



**City of Kent**  
**City Council Committee Meeting**  
319 S. Water St., Kent Ohio 44240

**April 1, 2026**

**MINUTES**

**CALL TO ORDER**

Mayor Jack Amrhein called the Committee meeting to order at 7:00pm.

Present: Ms. Melissa Celko; Mr. Jeff Clapper; Mr. Eric Dreger; Mr. Chris Hook; Ms. Heidi Shaffer Bish; Mr. Benjamin Tipton; Ms. Sarah Wesley

Also Present: Mr. Jack Amrhein, Mayor and President of Council; Ms. Kathy Coleman, Clerk of Council; Mr. Dave Ruller, City Manager; Ms. Hope Jones, Law Director; Mr. Jamie Samels, Fire Chief; Mr. Jim Bowling, City Engineer; Dominique Bollenbacher, Community Outreach Coordinator; Ms. Bridget Susel, Community Development Director; Ms. Rhonda Hall, Finance Director; Ms. Angela Manley, Parks & Recreation Director; Ms. Melanie Baker, Service Director; Mr. Jordan Snyder, IT Technician; Ms. Joan Seidel, Health Commissioner; Mr. Nick Shearer, Acting Police Chief

**COMMITTEES**

**Committee of the Whole – Chair Amrhein/Vice-Chair Clapper**

**Board and Commission Interview**

- *Interview for Design & Preservation Committee – **Julie Kenworthy***  
Ms. Kenworthy emphasized her passion for preservation, underscoring her role as the director of the Kent Historical Society and her commitment to the Kent community. She believes in the importance of objective decision-making in design and preservation, stating that her background aligns well with the position's requirements. She was advised that the voting would take place at the April regular meeting and she would be advised of the results by email.

**City Staff Updates**

*Strategic Planning Update*

- **Mr. Ruller** provided a summary document of strategic threats, opportunities, programs, and efforts for the years 2026-27. He remarked on the refreshed and more visually appealing presentation of the document, diverging from the previous formats. Upcoming events include the city's manager's annual update to the Chamber of Commerce, which will include strategic planning as well as new businesses and infrastructure updates. He acknowledged the need for effective guidance in strategic planning and is exploring potential consultants for this process and encouraged Council to share any recommendations.

### Rail Crossing Quiet Zones

- **Mr. Bowling** discussed the potential for implementing quiet zones at rail crossings in the City, citing ongoing research since January. The study involves analyzing quiet zones in other communities, community opinions, infrastructure status, safety impacts, and budgetary costs associated with quiet zones specifically at the CSX crossing. Key safety concerns include the management of train horns and the risk of trespasser incidents, particularly in areas with homeless populations. Cost estimates vary based on railroad requirements, with a need for ongoing maintenance every five years. Community interest is being gauged for potential investment in quiet zones. Further discussions are planned for the next workshop to gather community feedback.

### Service Department Updates

- **Ms. Baker** advised Council that brush chipping started early due to the windstorms March 13-16. Canvassing of the city will continue for one more week. Regular brush chipping will occur in May, starting the week of May 4th. Additionally, the yard site is now open three weeks early, with specific hours on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. The large spring cleanup is also scheduled for May, where residents can dispose of items with Republic's help. A scrap tire pickup will take place on May 28th at the water reclamation plant, alongside promotion of the Portage County solid waste facility, which accepts various recyclable materials year-round.

### Community Development Update

- **Ms. Susel** reported that a request for qualifications has been issued to hire a consultant for updating the comprehensive housing study and needs analysis, referred to as the housing study. Proposals are due by April 9th, with a contract anticipated in May. The update will take several months and aims to analyze data from the 2016 housing study, which provided quantitative support for anecdotal evidence regarding housing inventory concerns. It is acknowledged that private development cannot be entirely controlled, but the updated study aims to guide developers towards diverse housing options. Ms. Susel responded to questions from Council regarding implications for residential development, enrollment trends, zoning, and market dynamics in the Kent area. The discussion addressed key issues such as housing demand, land availability, zoning overlays, and the challenges of private-sector housing development in a college town context.
- A request for qualifications will be published for an economic development strategy to reinforce ongoing efforts in economic development, particularly in downtown redevelopment. The timeline aligns with the housing study update, with an anticipated contract by late May. Each consultancy report will be presented to the council to highlight key findings.
- Main Street Kent has requested time at the next committee meeting to discuss the scheduling for the Franklin Street closure, stressing that this is not intended to remove the annual closure. Main Street Kent conducted a survey of its DORA participants and proposes shifting the closure period from Memorial Day to Labor Day, rather than the first Saturday in May to the last Saturday in October.

## **Community Development Committee-Chair Shaffer Bish/Vice-Chair Wallach**

### Down Payment Assistance Program

- **Ms. Susel** provided Council with an overview of a new down payment assistance program which seeks to transition single-family rental properties back to owner-occupied status using a \$50,000

general fund allocation. The program features a \$10,000 forgivable deferred loan with no payments required. Forgiveness occurs at \$1,250 per year over eight years, after which the loan is fully forgiven. If the property is sold before eight years to a non-owner occupant, full repayment of \$10,000 is required. If sold to another owner occupant before eight years, repayment is prorated based on years remaining. Eligibility requires the property to have been licensed as a rental for **three years** prior to application (revised from one year after council discussion to ensure commitment to the program). Applicants must have a primary mortgage; the city's loan would be second position to ensure repayments in case of default. The program is open to all income levels, aiming to promote homeownership rather than focus on income eligibility. Marketing will target real estate agents, banks, and community organizations; partnerships with lenders for incentives (like reduced closing costs or points) are being explored. The program addresses concerns about long-term rental property degradation and declining profitability of single-family rentals.

MOTION TO AUTHORIZE THE DOWN PAYMENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM was made by Mr. Clapper, seconded by Mr. Tipton and carried by unanimous voice vote.

Proposed Amendment to Community Reinvestment Area Agreement with Mazda Dealership

- **Ms. Susel** discussed the Community Reinvestment Area (CRA) agreement with Mazda, and proposed an amendment which aims to eliminate the \$500 annual fee that Mazda has been paying, which is no longer required for other businesses under similar agreements. This fee was removed from the Ohio Revised Code by the Ohio Department of Development, and since Mazda's agreement predates this change but began receiving exemptions afterward, the action seeks to ensure parity with other CRA agreements.

MOTION TO AUTHORIZE AMENDMENT TO MAZDA'S CRA AGREEMENT was made by Mr. Clapper, seconded by Ms. Celko and carried by unanimous voice vote.

**Finance Committee – Chair Celko/Vice-Chair Tipton**

Grant Submission for Fire Safety Equipment

- **Chief Samels** requested Council's approval to apply for a \$25,000 grant from the Joey D. Bernardo Foundation, which would fund new repelling gear for all firefighters, allowing them to safely descend from buildings in emergencies. The proposal includes a trainer program costing \$3,000 and there is no match necessary from the City.

MOTION TO AUTHORIZE APPLICATION FOR THE JOEY D BERNARDO FOUNDATION GRANT was made by Ms. Shaffer Bish , seconded by Ms. Wesley, and carried by unanimous voice vote.

City Staffing and Funding Options Report

- **Mr. Ruller and Ms. Hall** provided information on the city's financial status, service needs, economic development, tax strategies, and the proposed course for addressing funding challenges through voter-approved measures. The complexity of balancing fiscal responsibility with community expectations in a high-need, low-resource environment was highlighted. Key points:
  - *The City faces a funding gap between service needs and current revenue.* Despite economic growth and careful budgeting, there is an imbalance between community expectations and what

the city can afford with existing revenue streams. Without additional funding, critical staffing and infrastructure needs cannot be met adequately.

- ***Maintaining the current income tax rate while redirecting funds is the preferred strategy.***  
The staff recommends removing the temporary 0.25 percent tax initially dedicated to the police station once the debt is retired, then seeking voter approval to reinstate it for broader service needs. This approach avoids increasing the overall tax burden on residents while addressing critical operational priorities.
- ***Incremental staffing increases are urgent and necessary.***  
The minimum baseline identified (3 police, 3 fire, 3 laborers) reflects essential immediate needs. Additional staffing beyond this baseline is desirable but constrained by budget realities.
- ***Economic development efforts have paid off and should continue to be supported.***  
The success of downtown revitalization demonstrates the value of targeted investments in economic growth platforms. Sustaining and building upon this progress is critical to maintaining and expanding the tax base.
- ***Strategic use of tax credits and incentives could improve resident retention and revenue.***  
Considering a tax credit system or non-resident income tax could help balance revenue needs with fairness, encouraging more workers to live in Kent and reducing financial pressure on current residents.
- ***The city must balance service expansion with fiscal responsibility.***  
The limited financial resources require prioritizing core services and carefully evaluating proposed new initiatives or expansions, particularly social programs that are not central to the city's mission.
- ***Voter education and engagement are crucial for successful revenue measures.***  
Any tax measure will require a well-planned public education campaign to communicate the necessity and benefits of funding changes, as well as transparency about how funds will be used.
- ***Timing of ballot measures should align with voter turnout and administrative efficiency.***  
While the fall election offers a seamless transition opportunity, there is flexibility to delay if more public education and preparation is needed. Avoiding gaps or confusion in tax rates is important for both residents and businesses.

#### Proposed 2026 Budget Appropriations Amendment #3

- **Ms. Hall** presented the third budget appropriation amendment of 2026 to Council.

MOTION TO APPROVE THE BUDGET APPROPRIATIONS AMENDMENT was made by Mr. Clapper, seconded by Mr. Hook, and carried by unanimous voice vote.

### **Health and Public Safety – Chair Hook/Vice-Chair Clapper**

#### Portage County Hazard Mitigation Plan

- **Ms. Baker, Chief Samels and Chief Shearer** reviewed the Portage County Hazard Mitigation Plan update, emphasizing its collaborative nature, operational importance, funding implications, and community impact. The plan is fundamental to ensuring that Portage County and its municipalities, including Kent, remain prepared to respond effectively to a wide range of emergencies.

MOTION TO AUTHORIZE PORTAGE COUNTY HAZARD MITIGATION PLAN was made by Ms. Shaffer Bish, seconded by Mr. Clapper, and carried by unanimous voice vote.

**Land Use – Chair Clapper/Vice-Chair Hook**

No report.

**Streets, Sidewalks, and Utilities Committee-Chair Wallach/Vice-Chair Tipton**

*N. Mantua Street TID Grant Application*

**Mr. Bowling** requested Council’s approval to submit a \$500,000 grant application to ODOT for the transportation improvement district, initiated in 2022 in collaboration with Kent City School District and Davy Tree Corporation. Public meetings were held from May 2023 to August 2025. The project aims to enhance safety for all users, balance vehicular needs with various transportation modes, improve vehicle access, and enhance the city's aesthetics and entry points.

MOTION TO AUTHORIZE ODOT TID grant application was made by Mr. Clapper, seconded by Ms. Celko, and carried by unanimous voice vote.

**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:53pm.



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City of Kent Clerk of Council