

MINUTES OF PUBLIC HEARING

June 15, 2026

Temp. Ord. A-37

An ordinance approving the application to expand the Downtown Community Cuyahoga Falls Entertainment District within the Downtown Cuyahoga Falls area; making certain findings in connection therewith, and declaring an emergency.

On the 15th of June, 2026, at 6:30 p.m. EST, public hearings were called to order and conducted regarding Temp. Ord. A-37 dealing with amending specific sections of the Codified Ordinances of the City of Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio. Notice of the hearing was published in the Akron Legal News on May 15, 2026 and May 22, 2026. A true and accurate copy of the published Notices are attached to these Minutes.

Ms. Mary Spaugy, Community Development Director, and Ms. Carrie Snyder, Deputy Development Director, presented Temporary Ordinance A-37 to Council. Community Entertainment Districts (CEDs) were created by the Ohio Legislature in the early 2000s to aid economic revitalization in areas lacking D5 permits. Current CEDs in Cuyahoga Falls include the Portage Crossing CED, which was established in 2013, covers 20 acres, and allows 4 D5-J permits and the Downtown CED, which was created in 2017, covers 57 acres, and allows 11 D5-J permits (one per five acres, up to 15 maximum per district). The City of Cuyahoga Falls has 26 D5 permits, all currently allocated. No more than 15 D5-J permits can be issued within a single CED, regardless of district size.

Pilgrim Church at 130 Broad Boulevard was not included in the original Downtown CED. The owner seeks inclusion to pursue a D5-J permit. Without inclusion, the only alternative is the costly TREX process (acquiring a permit from another jurisdiction, costing \$10,000–\$20,000 plus fees).

Expanding a CED follows the same process as establishing one: public notice and adoption of an ordinance or resolution. The Division of Liquor Control requires an updated street boundary description for the entire expanded district. New parcels (including 130 Broad Boulevard) are zoned MU-5 (Urban Center) or MU-6 (Downtown), supporting mixed-use development and meeting CED requirements. Zoning and permitted uses will not change with the expansion.

The CED expansion does not affect the DORA (Designated Outdoor Refreshment Area), which allows outdoor consumption of alcoholic beverages in designated cups. If the City Council approves the expansion, Pilgrim Church can apply for a D5-J permit without incurring the high costs of the TREX process, supporting local economic development and mixed-use activity in the downtown area.

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Ms. Spaugy stated that the City implemented its Downtown Community Entertainment district in 2017 as an economic development incentive tool to revitalize its downtown corridor. A Community Entertainment District is different than the DORA that this Council passed a few years ago. It allows cities to have additional liquor permits for liquor, beer, and wine sales, specifically in the downtown area. Its creation allowed the City to capture 11 of these permits specifically in the downtown, and only one of those permits remain. They are here tonight requesting the expansion of this district. Pastor Joy Fenton began discussions with the Community Development Department about three years ago about the reimagination of underutilized spaces at both Pilgrim and Church Square. The reimagination process is needed as congregations have seen a decline in their members. Pilgrim is the first in this process here in Cuyahoga Falls, and collaboration with its congregation, the City, and the local art community are important keys into making this project a success. One of the ideas is the concept of a wedding event space that will also allow them to house receptions, which requires a liquor permit to do so. At the original time of the passage, Pilgrim Church was excluded in the Community Entertainment District boundary, so they are asking to amend the boundary tonight to include Pilgrim. At the time that they started analyzing this expansion, they also noticed that they were missing key aspects of future projects that are down in the pipeline and it made the most sense to try to maximize the expansion to maximize the actual liquor permits allowed in downtown. This proposed expansion will allow the City to gain the maximum number of permits downtown, which is 15 permits for liquor, beer, and wine sales. This doesn't mean that all 15 permits will be utilized, but it is there in case they need it for additional projects. They are asking that it also be expanded to North Front for future development options with the condos excluded.

Ms. Carrie Snyder, Deputy Community Development Director, explained the liquor permitting process and D-5J permits to Council. There are currently two D-5J permits in the city. The first was established in 2013 at Portage Crossing, It is the smallest district that's allowed, which is 20 acres and allows for four D-5J permits, two of which are currently in use and two of which are available. The downtown district was established in 2017. The existing district encompasses 57 acres, and includes 11 D-5J permits, one of which is currently available. Pilgrim Church - was not included in the original CED, so it is not eligible to use that D-5J permit without this expansion. The options are to expand the existing downtown community entertainment district to include Pilgrim. The suggested expansion includes additional properties to maximize the City's liquor permits. Option two would be to pursue an Economic Development Transfer, or a TREX, permit. A TREX requires acquiring an existing permit from another jurisdiction and transferring it to the site of an economic development project. This process typically involves a cost of \$10,000 to \$20,000 in the purchase of the permit/business in addition to legal and

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administrative costs and those do not include the approximately \$2,500 that every D5 permit holder pays annually to the State of Ohio as a permit fee. TREX permits also require economic development, job creation, and the other items that are required under the CED process. Under state law, expanding a Community Entertainment District requires the same procedures that were used to create it. One of those requirements is a public notice and adoption of an ordinance or resolution. When they started looked at different options to include Pilgrim, it made sense to maximize the availability of these permits and also to not come back here again in a couple years when Church Square is fully reimaged or there's future development to the north of the downtown area. It is important to note that expanding the Community Entertainment District would not change zoning classifications or permitted land uses for any property and does not impact the DORA in any way. The DORA boundaries remain what they are, which ends at Second Street.

Reverend Joy Fenton Jones, 1415 Grant Street, Akron, Ohio stated that she is the pastor at both Pilgrim United Church of Christ at Broad and Second and First Christian Church, which is just across the street on Church Square. Her particular area of interest and expertise is church property reuse. She advises and works with churches of several different denominations across Northeast Ohio on reimagining their buildings to achieve greater community good and greater long-term sustainability. Over the past two years, Pilgrim has worked very hard to engage its neighbors in conversation, to build relationships, and to think imaginatively about what is possible in their beautiful historic building. They are thrilled to have formed a partnership with Michael Owen, Todd Etterer, and Jody Owen. Their congregation voted almost unanimously, save one vote, in favor of moving forward with this reimagination of Pilgrim. They are very excited to enter this partnership and to utilize their building in ways that are more creative and more community-facing and more aligned with the energy on Front Street and in the downtown area. Being included in the entertainment district is one of the elements of that growth. It is an opportunity to engage the community by hosting weddings and receptions, concerts and arts events, among other things.

Pilgrim has a long history and a deep commitment to the recovery community in Akron and will continue to honor its commitment to the many recovery groups that meet in the building and to make sure that they are still able to offer them safe and appropriate space for those meetings that we know are vital to those folks and to the community. The partnership with Michael, Todd, and Jody includes mandatory provisions to preserve Pilgrim's Historic Sanctuary and the historic first edition, ensuring that the steeple there remains a downtown Cuyahoga Falls icon well into the future. Church Square, which includes First Christian Church, St. John's Episcopal, and First United Methodist, has also embarked on a journey of reimagining their shared land and facilities. Together, they own more than four acres and more than 140,000 square feet of buildings on Church Square. They are

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united in the belief that they can do more to utilize their green space and buildings in service to the community. They are also committed to historic preservation on Church Square and united in their commitment to preserve the historic sanctuary space in each of those three buildings. They are united in their understanding that being part of the entertainment district opens up so many possibilities for community gathering, for entrepreneurial efforts, and for community-facing events. All four of the congregations and all five of the clergy that serve them are enthusiastically in support of this expansion.

Mr. Michael Owen stated that they feel really honored to be part of this community and to bring the development experience that Todd and Jody and he has had over the decades to try to work with such a historically and architecturally-significant property. The absolute incredible stewardship that has taken place and the property management that has taken place in these buildings allows them to still be relevant. He is going to ask nothing more from them than that go on a path that continues to make these pieces of the community relevant over the next 192 years, that they find a way to the end of time to preserve something that was built and cared for since 1840 and that they have a chance as a community to show a national model of how all of these first-ring suburbs are dealing with church properties that are heavy in real estate and short on congregation. And they have had much luck over the last decades using the arts and music to lift these up.

Mr. Mark Wilkerson, 2467 Sixth Street, stated that he does not have an objection to this. He would ask that Council put guidelines into the Police Department to monitor the clientele and if they see a downturn in the clientele, they start to react before it is too late, and that Council should appropriate to the Police Department enough money to hire three beat cops. They should be on foot, not standing at a light, switching lights for people, but actually walking the beat.

Mr. Todd Etter, 2627 Chamberlain Road, Akron, stated that he is part of the development team and has been involved in a lot of different real estate transactions. Having arts, having music, having events, having services with the church and putting those pieces together is a challenge, so they are pleased to be able to have the opportunity to come here and encourage the expansion of this area, because with Pilgrim, as well as others, it helps make these other good things happen.

No further comments, either for or against the legislation, were offered by anyone in attendance.

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Certification

The undersigned, Dana M. Capriulo, Clerk of Cuyahoga Falls City Council, hereby certifies that the foregoing is a true and correct copy of the minutes of the public hearing held by the Council of the City of Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio, at 6:30 p.m. on Monday, June 15, 2026.

Dated: June 15, 2026

Dana M. Capriulo, Clerk
Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio, City Council