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Committee meetings

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Summary

- The Special Improvement District (SID) for Highland Square has wide support from businesses and property owners, led by Ward 1 Council Member Fran Wilson. The next step is to circulate a [petition](#) to establish a nonprofit organization.
- Homelessness continues to be a top issue for city council after recent weather-related deaths. Efforts are underway to increase funding for warming centers with Ward 5 Council Member Johnnie Hannah and Wilson expressing deep concern and a need for a way forward. Planning and Urban Development Director Kyle Julien is working to fill operating budget funding gaps.
- The city is planning ways to mitigate harm should Immigration & Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents arrive locally. Mayor Shammias Malik and Wilson [introduced legislation](#) advocating against state-level efforts to force local municipalities, businesses, schools and others to work with ICE in reporting undocumented residents. The plan includes efforts to increase dialogue with federal partners and leverage best practices in supporting protest groups.

Follow-Up Questions

- The Innerbelt continues to be put on the back burner, with street improvements offered as reparations. What other funding streams can the city pursue to advance the process of restorative justice, healing and reparations that genuinely address the harm?
- Malik mentioned that the Akron Police Department would utilize “dialogue teams” to work with protest groups during ICE protests, should agents arrive. Given that some members of council and the community are mistrustful of the administration’s police reform efforts, what measures are being put into place to ensure that Akron Police officers don’t escalate tensions, and what will be done in the event APD harms protestors?

Notes

[Feb. 9 agenda](#)

[Watch the full meeting here.](#)

Planning and Economic Development

Members: Council Member At-Large Jeff Fusco, Ward 7 Council Member Donnie Kammer, Ward 10 Council Member Sharon Conner, Ward 9 Council Member Tina Boyes and Ward 5 Council Member Johnnie Hannah were present.

The meeting began at 1 p.m. Fusco wanted to revisit a few items from prior meetings, namely the Highland Square Special Improvement District.

Special Improvement District

[See the full resolution here](#)

Deputy Director of Economic Development Sean Vollman spoke about the SID, defining it as “an area of property where the members of the organization are the property owners from a defined area. The SID provides a way for those property owners to fund additional services over and above normal city services.” He said the owners of 60% of the front footage in the district along West Market have agreed to an assessment that will fund the

services. The Downtown Akron Partnership is an example of an SID already operating in Akron.

Wilson put together a [slideshow](#) noting multiple public safety issues in the area and stating that this effort aims to address them. Over the past six to seven months, the city has been working with 15 to 20 property owners in the area to develop the plan. The SID will fund weekend patrols, programs, litter pickup, space improvements, and snow/leaf pickups. Two petitions need to be circulated before approval.

Vollman said the first petition is to gather 60%+ property owner signatures to form the SID, which the city would approve with a council vote. After that, the SID would file as a nonprofit organization. SID members would vote on by-laws and elect a board of directors. Petition 2 would entail the Services Plan and Assessment, where 60%+ of property owners would sign to approve the services plan, followed by approval from a council vote. The final step is implementation, targeted at improving the safety, atmosphere and businesses proposed for the district. Vollman said they have exceeded the 60% threshold, and the final step is legislation to approve the articles of incorporation.

Abraham Nabors, a member of the family who owns [Mustard Seed Market](#) said that “establishing Highland Square as an SID will help restore the neighborhood that I grew up in as a family-friendly, walkable neighborhood.”

The resolution passed unanimously

Capital Investment Budget

[See the full resolution here](#)

Long-Range Planning and Development Manager Helen Tomic described the changes as general housekeeping for the [2026 Capital Budget](#). The resolution would amend and correct line items in the budget, including:

- Line item 22, \$1,484,000 Commercial & Industrial Development
- Line item 24, \$500,000 Transportation, Parks, Public Facilities, Housing, and Economic Development.

Wilson asked questions regarding Line Item 75 to change the description to add recruitment and hiring costs, and Tomic said these costs are for classes, uniforms, etc.

Wilson asked which police employment costs are included in the capital budget. Tomic said background checks are included in the budget and committed to providing Wilson with additional information at a later date.

Wilson additionally spoke to the [long-gun program](#) and what policies are currently underway, and the need for reform.

Homelessness

Wilson referenced the need for additional funding to address homelessness in the city, noting recent weather-related deaths. Planning and Urban Development Director Kyle Julien mentioned efforts to boost funding and capacity for warming centers under the Operating Budget. Hannah said the warming center located at [111 E. Voris St.](#) was “too small.” He asked if funding was available to allow for expansion or a new expenditure for a larger facility. Fusco said the Capital Budget has to be passed by Feb. 15, in accordance with state law, motioning to suspend the rules for passage. The legislation passed unanimously.

Traffic Calming

Director of Public Service Chris Ludle and Development Engineering Manager Michelle DiFiore provided a [traffic calming](#) update covering the last five years. They spoke about funding the Safe Streets to School and Safe Roads for All initiatives from the U.S. Department of Transportation and the Ohio Department of Transportation.

DiFiore said the best practice is to install speed tables in series, consider roadway width to prevent people from driving around them, and the need for more input from the community on where traffic issues are. Public outreach over the years has been robust, with more than 500 requests and 1,300 surveys from residents in 2022 alone. In 2023, 40 solar radar signs were purchased and installed, launching a traffic calming pilot program on the Akron Engage website, with the first report completed in March 2024. The program has grown in size and scope over the years, including modifications to “high injury networks” identified at North Street, Lover’s Lane, Archwood Avenue and Lakeshore Boulevard. The need for additional data was identified, and the city has worked with AMATS on data collection using solar signs, two portable radar trackers, and research into an external subscription program that leverages cell phone data. The presentation mentioned multiple grants the city received to improve crosswalks across the city, enhance bike and pedestrian infrastructure, and support development in Summit Lake, beginning in 2027.

Wilson asked about pausing the purchase and installation of additional radars due to code requirements. DiFiore explained that the manual of uniform traffic control devices has been updated. There are plans to purchase a newer radar that requires going through the purchasing department processes as opposed to purchasing from ODOT.

Digital billboard in Kenmore

[See full ordinance here](#)

Ward 9 Council Member Tina Boyes met with members of the engineering department and after a public hearing regarding a request for a digital billboard on Macintosh Avenue installed by Kenjoh Outdoor Advertising. Residents have been [having water issues since 2013](#). There's an underground storm sewer that is buried on private property. There are drainage issues, and the engineering team hopes to address them in the future. After a brief discussion, the committee voted unanimously to approve the request.

NEW LEGISLATION

Development agreement with Ajinomoto

[See full ordinance here](#)

The mayor's office is seeking to enter into a development agreement with [Ajinomoto Health & Nutrition North America](#) at 929 Home Ave. Ajinomoto, formerly known as Northern Gourmet, specializes in health and nutrition science related to amino acids among other things. The council previously approved the redevelopment plan in order to accommodate Ajinomoto's \$14 million on-site expansion plan.

Ajinomoto has 75 employees with over \$6 million in payroll. The expansion is expected to add jobs. Leo Pike and Abi Larkin from Ajinomoto were present. Pike referenced the company's investment in Akron, including new job creation and giving back to the community through schools. The company has been in Akron since 2019, when it purchased majority ownership in Northern Gourmet. It completed the purchase of the company in 2024.

The committee voted unanimously in favor of the ordinance.

121 apartments coming to downtown

Vollman said the city is looking to enter an agreement with Osborne Capital Group to renovate the old Philadelphia Rubberworks Building at 123 West Bartages into 121 apartments, 10 of which are designated as affordable at 80% of area median income (AMI). The \$41 million investment will be similar to the Goodyear investment made by the same company. The agreement would allow the city to boost residential offerings in downtown Akron.

Fusco requested the consent agenda. Wilson asked questions regarding the affordability aspect of the project. Vollman said the federal financing from CDBG requires no more than 80% (AMI). The item passed unanimously.

This was followed by legislation ([see ordinance here](#)) to enter into an agreement with 123 West Bartages LLC. Tomic and Julien expounded on the redevelopment of 24,000 square feet into apartments, with the city providing \$900,000 in development grants.

Fusco requested consent on the item to allow the council time for further review. The action carried unanimously.

Innerbelt Traffic Studies and Build Grants

[See full ordinance here](#)

Ludle said the purpose of the legislation is to allow the city to submit an application to the U.S. Department of Transportation for the BUILD Grant Program for \$2 million planning study to reconnect the community to the [Akron Innerbelt Master Plan](#) and specifically Innerbelt Decommissioning Study, Route 59 Removal Study, Traffic and Safety Study, looking at Dart and Rand and the “bend streets” such as Exchange and Vernon Odom, Cedar, Euclid and Bartages. The funds are discretionary, and the city is seeking a match. The grant application is due Feb. 24. This builds upon \$13 million spent on redeveloping Main Street.

Hannah asked, “How long is it going to be before we do something with that Innerbelt? We have had city meetings, we have had proposals, we have asked for grants for this, grants for that, my question is how long?”

Ludle said the city received a \$10 million federal grant, but it’s been on hold, and without funding, and the project can’t move forward. He said the city is moving forward with the

ODOT resurfacing project, noting that Vernon Odom Boulevard is part of the Innerbelt. Funders want to know the design plans, he said, adding that the previous grants came after work from multiple administrations. Fusco moved to suspend the rules with a favorable report.

This was followed by an ordinance specific to the Merriman Valley Master Plan to study road improvements. The plans would improve walkability with bike paths, connections to the Cuyahoga Valley National Trail, street improvements and more. The legislation passed unanimously.

PUBLIC SERVICE, PUBLIC UTILITIES & GREEN

The meeting started at 2:08 p.m. with all committee members present, including Kammer, Ward 6 Council Member Brad McKittrick, Wilson, Bolden and Ward 2 Council Member Phil Lombardo. Kammer called for a motion to approve the minutes from the prior meeting.

Canal Place Parking Lot Construction

Discussion around entering into a contract for construction and call for bids at the Canal Place Parking, a city-owned lot near Spaghetti Warehouse. There was a discussion about the need for expediency before the spring/summer start of festival season. The ordinance passed with brief discussion.

Low head dam removal contracts

Ludle said the city had received \$2.8 million from the Ohio EPA to bid and award the restoration of the Little Cuyahoga River from the tunnel site at Autumn Lane. to the dog park. This legislation is geared to assist with erosion remediation. The next phase is acceptance of funds alongside bidding and awards. Work thus far has seen a significant fish habitat. The legislation passed unanimously.

Royce US Protection Contract

Ludle said this contract is for renewing the building security contract. Kammer had questions regarding the cost increase. The company requested a 2% staff wage increase. Council has not yet received the contract. Kammer voted no because he hasn't see the the contract but he'll likely vote yes later. Wilson also voted no because they wanted to see the contract as well. Wilson also mentioned previous use-of-force issues. Ordinance passed 3-2 (Kammer, Wilson voted no).

Wendling Drive Improvements

Committee passed legislation to begin process of improvements to Wendling Drive in Northwest Akron. This includes work on pavement, driveways, sidewalks, storm sewers, roof drain pipes, and more. Luddle explained that there will be future legislation for this roadway project to award the project after bidding and legislation on approval of assessment equalization board. This legislation begins the six-week process to send estimates to all the affected property owners. The entire roadway will be removed due to its condition. Bolden extended praise for forward progress, as this has been years in the making. The legislation was passed with consent unanimously.

Utility Bill System contract with Raftelis Financial

This legislation enters into a contract with Raftelis Financial Consultants to update the city's software for utility billing. Finance Director Mike Wheeler spoke to the legislation. Public Service is responsible for the rules and regulations of utility billing, while the operations of utility billing go through finance. Over the past couple of years, the city has been working to implement SpryCIS, a new utility billing system. This legislation would allow Raftelis to work with the city for 3 months after launch for technical assistance. Wilson asked a question regarding an amendment. Finance explained that this contract was initiated in 2022, and this legislation amends the existing one. Legislation was passed with consent unanimously.

Veolia Water Services North America, LLC Contract

Director Wheeler from finance continued with updates to the utility billing system. This legislation would update the IVR (Interactive Voice Response) system. This amendment would allow for upgrades when customers call into the utility office. There will be continued support in the event that the state implements tenant-based billing. They also provide project support for meter implementation and billing system support. The project will wrap up by the end of 2026. Wilson asked for the contract. Legislation was passed with consent unanimously.

PUBLIC SAFETY

The public safety committee started at 2:32 p.m. with members McKitrick, Kammer, Lombardo, Hannah and At-Large Council Member Eric Garrett. All members were present.

Immigration and Customs Enforcement Resolution

Legislation by Malik and Wilson. Malik referred to the chaos that ICE and the federal government are causing to Ohioans, making mention of the expiration of asylum for Haitians in Springfield and recent bomb threats there.

Four pieces of legislation in the Ohio House and Senate would require local law enforcement, schools, healthcare institutions and others to assist in ICE operations by asking for immigration status or penalizing organizations that don't work with ICE. Malik said this is overreach. This legislation would send a unified message from the city of Akron to members of the Ohio Legislature and the governor's office, urging them to oppose the bills from becoming law.

Hannah asked the mayor directly, "How will you handle the situation if ICE is coming into our community in the city of Akron?"

Malik responded, "From a starting point, we can't obstruct ICE from conducting operations. We're not going to violate the law in that regard. At the same time, we do not have to marshal our resources to assist in those operations, to the extent that we've seen these surges in places like Minneapolis and other places, that have, in a lot of ways, happened in a lawless way. We have no interest and no desire to take part."

He also mentioned protests and the city's progress on policy changes related to crowd management. There is an intention to allow people to protest peacefully. The Akron Police Department has developed a "dialogue team" whose job is to have open communication and dialogue with protest groups, informing them of legal and illegal activities. He expressed interest in increased communication with federal agencies in the event ICE appears.

"We would seek to work with our federal representatives and others to try to understand and have greater communication, and I think one of the things that I think there's some bipartisan consensus around, especially after the awful killings in Minnesota, is that at the very base level be some communication and insisting that masks are not worn and that body worn cameras are worn," Malik said. He stressed that he does not want to see these operations in Akron.

Boyes expressed appreciation and support. McKittrick called for suspension of the rules, and the legislation was passed with a favorable report unanimously.

