RECORD OF PROCEEDINGS
REGULAR COUNCIL MEETING
MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 21, 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, Street Commissioner Young, Solicitor Matheney
VISITORS:	John Buda, Leaview Ln.; Meredith Sonby, Sheerbrook; Denise and Cassie Valerio, Auburn

The Mayor called the Regular Council meeting to order on Monday, September 21, 2026, and led the Pledge of Allegiance. The Fiscal Officer read the roll. **Porter made a motion to approve the minutes of September 8, 2026, Regular Council meeting, seconded by Cavanagh. Voice vote – ayes, all. Motion carried.**

Chief Rizzo introduced Vince Valerio, describing more than 30 years of law enforcement experience, including service with Mantua Village, the Geauga Park District, Russell Township and, as a part-time officer from 1999 to 2011, South Russell. The Mayor appointed Valerio to the full-time police officer position effective October 1, 2026. **Canton made a motion to confirm the appointment of Vince Valerio (effective 10-1-2026) as a full-time Patrol Officer with the South Russell Village Police Department, seconded by Cavanagh. Voice vote – ayes, all. Motion carried.** The Mayor administered the oath to Valerio.

MAYOR'S REPORT: The Mayor provided information about the annual Veterans' Breakfast and noted that written comments and thoughts on the upcoming budget process were distributed to Council. The Mayor stated he would not be present at the Budget Work Session and invited Council to call with any questions.

FISCAL OFFICER REPORT: The Fiscal Officer distributed her report. She reminded Council that the Budget Work Session is Monday, September 28th, at 6:00 p.m. She provided an analysis of income tax collections, noting that although collections have been slightly down this year compared to last year's unusually high figures, September receipts totaled $186,000 versus $139,000 last September, marking the highest September on record. She indicated collections are making a bounce back, though the year may not end as strongly as last year, which was significantly higher than a typical year.

The Fiscal Officer reported that Mrs. Harvey, who previously donated the butterfly garden, wished to contribute ongoing funds for maintenance. Mrs. Harvey recognized that ongoing costs of donated projects are typically borne by the Village. The Finance Committee is considering whether to establish a broader park fund with designated sub-purposes and is still working through how to set up the fund for donations.

FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT: The Finance Committee met on September 17th. The next Finance Committee meeting is scheduled for October 15th at 9:00 a.m. The Finance Committee also reminded Council to consider the five-year plan during the budget meeting next Monday night, identifying opportunities the Village might pursue over the next five years.

SOLICITOR REPORT: Nothing to report.

STREET COMMISSIONER: The Street Commissioner reported on maintenance at Rarick Cemetery, stating that staff have cleaned approximately 70 headstones and will resume work when weather allows. He mentioned a potential access waiver from the Cotesworth property for access to the cemetery, indicating the caretaker was willing to sign a waiver, though access could proceed with or without one. He discussed results of the cemetery survey confirming fences and corners are in line, with an offset pin placed due to a collapsed retaining wall at the southwest corner. He noted the cemetery footprint is slightly smaller than initially thought, by about a foot on the rear line, and raised the question of whether to pull fallen trees fully onto Village property for cleanup or to stop at the property line.

The Street Commissioner stated he would refresh fencing replacement quotes to get current pricing and scheduling. On headstone repairs, he described a plan to use a stone epoxy/caulk consistent with National Monuments recommendations and citing Federal Monument maintenance guidelines. Questions were raised about the Village's authority to repair privately owned headstones, with the Solicitor indicating a need to review rules and regulations related to correcting dilapidated conditions. The Fiscal Officer recalled a motion passed last year allowing certain cemetery maintenance, but she couldn't recall the precise details. Cavanagh previously attempted to contact two families with descendants in the area last year but received no responses. Porter confirmed that there is money in the cemetery budget for such fixes. It was also noted that there remains a possible burial pursuant to an agreement allowing the widow of a former mayor to be buried next to him.

The Street Commissioner provided an explanation of the proposed brine program for winter road maintenance. He explained that the brine process improves on the slower process of traffic crushing rock salt to form chemical slush. This approach is expected to produce faster melting results, reduce plowing needs in certain conditions by moving snow off the roadway into the ditch, and shorten turnaround and cycle times, reducing waste. In response to questions about water quality and vegetation, the Street Commissioner stated that surrounding jurisdictions typically see between a 5 and 30 percent reduction in salt detected in aquifers, and that groundwater impacts to roadside trees would be no greater than currently observed. Because brine application reduces the amount of rock salt left on roads after snowfall, it lowers runoff into ditches, storm systems, and aquifers and allows better control of light snow and heavy frost events through pre-wetting, thereby reducing residual rock salt on the roadway.

Regarding equipment, the Street Commissioner proposed acquiring a brine machine capable of making 3,000 gallons per hour, with production limited by non-city water supply flow. Brine would be transferred to storage tanks, and, per the grant, two tailgate tanks and spinner assemblies with misting nozzles would be installed on two trucks, each carrying 150 gallons. Existing truck computer systems are being unified and calibrated; the brine equipment can be added to selected trucks now and expanded later, although future additions may not be grant-eligible. Each brine tank and tailgate spreader is approximately $12,000 and compatible with current controllers, including an older truck upgraded last year, which will be able to run liquid.

The grant will cover $74,000, including the brine maker, a 5,000-gallon storage tank, two tailgate spreaders and tank assemblies for application, and a salinity meter mounted on the column for batch verification. The salinity meter will be used to double-check the brine

concentration before every batch transfer to avoid misapplication, potentially resulting in water being applied and ice forming on the road. When asked about housing the equipment, the Street Commissioner stated the brine machine would be installed at the back east-southeast corner of the salt storage facility under the short-side overhang, with water available near the old well and a frost-proof spigot planned. Truck flow will be organized to minimize backing, with dedicated movement for filling brine, fueling, and loading salt to reduce accident risk.

Explaining the brine process, he likened the machine to a coffee pot: water filters through real salt, collects in a tank, and remains in suspension within the 5,000 gallon tank. The tank will be cycled monthly year-round to maintain suspension.

The Street Commissioner confirmed the grant application was submitted and the grant was awarded. Council now needs to accept it. The Fiscal Officer clarified it is a reimbursement grant requiring upfront payment by the Village, completion of one quarter's work before the first reimbursement request, and strict adherence to reporting: four quarterly reports, two semiannual technical reports, a final fiscal report, and a final technical report. She further cautioned that such a grant bears the risk of losing funds if any report is missed. The Fiscal Officer emphasized the need to meet deadlines and remain on top of submissions. Porter noted October 1st as the next quarter, while the Fiscal Officer indicated reporting would begin after implementation; the Street Commissioner anticipated activity after January. It was confirmed the project was not budgeted for the current year. The Street Commissioner indicated scheduling discussions would occur after January 1st, and acknowledged the need to incorporate this into budget plans. He affirmed salt in ditches impacts storm water, and that this program addresses storm water engineering concerns.

The Fiscal Officer relayed a recommended timeline from a summary, indicating all equipment purchase, installation, operations, and grant-related work should be completed by August 31, 2027, with the final closing report due about October 15, 2027, based on a 35-day reporting requirement. All grant-related paperwork must be retained for five years after project completion, and personal administrative expenses are not reimbursed. The Street Commissioner reported neighboring communities have used similar grants for a variety of purposes including truck blades. Some already operate brine programs. Moreland Hills uses brine, Chagrin Falls uses a small brine program, and Russell does not. He added that Orange Village has some usage and drew on his prior experience at Pepper Pike, where brine has been used for approximately 25 years.

Addressing past alternative additives, he acknowledged "beet juice" discussions and cautioned that brine is not a cure-all but a tool requiring proper training and application to avoid misuse at incorrect temperatures. He identified the brine program as a budget item for next year and affirmed the quoted costs include installation, with only minor facility items like a water line. Existing truck controllers were already compatible. He noted this planning allows for advance preparation, expressed that having brine this year would have been beneficial given current salt conditions, and estimated typical returns in one to three years, contingent on personnel training and consistent application.

STREET COMMITTEE REPORT: The next Street Committee meeting is scheduled for Thursday, October 1st at 5:30 p.m.

BUILDING COMMITTEE REPORT: The Building Committee reported that it will review the renewal of the DAGG Inspection Services revised contract at its meeting on Wednesday, September 23rd, at 8:00 a.m. The Planning Commission met on September 10th and approved two changes without opposition: Jackson Grey Jewelers is expanding its space by twice the amount due to an adjacent vacancy, and O'Neill Landscaping is taking over office space that was office use and is now commercial.

POLICE CHIEF REPORT: The Police Chief expressed appreciation regarding the successful efforts to hire and onboard new personnel and stated he had no further report.

SAFETY COMMITTEE REPORT: The Safety Committee will meet on Wednesday, September 23rd , at 9:00 a.m. at the Police Station.

HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE REPORT: The Committee met on September 14th and discussed healthcare costs, noting significant inflation pressures. Medical Mutual has proposed a 4.49% increase for next year and is offering a discounted rate if the Village agrees to a no-shop arrangement, potentially reducing the increase to between 1 and 3%. The committee observed that a similar approach previously resulted in about a 1% increase, which was favorable, and recommended accepting Medical Mutual's no-shop offer for 2027. It was noted the Village's plan remains grandfathered from before the Affordable Care Act, with rates based on the Village's employee pool rather than the general population, and current average market increases are around 12%. Renewal occurs annually, with Medical Mutual controlling whether a no-shop option is offered in future years. The Fiscal Officer added that when the Village does shop, Medical Mutual is usually the lowest or second lowest. **Berger made a motion to approve accepting the no-shop offer of Medical Mutual for the 2027 healthcare program, seconded by Bell. Voice vote – ayes, all. Motion carried.**

PROPERTIES COMMITTEE REPORT: The Committee reported replacing a memorial tree for former Mayor Young. **Cavanagh made a motion to approve the purchase of a three and a half foot Brandywine Maple Tree in the amount of $390 as a replacement for the tree planted in memory of former Mayor Young, seconded by Canton. Voice vote – ayes, all.** The next Properties Committee meeting is scheduled for September 28, 2026, at 9:00 a.m.

Discussion focused on landscape planning for the Village campus corner lots and the need for another meeting to solidify plans. Further discussion was needed regarding perennial plantings set back about 20 feet on a mound, similar to park landscaping. Members emphasized the necessity of a sketched plan and ongoing maintenance for any new plantings, including watering and feeding. Timing concerns were raised due to the end of the year, with consensus to address decisions at the next Properties meeting.

Concerns were raised about two dead trees on Village properties, one near the Police Department posing a risk on Bell Road, and one at the former rental property potentially affecting a neighboring property. A request was made to address these.

There was discussion about the concrete driveway in front of the salt structure, with the lowest quote from CMG coming in at $68,000. With the gap between the asphalt and the concrete, perhaps the concrete should be installed this year. The Fiscal Officer cautioned that roughly $70,000 was not currently budgeted and that transfers and a budget amendment would be necessary if Council were to pursue this project this year.

The Street Commissioner advised against relying on recycled asphalt grindings due to compaction concerns and recommended a temporary, unpinned concrete fill to bridge the elevation variance and prevent snowplow blade damage. He estimated needing approximately three yards of concrete costing about $1,000. He indicated the work could be performed in-house within about two hours and completed before snowfall. He explained that the temporary concrete would not be pinned to the existing slab so it could be removed when the roadway is later replaced; future work would include drilling and tying rebar to pin new concrete to the existing slab.

Porter suggested budgeting $70,000 for 2027, bidding the project, and avoiding rushed work late in the season, which, supported the recommendation to implement the temporary fix now and pursue the permanent solution next year. It was agreed no motion was necessary for the approximately $1,000 temporary patch.

PARK COMMITTEE: The committee reported the Fall Festival was canceled, and significant work had gone into planning. Thanks were extended to the committee members, staff, volunteers for work related to the Fall Festival, including paperwork and contracts. A broader conversation was raised about whether communities and schools are scaling back these festivals due to fatigue and whether such events should continue annually or shift to every other year.

Parks Committee met last week and discussed several items. On September 10th, an Eagle Scout project was presented involving installation of kestrel boxes and he proposed installation of one box in the park near Bell Road, placed in an open area rather than next to trees. Concerns about impacts on small birds were addressed with explanations that kestrels are natural predators and consistent with the ecosystem. The Parks Committee gave its nod of approval, and the matter will next go to the Properties Committee.

The Fiscal Officer asked about the disposition of the chips, cookies, and water purchased for the canceled Fall Festival. It was discussed that the water should be retained for the Emergency Plan, and potentially the chips and cookies could be donated to local charities, to include the Fall Festival at Gurney Elementary School, A Dad's Club, and/or the Geauga County Veterans' Food Pantry. **Cavanagh made a motion to donate the chips and cookies and retain the water for Village emergency use and designate charities such as Veteran's and the Dad's Club, seconded by Canton. Voice vote – ayes, all. Motion carried.**

Cavanagh reported an inquiry regarding ADA access to the playground. Current access is not impossible, but there is no dedicated hard surface or semi-hard surface pad. Measured distances indicate 150 feet from the pavilion to the playground and 180 feet from the playground to the parking lot. She recommended pursuing options to improve access and stated the matter will be discussed further, noting Parks Committee has no upcoming scheduled meetings and that Building Committee or Parks Committee coordination will be needed. Discussion also focused on the proposed new toddler playground. It was noted that Rensel has been researching age-appropriate equipment options and that families are enthusiastic about the initiative.

Berger indicated that signage delineating the proposed boundaries was prepared and will be posted to solicit public viewing and feedback. The project is intended to be funded through private donations. The Finance Committee, with the Solicitor's assistance, is reviewing sample

donation policies to formalize how funds will be accepted and used for this and other projects, including conditions under which designated donations may be accepted or declined. Berger emphasized the need to finalize a donation policy to address donor questions about terms, conditions, and contingencies in the event the project does not proceed. In particular, there is a proposed $25,000 donation to initiate the toddler playground. The plan is to establish the policy, engage potential contributors, and aim for sufficient funding by spring to advance the project.

PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMITTEE REPORT: Porter discussed the Enbridge gas line project. He stated that the Village received nine questions from the Chagrin Lakes Homeowners' Association (HOA) regarding the Enbridge project and explained that the project involves the proposed installation of an eight-inch medium-pressure gas line along both sides of Bell Road, generally from Alderwood to Route 306. He noted that the yellow flags seen along Bell Road are related to this project and that the work appears to be located within the Village right-of-way. Porter stated that the Village intends to use its codified ordinances and permitting process to review the project and that a pre-construction meeting with Enbridge is scheduled for Friday, September 25th at 9:30 a.m.

Porter stated that he and Cavanagh plan to attend the meeting with Enbridge and ask questions on behalf of the Village and residents. He explained that the Village has received plans from Enbridge and that the Engineer also has questions. Porter said some of the residents' questions relate to Enbridge's prior settlement with the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio, which involved exposed pipelines and dead-end pipelines that were not found. He explained that although that settlement did not involve the Village, it raises concerns because the Village has stormwater and sanitary lines along Bell Road and does not want boring or construction activity to damage those lines. Porter stated that the Village does not want to discover a problem after the fact through bubbles coming to the surface, stormwater problems, sanitary issues, or other damage.

Porter reported that the Village will insist upon a permit for the Enbridge project and will rely on the Engineer, the Street Commissioner, the Building Department, and possibly the Chief to help monitor the work. He stated that the Engineer should be the lead representative for Council during the project because of the technical nature of the work. The permit would involve the Building Department because of the Village's permitting process, and the Street Commissioner would be involved because the project is located along the roadway. The Chief may also be involved if the project affects traffic, road closures, or public safety.

There was discussion about whether the Village can require Enbridge to address private well and groundwater concerns. Porter stated that the Village has not hired a hydrogeologist and that many residents in the affected area are on wells, so the Village is concerned about disturbing groundwater. He said the Village would ask Enbridge whether a written well protection plan and written construction incident plan will be provided. Porter also stated that the Village will ask when the project is expected to begin and end because no definite start or completion date had been provided in the materials submitted to the Village.

Visitor Meredith Sonby asked what the Village's response would be if Enbridge were to begin work immediately before the questions were answered. Porter responded that Enbridge would need to apply for the required permit and that the Village may need time to consider that permit before granting or denying it. The Solicitor stated that she would need to verify the status of

the permit and the limits of the Village's authority. She also explained that while the Village may not be able to charge a building permit fee, there may be other requirements, fees, bonding, restoration requirements, or storm sewer televising that could be considered.

It was mentioned that the Engineer was unavailable to attend the meeting, and Council discussed the importance of having the Engineer or another representative from Verdantas present for the pre-construction meeting. Rensel stated that the technical concerns are serious and that the Village should not leave the matter to chance, especially given issues that have occurred in other communities. Council discussed the need for an emergency plan, clear subcontractor information, and confirmation that those working on the project know what to do if a gas line issue occurs. The Chief clarified that, based on his review, the project appears to involve supplementing the existing infrastructure and adding an eight-inch line to increase capacity, rather than simply replacing the existing gas line. Council discussed that additional information is needed from Enbridge, including whether the new line will tie into subdivisions along Bell Road or serve as a pass-through line.

Sonby said it would be helpful for HOA presidents to communicate proactively with residents because there has been confusion about the yellow flags and what to expect. The Mayor asked whether information about the Friday meeting could be posted on the website, and Council discussed moving the meeting to Village Hall in case more residents attend. The Mayor also asked that the HOA help share the meeting information with residents.

Porter then reported on the United States Geological Survey (USGS) contract. He stated that the contract monitors water levels in approximately six wells throughout the Village and must be renewed by September 30th if the Village wishes to continue. Porter explained that the contract monitors water quantity only, not water quality. He stated that the Public Utilities Committee recommends that the Village not continue the contract because the Village has not had a significant water concern since the drought around 2008, and residents can test their own water quality if desired. Porter stated that the cost is approximately $15,000 per year for 5 years, or about $75,000 total. No motion was made to continue the agreement.

Porter next reported on the Hazelwood storm sewer project. He stated that the Engineer has prepared a timeline for the project and will move forward with preparation for bidding and commencement of the work. Porter reported that the project is expected to begin this year and must be completed by June 19th of the following year. He stated that the project will go out for bid and that December 7th was discussed as a possible project start date. Porter indicated that Council should expect to see the project moving forward toward bidding in the next month.

Porter explained that stormwater from the Village park and surrounding areas flows toward 29 Woodside and can overwhelm the ditch and affect the road. He stated that the Village attempted to address the issue four or five years ago and those improvements helped, but the problem had returned. The Street Commissioner explained that water crosses Forest Dr. and flows into the ditch across the street, but because of an existing pipe under a tree, water can back up and move through nearby yards instead of remaining in the intended drainage channel.

Porter stated that the estimated cost of the Woodside project is approximately $20,000, including about $12,000 in engineering. The Street Commissioner explained that the proposed project would create a small floodplain or retention area with an outflow structure to restrict how quickly water leaves the area while still allowing it to drain. Porter stated that part of the

reason for Village involvement is that some of the stormwater comes from the Village park and because the issue affects the roadway. He stated that approximately seven or eight homes are affected by the drainage concern. Porter reported that the Public Utilities Committee recommends moving forward with the Woodside project and having an easement prepared in favor of the Village so that the project can be maintained in the future. Porter asked the Mayor to contact the homeowner about the easement.. The Solicitor was asked to draft an easement for the property, subject to the homeowner's review.

The Mayor reported that the Lake Louise Homeowners Association has proposed either October 12th or October 22nd to meet with the Public Utilities Committee regarding electrical power issues. He stated that the HOA board is considering the dates and will let the Village know which date they prefer. The Mayor also reported that residents of Silver Springs would like to meet with the committee regarding water flowing through their yards from the Maple Hill area. Porter stated that the committee would be willing to discuss the Silver Springs issue at the Public Utilities Committee meeting on October 1st at 4:30 p.m.

SAFE BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN TRANSPORT COMMITTEE REPORT:
Bell announced the next committee meeting is scheduled for Friday, October 2, 2026, at 7:30 a.m.

ADMINISTRATIVE TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE: Berger reported the committee met on September 14th, 2026, and the next meeting will be on October 12th or October 13th, 2026. The Fiscal Officer reported a training session with ADP regarding Sharepoint went well and questions are being addressed. Berger noted that a rug has been ordered which will be placed in front of Council tables to reduce sound bounce issues affecting the recording and broadcast of Council meetings.

ORDINANCES AND RESOLUTIONS:

Berger introduced an ordinance designating the Public Depository for the Village of South Russell for a five-year period and authorizing the Fiscal Officer to contract therefore and declaring an emergency. Berger made a motion to waive further 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 2026-65**

PAYMENTS REGISTER:
Berger made a motion to ratify the Payment List of September 15, 2026 in the amount of $93,381.91, seconded by Canton. Voice vote – ayes all. Motion carried.

NEW/OTHER BUSINESS:

Council discussed the Veterans Breakfast event approval and related process details. Berger stated that the November 9th Veterans Breakfast is approaching and that the administrative team needs direction regarding what is expected of them to make the event happen. He noted that a flyer had been prepared to invite veterans, but questions remained about the event process, responsibilities, registrations, database, attendance, and payment.

The Mayor explained that for the past several years, he has sent invitations to veterans using a database of approximately 75 names. Veterans respond to him, name tags are prepared, and the

Street Commissioner's staff put up the flags. Berger asked whether anything is expected of the administrative team and raised concerns that had been expressed about whether all attendees are Village residents and whether taxpayer funds are being used for non-residents. He asked whether the Veterans database should be maintained by the Village so that all South Russell Village veterans can continue to be invited in the future.

The Mayor stated that not everyone who attends is a South Russell resident. He explained that some invited guests have included speakers and guests from outside the Village, as well as people who assist veterans who cannot drive. He stated that the event usually has about 50 attendees, including approximately 40 South Russell veterans and about 10 additional attendees, such as wives, daughters, guest speakers, previous guest speakers, or caregivers. Porter stated that caregivers and guest speakers providing services should be welcome. Bell stated that while he supports the Veterans Breakfast, he has concerns about using taxpayer dollars for non-residents and believes the administrative staff should handle registrations and maintain the database, so the event is organized and the headcount is controlled. Cavanagh stated that when she helped with the Veterans Breakfast in the past, they did the best they could to contact veterans, including using phone numbers for those who did not have email or did not check their email. Cavanagh also stated that she has a record of the information and would be willing to help with it, although she did not want another job assigned to her.

The Fiscal Officer stated that if the Veterans Breakfast is a Village function, it should be handled in-house or at least have a clearly understood in-house process. She reported that the Village had contacted Sleepy Rooster to confirm availability, and although the restaurant is normally closed on Mondays, they were holding the date based on the assumption that the Village would be using it. The Fiscal Officer said the Village has a starting point for the Veteran's database from prior records and can use the website and TextMyGov to invite South Russell Village veterans.

Bell stated that he did not believe elected officials should bring spouses at taxpayer expense unless the spouse is a veteran or caregiver. Cavanagh agreed with that concern but also noted that some veterans need help coming into the event. Canton asked how it would work if he wanted to bring his wife but paid for her breakfast. Council discussed that the payment process would need to be determined and that the details should be clarified as part of the event process.

Porter stated that the goal is to make sure the Veteran's Breakfast continues beyond the current Mayor and Council as an established South Russell program recognizing veterans. He said the Village administrative staff should have the information necessary to continue the event in the future. Bell asked that the administrative staff confirm the event with Sleepy Rooster and begin taking RSVPs from veterans. The Fiscal Officer stated that she would confirm the date with Sleepy Rooster and then post the information.

Porter made a motion to approve the Veteran's Breakfast event for November 9, 2026, seconded by Cavanagh. Voice vote – ayes all. Motion carried.

ADJOURNMENT: Being that there was no further business before Council, Cavanagh made a motion to adjourn at 8:56 p.m., seconded by Porter. Voice vote – ayes, all. Motion carried.

William G. Koons, Mayor

Danielle Romanowski, Fiscal Officer

Prepared by: Christy Troyer