

On August 7, 2025, at 7:04 PM, the Village Work Session began with all council members, the Mayor, Law Director and Planner in attendance.

The first part of the session focused on the village's policy for renting out its community building. The discussion opened with a report from the Administrative Assistant, Barb, who had researched rental policies in neighboring communities like Westerville, Canal Winchester, and Blendon Township. The findings showed that these communities have dedicated staff or maintenance teams to inspect facilities after events, with some paying maintenance teams up to \$25 per hour for after-hours work.

A key concern raised was the strain that the current rental policy places on village staff, particularly Barb. The council members noted that the building, which was once rented out three times a year, is now rented multiple times a month, consuming a significant amount of staff time for tasks like touring the building, managing keys, and post-event checks. One council member expressed a desire to stop renting the building entirely, calling it "babysitting" and highlighting that the building's purpose as a municipal building with sensitive materials is being compromised. They suggested focusing on developing a separate, more durable rental facility at the village pool.

The discussion then shifted to the rental fee and security deposit. One council member suggested raising the deposit to \$300, arguing that it would deter disrespectful renters and help cover potential damage. Another council member countered that this would also discourage good residents who respect the space. The Mayor stated that the current \$300 security deposit is insufficient to cover potential damage, as some furniture items, like chairs and tables, cost over \$500 and \$1,000, respectively.

The council members also debated how to handle community organizations, like the Minerva Flora and the Minerva Park Community Association (MPCA), which use the building for meetings but do not pay a fee. Some argued that these groups should be treated differently from the general public, while others felt all renters should be subject to the same rules.

To find a temporary solution, the council proposed a trial period until December 31st. They suggested implementing a new policy immediately that would increase the fee and deposit to \$300 each, limit rentals to one per weekend, and halt all bookings for 2026 until the policy is finalized. This would allow the council to assess the impact of the new rules before making a permanent decision. The council president clarified that any staff hours used for after-hours checks would incur a two-hour minimum call-out fee, which would be an added cost for the village. The council members then discussed whether to incorporate this cost into the new rental fee.

Council members discussed a proposed rental fee and security deposit of \$300 each for the community building. Council President Camara reiterated that staff working on

weekends to inspect the building would be subject to a two-hour minimum call-out pay, which would add to the cost of each rental. The council acknowledged that the current fees don't adequately protect the village's investment in the building's expensive furniture and carpet. A council member brought in a sample of the new carpeting to show how much brighter it is than the worn, current flooring.

A council member suggested that the high demand for the building, which is rented eight times in August compared to three times a year in the old building, indicates that the current fees are too low. They noted that the building is seen as a low-cost, convenient option compared to other venues or even residents' own homes. Another council member expressed concern that completely stopping rentals would be unfair to residents who have come to rely on the space. They proposed a transition period with a reduced number of rentals and higher fees, which would allow time to develop a replacement facility at the village pool.

The council agreed to move forward with a trial period until December 31st, implementing a **\$300 rental fee and \$300 security deposit** and limiting rentals to one per weekend. They will not book any events for 2026 until a permanent decision is made. The council also discussed an alternate location for rentals, the shelter house, which is currently not being used for this purpose.

The conversation then shifted to two major infrastructure projects:

- **Maintenance Building:** The project is moving forward, with crews already clearing trees. The village has secured permits to begin construction, and the final permits are expected later.
- **Minerva Lake Road Project:** A kickoff meeting is scheduled for the next day to address resident questions about the project, including driveway access and mailbox relocation. A document with answers will be posted online. A key point of discussion was the plan to install **five-foot-wide sidewalks**, a standard that is more practical than the original four-foot plan.

Finally, council members discussed adding **streetlights** at the intersections of Minerva Lake Road with Farview and State Street to increase safety for pedestrians, citing concerns about crime. They plan to ask the contractors for pricing on this, including options for motion-activated LED lights, and to seek funding from the Link Us project, which is a continuous source of funding based on a county sales tax. The cost increase for this change is estimated to be around **\$10,000**. The mayor is also working on a plan to address resident concerns about driveways and mailboxes during the construction.

Sidewalk and Street Lighting

The mayor, fiscal officer, and a street lighting expert met to discuss adding **pedestrian lighting** along the new sidewalks and at key intersections. This is a priority due to safety concerns and to prevent crime. The council is considering installing the necessary infrastructure for the lights now and funding the fixtures themselves later, as a potential way to manage costs. The expert noted that **motion-sensor lights** are an option to address resident concerns about light pollution. The cost of a full lighting system for the intersection could be **\$30,000-\$50,000**.

Tree Planting Request

A resident group has requested that the village help plant three new trees. They are willing to pay for the trees and delivery (\$637 total), but are asking the village to either plant them or cover the planting cost, which is approximately **\$268** (50% of the tree's cost). The council notes that the trees come with a warranty that is only valid if a professional nursery plants them. They also suggest that the village could potentially "bundle" this project with the replacement of five or six other village trees that have died to get a better price. The council also expresses concerns about the size of the trees and where they would be planted.

Park Lane Court Flooding

A council member reports that an area of Park Lane Court is experiencing frequent flooding, with water taking 20 to 30 minutes to recede. Although this area has been previously evaluated and deemed "not an issue," the council feels it should be reexamined, especially since the flooding occurred twice in one week.

Sexual Harassment Training and Employee Recognition

The mayor reports that a mandatory sexual harassment training session was held for all village employees to meet liability insurance requirements. Although council members were not invited, the mayor believes they should have been present, as the training included examples of council members in other municipalities getting into trouble. The village is trying to get a video of the training for the council to view.

The mayor also announced that the village celebrated its employees with service awards. Several employees, including the police chief, have been with the village for five or more years, and one employee, John from the pool, has served for 40 years. This event marked the first time that all village employees were in the same room together for a celebratory event.

Council Communication and Committee Meetings

This section includes a heated discussion about the effectiveness of the council's committee meetings.

- **Problem:** The mayor believes that the current 30-minute committee meetings held before council meetings are not long enough to conduct proper business. She feels that important discussions about projects, like the Minerva Lake Road project, are being rushed, leading to a breakdown in communication and changes to projects late in the process.
- **Proposed Solution:** A council member suggests that the committees should return to having longer, separate meetings to allow for more in-depth discussion and better information flow. They also propose a system where new legislation must be submitted a week before the council meeting to give committees time to review it.
- **Discussion:** The conversation becomes contentious, with some council members feeling frustrated that they are not being included in important conversations. They state that the mayor, due to her proactive nature, often handles issues herself without informing the relevant committees, leading to a breakdown in trust and communication. The council members expressed a desire to help and take on more responsibilities, suggesting that a more formalized system of communication, like a running list of tasks or group emails, could be beneficial. They emphasize the need to work as a team and improve the flow of information to make the process more efficient and transparent for everyone involved.

Communication and Meeting Structure

The council continues to debate the effectiveness of the current meeting structure. The mayor advocates for the return of separate, in-depth committee meetings, arguing that the current 30-minute sessions are insufficient. One council member provides an example of a recent budget change that caught him off guard, illustrating the need for more detailed committee discussions. Another council member acknowledges the difficulty of scheduling these meetings, but stresses that they're essential for proper oversight and informed decision-making.

Apologies and Council's Role

A council member apologizes to the mayor for a public outburst. The council members clarify that their frustration isn't with the mayor's job performance but with a lack of inclusion in the decision-making process. They explain that they want to be more involved, ask questions, and understand the details of projects to better serve the community and hold administration accountable. The mayor responds by saying that she has been in more meetings and discussions with key people like Mike Flickinger than the council has, but she's been trying to bring the information to them. She states that she does not make major decisions, such as spending village money, without the council's approval, but she does make emergency decisions when necessary.

Village Administrator Position

The mayor suggests that the village has grown too much for its current staff structure. She states that she is often doing tasks she is not qualified for and relies heavily on outside consultants, like the engineer Mike Flickinger. The mayor recommends that the council seriously consider hiring a **village administrator** before her term ends, as this person could provide the necessary professional expertise to manage the village's numerous projects and take some of the burden off of the mayor and other staff. She emphasizes that this is a critical need for the village's long-term success.

Short-Term Solutions

A council member suggests that the mayor is overwhelmed and needs to communicate her need for help. The mayor agrees, stating that the lack of detailed committee discussions has already cost her several hours of work this week. She expresses frustration that project details, such as those for the sidewalks, are being discussed and changed right before they are scheduled to begin. The mayor believes that having more in-depth committee meetings, particularly for the Streets Committee, would have prevented these issues.

Communication Breakdown

The discussion highlights a **communication breakdown** between the administration and the council. A council member notes that they are often left out of detailed conversations, learning about project specifics and changes after decisions have already been made. The mayor states that she's asking for their help and wants to improve this communication, offering to forward project-related emails to the council.

Hiring a Village Administrator

The topic of hiring a **village administrator** is revisited. The mayor believes this position is crucial for the village's future and that a dedicated professional would reduce the village's reliance on external consultants. She suggests discussing the creation and hiring of this position in a future executive session, preferably in January after any potential changes to the council. She also clarifies that the salary for the mayor's position was not set in the current budget to allow for a more strategic discussion about it in the new year.

Committee Roster and Meeting Schedule

The council attempts to clarify the current committee assignments, noting that the website is outdated. They also discuss a proposal to change the meeting schedule, moving the start time for work sessions to 6:30 p.m. and the council meeting to 7:30 p.m., a change that a council member notes is already how things run in practice.

Improving Workflow and Communication Tools

A council member suggests that the village's communication tools are outdated. They propose looking into modern software and systems, like **SharePoint** or other platforms that could help with collaboration and document management. They also bring up the idea of using an intern to help with tasks like social media and administrative work, although this idea was previously met with roadblocks. The mayor acknowledges the value of these suggestions, noting that the current reliance on part-time staff and manual processes leads to mistakes and adds to the workload of key employees like Barb.

Code Enforcement Officer's Employment Status

The mayor clarifies that the village's **code enforcement officer is not an employee**, but a self-employed contractor. This means he has greater autonomy over his schedule, which can sometimes create challenges for the village in a timely response to issues or in having him attend meetings. The mayor suggests this is a topic that may require a contract review or a different arrangement.

Resident Complaints and External Vendors

The discussion turns to resident complaints about external vendors working in the village, specifically a utility company (Asplund) trimming trees. A resident was upset about the company's process and alleged damage to private property. The mayor notes that the village often doesn't receive advance notification from these companies about their work. The council agrees that while these companies are within their rights to work in their easements, the village should have a process for communicating with them to ensure residents' property is respected. The council believes that a council member could act as a liaison, relaying resident concerns to the companies.

Moving Forward

The meeting concludes with a call for better communication and a more structured approach to council business. The mayor expresses her satisfaction with the conversation and acknowledges that such discussions, though difficult, are necessary. The council agrees to move forward with a revised meeting schedule, with committee work sessions scheduled before the official council meetings. They also tentatively agree to work on improving their internal communication processes, such as creating a central repository for documents and using group emails to keep everyone informed. The group emphasizes the importance of open dialogue to prevent future frustrations and ensure the village is managed effectively.