



City of Kent

Regular City Council Meeting

319 S. Water Street, Kent, Ohio 44240

March 18, 2026

MINUTES

At 7:00pm, Mayor Amrhein called the Regular City Council meeting to order.

Present: Ms. Melissa Celko; Mr. Jeff Clapper; Mr. Eric Dreger; Mr. Chris Hook; Ms. Heidi Shaffer Bish; Mr. Benjamin Tipton; Ms. Tracy Wallach; 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; Ms. Melanie Baker, Services Director; Ms. Bridget Susel, Community Development Director

Motion to excuse Mr. Turner was made by Mayor Amrhein, seconded by Mr. Hook, and carried by unanimous voice vote.

OPENING REMARKS and PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Ms. Wesley welcomed the audience, then led Council in the Pledge of Allegiance.

COMMUNICATIONS

Public Comment

- **Ms. Mary Starbuck**, a member of the Kent Environmental Council Advocacy Committee, expressed concerns over intense development activities at 100 Johnson Road (Kolb Acres LLC). These activities involve large excavating machinery dredging a lake, which risks sediment contamination in nearby Fish Creek and loss of topsoil. She highlighted the lack of erosion control and the site's ecological importance as a natural wetland, which contributes to groundwater replenishment. She stated that Kent Environmental Council considers the Council's decision to deny the agricultural zoning application for the property correct, but remains concerned about ongoing excavation activities and their environmental impacts. She urged the council to take action against this misuse of land designation.
- **Mr. Roger Bliss** discussed the impact of train noise on quality of life in Kent, emphasizing that the disruptive sounds extend beyond crossings due to federal regulations requiring trains to sound horns. He introduced the concept of quiet zones, established by federal law in 2006, which allow for alternative safety measures that can replace the horn

protocol, creating a quieter environment without compromising safety. He encouraged the Council to explore these alternatives thoughtfully, moving away from the fear-based perception of train safety, and to engage with the available research on quiet zones to foster informed discussions.

Written Communication

- On February 24, 2026, the Clerk's office received notice that the March 3rd Planning Commission meeting had been canceled due to a lack of agenda items.
- On March 2, 2026, a whitepaper regarding snow removal in the City of Kent was received from Rick Hawksley and shared with Council.
- On March 5, 2026, the February minutes and March agenda for the Standing Rock Cemetery trustees meeting were received and posted online.
- On March 9, 2026, the Clerk's office received notice that there would be no Board of Zoning Appeals meeting in March.
- On March 11, 2026, the Clerk's office received notice that the March 17th Planning Commission meeting had been cancelled due to lack of quorum. The case that was to be considered will be presented at the next scheduled Planning Commission meeting on Tuesday, April 7, 2026.

City Manager's Report

MOTION TO APPROVE THE CITY MANAGER'S REPORT was made by Ms. Shaffer Bish, seconded by Ms. Wallach, and passed by unanimous voice vote.

CONSENT AGENDA

MOTION TO SUSPEND THREE READINGS OF DRAFTS 2026-18 and 2026-21 through 2026-28 was made by Mr. Clapper, seconded by Ms. Shaffer Bish, and carried by unanimous roll call vote, 8-0-0.

MOTION TO APPROVE THE CONSENT AGENDA was made by Mr. Clapper, seconded by Ms. Wallach, and carried by unanimous roll call vote, 8-0-0.

- Approval of February Regular Council Meeting minutes
- Approval of March Council Committee Meeting minutes
- **DRAFT 2026-18 AN ORDINANCE AUTHORIZING THE FINANCE DIRECTOR, UPON THE ISSUANCE OF A CERTIFICATE OF AVAILABILITY OF FUNDS, TO PAY CERTAIN PURCHASE ORDERS MADE THAT EXCEED \$3000.00; AND DECLARING AN EMERGENCY.**

- **DRAFT 2026-21** AN ORDINANCE AUTHORIZING A WATER TAP-IN FOR THE PROPERTY LOCATED AT 5873 HORNING ROAD, OUTSIDE THE CITY OF KENT, AND DECLARING AN EMERGENCY.
- **DRAFT 2026-22** AN ORDINANCE AUTHORIZING THE CITY MANAGER, OR HIS DESIGNEE, TO RENEW THE AGREEMENT WITH THE HAYMAKER FARMERS' MARKET FOR THE SUB-LAND LEASE OF A PARKING LOT LOCATED NORTH OF SUMMIT STREET, WEST OF FRANKLIN AVENUE, AND EAST OF AKRON BARBERTON CLUSTER RAILWAY COMPANY'S MAIN LINE TRACK, CONTAINING 0.168 ACRES, FOR THE PERIOD OF APRIL 4, 2026 THROUGH NOVEMBER 28, 2026; CONTINGENT ON THE CONTINUATION OF THE CITY'S LEASE WITH THE AKRON BARBERTON CLUSTER RAILWAY COMPANY, FOR THE AMOUNT OF \$1.00; AND DECLARING AN EMERGENCY.
- **DRAFT 2026-23** AN ORDINANCE AMENDING CHAPTER 1337 TITLED "FLOOD DAMAGE CONTROL," IN ORDER TO STAY IN COMPLIANCE WITH RECENT UPDATES TO THE FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY (FEMA) FLOOD DAMAGE CONTROL REGULATIONS AND DECLARING AN EMERGENCY.
- **DRAFT 2026-24** AN ORDINANCE AUTHORIZING THE CITY MANAGER OR HIS DESIGNEE TO TAKE ALL ACTIONS NECESSARY TO ACCEPT THE NORTHEAST OHIO PUBLIC ENERGY COUNCIL (NOPEC) 2026 COMMUNITY EVENT SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM AWARD IN THE AMOUNT OF \$2,000.00, AND DECLARING AN EMERGENCY.
- **DRAFT 2026-25** AN ORDINANCE AUTHORIZING THE CITY MANAGER OR HIS DESIGNEE TO ACCEPT THE NORTHEAST OHIO PUBLIC ENERGY COUNCIL (NOPEC) ENERGIZED COMMUNITY GRANT AWARD IN THE AMOUNT OF \$49,965.00, PLACING IT IN ESCROW WITH NOPEC AND DECLARING AN EMERGENCY.
- **DRAFT 2026-26** AN ORDINANCE AMENDING ORDINANCE NO. 2025-111, THE CURRENT APPROPRIATION ORDINANCE, PASSED DECEMBER 17, 2025; SO AS TO ADJUST APPROPRIATIONS, TRANSFERS AND ADVANCES FROM THE VARIOUS FUNDS OF THE CITY OF KENT TO INDIVIDUAL ACCOUNTS FOR THE CURRENT EXPENSES OF THE CITY FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDING DECEMBER 31, 2026; AND DECLARING AN EMERGENCY.
- **DRAFT 2026-27** AN ORDINANCE AMENDING SECTION 353.02 "PARKING REGULATION AUTHORIZATION" OF THE CODIFIED ORDINANCES OF THE CITY OF KENT TO CHANGE THE LANGUAGE ON NATHAN DRIVE AND PHILLIP DRIVE AND DECLARING AN EMERGENCY.
- **DRAFT 2026-28** AN ORDINANCE AMENDING ORDINANCE NO. 2025-128 THE POSITION ALLOCATION AND THE GENERAL COMPENSATION PLAN AND DECLARING AN EMERGENCY.

STANDING COMMITTEES AND LEGISLATION

Committee of the Whole – Chair Amrhein

- Voting on Planning Commission Appointment
 - MOTION TO APPOINT **ADAM STEPHENS** TO THE PLANNING COMMISSION was made by Mr. Clapper, seconded by Mr. Hook, and carried by unanimous voice vote.
 - MOTION TO AUTHORIZE INSERTION OF NAME INTO DRAFT 2026-19 was made by Mr. Clapper, seconded by Mr. Hook, and carried by unanimous voice vote.
 - **MOTION TO SUSPEND THREE READINGS OF DRAFT 2026-19** was made by Mr. Clapper, seconded by Ms. Wesley, and carried by unanimous roll call vote.
 - **MOTION TO ADOPT DRAFT 2026-19 AN ORDINANCE APPOINTING ADAM STEPHENS TO THE PLANNING COMMISSION AND DECLARING AN EMERGENCY** was made by Mr. Clapper, seconded by Mr. Hook, and carried by unanimous roll call vote.

- Voting on Civil Service Appointment
 - MOTION TO APPOINT **MARIAH TAYLOR** TO THE CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION was made by Ms. Shaffer Bish, seconded by Ms. Wallach, and carried by unanimous voice vote.
 - MOTION TO AUTHORIZE INSERTION OF NAME INTO DRAFT 2026-20 was made by Ms. Shaffer Bish, seconded by Ms. Celko, and carried by unanimous voice vote.
 - **MOTION TO SUSPEND THREE READINGS OF DRAFT 2026-20** was made by Ms. Shaffer Bish, seconded by Ms. Wallach, and carried by unanimous roll call vote, 8-0-0.
 - **MOTION TO ADOPT DRAFT 2026-20 A RESOLUTION APPOINTMENT MARIAH TAYLOR TO THE CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION AND DECLARING AN EMERGENCY** was made by Ms. Shaffer Bish, seconded by Mr. Clapper, and carried by unanimous roll call vote, 8-0-0.

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

No action.

Finance Committee – Chair Celko/Vice-Chair Tipton

No action.

Health & Safety Committee – Chair Hook/Vice-Chair Clapper

No action.

Land Use Committee – Chair Clapper/Vice-Chair Hook

No action

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

No action.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None.

NEW BUSINESS

None.

COUNCIL MEMBERS' COMMENTS

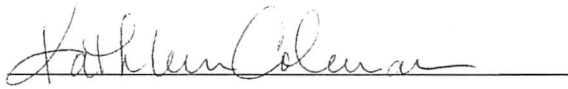
- **Mr. Clapper** made a motion to adopt a 6-month moratorium on AI data centers in the City. During discussion, the motion was amended to a one-year time-frame and was seconded by Ms. Wallach. The motion passed by unanimous voice vote.
- **Ms. Wallach** suggested that staff begin addressing the quiet railroad crossing issue. Mr. Ruller explained that Jim Bowling has been working on this topic, noting that funding for an initial study was already approved and is in progress. Following the study, eligibility assessments will begin, involving discussions related to the railroad. Mr. Ruller noted the importance of ongoing communication with Mr. Bliss and mentioned that findings from the quiet zone study will be submitted to committee in due course.
- **Ms. Wallach** asked about addressing Ms. Starbuck's concerns at Kolb Acres. Ms. Susel explained that the excavation is legally permitted by the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR), as the area is not classified as a wetland. Monitoring has been in place for potential silt migration, but currently, the operations are contained, and the pumping of water into the creek has ceased. Following the completion of excavation work, there will be a focus on addressing the piles remaining on-site, for which the operator must provide further information in alignment with their permit requirements.
- **Ms. Wesley** stated that there were journalism students from Kent State in the audience who were encouraged to take notes and ask questions about the legislative process being discussed. A student expressed confusion over the voting procedures, particularly regarding approvals and suspension of rules that allow for immediate voting on ordinances. It was explained that the meeting was primarily focused on voting, and attending prior meetings would have provided crucial context. The discussion clarified the distinction between regular meeting procedures and emergency measures that require immediate action. The importance of reading the agenda and minutes was emphasized for better understanding.

MAYOR'S REPORT

Mayor Amrhein reported a busy month, including attendance at the March for the Arts event organized by Main Street Kent. This event allowed Kent City school students to showcase over 700 artistic representations of Kent at local businesses. The mayor also mentioned an upcoming meeting with the mayor of Stow.

ADJOURN

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 7:30pm.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Kathleen Coleman", written over a horizontal line.

Kathleen Coleman
Clerk of Council

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Jack Amrhein", written over a horizontal line.

Jack Amrhein
Mayor and President of Council

*Kent Environmental Council
Notice of Environmental Concern, 100 Johnson Rd., Kent Ohio 44240*

March 10, 2026

*To: Kent City Council
From: Kent Environmental Council
Re: 100 Johnson Rd., Kent Ohio 44240*

We are writing you with environmental concerns regarding the current activities at 100 Johnson Rd., Kent, also known as Kolb Acres LLC. Intense development activity has been observed for several months on the property currently zoned O-R (Open Space-Recreation). Large excavating equipment has been digging and dredging the lake on the property of the former Lappin Farm. There is concern that while these two activities are operating simultaneously, it is likely that a considerable amount of sediment is being pumped into nearby Fish Creek impacting ground water downstream and the loss of precious top soil – once this soil is gone there is no getting it back. Adding to those threats this mucked soil is being piled on site without even the erosion deterrence of silt fencing, a common requirement on most construction sites.

Also of concern, is that this lowland area acts as a natural wetland, where surface water is filtered, purified and replenishes deeper aquifers providing potable water to area residents and farms.

On February 4, 2025, Kent City Council held an open forum discussion to address the application of Kolb Acres LLC, to place this property into an agricultural use zoning district. Kent City Council listened to concerns of residents living nearby about noise and general impact to quality of life near the property.

The Kent City Police explained that the application of noise violations to Kolb Acres LLC are still pending in court. It was also shown, during council discussions that the application for an agricultural permit on this property has not met the required standards for the past three years. In fact, this property was not even zoned to permit such activity two years prior. On February 18, 2025, Kent City Council voted to reject the application for this change in zoning. We agree this was the right action on the part of the city Council. Allowing a change to agricultural use zoning would only serve to insulate Kolb Acres LLC from any action as a nuisance, or for its negative environmental impact.

The question remains - what now? The excavation activities continue as well as the continued negative environmental impacts to the community. We are asking what, if any action, Kent City Council will take to stop this obvious misuse of the Open Space-Recreation designation and its ongoing irreparable harm.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely, - The Kent Environmental Council ((KEC)

Addendum added March 17 2026: Eric Long, Stormwater Engineer for the Portage Soil and Water Conservation District, visited Kolb Acres LLC earlier this week and consulted with the owner about soil and water issues there. Mr. Long may be a resource for the city of Kent in this concern. Eric specializes in construction site sediment, erosion control, and stormwater management, often working on drainage issues, environmental planning, and updating regulations to align with Ohio EPA permits.

Good evening,

My name is Roger Bliss, and I live at 124 Forest Drive, Kent Ohio. I want to share something that deserves broader public understanding.

Trains passing through Kent currently follow the Federal Railroad Administration's (FRA) default protocol. A 20 second sequence, at roughly 105 decibels, the sound level is comparable to a nearby motorcycle—loud enough to interrupt conversation or wake a sleeping family. Under that protocol, trains are required to sound their horns as they approach public crossings—two long blasts, one short blast, and one final long blast as the engine passes through the crossing.

That's the routine pattern we all know, and most people assume it's something you just learn to live with, that a 105-decibel horn of an approaching train is the only way to ensure safety at a train crossing. But in Kent, this is not only a crossing issue. It is a corridor-wide issue. The disruption is not confined to the crossings themselves. Because an approaching train's routine horn sequence begins about a quarter mile before the train enters the crossing, its effects extend well beyond the crossing; in total, a single rail crossing creates a half mile noise corridor. With 3 rail lines and 9 train crossings in Kent, these noise corridors often overlap, compounding the noise disruption for many.

Fortunately, in 2006, a federal law was passed that established an alternative solution to crossing safety: Quiet Zones. The federal Quiet Zone regulations have a structured safety review to determine whether supplemental safety measures can allow routine horn sounding to be discontinued. In effect, that creates a quiet crossing. The default horn-sounding protocol for approaching trains is no longer required at those crossings and is eliminated as a routine condition because the supplemental safety measures are in place. That matters because Quiet Zones, quiet crossings, quiet corridors are not about lowering safety. They demonstrate that safety can be maintained through more than one compliant approach.

So the question is not whether safety matters. Of course it does. The question is are we willing to look more closely at a possibility already recognized under federal law? Are there places where established alternatives could protect safety equally well without the 105-decibel train horn noise?

Those are reasonable questions and Kent has an opportunity to approach this thoughtfully — not through assumption, not through fear, and not through a false choice between safety and quality of life, but through informed review of applicable regulations and existing data and an unbiased consideration of what is possible.

Significant time has been spent researching Quiet Zones, and I invite everyone here to take a handout, explore the topic further, and share it with others

Thank you.