

Town Hall

May 17, 2025

The meeting was called to order at 9:10 p.m. by Trustee chairperson Port.

Present

Trustees:

Chris Hare
James Mueller
Kristina Port

Zoning Commission:

James Dickinson
Barry Rogers
Shannon Stanich
Chris Stormann
Nathan Wynveen

Board of Zoning Appeals:

Dushan Bouchek
Steve Gokorsch
Mark McGrievy
Nicole Mulloy

Zoning:

Shane Wrench
Bonnie Guyer

Fire Chief, John Frazier

This was a Joint Meeting between the Russell Township Board of Trustees, Board of Zoning Appeals and Zoning Commission.

The Pledge of Allegiance was said.

Welcome & Opening Remarks

- Trustee Port introduced Chris Hare, the newest trustee. Mr. Hare started in February 2025 replacing Matthew Rambo, recently elected Judge for the Geauga County Court of Common Pleas.
- Ms. Port thanked the Zoning Commissioners and Board of Zoning Appeals members for their time and valuable assistance to the township. Their hours and expertise are voluntary and greatly appreciated.

Zoning Commission Summary

- Zoning Commission Chairman, Barry Rogers noted number of meetings in 2024 as well as the following staff changes:
 - Ben Kotowski resigned in May 2024
 - Shannon Stanich joined the Commission in July 2024
 - Retirement of Cathleen Birli in summer 2024 and Bonnie Guyer joining as zoning secretary in November 2024
- Mr. Rogers noted that the primary focus of the commission has been the finalization of the Zoning Resolution Book update. Some updates to the Resolution Book in progress include:
 - Food trucks – Adding definition, requirements, and conditional use explanation.
 - Airbnb – Adding definitions and prohibited uses.
 - Signage – Rewording to comply with County standards, include electronic signs restrictions.

Town Hall

May 17, 2025

- Other Resolution Book items discussed:
 - County Planning Review of BZA terminology – changing “conclusions of fact” to “findings of fact and conclusions of law”. Action item – ask County for further clarification.
 - The Zoning Commission continues discussion regarding removal of the entire section, Extraction of Oil, Natural Gas, and Hydrocarbons.
- Zoning Resolution Timeline: May 28, final review; June 25, amendment initiation; July 23, public meeting; August 27, Zoning Commission recommendation to Trustees; September 18, public meeting.
- Mr. Mueller reminded the Zoning Commission members to pursue items from the Resolution Book update in dispute.
- Dr. Stormann investigated and provided a detailed report on the Land Use Survey 2012, noting zoning is based on the survey results. In addition, Dr. Stormann reviewed Russell Township properties protected by Western Reserve Land Conservancy. Trustees indicated land conservancy information and importance to the community needs to be easily available on the Township website. Mr. Mueller remarked that land conservancy as set up by residents lessens the number of buildable areas. Mr. Hare noted that residents’ focus on the importance of green space. The presentation as well as other documents pertaining to his presentation will be shared by Dr. Stormann.
- Ms. Stanich researched food truck regulations in neighboring townships and reported findings to Zoning Commission for further consideration and inclusion in the Resolution Book. Following her presentation a lengthy discussion that included matters such as private events, permits, and safety concerns ensued. Mr. Rogers indicated that based on research provided and feedback from the Trustees and Chief Frazier, the Zoning Commission is developing language for the Resolution Book.

Board of Zoning Appeals Summary

- BZA Charman, Steve Gokorsch noted the BZA meets only when variances have been submitted or should there be other business items to address. Changes in staff include:
 - William (Bill) Downings retired from BZA in December 2024. Mr. Downing served the Township for 6 decades in several capacities. His knowledge and expertise will be greatly missed.
- Indicated the letter sent to residents concerning a variance request near their property needs to be reviewed.
- *Action Item – In the event of a potential legal issue, BZA must directly communicate such issue to the Trustees.*

Resolution update recommendations and future areas of concern

- Mr. Mueller noted that the Zoning Commission should keep Trustees updated regarding court cases that may impact the township.
- Ms. Port, House Bill 315, Township Omnibus Bill impact.
- Mr. Dickinson, change to Airbnb county regulations/restrictions.
- Chief Frazier, age (or aging) of township residents.
- Mr. Hare, recreational development, community recreational areas.
- County regulation changes.

Town Hall

May 17, 2025

Community Room

Per Ms. Port, potential opening will be in July.

Community Participation

Suggestions to increase community participation and awareness include a township day or a local government day.

Open Discussion

- Chief Frazier reviewed several safety issues routinely encountered by the fire department:
 - Structure height (more than 35 ft) and ladder availability in an emergency.
 - Access to a structure.
 - Exposures – proximity of structures to each other.
 - Gates – quick access to the property. Required width, the driveway needs to accommodate fire trucks and ambulances.
 - Community paramedicine.
 - Addressing safety issues with an aging population.
 - Pre-plans (fire) are in place for all Russell commercial structures.
 - Mr. Rogers noted that the Fire Department will inspect any house or business
 - Availability of dry hydrants.
- *Action Item - Ms. Port will confirm Zoning Commission and BZA members will have access to the Ohio Township Association (OTA) newsletter, etc. as associate members.*
- Availability of funds for board members to attend meetings or workshops. Ms. Port indicated funds would be available.

Mr. Hare made the motion to adjourn. Mr. Mueller seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:15 pm.

Kristina Port, Chair

Karen Walder, Fiscal Officer

Recorded by: Bonnie Guyer