



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

**May 6, 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; Ms. Heidi Shaffer Bish; Ms. Tracy Wallach

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. Jalessa Caples, Acting Health Commissioner

**COMMITTEES**

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

**City Staff Updates**

- **Mr. Bowling** provided an update on the Safety Town project, which is aimed at providing a safe play area for children, complete with painted streets and a bike parking lot. The facility includes a walking trail for parents and seating throughout. Rotary is involved in fundraising and establishing a maintenance agreement with schools and the city for public access. The area will remain open like a community park, allowing for year-round use, with considerations for maintenance and parking arrangements. The initiative aims to enhance the South End community while ensuring sustainable operation post-construction.
- **Ms. Baker** reported that spring cleanup has commenced, including brush chipping in the southwest and heavy-duty trash pickup in the northwest quadrant. Additionally, two water towers near Kent State are under construction, with one nearing completion. She reported attending a recent seminar on urban deer management and relayed that city deer are more domesticated, having adapted to urban living. Data collection on deer-related incidents is underway to better understand the herd within city limits. Residents are advised against feeding deer, which have adapted remarkably well to city life. Further assessments will inform future management strategies.
- **Mr. Ruller** reported that there will be an upcoming request for authorization to retire some unnecessary servers at the next meeting.

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

### Tax Incentive Review Update

**Ms. Susel** explained that each year the Tax Incentive Review Council reviews the performance of the Enterprise Zone agreements for the City of Kent and the staff prepares an annual report for Council to accept. The 2025 report notes that there are 4 active Enterprise Zone agreements in Kent totaling \$24,968,643. The TIRC members are recommending continuing all agreements.

MOTION TO ACCEPT THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE TIRC AS PRESENTED WITH THE EMERGENCY CLAUSE was made by Ms. Celko, seconded by Mr. Clapper, and carried by unanimous voice vote.

### Franklin Avenue Closure

**Ms. Susel and Heather Malarcik** from Main Street Kent discussed with Council a recent poll of downtown businesses regarding the annual closing of Franklin Ave. A survey was conducted among 36 businesses on Franklin Avenue to gauge support for reducing the street closure time from over five months to a shorter period like Memorial Day to Labor Day. With a 67% response rate, 75% favored a reduced timeframe, aligning with community and business interests to make outdoor spaces more enjoyable and manageable. The current seasonal closure begins early in May and ends in October, which some find overly long, affecting business convenience and community use. Discussions included possible compromises, such as opening in early May and closing after Labor Day, with plans to poll the community for more precise feedback before final decisions are made, ensuring residents' preferences are considered and balancing business needs.

### 2026 Social Service Funding Awards

**Ms. Susel** reported on the 2026 Social Service Funding Awards, highlighting a significant budget increase to \$100,000 (up from \$65,000 in previous years). The funding supports a diverse range of local nonprofits that provide essential safety net services, as the city relies on expert partners rather than maintaining an internal social services department. Key allocations for this cycle include:

- Housing & Crisis Support: Funding for Coleman Health Services (eviction prevention), Family & Community Services (homelessness case management), and Safer Futures (domestic violence shelter).
- Youth & Education: Continued support for Lovelight's youth programming and a new PMHA summer camp for children in public housing.
- Health & Legal Aid: Grants for Community Legal Aid (pro-bono civil services) and the Portage Area Recovery Center (sober living).
- Food Security: Increased assistance for Kent Social Services' food pantry to address recent cuts in SNAP benefits.

Ms. Susel emphasized that all recipients must provide data-driven proof of impact and specifically serve Kent residents. While some new requests—such as property tax offsets for seniors—were denied for not meeting the definition of a "direct social service," the city remains committed to leveraging these partnerships to support its most vulnerable populations.

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

### Staffing Funding Discussion, continued

**Mr. Ruller** discussed with Council options to retire the municipal debt for the police station 11 years early, thanks to unexpected growth in income tax revenue from downtown reinvestment and local business expansion.

Tax Replacement Proposal: With the debt nearly paid off, staff proposes "sunsetting" the current 0.25% income tax and asking voters to replace it with a new 0.25% tax. Unlike the current tax, the new funds would be unrestricted, allowing the city to hire three firefighters, three police officers, and a dedicated year-round street paving crew.

- **Alternative Rebate Model:** One explored option involves raising the tax to 0.50% while offering a 0.25% rebate to residents in good standing. This would maintain the current rate for locals while increasing revenue from non-residents, though "Bond Counsel" is still reviewing the legality and feasibility of this specific model.
- **Strict Advocacy Rules:** Recent changes in state law and tighter regulations mean the city and its staff must remain strictly neutral. Advocacy for any tax change must come from independent community groups rather than city-printed materials or door-to-door campaigning by paid staff.
- **Timeline and Ballot Logistics:** The council is considering three speeds for implementation: "fast track" (targeting this fall), "deliberate speed," or "taking as long as necessary." Staff noted that even sunsetting an existing tax likely requires a ballot vote, necessitating very clear and precise ballot language to avoid legal complications.

Council members were encouraged to review the provided one-page summary of "upsides and downsides" and election calendars before providing further direction to staff.

### Consideration of Proposed Sale of Surplus City Property

**Ms. Manley** advised Council that Kent Parks and Recreation is looking to sell a residential ranch home located at 500 Middlebury Rd., which it has owned since 2017. The department aims to exit the residential landlord business, as the property no longer serves a functional purpose. The method for the sale would be an "absolute auction" (starting at \$0) hosted by Kiko Auctions on June 4<sup>th</sup>, which would feature simultaneous live in-person and online bidding. The property was recently appraised at \$150,000 and a 10% buyer's premium will be added to the final sale price to cover the auctioneer's commission. Council members raised concerns regarding whether the home could be restricted to owner-occupancy to avoid it becoming a student rental. However, Ms. Manley noted that because it is a public auction, the city must generally accept the "highest and best" bid regardless of the buyer's intent, and the auction format makes implementing such restrictions legally difficult.

MOTION TO AUTHORIZE THE SALE OF SURPLUS PARKS PROPERTY LOCATED AT 500 MIDDLEBURY ROAD WITH THE EMERGENCY CLAUSE was made by Mr. Clapper, seconded by Ms. Shaffer Bish and carried by unanimous voice vote.

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

### Health Department FDA Grant Renewal and Appropriation of Funds

**Ms. Caples** requested Council to authorize the acceptance of a \$10,000 Food and Drug Administration grant, which aims to support food safety best practices and will assist in achieving PHAB accreditation.

MOTION TO AUTHORIZE ACCEPTANCE OF THE GRANT WITH THE EMERGENCY CLAUSE was made by Ms. Celko, seconded by Ms. Shaffer Bish and carried by unanimous voice vote.

## **Streets, Sidewalks & Utilities Committee – Chair Wallach/Vice-Chair Tipton**

### Consideration of Proposed Parking Ordinance Change of Needham Avenue

**Ms. Baker** reported that a recent situation highlighted that Needham Avenue was too narrow for emergency vehicles due to cars being parked on both sides. After looking into the situation, it was discovered that no parking restrictions were in place. Staff is proposing amending the ordinance to prohibit parking on the south side, near fire hydrants, while continuing to allow parking on the north side. This adjustment would ensure clear access for emergency services. Residents were informed by the fire chief about this proposal and did not provide any feedback.

MOTION TO AMEND PARKING REGULATIONS ON NEEDHAM AVENUE AS PRESENTED WITH THE EMERGENCY CLAUSE was made by Ms. Celko, seconded by Mr. Clapper, and carried by unanimous voice vote.

### Consideration of Proposed Ordinances Changes Recommended by NPDES Audit

**Ms. Baker** reported that in April 2025, the Ohio EPA audited Kent's municipal storm water management program under the NPDES general permit to assess compliance with Ohio environmental laws and regulations. The city performed well but received four findings requiring updates to forms, recordable measures, storm water management protocols, and coordination with surrounding jurisdictions' sanitary sewer maps. Proposed changes to specific ordinances, which include definitions, discharge prohibitions, and storm water plan development, were discussed. The changes aim to streamline compliance and address concerns without incurring extra costs, as most requirements are standard among contractors and developers.

MOTION TO AUTHORIZE MODIFICATION TO THE CITY'S STORMWATER ORDINANCES AS PRESENTED WITH THE EMERGENCY CLAUSE was made by Ms. Celko, seconded by Mr. Clapper, and carried by unanimous voice vote.

*Proposed Amendments to the SR59 Project Agreement*

**Mr. Bowling** requested Council’s approval for an amendment to the inter-agency agreement for the state's alternative transportation project, initiated in 2023. The project aims to improve a section of SR59 for increased walkability, bike-ability, and transit usage. The amendment includes the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) as a project sponsor, responsible for replacing three aging traffic signals and securing land, with an additional \$2 million acquired for the project with no change in cost to the City or scope of the project.

MOTION TO AUTHORIZE AMENDMENTS TO THE SR59 PROJECT AGREEMENT AS PRESENTED WITH THE EMERGENCY CLAUSE was made by Ms. Shaffer Bish, seconded by Mr. Clapper, and carried by unanimous voice vote.

**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:13pm.



---

City of Kent Clerk of Council