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City Council

Documenter name: Karima McCree-Wilson

Agency: [Cleveland City Council](#)

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Summary

- After seven weeks of pro-Palestinian public comments and protests, council members did not pass a [resolution](#) calling for a ceasefire in Gaza *[Editor's note: This was council's last meeting of 2023]*.
- Council members acknowledged public concerns about [potential restrictions on public comment](#) and said they are working to improve the process.
- Several new members were appointed to the Commission on Black Women and Girls.

Notes

Council President Blaine Griffin called the meeting to order and began public comment.

Jenna Muhieddine from Ward 15 held up a [map of historic Palestine and today's Israel](#) and said Israel has violently stolen almost all of the land since its creation in 1948.

Audience members held up pictures that Muhieddine described as murdered and injured Gazans. She described what is happening in Gaza as a genocide. She said that council is hypocritical in [condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine](#) but not acknowledging that Israel has invaded Palestine and killed Palestinians.

She urged council to pass a resolution and said those who do not support a ceasefire resolution will not see another term in office.

Christopher Hudson from Ward 12 and the [Party for Socialism and Liberation \(PSL\)](#) condemned council's unwillingness to act and what he called the "criminal" obstruction of those calling on it to act. He said council has not considered three resolutions proposed by activists, has had members spout racist tropes about bombs and mobs, and attempted to suppress speech to the point of drawing a [First Amendment lawsuit](#).

[Editor's note: The lawsuit centers on an [incident in September](#) where Griffin stopped a public commenter from reading a list of council members who received money from a certain fund].

Hudson said that a Palestinian business in Ward 6 has been harassed and thousands have been killed in Gaza since activists started attending council meetings. He said that if Council Member Joe Jones wants to apologize, he should introduce one of the resolutions at this meeting. *[Editor's note: Jones said in a November committee meeting that the demonstrations at council's Monday night meetings [left him feeling unsafe and had him considering buying a gun](#). He later [offered an apology](#).]*

Kameron Damaska, from Ward 17 and the PSL, said that the heightened police presence at City Council meetings comes at a time when Cleveland [police are understaffed and recruitment is suffering](#). He asked what the reason is for the increased presence and attributed it to comments made by Council Member Jones. He said the police have been mobilized to suppress political participation.

Basma Hamid from Ward 13 said men, women and children are being killed every minute in Palestine and Gaza. She said no one has the guts to condemn these actions. She urged council to pass a resolution calling for a ceasefire.

Julia Medina said she is concerned about the United States using resources to fund the killing of civilians. She said there are people in the community who need services that there is no money for. She said that Cleveland doesn't stand with Israel, but with Palestine and America.

Dr. Syed Shoaib Shah from Shaker Heights said that council passed a resolution in 2020 declaring racism a public health crisis [but questioned what progress the city has made](#). Shah, CEO at the [Salaam Clinic](#) in Ward 7, said grocery and housing costs have increased. He said that there needs to be innovation.

Brian Duplaisir from Ward 15 said that his wife is Palestinian and together they have two Palestinian American daughters. He said their kids may not be able to ever visit their ancestral lands. He said that the council's silence makes people think it's OK to be violent toward Palestinians. He asked council members to make a statement that makes people feel as though they are safe and belong in Cleveland.

Dana Bye from Ward 15 is a third-year student at Cleveland State University College of Law. She said that by implementing public comment in 2021, council opened up an

avenue for residents to bring concerns directly to council members.

She is concerned that some council members are seeking to limit what can be said in public comment. She said the voices that are uncomfortable to hear are the ones council needs to hear the most. *[Editor's note: The [proposal](#), which council has not yet approved, would have limited comments to items currently under council's consideration].*

Michelle Jackson from Buckeye-Shaker said that [Issue 38](#) came within an eyelash of being passed. Council [stated after the Nov. 7 election](#) that they needed to do more to engage with residents, then had a meeting about neutering public comment, Jackson said. She said that carefully crafted [legislation for public comment](#) was declined in 2021, and, instead, council [created a rule](#) that some members are now reconsidering.

Chance Zurub, a Cleveland Heights resident and a staff attorney at the [Council on American-Islamic Relations \(CAIR\)](#) in Cleveland, also spoke. He said that he has been organizing protesters and meeting with council members. On three separate occasions, activists wrote resolutions, and in seven weeks there has been no action taken, he said.

He said that he doesn't accept Council Member Jones' apology. He said any apology without offering a ceasefire is not substantial. He said the death toll [in Gaza is nearing 20,000](#). He said he has lost 30 people in his family.

He continued speaking after Griffin called his time, and protestors started chanting "resolution now" and "free, free Palestine."

The following appointments were announced and approved:

- Isabella McKnight to the City Planning Commission
- Stephanie Howse-Jones, Dameyonna Willis, Dr. Linda Bradley, Taneisha Fair and Anastasia Sakairoun were appointed to the [Cleveland Commission on Black Women and Girls](#) *[Editor's note: Signal Cleveland [reported in June](#) that the commission, approved in 2022, was off to a slow start].*

Condolences and congratulatory resolutions were read.

Griffin recognized Tedd Ginn Sr. and the Glenville Tarblooders for their second back-to-back state championship in high school football.

He acknowledged Mike Nelson, who is retiring this year from Cleveland Municipal Court.

Griffin also acknowledged [Omega Psi Phi fraternity](#). As the members joined him in the front of the room, and as Mayor Justin Bibb greeted them, attendees began chanting, “Mayor Bibb you can’t hide, we charge you with genocide,” “Free, free Palestine,” and “Ceasefire now.” After fraternity members finished gathering, Griffin said “thank you” and the chanting stopped.

Bibb and Director of Public Safety Karrie Howard joined Griffin in recognizing the fraternity members. A group member said that their values are to promote friendship, manhood, scholarship and perseverance.

[Emergency Ordinances](#) were read.

There were multiple ordinances referred for committee review regarding the [Department of Public Safety applying for grants](#), accounting services for Port Control, maintenance and repair of the roofs at Hopkins and Burke Lakefront Airports, and [declaring the American Gas Association Appliance Testing Laboratory a landmark](#). Legislation for seasonal employees for Public Works and the purchase of property insurance for Browns Stadium were also introduced.

[Legislation](#) for [ADAMHS](#) to provide social workers for the police co-responder program was read for the first time and passed.

Second reading emergency ordinances passed:

There were multiple road and public improvements projects, [amendments](#) to the revolving home loan fund for home repair for Southeast Side residents, and [legislation](#) about the [Exterior Paint Program](#).

There was legislation for [funding senior and family housing units](#), lifting the [maximum age](#) for eligibility as a first-time police trainee from 39 to 54, and [developing](#) the African American Cultural Garden.

Miscellaneous comments

Council Member Jenny Spencer said that even though council did not pass a ceasefire resolution this year, their hearts have been breaking. Too many civilian lives have been lost, Spencer said. She encouraged those reaching out to council to continue to share their stories. She said that she believes in the promise of the State of Israel, but its

increasingly right-wing government has been going in the wrong direction regarding Palestinian people. She said that U.S. financial support of Israel cannot be without conditions.

Council Member Charles Slife said he supports public comment and there were some differences between what was [originally proposed](#) and what was [adopted in 2021](#). He said he thinks that what council adopted is looser than what was first recommended. He said public comments in support of Palestinians are valid. He said people promoting their business or personal matters may not be.

He said public comment is a time for community members to address members of the executive branch as well, and that while the administration is not required by the charter to be present, he hopes they see the value in hearing from public commenters.

The meeting was adjourned around 8:30 p.m.

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