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

November 24, 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 6:47 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 any issues questions or comments from Council, the Rail or from the public concerning any of the previous evenings' presentations.

Mr. Bryan Hoffman, Finance Director, stated that he has provided replacement pages that include the solar project that Council approved in the Electric Fund. They replaced Exhibits A and B, which are attached to the ordinance as the official appropriations exhibits and then also attached replacement pages for the Electric Department detail accounting.

Personal Services

Note: We have a 27th pay in FY 2026, which occurs for the City every eleven 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, we 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.

Neighborhood Excellence, Communications and Community Outreach - NECCO (Page 213)

Personal Services - $48,368 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, and longevity increase; and Insurance - Medical/Dental (51104), and Insurance - Medical/Dental (51104), and Vision +3.5%.

Operations expenditures - $72,492 increase. Increase is mainly due to the following: Awards and promotions (53003) +$10,000 for assistance with the cost of the Front Street Live production which is held each summer; and Miscellaneous Contractual Services (54005) +$60,000, mostly for the creation and implementation of a digital marking campaign planned for $75,000.

Ms. Carrie Hummel-Snyder, NECCO Director, presented Council with highlights and changes in the NECCO Department. They have made destination marketing through advertisements and statewide publications, printed materials at hotels and destination centers throughout Northeast Ohio to encourage visitors within an hour or two range. The increase in Operations Expenditures for 2026 represents the next step in the plan. The proposed digital marketing campaign listed in this budget at approximately $75,000 will allow them to expand their digital reach through targeted digital media campaigns. They will be including things to do in the National Park, Metro Parks, nightlife, arts, culture and more. The targeted marketing will be broken into three groups: Childless adults, families and older adults/empty nesters. They are in the process of applying for a destination marketing grant through the Summit County Convention Bureau. If received, it would offset about 10 percent of this projected cost. The other increase in the budget is $10,000 in awards and promotions to provide assistance with Front Street live events. This allows them to expand dates and expand down to South Front Street.

Ms. Nichols-Rhodes asked if that is for a period of a year. Ms. Hummel-Snyder stated that is correct. The micro-site is being developed with current 2025 funding so the digital marketing dollars would be for the calendar year of 2026.

Mr. Stams asked if the digital marketing is done in-house or is contracted. Ms. Hummel-Snyder stated that most of this will be done with an outside agency that specializes in this type of work. They will be able to utilize a lot of photos and videos that they produce in-house, which would help keep the price down. The ad buys and the search engine optimization will be done by an outside firm. Mr. Stams asked if they have chosen the firm. Ms. Hummel-Snyder stated that they have not. This is the first step to be able to get the funds to move forward.

Mr. Balthis stated that it is great to find ways to draw more revenue into the city. He asked how they can make sure they are getting a return on the value and to track the impact and the financial reward. Ms. Hummel-Snyder stated that they envision having hashtags asking people to share their experience and that being part of the process. With the analytics, they will be able to track hits to the micro-site, how long people are there and for what events and activities. They are looking at geofencing. The idea is when traveling in the area, people start getting ads for things that are in the immediate area.

Ms. Loza thanked Ms. Hummel-Snyder for including the digital marketing campaign in this year's budget. It is important and has been underutilized. It is a modest budget to start with and it is a great place to grow from. She cannot wait to hear feedback on how that is working. It is a great

move for the City to spread their wings and get more people who do not know about Cuyahoga Falls into Cuyahoga Falls.

Community Development (Page 295)

Personal Services - $103,950 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, and longevity increases for several employees; and Insurance - Medical/Dental (51104), and Insurance-Medical/Dental (51104), and Vision +3.5%. Additionally, a portion of the increase is from employee health plan selection being different than what was budgeted in the prior year.

Operations expenditures - $19,573 increase. Increase is mainly due to the following: Signage Supplies (52071) +$3,000 for DORA decals; Office Equipment (53032) +$9,040 for several one-time items (Surface Laptop for Deputy, 22 iPads for boards and commissions, Personal Computers for Director, Planning Director, and Assistant Planning Director, Projector, and Toughbook for Housing Inspector); Computer System Support (54004) +$13,789 for a couple of one-time items for Encode CAG Compliance $2,500 and Encode Code Amendment update $2,300, and for some general increases in costs, including the department's share of E-mail and Spam Filter and new items for PC management software. This was offset by a reduction in Miscellaneous Contractual Services (54005) ($14,500) for one-time Rise Together consulting in 2025.

The Community Development Department has a few Special Revenue Funds under their management including the Community and Economic Development Fund (Fund 209), Community Development Block Grant Fund (210), and Enterprise Zone/Community Reinvestment Area Fund (212). The nature of these funds is to account for specific revenues that are legally restricted to expenditure for particular purposes. These funds are budgeted at the Community Development Director's discretion based on restriction of use and available resources. The following fund descriptions are from excerpts from our City's Comprehensive Annual Financial Report:

Community and Economic Development Fund - 209 (Page 299) To account for monies received from the sale of City-owned properties in an urban renewal area.

Community Development Block Grant Fund - 210 (Page 301) To account for monies received from the federal government through the Department of Housing and Urban Development as a direct entitlement community. The funding received is to directly benefit low and moderate income persons in the community. Projects funded include housing rehabilitation, economic development activities, infrastructure projects, planning and administrative costs that meet the programs national objectives. Projects are approved via an annual action plan. Fund also accounts for repayments from previous activities related to participation in the Summit County program as a sub recipient.

Enterprise Zone Community Reinvestment Fund - 212 (Page 307) To account for fees collected from enterprises receiving a tax incentive through an enterprise zone agreement for the purpose of

administering and monitoring the Enterprise Zone Agreement. The fee provision was eliminated in recent years, so the fund no longer generates revenue.

The most notable changes to Community Development Special Revenue Funds are in the Community Development Block Grant Fund which are highlighted separately below.

Ms. Nichols-Rhodes stated that there are a couple funds under Community Development, but her understanding is that there are no longer funds coming into the Enterprise Zone. Mr. Hoffman stated that that is correct. In the budget highlights was left some very small funds that have, in the past, been active but have since had the revenue source stopped or gotten to a place where there is very little revenue each year. They do not have too many expenses and the few that they have are small. The main one that they are looking at is the Enterprise Zone reinvestment. They have been looking at ways to utilize those funds. They are for different training throughout the city. A lot of them are special revenue and restricted in the way they use them. If a revenue source has not materialized over the last several years, it is because that activity hasn't happened in several years.

Ms. Diana Colavecchio, Community Development Director, presented Council with some highlights of projects the department has accomplished. They participated in the Ohio Economic Development Association's conference held in Akron this year. The Greater Akron Chamber is in the midst of renovating their space at 111 Stow Avenue which houses the offices of Council. Part of those renovations will be four new conference rooms and suites and one of the conference suites will hold 50 people. The other partnership they participated in is Welcoming America. They are very pleased to receive their one-star certification as a welcoming city. The Cochran Road expansion is one of their big projects and it is ready to bring in corporations of an industrial or manufacturing type. They are having discussing with Parks and Recreations and NECCO about a special event permit. Downtown has become a very popular place and people want to rent the Pavilion, the mall area and the new parking lot on Front Street because it is equipped to be a festival site and they need a permitting process. The other is a film permit. They have productions that are filmed in the city and they want to implement official use of the public rights-of-way. They want to implement a business registration. Currently, they do not have a system to register the businesses in the city and then categorize them by use. They are talking to Utility Billing and the Fire Department on how to best implement that. New capital requests they are looking for on a hybrid SUV under vehicles and then had some funds devoted for art projects. A couple other projects signage on the RiverLoop for the points of interest and that may include historic markers.

Ms. Colavecchio stated that it is their job to go out and get grants where they exist. This year, they submitted four different grant applications that they were successful. The first was through the ODOT TIF transportation network. They received $90,000 to work on bikeways and sidewalks and they are looking at the Portage Trail area where there is a gap. If they are successful, they will be using this money that is earmarked for the consultant fees and design fees for a connecting sidewalk. They partnered with Akron and received word that they are going to get $500,000 in cooperative grants. They would be contribute to this grant application for a build-out of a

multi-purpose path on Akron-Peninsula Road. It would connect four or five neighborhoods, including Akron's Riverwalk and Sycamore all the way to the Towpath. They also, along with Akron and the State, received $1.2 million from USEPA and that's regarding Brownfield remediation studies. They had received that $500,000 from ODNR as a match for the Mudbrook Trail which is being designed now.

Ms. Nichols-Rhodes stated that the budgetary funds of $9,000 are PC's and iPads for all the commissions. Ms. Colavecchio stated that there are 20-some iPads for Board and Commission members. The software is outdated and not supported anymore.

Community Development Block Grant Fund (Page 301)

Revenues – ($14,006) decrease. We are anticipating a slight decrease to the direct entitlement allocation from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

Personal Services - $7,653 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%.

Operations expenditures - $205,728 increase. Increase mostly related to Property/Building Maintenance and Repair (53021) +$240,000 for lead line remediation in low to moderate income areas. Offset by an overall reduction in the contractual Service Group (54000s) ($38,683) due to the planned funding for some items to come from carry forward legislation in early 2026, such as Housing Rehabilitation (54021) ($100,000) and HUD Housing Rehab Admin (54027) ($30,000), and some increases for Economic Development (54020) +$86,089, and HUD Senior Snow Removal (54025) +$10,000. Spending of new C.D.B.G. entitlement funds is based on community needs, and is difficult to predict. Therefore, much of the budget is roughly estimated to match entitlement revenue projection. Capital outlay – ($227,387) decrease. FY 2025 included the balance of the $500,000 earmarked for the Riverloop project $227,387, with the other portion $272,613 coming from the annual carryforward legislation in early 2025. There is no capital outlay planned for FY 2026 at this time.

Ms. Peggy Szalay, CDBG Entitlement Administrator, presented highlights from 2025. They provided ADA accessibility for the courtyard at the Police Department, insuring that disabled employees and residents will have access to that area. They have an ADA switchback along the RiverLoop providing wheelchair, stroller and bike access in the Riverfront area. They have improved pedestrian safety. They purchased a wheelchair flags for local retirement homes improving visibility and enhancing pedestrian safety along the State Road shopping corridor. They started Meals on Wheels assistance, supporting delivery of food to seniors in Cuyahoga Falls. The Senior Snow Program assisted 100 seniors and people with disabilities with snow removal during major snow events. They supported the food pantries in Cuyahoga Falls. assisting with food, school supplies and personal care items to low income residents of the city. Housing rehab is an ongoing program that assists with eligible housing repairs and abatement of lead paint for a grant

of $30,000 per low-income household. There has been a noticeable uptick in Cuyahoga Falls of the homeless. They provided outreach and direct aid and essential items, hats, gloves, socks, hand and foot warmers. They also worked completely through the 43-day government shutdown and kept turning out the good work they do in the Community Development Department.

Ms. Nichols-Rhodes asked how they determine who needs lead abatement in the home. Ms. Szalay stated that when they do housing rehab projects, they test every surface. If they are doing anything inside the house that is disturbing any painted surfaces, they would test for lead and abate them. They also match funds with Summit County to abate lead paint where there are children under the age of six.

Parks and Recreation (Page 309)

Personal Services - $293,556 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 several employees, increase in overtime +$50,000; and Insurance - Medical/Dental (51104), and Insurance - Medical/Dental (51104), and Vision +3.5%, offset by a reduction from employee health plan selection being different than what was budgeted in the prior year. Operations expenditures - $54,461 increase. General increases spread over many accounts, with the following notable items: Chemical Supplies (52004) +$10,000 for wading pool chemicals and pest spray from price increase; Recreation Programming Supplies (52061) +$7,000 related to 55+ Programming; Property/Building Maintenance and Repair (53021) +$33,500 mostly for one-time items for accessibility corrections as needed in the parks $25,000, wading pool chemical controllers 3 @ $7,000, and Quirk Community room flooring $16,500, with some prior year items dropping off; Tools & Equipment (53047) +$34,700 for one-time items such as walk behind floor scrubbers 2 @ $6,500, power scissor lift $8,000, and robotic pool cleaners 2 @$8,000, which do not meet our new capitalization threshold; Miscellaneous Contractual Services (54005) +$49,500 mostly for new or increase in recurring items such as Community Concert Series +$10,000, CFABA umpire fees $15,000, and 55+ Programming $16,000.

Recreation Levy Fund (Page 317, Five Year Capital Projection Page 318)

Revenues – ($163,175) decrease. As previously noted, we are anticipating a decrease in Operating Transfers-In category ($143,175) related to the leveling off of net income taxes available for transfer. The Recreation Levy Fund receives 8% of net income taxes. In addition, the last repayment of interfund balances (10 of 10) was received in 2025.

Operations expenditures - $195,362 increase. Increase is attributable to many factors, but most notably Landscape Supplies (52012) +$8,000 for recurring downtown hanging baskets, and park-wide landscaping, in which the increase is related to the addition of South Front Street hanging baskets; Property/Building Maintenance and Repair (53021) +$201,500 mostly related to Downview parking lot paving $89,000, Park Maintenance Quirk paving phase II $80,000, Brivo

Door Lock System for Lions Park and Pavilion $15,000, and parking deck contingency repairs under the capitalization threshold $50,000.

Capital outlay - The Five-year Capital Plan 2026-2030 for this fund is on page 318 and will be discussed in detail at the budget hearing. Capital Projects change from year to year and are generally not comparable. There is an increase of $65,500 in this group. Some notable items planned for 2026 are Tennis Courts $205,000, Valley Vista Splashpad $200,000, and Park Restroom improvements $150,000.

Ms. Sara Kline, Parks and Recreation Superintendent, recognized the attendance of the Chair of the Park Board, Rose DeBord, and the Vice-Chair, John Flasco. Assistant Superintendent Mike Fallis and Natatorium Director Cathy Burke were also present.

Ms. Kline stated that there are increases in specific line items in their operations budget. There has been a significant increase in cost of materials related to the aquatic facility, so they have asked for an increase in those line items. They have had an increase in programing supplies because of the costs, but they are also diligently working to increase programs for the City's older adults. In the General Fund, they are asking for funds to do a project at Quirk to replace some flooring in the building. There are some other repairs that they will continue to do in that building and the others as well. They have some expanded funding requests for their responsibilities Downtown. South Front Street will be reopened at some point next year and that would increase their expenditures needed for landscaping and other things in that area. They are doing some improvements at Downview. They did upgraded lighting, landscaping, and new signage. This coming year, they are going to work on the paving of the parking lot at Downview. With their responsibilities downtown, they work very closely with the Engineering Department on structural integrity and repairs to the parking decks, so there is a line item for that.

Ms. Nichols-Rhodes stated that there are some things in chemicals that cost $7,000 each and these are for the wading pool chemicals. It cost less money to have splash pools rather than the wading pools. There is $34,700 for walk-behind floor scrubbers and a scissors lift. She asked if different buildings share the equipment. Ms. Kline stated that they sometimes do. It depends on how often it is used at its home facility and how transportable it is.

Ms. Kline stated that they will be redoing and investing in the tennis court at Cuyahoga Falls High School. They have also budgeted for continued enhancement at the new and improved Valley Vista Park. They have a playground purchased and under contract for installation. They have hard surfaces under contract for installation. They have basketball hoops purchased. They need money to install the restroom building and the splash pad. They will be installing disk golf at Preston Park. They are partnering with the Library to do a trail end story walk and path. They are contributing the path and are awaiting word on a grant from the Akron Area Realtors Board that to contribute money toward that project. Other capital projects are replacement of irrigation system pumps. They also have some vehicles and other miscellaneous equipment. In the Leisure Fund

Capital, they are requesting for heavy-duty carts for Brookledge, a sump pump for the Natatorium and a robotic ball picker for Downview.

Mrs. Penta stated that Valley Vista Park is in her ward. The residents will be happy when it is done. The parking installation is $125,000, walkway and sidewalks $10,000, light installation $10,000 for 2027. She asked the timeline to have it fully completed. Ms. Kline stated that her goal is that they have those requests approved in the 2027 budget and get it started in the spring so it is done in the early part of the year. It was too much of a hit out of their capital budget to do everything this year. It would have precluded them from doing any other projects in the park system so they need to spread it out.

Mrs. Penta stated that it is a larger park, and as she ends her Council days here, she wants to make sure it is taken care of and they monitor it. She also asked for an update on Babb Run. Ms. Kline stated that they continue to work with the Water Department. They have had to take the lead on the design. They are working with Riverworks-Enviroscience. They have some stream restoration specialists in their Engineering Department they have been working with and they have presented some idea on plans and ideas on how to go over State and Federal funding. From the Parks Department's perspective, it is in a holding pattern until they can get those issues mitigated. They need to figure out the funding and game plan.

Leisure Time Fund (Page 325, Five Year Capital Projection Page 331)

Revenues - $293,879 increase, which is mainly attributable to more projected charges for services for Natatorium $75,500, Water Works $88,984, Brookledge $70,000, and Downview $46,404. Increase in charges for services is due to a general increase in activity.

Personal Services - $187,833 overall 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 - $104,526 overall increase. A breakdown of increase (decrease) by department are as follows: Natatorium $111,400, Water Works $31,338, Brookledge ($44,445), and Downview $6,233. General increases spread over many accounts, with the following notable items: Natatorium - Cleaning Supplies (52005) +$25,000 for price increases, with the most significant item being gym wipes which are popular with members; Property/Building Maintenance and Repair (53021) +$38,000 for continued gym floor refinishing work for the auxiliary gym and fitness room B $8,000 and back office carpet replacement $20,000; Tools & Equipment (53047) +35,100 for equipment for pool / aquatic center $5,100, and fitness equipment +$30,000; offset by a reduction in Architectural/Engineering Services (54002) ($15,000); Water Works - Chemical Supplies (52004) +$12,500 for pool chemicals price increase; Furniture and Fixtures (53019) +$19,000 mostly for increase in chairs and chair restrapping $2,500, Lifeguard

chairs for Lazy River $2,500, and one-time picnic seating for the concessions patio +$12,000; Brookledge - Advertising (53001) ($30,020) for some planned one-time targeted advertising in 2025; Property/Building Maintenance and Repair (53021) ($25,000) for some one-time items in 2025 for parking lot seal-stripe; Downview - Athletic Supplies (52060) +$20,000 for increase in driving range and miniature increase cost of supplies.

Capital outlay - The Five-year Capital Plan 2026-2030 for this fund is on page 331 and will be discussed in detail at the budget hearing. Capital Projects change from year to year and are generally not comparable, however, with that being stated there is an increase $16,000. Some notable items are two heavy duty carts for Brookledge $70,000, and a robotic ball picker for Downview $68,000.

Debt service - $6,900 increase. Debt service is only in the Natatorium department of the Leisure Time Fund. The slight increase is related to differences in the amortization schedule between the two years for the two remaining bond issues outstanding. The detailed Five-year Debt Schedule (2026-2030) for Leisure Time Fund is on pages 39-48.

Ms. Kline stated that there is an increase in pool chemicals and chemical costs for Waterworks and the Natatorium. At Waterworks, the chemicals have increased $12,500. They are going to continue refinishing the gym floor at the Natatorium in the auxiliary gym and Fitness Room B. They need to redo the carpet and flooring in the back office. There are a lot of things with the wear and tear of this building. It operates 362 days a year and, over 23 years, it has gotten a lot of use.

Ms. Nichols-Rhodes stated that the revenue projected for 2026 is increased by $293,000. That must be because all the improvements and keeping things done well. That is simply because more people are coming and more people are paying charges to come into the different facilities. It is not because of an increase in price. Ms. Kline stated that it is a little bit of all of the above. They have talked about rates at the Natatorium and Waterworks. They continue to strive to find a balance to make it affordable, especially with residents, and also because they are not overwhelmed by patrons. They have seen a tremendous increase in the number of swipes they get from Silver Sneaker customers and other insurance-based programs. They have expanded programs at the Quirk Center and at Waterworks. That has been a big boon on revenue in the Leisure Time Fund.

<u>Garage Fund (Page 279)</u>

Revenues - $25,000 increase. This increase is related to Internal Service Charges (45401) to other City departments. In governmental accounting, internal service Funds account for the financing of goods or services provided by one department of the City to other departments on a cost reimbursement basis. Therefore, when expenses of the fund are increasing, internal cost

reimbursement from other departments go up accordingly, offset by any increase in current fund balance from the prior year.

Personal Services - $43,095 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 several employees, increase in overtime +$6,567; and Insurance - Medical/Dental (51104), and Insurance - Medical/Dental (51104), and Vision +3.5%, offset by a reduction from the planned replacement of the Superintendent of Motor Vehicles being replaced at a lower rate of pay.

Operations expenditures - $44,698 increase. Increase is mainly due to the following, most of which is due to general inflationary increases spread over a few accounts: Tires (52050) +$5,000 related to the increase in tires for sanitation vehicles; Vehicle Parts (52052) +$16,000; Vehicle Maintenance and Repair (53033) +$20,000, which is also related to sanitation vehicles.

Mr. John Campbell, Garage Superintendent, stated that increases this year are not extremely big. Fuel prices for the last couple years have stayed a same for the city. They deal with some big numbers in that department, but the one that they have done pretty well over the nine and a half years is they have gotten back $75,131 in used car and equipment sales through the auction site. The only capital idea that they put in there is for a remediation of the fuel tanks that are buried in the ground. Installing was in the 2025 budget. Hopefully they'll start that pretty soon.

Ms. Nichols-Rhodes stated that operating expenses are going to be up $4,000. This is related to an extra $5,000 for sanitation vehicle tires and their parts have gone up. Mr. Campbell stated that there are bigger tires on the refuse trucks. The City streets are not big, long stretches and all those 90-degree turns have a scrubbing effect on the rear tires and they go through a fair amount. They generally buy recap tires for the back of those trucks.

The meeting adjourned at 7:54 p.m.