

City of Trotwood

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Meeting Minutes - Draft

Monday, December 15, 2025

6:30 PM

Workshop

**Trotwood Community and Cultural Arts Center
4000 Lake Center Drive, Trotwood, Ohio 45426**

City Council

*Mayor Yvette F. Page
Vice Mayor Tyna R. Brown, Ward 4
Council Member Bettye L. Gales, Ward 1
Council Member Martha H. Clark, Ward 2
Council Member Milton J. Pearson, Ward 3
Council Member Rhonda C. Finley, At Large
Council Member Denise Moore, At Large
Clerk of Council Kara B. Landis*

I. Call to Order

Mayor Page called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

II. Pledge of Allegiance

Mayor Page led the Pledge of Allegiance.

III. Roll Call

Clerk Landis took Roll Call.

STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT: Deputy City Manager Kellum, Law Director Conard, Clerk of Council Kara Landis, Finance Director Chris Peeples, Assistant Finance Director Julie Kilbarger, Police Chief Erik Wilson, Captain Mark Ecton, Captain Michael Molchan, and Assistant to City Manager Jamaica White.

VISITORS PRESENT: There were no visitors present.

IV. Approve the Agenda

Mayor Page requested a Motion to approve the Agenda. A Motion was made by Vice Mayor Brown, seconded by Council Member Finley, and the Motion CARRIED by the following vote:

Aye: 7 - Council Member Gales, Council Member Moore, Council Member Clark, Council Member Finley, Council Member Pearson, Vice Mayor Brown and Mayor Page

V. Old Business

[SR25-26](#)

Review Proposed 2026 Operating Budget

Mayor Page shared that the purpose of this Workshop is to provide a dedicated forum for Council Members to be transparent and ask specific questions for clarification on the 2026 Operating Budget. Mayor Page then opened the floor for questions.

Council Member Finley stated that although she was unable to attend the December 1st Regular Council meeting, she was able to join virtually. She shared that she would like to understand Council's major concerns with the 2026 Operating Budget, and address those concerns.

Mayor Page confirmed that to be the purpose of this Workshop, then reviewed how at the December 1st Council meeting there were six (6) Council Members present. She explained that when voting on OR11-25, the ordinance establishing the 2026 appropriations, three (3) Council Members voted yes and three (3) Council Members abstained from voting; however, because legislation relating to appropriations requires an affirmative vote of five (5) members of Council, the ordinance failed.

Council Member Pearson clarified that he abstained from voting due to uncertainty about Council's position on specific items, along with a hesitation to raise his questions in an open forum. He added that his questions have since been answered and he has no issues with the 2026 Operating Budget.

Council Member Gales explained that she abstained from voting because she was stepping back. She stated that her questions had already been answered and abstaining from voting was not about budgetary concerns.

Council Member Moore shared that she abstained from voting, citing concerns of a perceived lack of transparency during the budget meeting. She commented how the firefighters affected had not been officially notified of their termination, despite being less than 29 days from the end of their employment. She explained that she had no idea how all of this transpired, specifically the elimination of positions and how the City funded those positions since February at a cost of \$1 million.

Deputy City Manager Kellum clarified that administration follows strict legal and HR procedures for notifications in these types of situations, particularly for protected classes. She stated that this process was disrupted when the union leaked information. Deputy City Manager Kellum explained that in 2025, there were some one-time funding opportunities that allowed the City to "float" the positions while waiting for a decision on the retention grant. She said that one of those funding sources was ARPA dollars; another source involved \$500,000 that was advanced to the road level fund because income tax dollars had not yet been collected. Those advanced dollars had to be paid back to the City's general fund. Deputy City Manager Kellum reiterated that these were one-time funding sources that are not available in 2026. She went on to explain that DOGE eliminated the retention grant the City was hoping to secure, which is why the City can no longer fund these extra positions without a budget deficit.

Council Member Moore asked if the transfer was an agenda item during the year. Deputy City Manager Kellum advised that alone, that would not have

been an agenda item; however, it was included in the 2025 reappropriations that were presented to Council for a vote during the December 1st Regular Meeting.

Council Member Moore asked for confirmation that the City is eliminating five (5) positions. Deputy City Manager Kellum reiterated that the positions to be eliminated were never permanent jobs, they were "extra hands" funded entirely by temporary grants. She added that the 21 full-time firefighter positions remain unaffected. Deputy City Manager Kellum shared that the grant allowed the City to temporarily employ up to nine (9) additional full-time firefighters; everyone hired under the grant was aware that the positions were temporary, as was everyone working in the department. Deputy City Manager Kellum explained that over the period of the grant, four (4) of the nine (9) temporary employees moved into vacated full-time positions, and recently one (1) of the remaining five (5) temporary employees moved into a vacated full-time position, leaving only four (4) temporary positions to be eliminated. She confirmed that the City was safe before the temporary positions, and the City will be continue to be safe when the temporary positions are eliminated.

Council Member Finley mentioned the nine (9) temporary positions and how those employees were fully aware that their positions were temporary, then asked why it wouldn't have been appropriate for transparency, to hold discussions during that time period. Deputy City Manager Kellum stated that they were aware, as was the Fire Chief and HR; but formal notification is an actual process to be followed. Council Member Finley commented that there was no information to be leaked if the information was already known. Law Director Conard commented that while he cannot speak to exactly what happened behind the scenes, it is his understanding from Deputy City Manager Kellum that information that was not yet intended to be public, was made public, so preemptive action was taken, which interfered with the start of the formal notification process. Deputy City Manager Kellum reworded her statement, saying that the information was publicized in a manner that was inaccurate, causing a disruption.

Council Member Finley raised concern, commenting that the City is allowing others to control the narrative, when the City already knew, and the department already knew, the ending. She discussed reviewing long-term and short-term strategies to look at courses of action, such as the option to be furloughed so they could apply for unemployment, and should funding come back, they may be able to return to work; or possibly some type of burden sharing by renegotiating mutual aid agreements with other communities. Council Member Finley asked what other options or strategies have been looked at to address long-term sustainability within the Department.

Deputy City Manager Kellum cautioned Council to not just concentrate on four (4) people because if the budget doesn't pass, there are another 150 employees that won't be compensated, which she believes says to them that they are not a priority. Council Member Finley said that is not the intent of this conversation; it is not about the person, it's about the safety of the entire community and not allowing others to control the narrative and communication. She added that moving forward, she hopes there is an opportunity to prioritize when working on proposed budgets; for example prioritizing public safety over parks and recreation - while we want everything, we can't have everything due to limited dollars. Council Member Finley took

full ownership of not asking more questions at the Budget Workshop and she believes it is imperative to do a deeper dive when reviewing budgets as she had no idea of this situation until the Mayor brought the issue to Council's attention. She reiterated that she is not putting four (4) positions over the other 150 positions, it is about the big picture. Deputy City Manager Kellum explained that there are options to be discussed; however, right now they are concentrating on passing a budget, then they will have private conversations with those individuals.

Council Member Moore concurred with Council Member Finley and expressed that she would like a more detailed and accessible budget review process. She explained that the abbreviated summary presented during the budget workshop makes it difficult to fully understand what Council is agreeing to. Council Member Moore commented that she would like to find the best way to request and digest financial data.

Deputy City Manager Kellum suggested coming up with a compromise, and stated that not conducting a line-by-line review is not a lack of transparency, but rather respect of the Charter and for the City Manager, who is hired to manage the operations of the City. She went on to explain that the City Manager highlights notable issues and he and his team are expected to follow generally acceptable accounting principles when preparing documents to bring before Council. She added that major issues are then presented by each department and those are the areas to concentrate on, not a line-by-line review of the budget as that would seem to interfere with operations, which could be a violation of the Charter and compliance with Ohio Revised Code. Mayor Page asked Clerk Landis to read aloud Section 5-4 "Interference by Council" of the Charter.

After Clerk Landis read Section 5-4 of the Charter, Council Member Moore commented that the imperative word in that language is "inquiry." She stated that as a Council Member, she is responsible for understanding the budget and this would be verifying information she needs to vote, it has nothing to do with trust. She believes with upfront clarification, this budget would not be in limbo. Council Member Moore explained that she is not saying to question every line, adding that she isn't the expert, but she needs information from the experts and she doesn't believe it is a Charter violation to inquire or ask questions; that is her job.

Council Member Moore suggested some of the additional information she is referring to are things like, "What is the City going to do different in 2026? How is the City going to expand Parks and Recreation services? What is the City going to offer in addition to what was done last year? Should they expand from three to four concerts in 2026, or maybe change the type of music at each concert?" She doesn't just want the status quo, then reiterated that this is the type of information she would like when reviewing the budget.

Deputy City Manager Kellum stated that by trust, she means confidence in the staff's ability to provide accurate, fraud-free information, not questioning. She then acknowledged Council's needs and asked for their help to know exactly what type of information they want.

Council Member Moore explained that she wants to be able to understand the ramifications of important decisions such as eliminating five (5) jobs. She

added that she finds she gets more information from the community than she does in her position on Council, meaning how information is disseminated. She then asked Deputy City Manager Kellum what she meant when she referred to a "protected class" because many people, including her, do not know what that means. Deputy City Manager explained that in this case, one individual is over the age of 40, and being over the age of 40 can lead to potential age discrimination because it is a protected class; therefore, additional actions have to be taken to address certain circumstances, such as eliminating positions.

Vice Mayor Brown asked Clerk Landis when packets were distributed for the Budget Workshop. Clerk Landis believes packets were distributed the Thursday morning before the Workshop. Vice Mayor Brown reiterated that Council was given time to review the information and to ask questions prior to the Workshop. She explained that Council can call the Clerk, Law Director, City Manager, or Deputy City Manager about information they may not understand. Vice Mayor Brown stressed that Council does get the information and has time to ask questions; they are not in the dark prior to meetings.

Council Member Gales shared that those who have been on Council understand the current budget process, but there was a time when an orientation was given to new members and maybe Council should consider going back to that practice as it was very helpful for her.

Mayor Page reviewed the number of firefighter positions, stating there are 21 full-time firefighters and nine (9) additional grant-funded employees; Deputy City Manager Kellum confirmed that to be correct. Mayor Page said four (4) firefighters left the department so four (4) grant-funded employees were absorbed, which left five (5) grant-funded employees; Deputy City Manager Kellum confirmed that to be correct. Mayor Page stated that recently another firefighter resigned, so another grant-funded employee was placed into a position, bringing the full-time firefighter count back to 21, and only four grant-funded (4) positions remaining. Deputy City Manager Kellum confirmed that to be correct. Mayor Page then said her biggest question is why did the City hold on to these employees after February; she believes we wouldn't be in this position today if those employees were let go when the grant ended in February.

Deputy City Manager Kellum explained that FEMA grants have been in place for decades. She shared that sometimes there are delays when transitioning to a new administration and they believed they were going to receive a Notice of Funding Opportunity within a couple of months after the grant ended. She added that when that happens, the new grant is usually retroactive to the end of the prior grant period. Deputy City Manager Kellum stated that no one knew what DOGE was doing or the impact they would have, and the City never thought they would be in this position. She then repeated for clarification that the City started with nine (9) grant-funded positions and there are only four (4) grant-funded positions left after attrition.

Council Member Finley believes it is important to get as much information as possible, and more times than not, she abstains from voting because she needs to do her due diligence and know what she is voting on. She then asked Mayor Page to possibly look at another process with the budget as she would like to have more than three (3) or four (4) days to review the information at a higher

level. Mayor Page commented that she believes knowing how the budget is put together would help Council understand the budget itself. She went on to say that she was devastated after the last meeting and didn't know what was going to happen without a budget for 2026; the impact of not having a budget would devastate the City.

Mayor Page shared that during the December 1st meeting, she should have reminded Council that the ordinance in question was for the 2026 budget, and the concerns raised were about what happened in 2025. In addition, she described how funding comes from different sources. Finance Director Peeples approached the podium and explained that the Fire and Rescue Department have their own sources of revenue, which the Mayor reiterated using the analogy of buckets. Finance Director Peeples clarified that special revenue fund buckets cannot be mixed with general fund buckets. Mayor Page shared that she questioned why the City couldn't fund these employees in 2026 since the positions were funded for all of 2025. Finance Director Peeples explained that you cannot use Rescue Division funds to support Fire Division expenses. Mayor Page gave the example of a Council Member transferring money from their travel budget to another Council Member's travel budget; Finance Director Peeples confirmed that is an acceptable practice because it is within the same budget. He went on to say that a Council Member could not transfer money from another budget, for example the City Manager's budget, to Council's budget for their travel expenses.

Finance Director Peeples reviewed the previously mentioned one-time funding opportunities that allowed the City to cover the grant-funded employees. He shared that those funds were slated to be used for a small business program and homeowner's program. Finance Director Peeples agreed that in hindsight, the City should have laid off the temporary employees when the grant ended. He stated that the needs of public safety in general, fire and police, will require discussions with Council, along with water rates. He then talked about how positions in the Fire and Rescue Department have changed over the years, sharing that they used to have 18 firefighters, three battalion chiefs, and six lieutenants (included in the 18). He shared that the department now has a Chief, Deputy Chief, Fire Marshal, Information Officer, and a Paramedicine Officer; more staff making more money. He said that while the expenses have increased, the funding sources remain flat. Finance Director Peeples stated that each division has their own source of revenue, and EMS bills insurance companies when they make a run, which is another source of income for their division.

Council Member Finley commented that this is the type of information needed in their Budget Meeting so that Council can determine the best plan of action and strategies. Deputy City Manager Kellum shared that they are having conversations with the Fire Department on how to change their operations. Mayor Page circled back and explained that she didn't know about the separate buckets and how important that information is in order to understand where we are today.

Council Member Moore agreed that this is the type of information she is looking for to help her make informed decisions; she doesn't see this type of information in a book and wouldn't know to ask those questions. Mayor Page shared that she didn't know all of the information, but she asked questions that led to those conversations. Council Member Finley thanked the Mayor for

asking questions because it is important for all of Council to hear the questions and answers. She thanked the Mayor and expressed her appreciation for allowing Council the opportunity to ask questions, and also for being fair and transparent because it hasn't always been that way. Council Member Finley added that the Mayor promised she would do that, and she is doing that, and it means a lot that she allows their questions to be answered.

Mayor Page agreed that Council may need to revisit some of the ways things are done; however, in order to move forward, Council has to pass a budget. Council Member Pearson reiterated that he didn't have a question on the budget itself, he was simply uncertain of the City's position on a couple of issues and was unsure how to go about asking a question at that point in the discussion. Mayor Page asked Law Director Conard to explain how a Council Member should handle asking questions. Law Director Conard first suggested Council Members reread Section 5-3 of the Charter, which talks about the role of the City Manager. He then explained that there is a two-step process to understanding agenda items, and said packets distributed to Council Members and Workshops are scheduled for more in-depth topics or complicated issues. Law Director Conard stated that if a question comes up before a meeting, there is a mechanism to ask; you can call the City Manager, Deputy City Manager, Clerk, or the Law Director. He went on to say that Council Members also have the absolute right to ask their questions from the dais, which is where that should happen, in the public meeting, as that reflects to the public that they are doing their job.

Mayor Page clarified that in order to call for a vote, there needs to be a motion and a second, and the motion has to pass by a majority, or four (4) votes. Law Director Conard explained that the budget requires five (5) votes to pass according to the Charter. Mayor Page added that if the ordinance is presented as an emergency, it must also pass by five (5) votes. Law Director Conard commented there is probably no more important function of City government than creating a budget that is solid, that doesn't put the City in a deficit position and through transparency, let's the people know where money is being spent.

Mayor Page then asked each Council Member if they had any further questions.

Council Member Gales explained that when she first came on Council, budget meetings occurred over a couple days so that they received a full understanding of what was going on. She added that it wasn't a rushed process, and although she understands it is a burden on staff, it may be necessary in order to have clarification.

Council Member Moore agreed, and agreed with Mayor Page that knowing the process is very important. She mentioned workshops and believes they would eliminate issues such as this, as they flush out questions ahead of time.

Council Member Pearson stated that he is clear.

Council Member Finley thanked the Mayor for the opportunity to clear their minds and to ask questions because in the past there was no fairness or transparency. She added that she appreciates being a part of this body and she appreciates the Mayor being so inclusive. She added that Council is here to do a job and the job will be done.

Vice Mayor Brown thanked staff for the clarification they provide, and for being readily available whether by e-mail, a phone call, or even on the dais.

Deputy City Manager Kellum explained that it is their intent to provide Council with the information they need, then asked Council to give some direction on what more they need regarding the budget.

Mayor Page shared her appreciation for staff and Council, and reiterated that she is always available to help in any way she can, then confirmed all minds were clear.

VI. Adjourn

There were no further questions and Mayor Page adjourned the meeting at 7:50 p.m.