

Regular

January 22, 2025

Ontario City Council met in regular session on January 22, 2025, in the Municipal Building with Council President Eddie Gallo presiding. The meeting opened at 7:03 p.m. with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Present during roll call were Council members Troy Sapp, Kyle Webb, Dave Rehfeldt, Josh Bradley, Sherry Branham-Fonner, Rose Feagin, Nathan Sunderland, Council President Eddie Gallo, Mayor Kris Knapp, Law Director Andrew Medwid, Service-Safety Director Adam Gongwer, and Clerk of Council Cathy VanAuker.

The minutes of the regular Council meetings of December 18, 2024 and January 8, 2025 were presented for approval. Hearing no corrections, the minutes were approved as presented.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Mr. Sapp said OYS Director Kenn Spencer contacted the baseball/softball commissioner who will address the concern about the Marshall Park backstops prior to the beginning of the season so the ball can't get under the fence and risk the possibility of players getting their hands caught.

Mrs. Branham-Fonner reported the Personnel Committee met this evening in executive session. The next Personnel Committee of the Whole meeting, in executive session, will be held February 5, 2025 at 5:30 p.m.

Ms. Feagin said the Streets Committee met to discuss the 2025/2026 street paving plan and the placement of digital speed limit signs.

MAYOR'S REPORT

Mayor Knapp read the State of the City, accompanied by a slide show of pictures taken throughout the year.

STATE OF THE CITY

I am proud and honored to share the State of the City of Ontario with everyone. It is important that we acknowledge those who are directly involved with our city every day. I would like to start with our Administration, Service Safety Director and Administrative Assistant and Office Personnel, our Police Department along with our Chief, Captain, Lieutenants, Sergeants, Patrol Officers, K-9, School Resource officer, and dispatchers. Our mayors court, Law Director, Magistrate, and Clerk. Our Planning Commission, Zoning Inspector, and Civil Service. Our City Council, Clerk, and Committee members. The Treasurer, Auditor, Deputy Auditor, and Income Tax Department. Our Water and Sewer Departments which include our Service Employees and Clerk along with our Streets Service Department. Our Parks Department, Recreational Department, along with OYS and Ontario Community Events. Our Senior Center individuals, Board of Health Representatives, Records Retention appointee, and Cemetery Superintendent. All these individuals, either employed or volunteers, have an integral part of the city's day-to-day operation.

2024 was a transitional change in many areas of the city and ended on a positive mark. The city of Ontario began the year with Veterans opening our council meetings with the Pledge of Allegiance. We also started the tradition of Veterans Way on Lexington-Springmill Road by hanging our community banners of our local veterans. The City of Ontario completely funded the cost of these banners. This will continue in 2025. We had a serious incident in February with our Officer Involved Shooting. We are grateful that the individual officer is back on duty and is recovering from that incident. I also want to acknowledge the entire police division for their continued dedication to this great city. As spring approached, there was a big discussion about the date of April 8, 2024. This was the Solar Eclipse. As quickly as the event occurred, the countless hours of preparation through our Police and other

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entities in Richland County made this event a success. If anything, this helped the city prepare for any major events in the future. Our council held a council meeting at Ontario High School in front of the student body. This now leads us into the summer months in which our Ontario Community Events become fully activated. With the start of our Summer Recreation, the Summer Concert series, and our biggest city event of the year, the fourth of July festival, this gives our city an opportunity to highlight many facets of our park and bring our community together with an exciting festival. We always appreciate the encore at the festival with the fireworks display provided by the Niss Foundation. I also want to acknowledge the three newly crowned Miss Ontario queens. Miss Ontario, Katie Bolen, Junior Miss Ontario, Karlie Brinker, and Little Miss Ontario Mila Morrison. Just before that weeklong event occurred our city was able to obtain and move the M4201-Anticraft twin 40mm Duster, "Tank". Many thanks go to Master Sergeant Brett Baxter and the 1486th Transportation Company.

Our city then went into a transitional administration period. The former Mayor Randy Hutchinson decided to leave before his term ended and transitioned into a new role outside of city government. It is important to thank him and acknowledge the dedication he has given to the City of Ontario for the past 10 years. We wish him the absolute best in his future. We had 5 individuals submit to the party and they appointed a new mayor to finish his term. Along with this transition we have had a new Service Safety director and Zoning Inspector. Another transitional event that occurred at a similar time was the sale of the General Motors property owned by the city to ICP.

As fall approached our city was awarded the Earth Stewardship award from the Richland County Soil and Water Conservation District, our streets department worked extremely hard to clean out Touby run which helps our storm water flow. Our city council passed a significant ordinance which was the moratorium for the sale of marijuana inside the city limits of Ontario. After months of meetings and countless hours of volunteer work, our city's Comprehensive Plan came together. Our city finished the year with an upgrade to our community room which had not been done in over 30 years. We also had our annual Ontario Police toy drive, our Christmas tree lighting and breakfast with Santa.

Our city had multiple businesses open or relocate in Ontario in 2024. We had Stumps, Aquatics, and Exotics, Loft and Rails, Bath and Body Works, Akron Children's Hospital, Carter's-Osh-Kosh, Culvers, Eagle Loan, Hibachi Express, Vape City Smoke Shop, I am Boundless, Child Care, The Void – Gaming and Hobby Shop, Peony & Birch Botique, A Touch of Home, Grocery Outlet, Fleets Fitness Center, Fourth Street Coffee, Fresh Grounds, and the 4 leaf Rover. Not to mention the Steak and Shake building going to Starbucks, and the Denny's building going to Canes. We also have the Richland Mall under new ownership and now called The Ontario Center, ODOT approving plans to build on the Beer Road property, and Avita announcing the new Cancer wing in the Sears building. Who knows 2025 might bring the city another Chicken restaurant.

2024 was a continually active year for our city. We had a change in multiple positions within the city, our city council approved updates in our working and wage ordinances. Our police department ended the year with approximately 4,000 more calls for service than in 2023. A huge investment that our city took part in is our Flock camera system. Approximately 60 percent of the cases our police investigate now include the flock system. Unfortunately, felony cases were up 53 percent with many calls involving violence. There were over 1600 traffic tickets issued, 1100 waivers paid and over 1800 charges heard in Mayors court. Our Mayors court revenue in 2024 was just shy of \$300,000 with our city keeping approximately \$231,000. Our police department increased its training due to having two officers who can bring outside advanced training into Ontario. This is an enormous opportunity for our city as these classes allow our officers to attend for free and there is minimal travel and overnight accommodation. With the accreditation that our Police department received with CALEA, the recommendation is to have a department commit and keep all training records up to date and on file. This will be assigned to a supervisor with proper credentials to facilitate this task. Finally, our city revenue went up by over 7 percent excluding the sale of the GM property from 2023. Even though a large budget was proposed for 2025 I am confident that our city as in past years should be below the anticipated budget.

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I am also happy to say that Ontario ended the year with many grand openings, opportunities and a comprehensive plan for an exciting transition into 2025.

As we look ahead into 2025 my goal as mayor is to implement the Comprehensive Plan. I plan to assist in the organization of a new Community Improvement Corporation (CIC). I want to collaborate with the citizens to improve the “Old Ontario” area, this is personal to me as it is where I grew up. I will continue to improve our city’s infrastructure by targeting old water and sewer lines and writing grants through the OPWC Regional Planning organization, as well as other state and federal agencies. We did receive the OPWC grant to improve multiple waterlines and looping in 2025. We continue to improve our sanitary sewer and our I&I and continue open conversations with the Mansfield Mayor and administration. I will also work to improve the safety of our roads, as our city received the ODOT safety grant in the amount of 3.9 million for a roundabout. Our council approved a new temporary budget for which we can improve our capital assets of new cruisers, plow truck, lift truck, and the Marcs radio system. I am happy to announce that our city recently received the ODOT Safe Routes to School grant which allows the planning and engineering for new sidewalks in our city. This will be an ongoing plan to improve the safety and mobility of our school students and citizens. I will continue to keep lines of communication open with Congressman Jim Jordan, State Senator Mark Romanchuk, so that we may apply for grants to assist ICP in the infrastructure of electrical power. This is a priority to develop the General Motors property with Industry. I am working with Blue Scope in creating a recyclable program for our parks. We all have an exciting opportunity to continue the success of this city. We have multiple council seats; auditor and the mayor position up for election in 2025. I have turned my petition in and will look forward to having my name on the May 6th ballot. I want to thank my Service Safety Director Adam Gongwer, our Chief of Police Tom Hill, all our city employees, each one of our city council members, and my wife and daughters for their continued support. There are multiple decisions, events, and projects ahead of this great city. I look forward to putting the City of Ontario first and wish to amplify this city into a triumphant and prosperous year.

SERVICE-SAFETY DIRECTOR’S REPORT

When Mr. Sunderland asked for an update on a possible 4-way stop at Walker Lake/Home Road, Director Gongwer said they are meeting with Mansfield in a couple of weeks and will discuss a shared cost on their engineer’s recommendation for a traffic study to determine if a 4-way stop is the best safety solution.

- Mr. Webb requested they discuss if there is a need to look at a solution for the W. 4th Street intersection because there is an issue with the turn lane going south into Ontario. There isn’t a turn lane on the Mansfield side but it affects drivers going in and out of Ontario.

LAW DIRECTOR’S REPORT

Law Director Medwid presented his annual report.

LAW DIRECTOR’S REPORT OF CASES AS OF 12-31-2024

2024 MAYOR’S COURT TOTALS

2024 Total number of tickets / summons issued = 1535, increase of 13% from 2023

2024 Total number of charges / counts issued = 1856, increase of 7.2% from 2023

2024 Total OVI charges = 8, increase of 100% from 2023

2024 Total Income Tax Cases = 83, up from 18 in 2023

2024 Total Zoning Dept. Case = 1, down from 2 in 2023

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2024 Total charges heard in Mayors Court = 1880, increase of 7.2% from 2023

2024 Total waivers paid at Clerks office = 1,100, increase of 18.3% from 2023

2024 Open arrest warrants = 320, decrease 5.9% from 2023

2024 MANSFIELD MUNICIPAL COURT TOTALS

2024 Total traffic = 53, decrease of 27.4% from 2023

2024 Total criminal =71, increase of 39.2% from 2023

2024 Mayor's Court Revenue \$294,154.75, increase of 18.8% from 2023

Total paid to State of Ohio \$53,005

Total paid to Richland County \$1,857

Total paid to Collection Agency \$3,879

Total paid to Victims (Restitution) \$3,874.06

2024 Total Paid into the City of Ontario \$231,539.69, increase of 18.8% from 2023

OYS REPORT

Kenn Spencer gave a video presentation and report on the OYS activities during 2024.

- There was a record number of children participating in sports and more people in the park than ever before.
- The liner purchased for the soccer fields works very well.
- The Miss Ontario pageant continues to grow.
- New this year:
 - Free indoor concert will take place within the next 60 days
 - Stowell Park will see increased activity with a pickleball tournament
 - A Farmers Market
 - Possibly a Christmas Parade
- The city's employees do a fantastic job maintaining the parks.
- 38 students were able to work in the parks this summer.

Mr. Spencer thanked Council for giving him this opportunity.

Mr. Spencer responded to questions and noted OYS will be able to reduce some of their expenses now that they have a better understanding on the amount of staff needed for summer rec, how to manage financials, and plan to improve their fund raisers.

MISCELLANEOUS MATTERS

The Ohio Division of Liquor Control submitted a notice of stockholder change for Red Lobster. The notice will be returned that Council did not request a hearing.

PUBLIC COMMENTARY

Seeing no one who wished to speak, the Public Commentary portion of the meeting was closed.

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CONSIDERATION OF ORDINANCES AND RESOLUTION

ORDINANCE NO. 24-29

AN ORDINANCE AMENDING CHAPTER 1137- STANDARD ZONING DISTRICTS; 1137.05 - B-BUSINESS DISTRICT; PARAGRAPH (C) CONDITIONALLY PERMITTED USES, AND DECLARING AN EMERGENCY.

Mr. Sunderland read Ordinance No. 24-29, for the third time, by title only.

Mr. Sunderland moved to adopt Ordinance No. 24-29, second by Mr. Webb. Two members cast their votes Aye, five Nays by Mr. Sapp, Mr. Rehfeldt, Mr. Bradley, Ms. Feagin and Mr. Sunderland, and Ordinance No. 24-29 failed.

RESOLUTION NO. 25-01

A RESOLUTION DECLARING THE INTENT OF THE CITY OF ONTARIO TO SELL PROPERTY NO LONGER NEEDED FOR MUNICIPAL PURPOSES THROUGH AN INTERNET AUCTION\SALE DURING CALENDAR YEAR 2025.

Ms. Feagin moved to suspend the reading of Resolution No. 25-01 on three separate days, second by Mr. Webb. Six members cast their votes Aye, zero Nay, one Abstain by Mr. Rehfeldt, and the motion passed. Ms. Feagin read Resolution No. 25-01 for the first time, by title only.

Ms. Feagin moved to adopt Resolution No. 25-01, second by Mr. Sunderland. Six members cast their votes Aye, one Nay by Mr. Rehfeldt, and Resolution No. 25-01 was adopted.

RESOLUTION NO. 25-02

A RESOLUTION DESIGNATING THE ONTARIO COMMUNITY INVESTMENT CORPORATION AS THE OFFICIAL AGENCY AND INSTRUMENTALITY OF CITY OF ONTARIO FOR COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PURPOSES, AND AUTHORIZING THE CORPORATION TO ACT ON BEHALF OF THE MUNICIPALITY.

Mrs. Branham-Fonner read Resolution 25-02 for the first time, by title only.

At 7:54 p.m., there being no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned upon a motion by Mr. Webb, second by Mr. Sunderland.

/s/ Eddie J. Gallo, President of Council

/s/ Cathy VanAuker, Clerk of Council