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Safety Committee

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Agency: [Cleveland City Council](#)

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Summary

- The committee discussed proposed updates to the city's property nuisance laws. It held the legislation for further discussion.
- It also discussed summer safety plans.

Notes

After a few moments of no audio during the meeting, Committee Chair Michael Polensek called the meeting to order. At the [3:15 mark of the video](#), audio was restored.

Committee members were joined at the table by Nicole Carlton, assistant public safety director, who was representing Public Safety Director Dornat "Wayne" Drummond. She was flanked by Assistant Director Jason Shachner and Police Chief Dorothy Todd.

First topic was [Emergency Ordinance 228-2025](#), an emergency ordinance that would update the city code regarding criminal activity/nuisance property issues. This was introduced to City Council in February. Legislation passed in 2018 established the current code.

Polensek asked the panel about the execution of this. Carlton explained that, if approved, the amendments ensure effective action would be taken against properties with repeated nuisance activities. She summarized the key amendments, as laid out in the legislation's [executive summary](#).

The list of nuisance activities would include street racing and [street takeovers](#). Three or more nuisance offenses in six months would result in a letter being sent to the owner of said property. They would have 10 days to respond with a plan to address the nuisance. Failure to submit the plan results in a fine of \$100 per day. The director of Public Safety can designate the property as a nuisance if any more violations occur at least 13 days but

no more than six months after the original written notice.

Polensek gave examples of “the neighbors from hell” that in part inspired the original legislation in 2018: Police activity, barking dogs, juvenile curfew violations. The original legislation includes nuisances at commercial businesses, he said.

Polensek asked about the current process, saying the breakdown in enforcement is that the property owners are not being notified of issues. He asked how these laws would be enforced.

Cleveland Police Sgt. Reginald Lanton arrived and introduced himself. He has worked on the nuisance front for about a year. Polensek asked him if he knew how many homeowners had received these assessments. Lanton was unsure about the numbers but said letters had been sent. Polensek asked how the fines are handled. Lanton said the city’s Division of Assessments and Licenses handles it initially.

Further questioning from Polensek to Shachner revealed that no one seems to know just how many letters have been sent or how many fines have been received. Polensek said many property owners are not concerned until it hits them in the pockets.

Carlton blamed IT problems for not generating those tracking figures. They can’t speak to what was or was not done in the past. Carlton said Drummond has tasked Lanton and other staff to track those numbers. Polensek expressed his frustrations about putting legislation together and later learning about hangups with enforcement. He said he appreciates the updates from this panel.

Shackner spoke about the amendments this legislation proposes. He also spoke about the lack of existing accountability and consequences. He said this legislation clarifies the process. Property owners have contacted the department to report activity, Carlton said.

Polensek asked Todd how she envisions this working for the police. Todd said she has not seen the current letters that are circulating. But in the past, the property owner and police district commander were notified. The owner was advised to stay in contact with the commander. She was the commander of the Third District in the past. Oftentimes, she got calls from owners who had tenants in said property. Some were not willing to assist her in addressing the situations, so this legislation will help hold those property owners accountable.

Shachner spoke about the flow of the complaints through the department. In the past,

reports would be generated every Monday based on calls for service. But the reports did not include complaint letters. Shackner said that there might be a bit of a disconnect in the current system.

Polensek insisted that if there is a preferred protocol, the city needs to inform council. He has turned in various complaints to the Fifth District for illegal parking on a city land bank lot that he said has been destroyed. He wants it to work, noting frustration with the lack of enforcement since 2018. He commended Drummond and staff but wants to ensure that this is going to be effective.

Todd encouraged both council and the public to relay the exact address of nuisance properties to the police. They need not confront anyone.

Polensek asked if this legislation will help. Todd said yes.

Responding to a question Polensek had asked earlier about [LLCs](#), Shackner said a notice is considered properly delivered if it is sent by first class mail to the owner of the property according to the Cuyahoga County Fiscal Office. They have 10 days to provide any abatement paperwork. The city can charge \$100 for each day without an abatement plan following that 10-day notice. Failure to pay would be attached to property taxes, Shackner said.

Council Member Charles Slife said there is a missing component regarding squatters. He described a scenario with squatters in a property in his ward. The [Housing Court](#) will not issue John Doe evictions (that is, if the property owner doesn't know the names of the squatters, the court won't evict them).

Slife also presented another example: When neighbors call 911 regularly but an eviction is pending in Housing Court because owners aren't compliant with the city's rental registration law. He said there are times when abating a nuisance will be a higher priority over the owner being compliant in rental registrations.

Shackner said the solution may be difficult to legislate and may be up to the discretion of the court. Todd agreed, adding that this is a safety issue.

Shackner suggested that the registration ordinance be amended to address these issues. He spoke to the betterment of the community versus the property owner having the required paperwork in place in these issues. He suggested new legislation may allow it, but the court may or may not accept this, he said.

Council Member Stephanie Howse-Jones said that there is no definition of squatting in the city's charter and that council would first need to create a policy. Polensek agreed that they need to work with the law department and Housing Court.

Council Member Brian Kazy then asked about the numbers of citations in this matter within the last three years. The city tracks the number of letters and nuisances declared but not the fines that were levied, Lanton said. Those figures would be with the Division of Assessments and Licenses, Carlton said.

Kazy expressed his frustration about the lack of due diligence with factual evidence to determine whether or not this process is working. The department had to have known the questions might be asked, he said, adding that this is going on in every committee.

"You're asking me to vote on a piece of legislation that I don't know if it works in its current state," Kazy said.

Polensek agreed with Kazy and reflected on the past administration, saying the process has not worked and we want it to work. He said we don't know if the original \$100 fine was ever imposed.

Kazy expressed reluctance to pass this in its current state without more information.

Shackner spoke to situations where hundreds of calls were made about issues, with the outcome being that the persons involved were gone, so no nuisance could be observed or declared. Shackner said this legislation would allow police to act based on a witness' word.

After more conversation, Kazy warned about the vagueness of the language of the ordinance. He also asked Lanton if he was the only person handling this matter, to which he said yes but he loops in commanders. Kazy wants to make sure that this is able to be done by one person. Todd said that the commanders will be looking at these issues and unsubstantiated matters will be documented.

Council Member Richard Starr asked what a nuisance is, according to this proposal. Shackner said there are 18 defined in [Section 630.01 \(a\) in the legislation](#). Newly added nuisances pertain to [street takeover](#) equipment and stunts.

Starr said Building and Housing and the courts should be a part of this conversation. He

is in favor of holding this piece because of not having all the components in place to allow this to be effective. Starr also said the city is lacking property inspectors, and this whole operation boils down to Lanton for the entire city of 374,000.

Shackner said the rules of the road are in the ordinance, and changes to internal administration policies can follow passage. Starr said this does not get to the root cause of the problems. All of the departments need to be at the table before passage. Shackner said that one piece of law will not fix the issues.

Howse-Jones asked that the current procedures be written and shared with council. Lanton said the process has been shared with several council people. At that point, Howse-Jones asked again if there is a written process for how they're collecting data. Todd said it was pulled from the CAD service (911 calls for service database). Howse-Jones said that doesn't answer her question and that the city needs to spell this out.

Shackner said she made a great point. His understanding is that there is a form that you just click on, and the information is populated.

Howse-Jones asked if the form report is helping the process go smoothly. For example, does the system know if this is an owner calling to report a nuisance?

Todd answered that this is the human factor of it, with the district commander tasked with identifying this. Carlton added that Lanton would review reports and determine if further action is needed. Howse-Jones encouraged someone to assess the data that needs to be gathered.

Council Member Deborah Gray spoke to the confusion about the lack of outcomes given by the panel. She asked where nuisance calls go. Shackner explained that three or more calls to police dispatch in six months would result in a form being generated. Lanton would review that form.

Gray asked about current data being brought to this meeting. Polensek asked if the data is kept by ward, and Lanton said yes. Polensek said that compiled data needs to be produced because summer is coming soon.

Gray spoke about food trucks in parking lots at city parks and rec centers. She said they interfere with the residents and their enjoyment. Polensek said that trucks have to be signed up by the council member, and that might need to be added to the legislation.

Gray said she has called in about homeowners who are doing car repairs on their properties. This should also be included as a nuisance prior to voting, she said.

Todd said that vendor/food truck and car repair issues can be dealt with immediately, outside of this legislation.

Polensek said that the committee would hold this legislation and said all departments need to weigh in.

Next to be considered by the committee is the summer safety plan.

Polensek said that the plan is not totally in place yet. Todd spoke to the hot spots like last year. The Division of Police is partnering with the Ohio State Highway Patrol. This is a work in progress, she said. She said that they would make a presentation in the future.

There are 1,201 currently on the force, with 74 being new recruits. That leaves 1,127 sworn members. April 24 is the next graduation date for recruits. There are more classes scheduled this year as well. Todd will be sending those figures to Polensek. There will be a three-day hiring event in May. Pre-registering will yield an appointment time.

Polensek asked what the entry salary was, and the chief did not have the figure. A new [union contract](#) was approved by a majority of the force, Polensek said. Polensek said that the salaries must be raised to be competitive with suburban forces.

Polensek asked about [drone usage](#). Todd said the Community Police Commission is reviewing this. The council supports drone use, Polensek said. Drone footage is being used to report ongoing news, Todd said. New York is using them as first responders, she said.

Polensek asked about an [issue at a casino with a federal employee](#). Todd said this is not a call for service the division has looked into, adding that the facts provided to her did not rise to the level of an investigation. She will verify whether officers went to the scene.

Slife said people are concerned about their civil rights and First Amendment rights as well when it comes to protests. Slife said the city is looking to monitor illegal activity. Free speech is legal, but civil disobedience is inherently illegal, he said. *[Editor's note: The drone policy first passed by the Community Police Commission (CPC) prohibits drone use to monitor "individuals or groups within large gatherings or for crowd control." Cleveland*

police [used drones to monitor a pro-Palestinian protest](#) shortly after CPC's passage.]

Two residents spoke to this committee. Rev. Pamela Pinkney spoke to her approval of the legislature. She said the council is not the enemy of the people and is appreciated. She believes a discussion needs to be held with the police and the people.

Next was [Loh](#), who commended Kazy for his reluctance to vote on unclear issues. This learning session should be a lesson for the government and the people. Loh spoke to landlords who shift responsibility to residents. Loh said the homeless issue needs to be addressed. Loh also spoke to the drone issue.

Polensek adjourned the meeting.

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