

RUSSELL TOWN HALL

June 12, 2025

The Chair, Ms. Port, called the meeting to order at 9:02 a.m. Trustees Mueller and Hare were present. Fiscal Officer Karen Walder, the Board Administrator, and Fiscal Officer Assistant Mrs. Ezzone were also present.

The following Department Heads were present: Police Chief Tom Swaidner, Fire Chief John Frazier Zoning Inspector Shane Wrench, Assistant Fire Chief Nick Sambula.

The Pledge of Allegiance was said.

POLICE: Mrs. Walder asked the Board during the Budget Workshops to think like a homeowner and to focus on necessity. Mrs. Walder then reviewed the binder materials with the Board, pointing out that ninety percent of the Police Departments revenue is from property tax. Mrs. Walder pointed out to the Board that the last time the Police Department went out for a levy was eight years ago. Mrs. Walder pointed out that next year the Police Department will be short of the recommended cash reserves of about five hundred thousand dollars, and that it will be the third year of the current union contract. The proposed budget doesn't include any staff changes or reserve fund funding. The Board discussed putting a levy out for the Police Department, and what funding would be needed. Chief Swaidner advised that he like to add a full-time Detective and explained to the Board why this added position would benefit the residents and the Department. The Chief explained that he wouldn't need to pull an officer off road patrol to handle the investigation work, and having one officer consistently working on the case would be an extreme benefit. He also explained that given the rising cases of cyber fraud and scams targeting Seniors, response time is critical.

Chief Swaidner advised that he intended to extend his capital funding by reprioritizing projects and getting inspections for life expectancy on items like the roof at the Police Station, to possibly push out capital projects. Ms. Port asked if the Chief takes advantage of grant opportunities, and the Chief noted that he applies for all the grants that he can and utilizes as much grant funding as the department can get.

The Board discussed Levy options and the timing of a Levy. Chief Swaidner recommended against running competing Levies in the same year. He also noted that their community outreach is well established. Mrs. Walder reminded the Board of the initiatives being considered by the State legislature to address ever-rising taxes, and strongly advised against any Levy action that would remove taxpayer rollback. She recommended that the Board be very deliberate when considering the reasonableness and need for a Levy, and also recommended that the Board review the requirements enacted in HB140, which would apply to a Levy initiative.

Mrs. Walder recommended that both the Police and Fire Department consider moving their I.T. service to ADP to save money and so the township wouldn't have to manage multiple I.T. strategies. She suggested that by switching vendors there would be cost savings for both Departments and ADP could migrate both Departments to a .GOV domain as recommended by the Auditor of State. Chief Swaidner didn't recommend switching vendors. He strongly advised that he is happy with the twenty-four hours seven days a week service, he can call his vendor at any time any day, and someone is available to fix any issues. He suggested that any increase in I.T. costs over the last year was due to upgrading equipment and not necessarily costs in service. He acknowledged it would be up

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to the Board if they made that decision, but he doesn't recommend it and is very happy with his current vendor.

Mr. Mueller made a motion to put a levy on the ballot for the November 2025 election. There was no second.

The Police Department budget workshop ended at 10:55 a.m.

The General Fund budget workshop started at 10:56 a.m.

GENERAL FUND: Mrs. Walder summarized the proposed budget for Zoning. Ms. Port questioned whether Zoning fees should be increased and asked Mr. Wrench to look into it.

Facilities Manager Shane Wrench asked the Board if there was funding this year to have the walkway and steps at Briar Hill Cemetery done and provided an estimate of \$7,350. The Board agreed to move forward with this work in 2025. Ms. Port instructed Mr. Wrench to get pricing to place fencing along the driveway at the Riverview Cemetery as there is nothing that keeps people from driving over the edge into the ravine.

Mr. Wrench recommended spending thirty-six thousand dollars for a roof on the Administration building from the Reserve fund, and four thousand dollars for gutters and downspouts on the Administration building in 2025. The Board would like to proceed with the Admin roof and gutters in 2025 and Mrs. Walder indicated she would prepare a Supplemental Appropriation once the updated Reserve Study was accepted.

The Board asked that all Town Hall capital projects for 2026 be pushed out until after the Town Hall study is completed but would like sixteen thousand five hundred dollars earmarked for the stairs at the Town Hall in 2026.

Mrs. Walder recapped some items included in the 2026 budget; six thousand dollars for the Citizens' Park District, and capital items as submitted in ClearGov. Mrs. Walder also brought up the request for a donation for pickleball courts in the Commons.

The Fire Department returned to continue their workshop at 11:35 a.m.

FIRE: Assistant Chief Sambula explained that the dormitory project the department has been working on is the department's top priority (also noted in the strategic study). The department would like to remodel the dormitory to have separate spaces/entrances for males and females, and to provide more space for individuals. The department learned during COVID that the dormitory needed to be redone. The Assistant Chief asked if the department could use any Capital Grant money that hadn't been allocated for this project and if the General Fund could supply the remainder of the balance since the department doesn't have the capital funding to complete this much needed renovation. Phase one of this project is the only part being completed at this time and the estimate is that it will cost around one hundred and sixty-five thousand dollars. The board agreed to funding for the project from the Capital Grant and the General Fund after receiving assurance from the Fire Department that the project would be completed by June 2026.

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The Board discussed with the Fire Department pushing the Expedition vehicle purchase out a year. In 2026 the department will be short in the recommended cash reserves by about fifty thousand dollars, however Mrs. Walder noted that actual revenue and expenditures might make up this deficit. The board approved funding the difference for the minimum cash reserves for the Fire Department up to fifty thousand dollars in 2026 from the General Fund, and that a levy be put on in 2026 for the Fire Department.

Fire Department discussion ended, and the Board returned to General Fund budget discussion at 12:23 p.m.

GENERAL FUND: Mrs. Walder asked the Board what they would want included in the 2026 budget to support reasonableness and need for the Police Department levy in the fall of 2025. The Board asked her to include adding a full-time employee (Detective) with benefits, fully funding reserve accounts, a three percent raise starting in 2027, and meeting the cash reserve requirements for next 5 years. Mrs. Walder advised that there are two resolutions that will need to be passed by the end of July to place a Levy initiative on the ballot.

The Board agreed that they will not include revaluation relief in 2026 as they had done in the past two years and also reiterated the goal to have each Department stand on its own.

The Board had a lengthy discussion on contributing via donation to the joint recreation board for a pickleball court in the West Geauga Commons. Mrs. Walder asked the Board to weigh the priority of maintaining property already owned by the Township – like the Town Hall - against this request. The Board would like to see what other funds the commission receives, and what Chesterland and the School Board contribute to the project.

Ms. Port asked for ten-thousand dollars to be added to the capital account for the Cemetery for 2026. She also requested twenty-five thousand dollars for ADA operators for the Community Room. The Board directed that remaining funds in the General Fund in excess of recommended carry over should be "ear marked" for the Town Hall renovation.

Mrs. Walder reviewed the list of changes to the Budget requested by the Board during the workshops and they concurred.

Mr. Mueller made the motion to put a levy on the fall 2025 ballot for the Police Department. Mr. Hare seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 1:05 p.m.

Kristina Port, Chair

Karen Walder, Fiscal Officer

Recorded by: J. Dorka