

RUSSELL COMMUNITY ROOM

February 19, 2026

The meeting was called to order at 6:03 p.m. Trustees Port and Heutmaker were present. The Board Administrator and the Fiscal Officer were also present.

The following Department Heads were present: Police Chief Swaidner, Road Superintendent Maltese and Zoning Inspector Frank Kolk.

The Pledge of Allegiance was said.

**MINUTES:** *Mrs. Heutmaker motion to accept the minutes of the Regular Meeting held on January 15, 2026, as presented. Ms. Port seconded the motion, and it passed.*

The vote: Mrs. Heutmaker - Yes, Ms. Port - Yes

**MINUTES:** *Mrs. Heutmaker made the motion to accept the minutes of the Special Meeting held on January 29, 2026, as presented. Ms. Port seconded the motion, and it passed.*

The vote: Mrs. Heutmaker – Yes, Ms. Port – Yes.

**MINUTES:** *Mrs. Heutmaker made the motion to accept the minutes of the Special Meeting held on February 2, 2026, as presented. Ms. Port seconded the motion, and it passed.*

The vote: Mrs. Heutmaker – Yes, Ms. Port – Yes.

**ANNUAL REPORTS:** *Mrs. Heutmaker made the motion to accept the 2025 Annual departmental reports from the Police, Fire, Road, Facilities & Zoning. Ms. Port seconded the motion, and it passed.*

The vote: Mrs. Heutmaker – Yes, Ms. Port – Yes.

Trustee Hare arrived at 6:07 p.m.

**MINUTES:** *Ms. Port made the motion to accept the minutes of the Regular Meeting held on February 5, 2026, as presented. Mr. Hare seconded the motion, and it passed .*

The vote: Mrs. Heutmaker – Abstain, Ms. Port – Yes, Mr. Hare – Yes.

**ZONING:** The Zoning Secretary advised the Board that two applications have been received for the Board of Zoning Appeals, and the next step is to coordinate schedules for interviews.

**AUTHORIZED SIGNATORY:** *Mrs. Heutmaker made the motion to designate Trustee Hare to act as Russell Township’s authorized signatory for the 2026 Scrap Tire Grant Application to the Geauga Trumbull Solid Waste Management District. Ms. Port seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.*

**ROAD:** The Road Superintendent updated the Board on the resolution from Verdantas, and that there are a few changes that are being made to the resolution.

**2026 ROAD PROJECTS:** *Mrs. Heutmaker made the motion to approve Resolution 2026-4, a Resolution of Convenience and Necessity for the Improvement of Cypress Pond Lane, Harmony Falls Lane, and Gamekeepers Trail in Russell Township which authorizes the Geauga County Engineer to prepare engineering plans. Ms. Port seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.*

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**DRIVEWAY STANDARD TEMPLATE:** The Road Superintendent advised the Board that the proposed driveway agreement will be for all driveways in the Township. This is due to having to remove up to six feet of residents' driveways when repaving roads, and residents having concrete or other materials other than asphalt for their driveways. This agreement will state that the Township will replace the six feet of driveway with asphalt and if the residents want a different material that they will have to pay for that themselves and sign a form.

The Board asked if mailboxes would be adjusted depending on the materials used for the driveways and the Road Superintendent advised the heights would be adjusted accordingly.

The Board asked if the Zoning Department will have this agreement with driveway permits and the Zoning Inspector replied that since it is the right of way that it is not a Zoning Department responsibility.

*Ms. Port made the motion to approve the Russell Township standard driveway apron as full depth asphalt for the first six feet from the roadway for any driveway in the township for new installations and for paving projects; where residents prefer concrete (or other surface) to the edge of road and do not wish to have full depth asphalt, they will sign an acknowledgment that they will adjust the height of their property driveway to that of the new road within 60 days of the final surface course being applied at their own cost. Should owners not make said adjustments, the Road Department will add one foot of asphalt over existing pavement to protect the roadways edge. Mrs. Heutmaker seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.*

**FISCAL OFFICER:** The Fiscal Officer advised the Board she will be out of office March second through sixth. She would like to attend the March fifth meeting virtually, if possible.

The Fiscal Officer announced that the Fiscal Office will be closed on March fourth from 9:30 a.m. – 11:30 a.m. while her staff is off site attending training at the County Building for cyber security.

The Fiscal Officer advised the Board that the year-end for 2025 is completed and they year is closed. There was a notice in the paper and a posting on the website. The next steps will be finalized after the amended certificate is received from the County Auditor.

The Fiscal Officer encouraged the Board to be more involved in preparation for the 2027 township budget, and she would like to schedule a kick-off meeting for the beginning of March.

The 2024 – 2025 financial audit will begin March ninth with the Audit team being on site the week of March sixteenth. This will project the Audit to be completed around the first week of June.

The Fiscal Officer shared that the main topics of discussion at the OTA conference were property tax reforms and the initiative to eliminate property taxes. She encouraged the Board to attend the educational program on February twenty fifth at the West Geauga Library on property taxes, presented by the League of Women Voters and noted that she had provided the Board with the handout she prepared.

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The Fiscal Officer announced she will be running a trial for the County I.T. Department of an A.I. recording system for taking minutes. Geauga County Automatic Data Processing (ADP), who is the Fiscal Office's I.T. provider, will be providing a device that is the size of a credit card reader for her to beta test. She hopes this will help streamline meeting minutes. Trustee Port asked if Microsoft's CoPilot program will also be tested, and the Fiscal Officer explained that ADP has that program blocked due to security concerns.

The Fiscal Officer updated the Board on the abandoned property clean up in Hemlock Hills, that the last junk car had been removed and she is reviewing the invoice for payment.

The Fiscal Officer advised the Board that the Police Chief had approached her about attending a meeting to discuss renewal of the School Resource Officer agreement, since the Chief and the Fiscal Officer had worked together on the initial 3-yr Agreement. She realized that two members of the Board might not be aware of the terms of the agreement and may wish to review it before Township resources are engaged.

The Fiscal Officer also shared that the Police Chief said that he had a discussion with Laurel School about an officer on campus. The Police Chief indicated that Laurel was not interested at this time, however the Fiscal Officer recommended that the Board be consulted before further engagement of Township resources.

The Fiscal Officer noted a Facebook post that the Police Department had conducted training for senior citizens at the Geauga YMCA, and she suggested that the Board should approve the use of township resources outside the Township, instead of offering the program for our own residents in our Community Room.

**COSTCO MEMBERSHIP:** *Mrs. Heutmaker motion to authorize Fiscal Officer Karen Walder to submit applications for 1 business membership on behalf of the Road Department and Fiscal Office, terms outlined in an email from Karen Walder to the Trustees dated February 9, 2026. Ms. Port seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.*

**NOPEC ENERGIZED COMMUNITY RESOLUTION:** The Trustees were advised that the funding for the NOPEC Energy Grant for 2026 is thirteen thousand three hundred forty-nine dollars.

*Ms. Port made the motion to adopt Resolution 2026-5, a resolution authorizing all actions necessary to accept the NOPEC 2026 Energized Community Grant. Mrs. Heutmaker seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.*

**NOPEC ENERGIZED COMMUNITY AUTHORIZED SIGNATORY:** *Mrs. Heutmaker made the motion to authorize Fiscal Officer Karen Walder to act as Russell Township's Local Contact and authorized signatory for the 2026 NOPEC Energized Community grant agreement and portal system. Ms. Port seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.*

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**ENERGY RATES:** The Fiscal Officer updated the Board on the energy rate contract she had received that afternoon and indicated that the Board did not need to execute the contract at the \$.0889/kilowatt-hour rate today, but her recommendation is to secure a new agreement prior to April 1st. The Board hadn't seen the contract and would like to look into all options to make sure the Township gets the best rate before just signing with the current broker.

**BANK RECONCILIATION & FINANCIAL REPORTS:** *Mrs. Heutmaker made the motion to acknowledge receipt of the monthly bank reconciliation and financial reports for December 2025, as submitted by Fiscal Officer Karen Walder. Ms. Port seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.*

**BANK RECONCILIATION & FINANCIAL REPORTS:** *Mrs. Heutmaker made the motion to acknowledge receipt of the monthly bank reconciliation and financial reports for January 2026, as submitted by Fiscal Officer Karen Walder. Ms. Port seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.*

**COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC WERE RECEIVED.**

**COMMUNITY EVENTS:** The Board Administrator updated the Board on dates of community events. There will be scrap tire drop off and document shredding on August 8<sup>th</sup> at the Road Department from 9:00 a.m. – noon.

There will also be a senior scrap pick up September 9<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup> and residents can register for this free event with the Geauga County Department on Aging. The resident scrap drop-off event will be at the Road Department on September 12<sup>th</sup> from 9:00 a.m. – noon.

**TRUSTEE RESPONSE TO I.T. SECURITY ISSUE:** Trustee Heutmaker gave a statement on her stand on seeking reimbursement from the Russell Police Department's IT vendor. She is not recommending seeking funds from the Police Department vendor as they didn't bill the Police Department for work on the County's questionnaires and attending the County ADP Board meeting, and other meetings to resolve the issue that is still outstanding. Trustee Heutmaker estimated that the bill for services and time would be greater than the bill from Geauga ADP.

**I.T. POLICY:** Trustee Heutmaker created a policy for I.T. and cyber security that was reviewed by Clemans Nelson. There was much discussion and each member of the Board will review the policy and present any possible changes, or possible updates to be added to the current policy.

**PLANNING COMMISSION:** The Board Administrator reminded the Board that the Planning Commission requested letters of support from the Board, and the deadline was fast approaching.

**LEADERSHIP GEAUGA YOUTH SPONSORSHIP:** *Ms. Port made the motion to approve the financial sponsorship of 1 West Geauga student, who is a Russell Township resident, to the 2026 Leadership Geauga Youth Institute Program for an amount of \$300. Mrs. Heutmaker seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.*

**DONATION POLICY:** Trustee Heutmaker presented a policy she wrote and had reviewed by Clemans Nelson to the Board. After much discussion the Board will review the policy individually and submit changes.

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**BOARD OF ELECTIONS:** *Mrs. Heutmaker made the motion to authorize Trustee Hare to execute the Town Hall Contract for May 5, 2026, Election Day Polling Location with the Geauga County Board of Elections. Ms. Port seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.*

**BOARD OF ELECTIONS:** *Ms. Port made the motion to authorize Trustee Hare to execute the Community Room Contract for May 5, 2026, Election Day Polling Location with the Geauga County Board of Elections. Mrs. Heutmaker seconded the motion.*

**COMMUNITY ROOM USE:** *Ms. Port made the motion to grant permission for the Geauga County Board of Elections to use the Community Room from 5:30 am – 9:00 pm, on May 5, 2026, subject to Township rules and regulations. Mrs. Heutmaker seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.*

**TOWN HALL USE:** *Mrs. Heutmaker made the motion to grant permission for the Geauga County Board of Elections to use the Town Hall from 5:30 am – 9:00 pm, on May 5, 2026, subject to Township rules and regulations. Ms. Port seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.*

**AMERICA 250:** Trustee Hare updated the Board that Chester Township has a big event planned and will be reaching out to see if Russel Township will participate and donate funds to the event.

**EXECUTIVE SESSION:** *Ms. Port made the motion to move into executive session to discuss the employment and compensation of a public employee pursuant to ORC 121.22(G)(1). Mrs. Heutmaker seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.*

The meeting moved into executive session at 8:00 p.m.

There were three items for discussion in this executive session, and the following people were invited to attend.

Item #1: Board Administrator, Fiscal Officer.

In at 8:03 p.m.; out at 8:35 p.m.

Item #2: Board Administrator, Road Superintendent.

In at 8:35 p.m.; out at 9:12 p.m.

Item #3: Board Administrator, Frank Kolk.

In at 9:12 p.m.; out at 9:54 p.m.

*Mrs. Heutmaker made the motion to return to regular session. Ms. Port seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.*

The meeting moved into regular session at 9:59 p.m.

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**ROAD:** *Mr. Hare made the motion to authorize the change in salary to \$104,000.00 annually, effective March 1, 2026, for Giovanni Maltese, Road Superintendent, Russell Township. Mrs. Heutmaker seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.*

*Mr. Hare made the motion to adjourn. Mrs. Heutmaker seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.*

The meeting was adjourned at 10:01 p.m.

**PURCHASE ORDERS AND BILLS WERE APPROVED AS ATTACHED.**

Chris Hare, Chair

Karen Walder, Fiscal Officer

Recorded by: J. Dorka