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City Council

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Summary

- The dispute in Cleveland City Council over whether or not to permit a gas station has led to some serious disagreement in the Madison Avenue community. Meanwhile, Council Member Charles Slife indirectly condemned the 10 speakers tonight as an organized effort that monopolized the conversation.
- Cleveland City Council's Safety Committee will meet Wednesday to discuss the recent phenomenon of "street takeovers" that have led to confusion and frustration among some Cleveland residents.
- Council Member Stephanie Howse Jones said [Cleveland's Police Monitoring Team](#) and the U.S. Department of Justice have expressed concerns that their criticism of the police division's evaluation and promotion procedure has not been addressed.

Follow-Up Questions

- What does the Madison Avenue community truly think of the proposed gas station?
- What are the specific deficiencies in CDP's evaluation and promotion processes?

Notes

The meeting began promptly about 7 p.m. on Sept. 30. Cleveland City Council chambers were a little more crowded than usual, with several rows full of spectators. Many were here to speak in support of [legislation](#) that would pave the way for turning a vacant CVS into a gas station on Madison Avenue near West Boulevard.

In attendance:

Council President Blaine Griffin, Ward 6

Joseph Jones, Ward 1

Kevin Bishop, Ward 2

Kerry McCormack, Ward 3

Deborah Gray, Ward 4

Richard Starr, Ward 5
Stephanie Howse-Jones, Ward 7
Michael D. Polensek, Ward 8
Anthony Hairston, Ward 10
Danny Kelly, Ward 11
Rebecca Maurer, Ward 12
Kris Harsh, Ward 13
Brian Kazy, Ward 16
Charles J. Slife, Ward 17

A quorum was present.

The meeting began with a moment of silence. Council President Griffin then warned members of the audience not to disrupt or interrupt the proceedings or they could be charged with a misdemeanor. He said if anyone does interrupt the meeting, officers would escort them out and the doors would be closed to keep them out.

“This is the first and only warning,” Griffin said.

This warning has been issued at recent meetings in response to [demonstrations](#) at City Council meetings, primarily concerning its stance on the conflict in Gaza.

PUBLIC COMMENT

All commenters spoke about a vacant CVS at Madison Avenue that is under consideration for rezoning. The rezoning proposal would allow the transition of the property into a gas station. The proposal has generated some controversy in the community, with members of the public voicing both support and dissent.

Tony Anderson from Ward 15, Kayla Keith from Ward 11, Marrena Edwards from Ward 18, Jacob Plumley from Ward 15, Hassan Alwan from Ward 15, Sandy Osso from Ward 15, Nancy Keith from Ward 11, Stephanie Honeycutt from Ward 11 and Delda Green from Ward 15, and Marcella Lee from Ward 15 all spoke in support of the new gas station.

There was a common sentiment that the gas station would provide an economic boon for the Madison Avenue community. Edwards and Plumley expressed a belief that the neighborhood was derelict and a new business could contribute to a revival. Keith said the neighborhood was underserved and this gas station would provide goods and services to a community lacking equitable access. Osso claimed much of the opposition

to the project stemmed from people who did not live in the neighborhood. The speakers received applause from a good portion of the audience.

No individuals spoke in opposition to the gas station. However, Council Member Charles Slife would later say during council's miscellaneous comments that two individuals signed up all 10 of tonight's speakers and said he feared the public comment sign-up was being monopolized by lobbying. Some members of the audience applauded his comments.

Reading of passed legislation

Among the readings of passed legislation:

One of the resolutions passed by council tonight joined U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown in urging CSX, a railroad company, to pull back from [controversial plans](#) to reduce train stops and staff at the Collinwood Rail Yard.

Introductions

State Rep. Terrence Upchurch was in attendance. Shanelle Smith Whigham, an executive vice president of KeyBank, and the [Local Initiatives Support Corporation \(LISC\)](#) team were introduced by Kerry McCormack. Council members praised their efforts. *[Editor's note: learn more about LISC and the recently approved public-private housing investment fund in [this Signal Cleveland meeting brief](#) based on Documenters' work.]*

Council President Blaine Griffin praised "Boots on the Ground," a [nonpartisan event](#) to encourage men, particularly Black men, to vote in the upcoming election.

Ward 8 Council Member Michael Polensek is seeking a report from the Cleveland chief of police on the [street takeovers](#) that occurred in Cleveland Saturday night, which Polensek called a "great concern" to City Council. This will be discussed at Wednesday's Safety Committee meeting.

Slife spoke on the public comment process. He said all 10 slots were signed up by only two individuals. "I think the spirit of this was never an organized lobbying effort," he said. He was referring to the speakers in support of the gas station. He said this process allows people to monopolize the conversation and blocked dissenters by filling out all 10 public comment slots.

Ward 1 Council Member Joe Jones expressed frustration with local gas stations, saying owners weren't taking care of their properties or cleaning up debris. Jones then expressed frustration that constituents don't understand all the work council members do. He then proposed a law that would mandate a restroom for men and women, saying gas stations in his community don't allow the public to use the restroom and people in his ward struggle to find open facilities.

Ward 7 Council Member Stephanie Howse-Jones spoke about the consent decree monitoring hearing held by U.S. Judge Solomon Oliver Jr. "Very, very enlightening." The Cleveland Police Monitoring Team is a panel established by federal authorities to monitor Cleveland's police reform and issue recommendations. Read more about the recent hearing [here](#) on Signal.

She said the monitoring team discussed its 2024 focus, which is on search and seizure, use of force, and crisis intervention. Judge Oliver complimented the city for its progress on departmental issues. The U.S. Department of Justice (DoJ), however, expressed concern that the City of Cleveland's personnel evaluation and promotion process is flawed. A 2021 report by the monitoring team also brought up these issues, and the DoJ also gave the city examples of these issues in 2022.

Howse-Jones said many of these issues are still unresolved. She did not go into specific detail on what exactly the city was deficient in, but she described the information and lack of progress as "troubling."

With that, the meeting was adjourned.

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