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## City Council

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## Summary

- Dozens of local activists chanted during the meeting to call for a ceasefire in Gaza. There was a [similar protest in council chambers on Oct. 30](#).
- Eagle Avenue bridge, a historic city landmark, is being demolished.
- The City Council Safety Committee is apparently reviewing some “pretty important” legislation on Wednesday. I have to imagine that it refers to either Ordinance 1250-2023, which establishes the 2024 Cleveland Youth Diversion Program, or Ordinance 1302 and 1303-2023, which relate to new collective bargaining agreements with the Fraternal Order of Police and Cleveland Police Patrolmen’s Association [*Editor’s note: Changes to the handling of police discipline in those contracts [may violate the consent decree](#)*].

## Follow-Up Questions

- How will council deal with these demonstrations going forward? They’ve been occurring pretty regularly, and this recent one comes amid talk of [changing the rules for the public comment period](#).
- What is the “important” being considered for Wednesday’s Safety Committee meeting?

## Notes

### Public comment

The public comment period was again dominated by activists calling for a ceasefire in Gaza. These demonstrations have been occurring regularly for the past few weeks. Dozens of residents attended this demonstration, eight of whom took the floor during the public comment period.

- The first public commenter was Basma Hamid. She called for America to stop sending money to Israel and shared ways she thought Cleveland could use that money. "Cleveland does not stand with Israel," she said. "Mayor Bibb, when you say that Cleveland stands for Israel, you are just speaking for yourself."
- Riley Petro, from the Party for Socialism and Liberation, spoke next. He complained about the Sept. 25 meeting [where fellow activist Chris Martin's microphone was cut off](#) while Martin was reading a list of council members and their campaign contributions. Petro had issues with the inability to address council members directly and with restrictions that only allow addressing the council as a whole. He then commented about the council not taking into discussion calls for the City of Cleveland to call for a ceasefire in Gaza.
- Next was Robin Beth Schaer, a Jewish-American woman who spoke to call for a ceasefire. "For many of us there is much learning and unlearning necessary to see this moment clearly," she said. She discussed her belief that she was raised on the "lie" of Israel's foundation. "As a Jew, it is not betrayal to lay Israel's history bare," she said. "All of this death and destruction in Gaza is the opposite of healing the world .... Think of all the lives that will never be led, the inventions and artwork we will never know, all the family lines erased." She also said of the war that: "We cannot bomb our way to safety."
- Graham Ball spoke next. He recalled the story of a Palestinian who came to a local high school and was his classmate. This person went to Egypt to study medicine but was killed last month by an Israeli airstrike, Ball said. Ball thanked Council Member Rebecca Maurer for [calling for a ceasefire](#). "I understand that many of you here are remaining silent because you are politicians and the age-old political wisdom is to avoid this subject at all costs. But I'm here to tell you that wisdom is outdated, the conversation has shifted, and your political calculus must change as well."
- Josiah Quarles spoke next. He focused on what he called a housing crisis in Cleveland. "We have to move with expediency and understand the value of human beings, their lives, and their values," he said.
- Lucie Rose Shiffman, a Jewish-American woman from Beachwood, spoke next. She also joined calls for a ceasefire. "I am here today because I believe in a future where all people, Jews, Muslims, and Palestinians, feel safe. I believe in a future where hostages are returned to their families and children are free to go to school and play outside."
- Akshai Singh, representing Starbucks Workers United, spoke next. They said they are a member of SWU and Democratic Socialists of America, and both organizations have issued calls for a ceasefire. They said they moved back to Cleveland from Pittsburgh following the terrorist attacks on the Tree of Life

Synagogue in that city. "Ethnic cleansing is not a Jewish value, nor does it secure the return of innocent Jews to their families, nor does it make Jewish people safer in this country," he said. "I thank Councilwoman Maurer, council's only Jewish member, for calling for a ceasefire."

- Dennis Ashton, a local activist, spoke next to condemn the homelessness situation in Cleveland. He said there are tents all over the city, but funding for homeless services is tied up in the city. "We can't even open a shelter for a woman and a kid sleeping in a car. If we report her, they're gonna take the kids," he said. He said he detests the slow pace of homelessness projects. He spoke about possibilities for a land bridge connecting downtown to Browns Stadium, but said no new homeless shelters have been built in three years. "That's a shame. It's a real shame."
- Brian Huser, a Jewish-American man from Shaker Heights, spoke to join calls for a ceasefire. He spoke on the Nakba, a term referring to the mass expulsion of Palestinians from parts of modern-day Israel in 1948. "I mention the Nakba because Israeli leaders are mentioning the Nakba, after decades of Nakba denial. They mention it aspirationally."
- The last speaker was Estelle Raskin, a Jewish-American woman from Ward 15 who also joined the call for ceasefire. "Anti-semitism is a real, lived experience, that is not, I repeat, that is not the voicing of dissent against systematic state violence." She condemned the council's rhetoric on what she viewed as a peace movement, saying that calling for a push for a ceasefire anti-semitic is "reprehensible."

At the end of the public comment period, there was a loud and persistent protest from the audience calling council to pass a [resolution](#) calling for a ceasefire. Council President Blaine Griffin ordered the council to continue business in spite of the demonstrations. The chanting continued through the entirety of the condolences, moment of silence and communications periods of council, which were not audible due to the noise.

### **First Reading of Emergency Ordinances**

- The demonstrations continued throughout the reading of the [emergency ordinances](#), making it impossible to understand most of the resolutions being read. However, according to the agenda, these were some ordinances read and referred to committee:
  - [1340-2023](#), which would authorize the Directors of Public Safety or Law to apply for grants issued under the STOP Violence Against Women Act. This money would be used to establish a sexual assault victim advocate position, to fund portions of the Cleveland Domestic Violence Program, and

enter contracts with the Cleveland Rape Crisis Center.

- [1343-2023](#), which provides funding for the Bedrock Development Project, also known as the Cleveland Riverfront Masterplan. This is a massive development project that seeks to redevelop the riverfront area on the eastern bank of the Cuyahoga River, by Tower City and the Flats. You can read more on the [details of this project](#) here.

At this point the demonstrations began to subside as demonstrators left the room. The room was almost entirely cleared out, with only council and a handful of individuals still in attendance.

## **Second Reading of Emergency Ordinances**

- Following this, second readings of emergency ordinances were read. Some ordinances passed include:
  - [1088-2023](#), paying the state of Ohio to demolish the Eagle Avenue bridge over the Cuyahoga River. This is the iconic green steel rail bridge, which has not been used in decades. It is in a serious state of disrepair and at risk of collapse. This ordinance follows a [public comment period](#) on the bridge's future held in July.
  - [1187-2023](#), which authorizes the city to apply for a grant from the U.S. Department of Transportation for the Reconnecting Cleveland I-90 Program. This is an initiative to overhaul parts of I-90, especially between East 9th Street and Carnegie Avenue, to better handle modern traffic needs.

## **Tabled Ordinances**

Next council read through a list of ordinances to table, meaning that exact legislation could not be considered again. Some of the legislation references former Mayor Frank Jackson's administration, showcasing that some of them have been languishing in council chambers for some time. (Jackson left office nearly two years ago.)

Most of the legislation dealt with minor administrative matters such as redesignating parks and local landmarks. Some examples include:

- [1223-13](#), which would have modified ordinances relating to the permit process for the planting or removal of trees as well as the property owner's responsibilities in maintaining those trees.

- [646-15](#), which would designate a commemorative day to celebrate the history of League Park and the Negro Baseball League.
- [177-2020](#), which would have change the name of “E.J. Kovacic Recreation Center,” located at 6250 S. Clair Ave., to “Muhammad Ali Recreation Center.”

There were 13 yeas to table those two pieces of legislation. Council Member Stephanie Howse-Jones was the only council member to vote ‘nay’ on tabling this legislation.

*[Editor’s note: Find the full breakdown in the [meeting minutes](#).]*

### **Miscellaneous council business**

Council Member Michael Polenesk reminded council members that, at 10 a.m. Wednesday, the Safety Committee will be reviewing “very important” legislation.

Next, Council Member Charles Slife spoke to implore council staff to review this evening’s recording and ensure an accurate transcript is available. This is due to difficulties hearing the ordinances read during the previously mentioned demonstrations.

The meeting ended with Howse-Jones speaking on her experiences with the Ashé Leaders Fellowship, which had its first national convention last week. This fellowship seeks to identify, support and amplify what the fellowship views as “emerging leaders” in racial and social justice. The convention visited the U.S.-Mexican border, touring a junction known as “Whiskey Eight,” where some tents and humanitarian supplies were located. She spoke on how the border fence was built 30 feet tall to intimidate migrants from crossing it.

She then spoke on how while she was there, a Border Patrol vehicle pulled up with a migrant mother and her child as passengers. “But the thing that really struck me was, they drop the mother and her child there, and that was it.” She said the government abandons people in the wilderness with no help. “They are legit just leaving people there with nothing. No bathroom, nothing to drink, nothing to eat. And I was like, what in the -- I just couldn’t grasp this.”

“One of the things they asked was that—please tell our story,” Howse-Jones said of the migrants. She said the experience left her with a desire to be more ambitious about affecting change.

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