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## Committee of the Whole

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Agency: [Cleveland City Council](#)

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## Summary

- This was a long and busy meeting, covering 30+ pieces of legislation before they are voted on at the full council meeting later tonight. Tonight's is scheduled to be the last full council meeting of the year.
- Council members have concerns about hiring and vacancies across city departments, especially when those positions are budgeted for and the unused money rolls over to the next budget year.
- There are a number of projects taking place across the city in 2025, including housing, mixed-use projects, new trails and youth programming.

## Follow-Up Questions

- What is the Tax Incentive Review Council and how does it make its decisions? What does it mean for tax incentives to be terminated, as they were for the LaSalle Theater project?
- Stephanie Howse-Jones made a really compelling case, in my opinion, for the city to encourage private businesses (specifically downtown businesses) to contribute to youth employment programs like Youth Opportunities Unlimited (YOU). How many private businesses participate (not public entities or nonprofits), and how can the city push more of them to participate?

## Notes

This meeting began just a few minutes after the conclusion of a committee meeting focused on moving money — some from the city's [General Fund](#) — to [Gateway for upkeep at the ballpark and arena](#). I streamed the first part of the meeting on YouTube here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lnmSCZYrHLE>

The [agenda](#) wasn't published until shortly before the meeting began. Council President

Blaine Griffin (Ward 6) presided over the meeting and addressed each item on the agenda in no particular order. The committee signed off on the legislation.

**1328-2024:** The mayor of Shaker Heights and Cleveland Heights officials were present. **Applying for a clean water grant from the Ohio Department of Natural Resources for a project at Shaker Lakes**, which is in Cleveland Heights and Shaker Heights, but the parklands are owned by the City of Cleveland. The Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District will remove the dam and restore Doan Brook to its natural state. Lots of trees will be planted, and the cities of Shaker Heights and Cleveland Heights will build boardwalks and trails. This will not cost the City of Cleveland anything.

- Kerry McCormack (Ward 3) asked why Cleveland owns parks outside its borders, and if this property could be given to Shaker Heights or Cleveland Heights. The parklands were owned by the Rockefeller family and were gifted to the City of Cleveland. Overturning the wishes of the Rockefeller family can be done, but only with a complex legal process.
- If the grant is approved, the project will begin in 2026.

**1323-2024:** Permitting the Greek cultural garden to install a big stone artwork. It was originally planned in 1939, but wartime shortages prevented its construction, according to Cleveland Commissioner of Real Estate Susanne DeGennaro. There were no pictures available of the frieze, and there were no objections or questions from council. [Here is an article with a drawing of the frieze from 2022.](#)

**1048-2024:** Authorizing the City of Cleveland to contribute money to **construct a connector trail from Fairview Hospital** down [Old Lorain Road into the Metroparks](#).

**1240-2024:** Amending a contract agreement to **include the Metro West Development Corp. in the [Blanket Mills](#) mixed-use development project** in the Clark-Fulton neighborhood. It will have 60 apartments above storefront office space for Neighborhood Family Practice and the Spanish American Committee, according to Council Member Jasmin Santana.

**1275-2024:** Authorizing **project financing for a facility at 17000 St. Clair Ave. for Team Wendy**. [Team Wendy](#) was founded in Cleveland and manufactures helmets. The project will move “at least 200 jobs” from California to Cleveland, joining approximately 200 existing jobs there, according to Steve Davis, VP of Finance for Team Wendy. This is at the Cleveland Industrial Innovation Center.

**1244-2024:** A development agreement with Ryte Development Corp. for **a mixed use**

**project called Glen H.A.V.E.N. near East 105th Street & Superior Avenue.** The project was described as respite care focusing on folks with dual diagnoses, according to Bridget Grant, the developer. It will be built on what is now 10 separate land bank parcels, a Community Development representative said. Kevin Conwell of Ward 9 said he supports the project in his ward and wants the City of Cleveland to support more projects led by Black women developers.

**1311-2024:** A real-estate exchange needed before a [tax-increment financing \(TIF\) agreement](#) for the **Shoreway Tower** overlooking Edgewater Park. Jenny Spencer (Ward 15) said a [community benefits agreement](#) will be discussed next year. Richard Starr (Ward 5) said he is looking forward to seeing the community benefits agreement. Rents are expected to begin “at the mid to high \$1,000” for a studio or one-bedroom apartment, said Adam Comer of J Roc Development. McCormack asked a bunch of rapid-fire questions, seemingly making his point that new developments on surface parking lots are “a win for the City of Cleveland.”

**1327-2024:** An **agreement to transfer grant funds for the African American Cultural Garden.** The City of Cleveland is sitting on \$325,000 for the project, and this move will transfer those funds to the Cleveland Foundation to be used for donor engagement and phase two construction of the garden. The project is budgeted at \$4 million and has raised almost half that amount so far, including a recent \$500,000 grant from the St. Luke’s Foundation, according to Obie Shelton, executive director of the Association of African American Cultural Gardens.

- Conwell expressed his support for the project
- Brian Kazy (Ward 16) said the administration should just find \$2 million to finish this project (which began in 1961).

The meeting broke for lunch just after 12:30 p.m. with a return planned for 1:15 p.m. The meeting resumed at 1:28 p.m. Part two streamed here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=05JOgy36ii8>

**1242-2024:** Authorizes **the Public Safety Department to apply for and receive a grant for police recruitment.** The grant is for \$16,500.

**1273-2024:** Authorizing the city to sign a petition to **continue the Downtown Special Improvement District (SID) and include new properties in the district.** Griffin said the money that the city currently pays into the Group Plan (which is now almost disbanded, according to McCormack) would now go to the [Downtown SID](#). The city would add 41 city-owned properties to the SID at a cost of \$489,000 annually, said Economic

Development Director Tom McNair.

- The SID pays for things such as the Downtown Ambassadors. Its funding comes from member businesses and property owners.
- The money from city-owned properties would come from the General Fund, McNair said. He added that the city has been paying \$450,000 per year to the Group Plan Commission.
- Stephanie Howse-Jones (Ward 7) asked about the total costs of the city participating in the SID. The city would pay \$489,000 annually from 2026-2032 for a little over \$3.7 million total, McNair said.
- Howse-Jones also said she wants to see downtown businesses invest in youth summer jobs programs instead of just requesting police presence downtown: “As the City of Cleveland is being a partner in the Special Improvement District, we also want to have an expectation that our property owners are also looking into being a partner ... in our youth summer [employment] program.”

**1272-2024:** An **amendment to the City of Cleveland’s Youth Diversion Program**, which will run through the end of 2026 with an additional \$82,000. The program is run by the Community Relations Board.

**1313-2024: Authorizing the Department of Public Health to enter into contracts for the MomsFirst program.** Khadijah Fair, who previously worked with the Cleveland Metropolitan School District and the Cleveland Transformation Alliance, is the new MomsFirst Director. Much high praise from many members of council to Fair.

**1326-2024:** An ordinance **extending the Cleveland Thrive violence prevention and interruption programs**. The grants have paid for network building, training and hiring staff, according to a city official. It runs through 2026.

**1334-2024:** This was described as the **annual supplement to the city’s budget**.

- \$5,370,000 is being added to the budget as follows:
  - GENERAL FUND \$5 million
  - INTERNAL SERVICE FUND \$150,000
  - SMALL [ENTERPRISE FUND](#) \$220,000 (which is for management of the West Side Market)
- A lot of questions from council members about these budget changes, especially around staff vacancies. I was a little confused by this because staff vacancies weren’t mentioned in relation to the \$5 million listed in the ordinance. That’s because it was included in a handout council members had, which included figures for the next two pieces of legislation...

**1336-2024:** This was an additional transfer ordinance, moving money from the city's budget in 2024 to 2025.

- A total of about \$18.3 million is being transferred
  - \$11.9 million to the General Fund
  - \$3.4 million to the Special Revenue Fund
  - \$2.7 million to the Major Enterprise Fund
  - \$75,000 to the Small Enterprise Fund
  - \$155,000 to the Internal Service Fund

**1335-2024: Payroll for the 2025 budget, totaling about \$275.5 million** from the General Fund. *[Editor's note: This is temporary until council approves a final, full budget for 2025. Budget hearings typically start in February].*

**1009-2024:** Accepting **a grant from the State of Ohio for brownfield remediation** at the National Acme site in Collinwood. The Cuyahoga County Land Bank will administer the grant and the site.

- Total remediation of the site is now priced at about \$11 million, per McNair.

**1243-2024:** To **approve the recommendations of the [Tax Incentive Review Council \(TIRC\)](#)** for year 2023. The TIRC annually reviews projects that are receiving tax incentives.

- Six projects were in full compliance
- Three projects were not in compliance but had shown progress
- TIRC is recommending terminating tax incentives to one project that was far out of compliance, according to McNair. The project was the renovation of the former LaSalle Theater in Collinwood

**1239-2024:** Extending [incentives to Aer Lingus](#) to provide flights from Cleveland to Ireland.

**1145-2024:** Authorizing the State of Ohio Transportation Department to **resurface part of Villaview Road**.

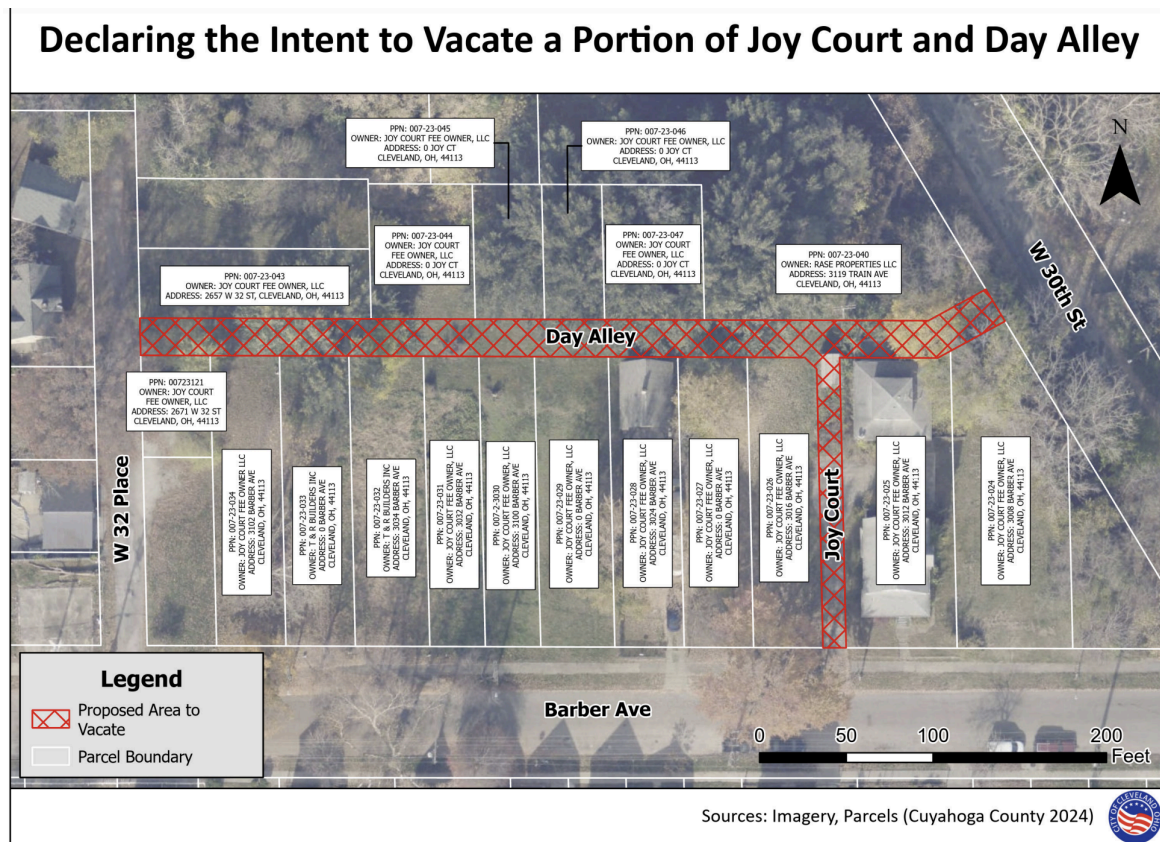
**1238-2024:** A **"new contracting technique" for parks and recreation facilities**, per James DeRosa, director of the Mayor's Office of Capital Projects (MOCAP). The new technique is following the process that the city uses for engineering and construction elsewhere. It will bid two-year contracts instead of having each project bid individually.

- Kevin Conwell (Ward 9) described it as time management and cost saving.

**1245-2024:** Allowing Cuyahoga County to install a **10-foot-wide multipurpose trail for the Euclid Beach Connector project**. This portion of the trail in the public right of way will go along 200 feet of Shore Acres Drive and 50 feet of East 156th Street, according to Katie Moore of MOCAP It will be both a shoreline stabilization project as well as a public accessway to the park, DeRosa added.

**1246-2024 and 1247-2024:** Both of these are **related to the construction of the Cleveland Clinic Peak Performance Center along the riverfront**. The northern and southern foundations will encroach on Eagle Avenue (which is called Scranton Road here, even though it's on the other side of the Eagle Avenue bridge).

**1254-2024:** Declaring the intent to **vacate two streets** off of **West 30th**, Joy Court and Day Alley. Both streets are overgrown and unused, and the neighbors and McCormack approve, DeRosa said.



**1215-2024:** Accepting grant funds for a **digital skills job training program through the rec centers**. The grant is for \$150,000 to purchase equipment and software and to hire instructors.



**1251-2024:** Authorizing the city to contract with a temp agency for the **hiring of temporary seasonal workers for maintenance at parks, cemeteries and other public facilities.**

- Kazy said the previous contractor (Snider-Blake) has provided really lousy outcomes.
- Howse-Jones suggested hiring local teenagers instead of temporary seasonal workers.
- Rebecca Maurer (Ward 12) told a story about a high-performing Snider-Blake seasonal worker who has been unable to get hired full-time at the city. She suggested that the city would do better to have a pathway to retain the best seasonal workers.
- Maurer also asked and Assistant Director of Public Works John Laird confirmed that temporary workers are still subject to the city's fair wage policies (\$15.85 for 2025).
- Multiple council members (Kazy, Conwell, Maurer, Polensek) also provided stories and examples of problems with Snider-Blake – including the quality of the work provided by seasonal workers, the reliability of the workers, and the treatment of workers by Snider-Blake. *[Editor's note: [Council members have raised issues with Snider-Blake before.](#)]*

**1315-2024:** Authorizes Public Works to **hire one or more consulting firms for nuisance properties and vacant lots.** This is very similar to the previous ordinance, except it's for mowing on vacant lots instead of public property, and no further discussion was had.

**1308-2024:** Accepting the **donation of property on Lakeshore Boulevard and East 159th Street.** This was a site owned by a McDonald's and will be the new location of the historic Euclid Beach arch, according to DeGennaro.

- The ambulance (Medic 42) was less than 6 months old when it was hit, and repairs to the vehicle that keep it under warranty are best performed outside of the city's vehicle maintenance.
- Repairs will cost more than \$90,000

- Includes \$146,000 for e-sports programming, including in Glenville, which was the only area of town that didn't have access to an e-sports program, according to Sonya Pryor-Jones, Cleveland's chief of Youth & Family Success
- Kazy had concerns with the process of bringing this spending as a walk-on at the end of the year. He said the administration's failure to plan should not constitute an emergency for council, which I thought was funny for him to say as council was wrapping up a marathon committee meeting to get to all the legislation they couldn't get to earlier in the year.



The meeting was adjourned around 4:45 p.m.

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