

Cuyahoga Falls City Council
Minutes of the Finance and Appropriations Committee Meeting

November 10, 2025

Members: Mary Nichols-Rhodes, Chair
Mike Brillhart, Vice Chair
Meika Penta, Brian Ashton, Joe Siegferth

Ms. Nichols-Rhodes called the meeting to order at 6:39 p.m. All members were present.

Legislation Discussed

Temp. Ord. B-89

Discussion:

Temp. Ord. B-89

An ordinance establishing annual appropriations of money for the current expenses, capital expenditures and other expenses of the City of Cuyahoga Falls for the fiscal year ending December 31, 2026, and declaring an emergency.

Ms. Nichols-Rhodes asked if there were comments or questions from the Committee, the Rail, and the public regarding last week's presentation of the 2026 Budget.

Mr. Bryan Hoffman, Finance Director, stated that the Personal Services Line Items in the budget document section of the highlights indicate a 27th pay. The dramatic rise in the salary line is because that extra pay is indicated in there.

PERSONAL SERVICES:

There is a 27th pay in FY 2026, which occurs for the City every 11 years or so, due to a 52-week year actually being 52.1786 weeks, therefore, departments with the same staffing level will have an estimated 3.8% increase on salaries, wages, pension and Medicare from the additional pay alone. To plan for the 27th pay in 2026, they began encumbering 1/3 of the estimated cost of one pay period for 2023, 2024, and 2025, to lessen the financial burden of the additional pay in 2026. However, due to union contractual obligations, this does not affect health care benefits, and life insurance. This last occurred in FY 2015.

Municipal Income Tax Fund (Page 143)

Revenues - (\$1,336,927) decrease, which is due to projected decreases in most income tax revenue accounts, with the largest being Withholding Current (41003) (\$1,489,063), offset by an increase Individual Current (41006) +\$272,377. This revenue source has bounced back significantly since the COVID-19 global pandemic, and coupled with the investment made in the City to attract residents and business, had continued to grow each year since. However, we feel it has leveled off in 2025, and we are forecasting revenue to be more consistent with 2024 levels. We are forecasting collections in the first part of 2026 to less than 2025 collections with modest growth in the second half of the year.

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Also, based on 2025 current trending, we are anticipating that our annual refund from Regional Income Tax Agency (RITA) in the amount of \$620,000 to decrease marginally. As a note regarding performance of the RITA contract, the City paid the following retainers annually and received refunds at the conclusion of the audit the following year, as follows:

2019 Retainer \$642,238.45. Refund of \$328,655 on 5/29/2020. Net cost of collections \$313,583.45.

2020 Retainer \$685,323.67. Refund of \$327,519 on 5/28/2021. Net cost of collections \$357,804.67.

2021 Retainer \$791,553.37. Refund of \$439,456 on 5/31/2022. Net cost of collections \$352,097.37.

2022 Retainer \$909,338.70. Refund of \$560,741 on 5/31/2023. Net cost of collections \$348,597.70.

2023 Retainer \$945,892.74. Refund of \$655,317 on 5/31/2024. Net cost of collections \$290,575.74.

2024 Retainer \$992,361.45. Refund of \$652,235 on 5/30/2024. Net cost of collections \$340,126.45.

Therefore, the total cost of collection has decreased in all but two years, as 2019 retainer was only for 11 months in the start-up year, and the last year (2024 retainer), which included additional collection efforts. We are very pleased with our contractual arrangement with RITA.

Personal Services - \$10,908 increase. Cost of living (COLA) increase and increase in benefits that are primarily related to pension and Medicare on increase in salaries and wages, and Insurance- Medical/Dental (51104), and Vision +3.5%.

Operations expenditures – (\$16,142) decrease. Mostly due to the decrease in Miscellaneous Contractual Services (54005) (\$79,684) related to our contractual RITA retainer which is 3% of gross income tax collections. Due to the projected decrease in income tax gross revenue this expense decreases proportionately. This is offset with an increase in Refunds & Reimbursements (54301) +\$71,534 related to projected tax payer refunds.

Transfers Out – (\$1,789,693) decrease. The allocation of income tax funds are governed by Codified Ordinance Section 161.14. To paraphrase, income tax collections less the costs of collecting, enforcing, and administering are distributed as follows: General Fund 62.67%, Recreation Levy Fund 8.00% and Capital Projects Fund 29.33%. The decrease in net transfer is attributable to the decrease in estimated income tax proceeds, as noted above.

Mr. Hoffman stated that Mr. Matt Skitzki, Tax Administrator, was present to speak about the Income Tax Department and funds. The Municipal Income Tax Fund brings in income taxes. They separate out expenses for collecting income taxes and then forward those net revenues to three funds: General Fund, Capital Projects Fund and the Parks and Recreation Levy Fund. Those then get split out and expensed through Operational Expenses in the General Fund, Capital

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Projects in the Capital Projects Fund and usually Capital Projects in the Rec Levy Fund. Over the past several years, they have seen quite a variation in income taxes. They grew for a couple years straight and then, in the last several months this year, they are starting to see a softening on income tax collections.

The Finance Department has taken a look at historical trends through previous downturns in income taxes. They applied historical trends to growth rates, and they are anticipating continued revenues below previous years through the first couple months of 2026 and then slow growth through the second half of 2026 which then results in approximately the revenue amount they collected in 2024.

Mr. Skitzki stated that the total referenced on page 43 for 2026 is projecting \$34,754.07. It has leveled off in 2025. The first part of 2026, they are forecasting a decline and then, for the rest of 2026, forecasting modest growth. It is still higher than it was a couple years ago, so they are projecting a lower growth rate but doing better than before. They are celebrating Ms. Mary Cunningham on her 30-year work anniversary. She has a great knowledge of the department history and has a great relationship with taxpayers, and he is grateful for her.

Ms. Nichols-Rhodes asked if people come into the building or do they make appointments to do tax preparation. Mr. Skitzki stated that they do. There are no appointments. It is walk in. About a half of a percent of filing is done with walk-ins, so about 70 percent is electronic filing, half a percent walk-ins and 30 percent paper filing, a pretty small fraction of the people. Usually, it is a situation where there is something unusual going on where the taxpayers need in-person help.

Ms. Nichols-Rhodes stated that everybody appreciates that that is available in Cuyahoga Falls. There is a \$620,000 RITA refund, but it's noted to decrease marginally. She asked if that is because incomes have leveled off. Mr. Skitzki replied that that is correct. Since it is 3 percent of the total collection, when collections go down, the rebate retainers go down.

Mr. Balthis asked how the experience has been with RITA and have they seen any impact from the responsibility of contractors where they pay more attention to workers' classification. Mr. Skitzki stated that their relationship with RITA has been great. If someone comes in with an unusual situation, they can call RITA on the phone and they are on speaker phone and working it out between them, the taxpayer and RITA. They are able to resolve that on the spot because they can call RITA and speak with a bankruptcy specialist or someone in collections and give the taxpayer an instant response. He has seen a difference just in the process overall concerning contractors. It is more efficient now and running more smoothly because they are getting better instructions and documentation out to the contractors initially. It is an improved process that is working better from start to finish.

Ms. Nichols-Rhodes stated that she appreciates Mr. Hoffman adding in the 27th pay in Personal Services, just so everybody knows that the City has anticipated this.

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Mr. Hoffman stated that, every 11 or 12 years, the 27th pay occurs. There is a small portion of the calendar where there is a day or two in pay that they have then to catch up. As mentioned, they did anticipate this over the last three years. They have been setting aside a portion of the fund balance to Revenues to pay this 27 pays, so it has minimal impact from a cash-flow perspective.

Communications (Page 157)

Operations expenditures - \$151,832 increase, which mostly related to Miscellaneous Contractual Services (54005) for contractual costs of the COG. The COG estimates Cuyahoga Falls 2026 share to be \$1,632,594.28, and our budget request is \$1,650,000 to cover possible contingencies. The COG also has a 27th pay period which contributed to the increase.

Mr. Hoffman stated that the Communications Department is in the General Fund. This is the department that houses all of their tech computers or dispatchers. Several years ago, the City joined the Regional Dispatch Center COG, and they do sit on the Board of the Regional Dispatch Center and are very much a part of the decision-making process when it comes to dispatching in the City of Cuyahoga Falls. They still house this department in the General Fund. It is a one-line item and that is the contract estimated amount that they would be spending for dispatchers for 2026.

Building and Grounds Maintenance (Page 207)

Personal Services - \$46,055 increase. Cost of living (COLA) increase and increase in benefits that are primarily related to pension and Medicare on increase in salaries and wages, Insurance-Medical/Dental (51104) +3.5%, offset by a reduction from employee health plan selection being different than what was budgeted in the prior year.

Operations expenditures - \$19,477 increase, which is mostly due to Property/Building Maintenance and Repair (53021) +\$14,200 for some one-time justifications for concrete pad around Columbarium, asphalt parking lot at the Annex by the grounds garage, and City welcome signs which don't meet our capitalization threshold (revised to \$10,000 for 2026); Office Equipment (53032) +\$13,470 for one-time justifications for personal computer replacement for four employees, laptop, shredder, computer equipment for Conference Room B for employee onboarding and training, and AED Lifepack/cabinet for hallway by Mayor's Court; Architectural/Engineering Services (54002) +\$10,000 for Cemetery design; and Computer System Support (54004) +\$5,331 mostly for an increase in the department's share of E mail and Spam Filter and TreeKeeper software subscription.

Mr. John Ball, Building and Grounds Superintendent, stated that there are not any big changes this year.

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Ms. Nichols-Rhodes stated that there is \$19,477 increase in Operations, mostly due to property maintenance and repairs, a one-time concrete pad in the cemetery and a lot of office things. She asked if there was anything in there Mr. Ball wanted to mention in particular. Mr. Ball stated that they are doing computers up in Conference Room B for orientation for new employees, so they are adding a few of those to make the process quicker. Ms. Nichols-Rhodes stated that a lot of the departments are having contractual increases due to computer updates.

Engineering (Page 199)

Personal Services - \$115,689 increase. Cost of living (COLA) increase and increase in benefits that are primarily related to pension and Medicare on increase in salaries and wages, merit increases for employees, increase in overtime +\$13,000; and Insurance - Medical/Dental (51104), and Insurance - Medical/Dental (51104), and Vision +3.5%, coupled with an increase due to changes in employee health plan selection being different than what was budgeted in the prior year.

Operations expenditures - \$5,651 increase. Increase is primarily attributable to Computer System Support (54004) +\$5,323 for an increase in the department's share of E-mail and Spam Filter, other recurring items, and new items such as Adobe, Bluebeam, and PC management software.

Mr. Tony Demasi, City Engineer, stated that the Engineering budget for 2026 looks pretty similar to 2025 with some changes to Personal Services. In addition, they have a modest increase request for computer system report and they want to purchase some outside services such as Adobe and Bluebeam items that would help them do their job better. This year is the second year in a row they were awarded and managed \$30 million worth of projects and next year is looking to be fairly busy as well. As far as staffing, they are currently fully staffed in the engineering side of the department. Mr. Wes Carter is here. He came to them from the City of Canton, so he compliments him and McKenzie. They do have a small increase in their training budget because the State of Ohio does require continual training for engineering. They are not fully staffed on the engineering technician side, so they have part-time help getting through that process. He is extremely proud of the work that their staff does. He could not do what he does without them.

Ms. Nichols-Rhodes stated that nobody would ever question how much work they do. With all the people who retired that had been with the department forever, it is very heartening to know that he has found new people that are working out just fine and they appreciate them

Ms. Nichols-Rhodes asked if there were comments or questions from the Committee, the Rail, and the public regarding Communications, Building and Grounds Maintenance or Engineering.

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Storm Drainage Utility Fund (Page 259)

Revenues - \$935 increase. This small increase is associated with projected special assessments revenue for delinquent accounts filed with Summit County Fiscal Officer in September 2025, compared to the prior year.

Personal Services - \$31,208 increase. Cost of living (COLA) increase and increase in benefits that are primarily related to pension and Medicare on increase in salaries and wages, Insurance - Medical/Dental (51104) +3.5%, offset by a reduction from employee health plan selection being different than what was budgeted in the prior year.

Operations expenditures - \$12,326 increase. Mainly attributable to Property/Building Maintenance and Repair (53021) +\$26,500 for catch basin repairs +\$60,000, which don't meet our capitalization threshold (revised to \$10,000 for 2026), offset by a reduction of concrete repairs, and project partner for city right away; Tools & Equipment (53047) +\$21,000 for an increase in general tools recurring item, a new recurring item (Metal Plates for construction management), and three one-time purchase items (Arrow Board, Tripod and wench, and AED for Stockroom/Office); offset by a reduction in Miscellaneous Contractual Services (54005) (\$27,000) mostly related to Project Partner as program expenses have decreased in recent years, and a reduction in Management Consulting Services (54010) (\$16,000) which is not needed for 2026.

Capital Outlay - (\$699,666) decrease. The Five Year projection 2026 - 2030 for the fund is presented on page 260 and will be discussed in detail at the budget hearing. Capital Projects change from year to year and are generally not comparable. FY 2026 Infrastructure is (\$590,000) less the 2025 adopted budget, due to four less projects being scheduled for 2026, with the largest project in 2026 being Falls Avenue Front St. to 3rd storm sewer.

Mr. Russ Kring, Water Utilities Superintendent, stated that, in the Storm Drainage Fund, they have several large projects scheduled for next year. They have used trenches and also pipe lining whenever possible to minimize traffic impacts and saved money, but in the fund really the smaller work is where they get the most bang for their buck. In 2025, they fully replaced 13 catch basins, including several very large ones in the low part of Howe Road that were deteriorated beyond repair. In the budget, they have some scheduled for next year.

Water Fund (Page 249)

Revenues - \$23,036,646 increase. The largest contributing factor to this increase is related to Note Proceeds (49503) for the planned issuance of bond anticipation notes +\$17,755,000, which is tethered to the Water Treatment Plant Softener Building project in the amount of \$22,500,000; Loan Proceeds (49505) +\$3,635,426 for anticipated Ohio Water Development Authority loans in the amount of \$4,510,000 for Bailey Road Water Line \$1,300,000, Marcia Water Line \$450,000,

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and lead service line replacements included in operations \$2,760,000; and Charges For Services Group +\$2,034,550 related to revised Water rates ordinance passed in December 2023.

Personal Services - \$353,885 increase. We are planning on hiring additional personnel which are partially charged to this Fund (Inventory Control Clerk, Engineering Aide IV, and Maintenance Mechanic), Cost of living (COLA) increase and increase in benefits that are primarily related to pension and Medicare on increase in salaries and wages); and Insurance - Medical/Dental (51104), and Vision +3.5%.

Operations expenditures - \$2,836,745 increase. Mostly due to Property/Building Maintenance and Repair (53021) +\$2,719,000 for lead service line replacements funded by OWDA loan.

Capital outlay - \$21,977,334 increase. The Five-year Capital Plan 2026-2030 for this fund is on pages 251 and will be discussed in detail at the budget hearing. Capital Projects change from year to year and are generally not comparable. FY 2025 includes a few large items: Water Treatment Plant Softener Building \$22,500,000, Bailey Road Water replacement \$1,300,000, and Ross Park Water Tank \$500.

Debt service - \$219,393 increase. The increase is mostly related to recent OWDA loan activity, in which payments are now due in 2026 (Principal \$81,329, Interest \$168,954). This was offset by the payoff of a finance purchase agreement (formerly capital lease) from 2021 for a Vacall Sewer Jet Truck. The detailed Five-year Debt Schedule (2026-2030), which includes the Water Fund on pages 39-48.

Mr. Kring stated that an extensive Capital Improvement Plan was developed as part of the Master Water Plan, and their focus since then has been to replace the aging infrastructure in coordination with that list. They have quite a few projects designed that they hope to construct in 2026 as well as several more that they will plan on designing next year. They try to perform waterline replacement in coordination with paving schedules. The design of their new softener building has progressed in 2025 and they will bid that project out in 2026 with a possible construction start.

Ms. Nichols-Rhodes stated that they went on a tour of the Water Department and it is sorely in need of improvement. They want clean, reliable water and they have to pay for that. They appreciate that he is are on top of it, moving along as they can.

Mr. Balthis asked for an update on how the softener building project is going. He asked if people should anticipate a change as a result of a new softener building. Mr. Kring stated that their current softener process is ion exchange, which is very unique. They are able to use that technically because of the brine well. Their system is almost 100 years old. It was installed in the mid-1930's, so that's the area that they will be replacing. They are going to an RO System which would give them more control over the softness. In theory, they could soften all to zero, but they will definitely have more control over the hardness of the water and be able to dial it down if need be.

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There is a chemistry to hardness at a certain level so they do not release the scale inside the pipes. This would give them more control over the softness and hardness of the water.

Mr. Ashton stated that everyone is working hard. He asked for a timeline for the plan next year and the year after that. Mr. Kring stated that they hope to go out to bid in spring. The project has grown a little bit in that once they start doing a section, they realize they need to upgrade pumps and, if you upgrade this pump, they don't need this building. It has kind of taken on a life of its own, but, in the long run, it is going to be almost a new plant and much needed. They are looking at 18 months to two years for construction. They hope to start this summer. They applied for some EPA funding. They are looking at hopefully summer of 2026 to maybe spring of 2028.

Sanitary Sewer Fund (Page 239)

Revenues - \$1,279,538 increase. The largest contributing factor to this increase is related to Charges For Services Group +\$1,279,865. The treatment and operating rate passed on to us for contractual treatment service with Akron and the County of Summit is anticipated to increase 4.4%, and \$25%, respectively. The City is continuing to closely follow the rate and project plan that was approved in December 2023.

Personal Services - \$277,928 increase. We are planning on hiring additional personnel which are partially charged to this Fund (Inventory Control Clerk, Engineering Aide IV, and Maintenance Mechanic), Cost of living (COLA) increase and increase in benefits that are primarily related to pension and Medicare on increase in salaries and wages); and Insurance - Medical/Dental (51104), and Vision +3.5%.

Operations expenditures - \$676,672 increase. Sewage Disposal - Akron (54120) +\$239,848, and Sewage Disposal - County (54121) +\$202,468 for increase in sewage disposal costs, as noted above; Property/Building Maintenance and Repair (53021) +\$140,000 for many new recurring items (Pump Station inspections/preventative maintenance \$40,000, Pump Station repairs \$35,000, sanitary main and lateral repairs under capital threshold \$60,000); and Architectural/Engineering Services (54002) +\$30,000 for consulting services which do not meet capitalization criteria, such as feasibility studies, etc. for projects outside our five-year plan.

Capital outlay - \$1,479,333 increase. The Five-year Capital Plan 2026-2030 for this fund is on page 241 and will be discussed in detail at the budget hearing. Capital Projects change from year to year and are generally not comparable. FY 2026 proposed budget is higher than the previous years, with the largest project being Sewer line Infrastructure Contingency \$1,000,000, and specific sewer line replacements of \$1,940,000 (Elmwood Street \$750,000, Nutwood Street \$640,000, Bailey Road \$250,000, and Kathron Avenue \$300,000).

Debt service - (\$24,706) decrease. The decrease is related to differences in the amortization schedule between the two years. The detailed Five-year Debt Schedule (2026-2030) for Sewer Fund is on pages 39-48.

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Mr. Kring stated that they have several larger infrastructure projects scheduled next year in the funds as well. Those will be a mix of full replacements and trenchless pipe repair whenever possible for the same reasons he mentioned in the Storm Sewer Fund. Additionally, the big project they have in the fund, the Gorge sanitary sewer final design is underway. They should be completed with the design in 2026. The goal for that project is to be ready to construct it whenever the dam work takes place; that way, they can coordinate the work and they are only getting in there once and tearing up the park one time to do the work with the dam and then they out of there and the park can go back to what they do.

Electric Fund (Page 267)

Revenues - \$6,242,336 increase. The largest contributing factor to this increase is related to Charges For Services Group +\$6,365,633. This increase is due to additional estimated purchased power needs coupled with a rate adjustment. We are requesting a rate increase which was determined with the assistance of Utility Financial Solutions, LLC. The rate study includes analysis of future capital, debt, and operational needs, and the average of which is 5.9% for 2026. It is our plan to introduce legislation for the proposed rate change.

Personal Services - \$403,541 increase. Cost of living (COLA) increase and increase in benefits that are primarily related to pension and Medicare on increase in salaries and wages, merit increases for employees, increase in overtime; and Insurance - Medical/Dental (51104), and Insurance - Medical/Dental (51104), and Vision +3.5%.

Operations expenditures - \$5,456,301 increase. With a large service distribution process with a fund like this, there are usually many increases and decreases to various accounts based on current supplies, pricing, and planned needs through the year. Notable increases are as follows: Purchased Power (54106) +\$6,703,192 based on capacity plan provided by American Municipal Power (AMP); Wire and Cable Supplies (52032) +\$50,000, Underground Electrical Supplies (52033) +\$50,000, and Electrical Poles +\$50,000, all to restore reduction of account budget in 2025 and supply needs of the department.

Capital outlay - \$585,000 increase. The Five-year Capital Plan 2026-2030 for this fund is on page 270 and will be discussed in detail at the budget hearing. Capital projects change from year to year and are generally not comparable, however, two of our largest projects are being carried over from 2025, which we are anticipating issuing notes for: Gaylord Grove Substation Major Equipment \$5,200,000, and Substation 7 Upgrade \$4,700,000. Therefore, total capital is more comparable than in prior years.

Debt service - (\$710) increase. The slight decrease is related to differences in the amortization schedule between the two years. The detailed Five-year Debt Schedule (2026-2030) for Electric Fund is on pages 39-48.

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Mr. Rod Troxell, Electric Superintendent, stated that substations and supplies are not very different than last year. The critter guards are to help with the nuisance outages. They are actively putting those on substations and have completed Sub 6, Sub 3, and they are working on Sub 1 and Sub 5 and then they will be doing some more next year as well. Some of the things are designed to do a little bit of induction so when they land, they feel a buzz so they do not stay very long. Hopefully, that line item will go away in a couple of years. Computer system support is going up. Milsoft Outage Management is the big one. The new AMI meters or GIS is 90 percent complete. They will be able to start tracking outages on an electronic system, and that will allow the customers to receive a text and let them now that they are out of power. Once they get out and see what is going on, the field workers will put an estimated restoral time, and the customers will get a text notifying them they are back in power. It is going to help with troubleshooting because the system with the GIS is a smart system and it would actually be able to tell if they have one house out or if they have multiple houses out on one transformer, so they are not having to go out to patrol the whole line before they actually find the problem.

Under Miscellaneous Contractual Service, a 10-year study for 2027 is indicated. That is simply a reminder that they do a 10-year study for 2027. Tree Trimming Services, that budget has stayed the same, but there is a new line item called Live EO. There is only \$50,000 on here, but that is a company they already ran satellites over the system, and they will have meetings in December to take a look at that data. That data would show any of the trees that are close to the line. It is AI driven, so it learns from itself and they will be able to know what species it is and if they have a problem that comes along and help redirect the tree company. The gentlemen from Davey Tree will learn that system as well. Wherever that system shows the main concerns, they would go exactly where the trees need to be and reduce outages. They also hope it reduces some of the squirrel problems. Some capacitor bank equipment purchase and install is a huge run that has moved a couple years. They are pretty confident that is going to go in 2026. Under infrastructure, at Sub 4, they are going to shift the driveway to the other side. The reason they are doing that is they are going to be putting battery storage out there. Once we get that drive moved, the battery will go in and help with the peaking load. They put in a canopy over the fuel pumps at the new complex. It is going to cover the area when filling up the vehicles for this time of the year. They talked about inflation and all that and this equipment is no different. They used to be able to buy these things for \$50,000 but now it is \$110,000. It allows their guys to test all the transformers that they bring in-house. A lot of things they are able to fix and put back on instead of buying new, so it saves money.

The Gaylord Grove substation is continuing to move. They are hopeful, in 2026, that is going to happen. The Substation 7 upgrade could possibly become a Sub 7 removal. That is the Sub that is over by the Water Treatment Plant. They are looking to bring two feeds into the Water Treatment Plant with the existing Sub that they have and possibly do away with that Sub all together. They are going to buy a truck similar to what the Water Department uses but on a small scale and it would have a 200-gallon water tank. They are looking to reduce a bucket truck and they are going to get a train truck for the substation department.

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Ms. Nichols-Rhodes asked how he likes the new building. Mr. Troxell stated that he loves the new building. It is nice that the vehicles are inside and they don't have to clean anything off the trucks that have materials back full of snow.

Ms. Nichols-Rhodes stated the solar panels are producing as much or more than expected. Mr. Jimmy Filon, Assistant Electric Superintendent, stated that the solar panel cost about \$200,000 and they expect it to pay for itself in six and a half years. The average house in Ohio uses about 30 kilowatt hours a day. Their building's peak has been 9 for the entire building. So, a lot of days, they have zero power use and it is great for the environment.

Mr. Balthis asked how have they been doing with employee retention and recruitment. Mr. Troxell stated that they are doing well. He anticipates that they could possibly become fully staffed in the early part of next year. They are looking to make a fourth line crew, which they have never done. Employees are sticking around and hopefully they keep doing it. Mr. Balthis asked if an additional crew would be something to help make those upgrades. Mr. Troxell stated that that is a key component. They will notice the dollar amount down on that. Mr. Balthis asked if they still have it going out the full five years. Mr. Troxell stated hopefully only five years. They have purchased almost everything needed to move forward on that. They have a lot of area done, but still have a lot more to do. They are making good progress. To put that in, they have to take a substation off line and be able to route the power through another substation. Hopefully, they can do that, but the goal is not to do that.

Mr. Balthis asked how long does he think it would take to get the whole system upgraded. Mr. Troxell stated that he hopes to see it before he retires. He is looking to stick around probably about another four years or so. It is the transformers that take time and then, when they deal with businesses and take them out of power, they have to schedule around that. Unfortunately, they do a big area. They have done approximately 170 customers. They take them out about 8:30 in the morning and by 10:00, everybody is back in power. Mr. Balthis stated that they do an amazing job in the Electric Department, but Mr. Troxell also does an incredible job as superintendent and he appreciates all the work he does. The Electric Department has accomplished a lot the last few years and it is in no small part because of his leadership.

Mrs. Spinner asked if with the new meters people won't need to call and let the City know when there is an outage. Mr. Troxell stated that they still need to call. Mrs. Spinner stated that she thought those new meters have that capability now. Mr. Troxell stated that they do, but only management can access the system. It is a cumbersome system, but the new software will take all that information and put it on. Please keep calling. It helps them greatly.

Mr. Mark Wilkerson, 2467 6th Street, Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio, stated that it was mentioned the solar panels on the roof would pay for themselves over six and a half years. He asked what the life expectancy of those panels are. Mr. Filon stated that he believes it is 25 to 30 years.

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Mr. Hoffman stated that he wanted to make a quick comment in regard to next week, because they have proposed legislation for the solar deal on Hardy Road Landfill that was not included in the budget as it was put together. They do anticipate providing some replacement pages to Council in the next week includes that for the 2026 budget. That will be the only change when they do bring in the replacement pages for the proposed project coming up.

Mayor Walters stated that when they call the non-emergency number, they will get an AI voice and she will engage with the caller. The first thing stated is that is if this is an emergency, please call 911. Once past that, she will ask a lot of questions. A lot of questions can be answered by her. For example, if the question is are fireworks legal in Tallmadge, she'll dig into the ordinances and say they are not. AI can answer a lot of those with no human interaction because it is not needed. Whatever the caller is telling her is it is also appearing on the dispatcher's screen in real time and can click over and talk to the caller immediately if need be. If it is not a true emergency, they may have to call you back if the AI cannot answer it. He wants the public to know the more they talk, the more information they can gather in addition to being read in real time, so do not hang up in disgust because they think it is an answering machine.

Mr. Troxell stated that the non-emergency number for the Electric 24-hour service number 330-971-8050.

Ms. Nichols-Rhodes asked if there were comments or questions from the Committee, the Rail, and the public regarding this evening's presentation of the 2026 Budget. Hearing none, she adjourned the Finance Committee meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 7:31 p.m.