information about trees, fences, and right-of-way impacts so Council could answer residents' questions. The Engineer said a quick review showed that the proposed five-foot extension would keep the project well within the right-of-way, that the tamarack tree appeared close to the right-of-way or on the residential side but would not be affected by a five-foot path on the south side, and that he did not see fences inside the right-of-way based on aerial review.

The Solicitor was asked about bikes, shared use, and the Ohio Revised Code. It was suggested that the Village website could provide information or links, though Council would have to consider whether prior legal research protected by attorney-client privilege should be released. Council discussed whether a five-foot path could or should permit bikes, e-bikes, and scooters. It was stated that Class 1 and Class 2 e-bikes are permitted on shared-use paths, while Class 3 e-bikes are not, and that e-bikes and scooters could create safety concerns on a five-foot pathway. A question was raised whether the Village could create an ordinance making the path walking-only or requiring people to walk bikes, but concerns were raised about state law and enforceability. Council also discussed historical concerns related to the Cotesworth property, including its century-home status and local history. Committee members reiterated that if a path proceeds, the north side was preferred by at least some members.

ADMINISTRATIVE AND TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE: The Committee first thanked the Mayor for providing a structured event statement for the tentative park event. The committee stated that this would help Council understand staffing and budgeting needs and would provide a tool to review events after completion to determine whether the event accomplished what it was intended to do and whether it should be repeated or changed.

Berger made a motion to appoint Phyllis Marino as a citizen member of the Administrative and Technology Committee, seconded by Bell. Voice vote – ayes, all. Motion carried.

The committee then reported on amendments to the Chain of Command Policy adopted January 20th. The policy provided that Building Department staff would report directly to the Mayor. Because a new administrative assistant in the Building Department reports to the Fiscal Officer, the committee proposed amending the Chain of Command policy to reflect accordingly. **Berger made a motion to amend the document for the Chain of Command to reflect that the Building Department Administrative Assistant reports to the Fiscal Officer, seconded by Porter. Voice vote – ayes, all. Motion carried.**

The committee distributed an agenda for the July 18th Council retreat. The agenda tentatively included an outside expert on organizational behavior for one hour and added a fourth hour for strategic planning and development of a formal plan for the Village.

The committee also thanked the Chief for completing all listed technology work in Council chambers. The Chief reminded Council and the public to speak loudly and clearly into the new microphone and

explained that members of the audience would need to come forward into the microphone pickup area to be heard on recordings or live streams.

The committee discussed the Village Hall basement project. The stated purpose was to consolidate administrative staff in one location, because the nexus of administrative activity is at Village Hall. The basement had not been updated since approximately 1978 and needed paint, carpeting, new ceiling tiles, and lights to make it suitable for the building department staff. A quote from J&K in the amount of \$26,980 was discussed for carpeting, offices, painting, new ceiling, and stripping remaining tile floors. A separate \$13,400 lighting and ceiling-related portion was discussed as potentially being partially offset by a Northeast Ohio Public Energy Council (NOPEC) grant of because it involved energy-related lighting upgrades and ceiling work.

Berger made a motion for the Village Hall basement update in the amount of \$26,980 along with the lighting update, seconded by Porter. Voice vote – ayes, all. Motion carried.

During discussion, the Mayor opposed the project stating that it was not in the best interest of the residents. He stated that the current Building Department office allows a resident to walk about thirty steps from a car to a counter, while moving the office downstairs would require stairs. He compared the current 440-square-foot office with five windows to a 160-square-foot basement office with one window, and he raised safety concerns about an upset person entering the basement office.

The committee then provided conceptual sketches and schematics of a possible future Village Hall addition, emphasizing that they represented only hopes and dreams, not an approved plan. The concept would add a similarly sized structure to the back of the existing building, short of the porch area, with an informal estimate of \$600,000 to \$700,000. The committee presented the plans to spur strategic planning discussions about what the Village campus might look like in five, ten, or twenty-five years. The next Administrative and Technology Committee meeting is set for Monday, July 20th at 7:00 a.m.

After the report, Council discussed possible future uses of the existing Building Department offices if administrative staff were to move to Village Hall. Ideas included record retention storage, possible Street Department space, with a locker or shower facility using one of the restrooms. Council agreed that no immediate changes should be made to the vacated offices until it is clear the basement arrangement will work. The Building Committee noted that new software should reduce in-person Building Department traffic by allowing many permit applications and payments to be handled online, though some larger drawings for ARB matters may still come in person. Council also discussed the need to ensure permanent records remain in a location that is not damp, dirty, or otherwise unsuitable.

ORDINANCES AND RESOLUTIONS:

The committee attempted to appoint Phyllis Marino as a citizen member of the Administrative and Technology Committee. The Solicitor advised that the Administrative and Technology Committee was not one of the committees currently permitted to have resident members; the existing permitted committees were Public Utilities, Properties, Safe Bicycle and Pedestrian Transport, and Streets. Council then considered an ordinance amendment that would include the Administrative and Technology Committee among committees that may have citizen members. Berger introduced an ordinance amending Section 220.05 (a) of the Village of South Russell's codified ordinance to allow for Council to appoint resident or non-resident members to the Administration & Technology

Committee, a standing committee of Council and declaring an emergency. Berger made a motion to waive readings, seconded by Porter. Roll Call – ayes, all. Motion carried. Berger made a motion to adopt, seconded by Porter. Roll call – ayes, all. Motion carried. **ORD 2026-42**

The ordinance concerning the path levy was listed on the agenda for a third reading. Considering resident comments, Council discussed whether to proceed with the third reading or table the matter until the July meeting to allow more resident feedback. Council noted that the deadline to submit the levy to the Geauga County Board of Elections for the November ballot is the beginning of August. Given the tight timeline, any problems with the legislation would require a special meeting with five members present.

Berger made a motion to table the third reading of the ordinance declaring it necessary to levy a tax in excess of the ten mill limitations and declaring an emergency, seconded by Cavanagh. Voice vote – ayes, all. Motion carried.

Cavanagh introduced an ordinance amending section 1024.09 of the Village of South Russell's Codified Ordinances to provide for inspection and cleaning of septic systems within the Village to be administered through Geauga Public Health's Operation and Maintenance Program and declaring an emergency. Cavanagh made a motion to waive readings, seconded by Porter. Roll call – ayes, all. Motion carried. Cavanagh made a motion to adopt, seconded by Porter. Roll call – ayes, all. Motion carried. **ORD 2026-43**

Berger introduced an ordinance amending the 2026 appropriations, Cemetery Fund increasing expenses \$5,000; General Fund increasing other expenses \$41,200; Street Maintenance Fund increasing expenses \$270,000; Safety Fund increasing other expenses \$4,520; Park Fund increasing expenses \$8,000; Income Tax Fund increasing expenses \$271,000; and Bell Road East Fund decreasing expenses \$1,000,000 and declaring an emergency. Berger made a motion to waive readings, seconded by Cavanagh. Roll call – ayes, all. Motion carried. Berger made a motion to adopt, seconded by Porter. Roll call – ayes, all. Motion carried. **ORD 2026-44**

Berger introduced an ordinance transferring \$270,000 from the Income Tax Fund to the Street Maintenance Fund and \$1,000 to the Park Fund, and declaring an emergency. Berger made a motion to waive readings, seconded by Cavanagh. Roll call – ayes, all. Motion carried. Berger made a motion to adopt, seconded by Cavanagh. Roll call – ayes, all. Motion carried. **ORD 2026-45**

Cavanagh introduced an ordinance to de-certifying \$1,000,000 in grant revenue for Bell Road East, 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 Porter. Roll call – ayes, all. Motion carried. **ORD 2026-46**

Berger introduced an ordinance certifying \$100,000 in additional Income Tax Revenue, and declaring an emergency. Berger made a motion to waive readings, seconded by Cavanagh. Roll call – ayes, all. Motion carried. Berger made a motion to adopt, seconded by Cavanagh. Roll call – ayes, all. Motion carried. **ORD 2026-47**

PAYMENT REGISTER: Berger made a motion to ratify the May 29, 2026, Payment Register in the amount of \$19,033.49 and approve the June 15, 2026, payment register in the amount of \$229,327.94, seconded by Porter. Voice vote – ayes, all. Motion carried.

NEW/OTHER:

Regarding replacement cleaning services for the Village campus buildings, two companies bid approximately \$362 and \$367 per month, while another bid approximately \$1,900 per month. A preferred company was unable to accommodate the Village. The service would be provided once per week on the weekends. Council agreed that the matter would be addressed at the July 13th Building Committee meeting after discussion with the Fiscal Officer and Police Chief about options.

EXECUTIVE SESSION:

At 9:58 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 and inviting the Mayor, Fiscal Officer, Police Chief, and Solicitor, seconded by Porter. Voice vote – ayes, all. Motion carried.

Council reconvened at 10:08 p.m.

Berger made a motion to acknowledge the resignation of Officer DiMaria, seconded by Bell. Voice vote – ayes, all. Motion carried.

Bell made a motion to acknowledge the resignation of Officer Kimery seconded by Cavanagh. Voice vote – ayes, all. Motion carried.

Bell made a motion to approve the Chief advertising for two full-time and one part-time open positions in the Police Department, seconded by Porter. Voice vote – ayes, all. Motion carried.

Adjournment: Being that there was no further business before Council Bell made a motion to adjourn at 10:09 p.m., seconded by Rensel. Voice vote – ayes, all. Motion carried.



William G. Koons, Mayor



Danielle Romanowski, Fiscal Officer

Prepared by: Christy Troyer