



**Ravenna City Council
Special Meeting Minutes
December 22, 2025**

The public meeting was held in person in Ravenna City Council Chambers.

The Special Meeting of Ravenna City Council was called to order by Council President, Rob Kairis at 6:25pm.

Council present: Council President Rob Kairis, Amy Michael, Paul Moskun, Matt Harper, Christina West, Tim Calfee, Cheryl Wood, Tyler Marovich

Also in attendance: Mayor Frank Seman, Police Chief, Jake Smallfield; Service Director, Tim Contant; Finance Director, Tami Lorence, Council Clerk, Chelsea Gregor, Larry Selinius, Cliff Soudil, Barbara Niemiller, Jed Wise, Donna Gray Wise, Cynthia Miller, Joe Bica, Joseph Osborne, Ron Fields, Brian Breiding, Aimee Breiding, Doug Shelton, Karen Anderson, Mike Burner, James D. Anderson, Tom Riddle, Peter Martin

The Clerk read the Call for the Special Council meeting to discuss and/or act upon Resolution 2025-112 to allow the public to comment on Resolution 2025-112, declaring the necessity to increase the city's income tax by .25% to provide funds to support the planning and building of new police and fire stations as well as a new city hall.

RESOLUTION NO. 2025-112 A RESOLUTION DECLARING THE NECESSITY FOR AN ADDITIONAL TWENTY-FIVE HUNDREDTHS OF ONE PERCENT INCOME TAX TO PROVIDE FUNDS FOR THE PURPOSE OF PLANNING AND BUILDING A NEW FIRE STATION, POLICE STATION AND CITY HALL IN THE CITY OF RAVENNA, OHIO , AND DECLARING AN EMERGENCY.

Council opened up the floor for public comment.

Mr. Kairis opened public comment on a proposed ordinance to increase the Earned Income Tax by 0.25% to fund safety buildings and City Hall, inviting residents to speak.

Karen Anderson asked how much funding had already been set aside and what prior financial planning had been done.

Ms. Lorence explained that approximately \$300,000 per year had recently been allocated toward initial design and planning, and that discussions had been ongoing for many years.

Ms. Anderson expressed support for the police and fire facilities but questioned the necessity of including City Hall.

Ms. Wood and Ms. Michael explained that constructing all facilities together was more cost-effective than building them separately in phases, noting that delaying City Hall would significantly increase future costs.

Ms. Anderson also asked about the possibility of using additional county funds, and Ms. Lorence stated she was unaware of any such funds being available.

Ms. Kairis clarified that the purpose of the meeting was to gather public input rather than provide definitive answers, and emphasized that due diligence had been done.

Ms. West added that a committee and the Finance Department had explored multiple funding options and that resident feedback would help inform the final decision.

Jed Wise addressed City Council regarding the proposed income tax increase, stating that Ravenna already has the highest income tax rate in Portage County and would rank among the highest-taxed cities within the Regional Income Tax Authority jurisdictions. He argued that the city was moving in the wrong direction and recommended lowering the rate to 2.25%, operating within a tighter budget, and seeking cost-saving measures such as collaboration with Ravenna Township or selling assets.

Mr. Wise expressed concern that high taxes discourage businesses and workers from locating in Ravenna and compared the situation to residents leaving high-tax states. As a lifelong resident and member of a family that operated a local business for over 85 years, he emphasized the importance of fiscal responsibility and competitiveness. He questioned how workers in the city would be informed of the proposed tax increase, whether major employers would be notified, and raised concerns about the fairness and legality of taxing workers who cannot vote on the issue.

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Donna Gray Wise addressed council, sharing her experience working with Mayor Seman and the Community Improvement Corporation (CIC) in making efforts to attract residents and businesses to Ravenna. She expressed concern that increasing income taxes would discourage people from moving to or investing in the city, noting longstanding challenges such as limited housing, dining options, and vacant downtown retail space. As a lifelong resident who returned after many years away, she emphasized Ravenna's strong location and commuter convenience but warned that higher taxes could drive people elsewhere. Ms. Wise also questioned the decision to rely on income tax rather than property taxes, citing issues with absentee landlords and rental conditions. Wise urged council to carefully consider how the proposal might impact the city's ability to attract and retain residents and businesses.

Carmen Laudato acknowledged that while the public generally supports safety services, there is widespread concern about the economic impact of the proposed project. She noted personal financial strain, citing potential additional costs of \$800 annually for her household, and stressed the need for clearer communication about the project's details, funding alternatives, and overall plan before placing it on the ballot. Drawing on her experience in city government, she highlighted the importance of thorough planning, transparency, and public engagement, cautioning that insufficient preparation could lead to repeated failures and wasted funds, including the proposed contract with Triad Communications.

Mr. Kairis clarified that the Triad contract had not been approved and that council could pass the income tax ordinance without committing to the contract. Laudato responded that, regardless, the plan to place the measure on the spring ballot is moving forward, and she urged the city to provide clear, detailed information on costs and options so residents can make informed decisions before any financial commitments are made.

Mike Burner asked several questions regarding previously approved quarter-percent taxes, including whether levies for safety forces, streets, and sidewalks were permanent.

Mr. Kairis explained that the safety forces, and street and sidewalks levies were permanent, while the current levy under discussion would last 30 years to cover the cost of the buildings.

Mr. Burner also asked why the Pledge of Allegiance is not said at every council meeting.

Mr. Kairis explained that it is included in regular council meetings per the agenda but has not traditionally been part of committee meetings, noting it is not a requirement but would be taken into consideration.

Mr. Burner expressed concern about taxation discouraging people from moving to the city and asked about the impact of a recently passed school levy on school rankings.

Ms. West noted that the levy had just passed and no data would be available yet.

Mr. Burner later raised a traffic signal timing issue, but Kairis clarified that the meeting was focused on the safety buildings and City Hall, thanked him for his comments, and closed the discussion.

Rob Kairis clarified that the meeting was focused on the safety buildings and City Hall, thanked the prior speaker, and then asked if anyone wished to speak in favor of the ordinance.

Ron Fields addressed Council, noting that he works for the City's police department but was speaking in two capacities. He invited the public to tour the police station to see the conditions firsthand and explained that understanding what taxpayers receive for their money is important. Mr. Fields also mentioned a recorded video tour of the fire department being prepared for public viewing. Fields stated that the cost to his household would be approximately \$300 per year and expressed that he believed the expense was worthwhile.

Barbara Niemiller addressed Council, explaining that she has lived in Ravenna for most of her life and recently committed to attending meetings regularly after purchasing a home in the city. She expressed frustration with negative perceptions of Ravenna and stated that while some criticize the city, they are unwilling to support efforts to improve it. Ms. Niemiller emphasized the need for new public safety buildings, noting that neighboring communities have made similar investments, and said she chose to remain in Ravenna despite higher taxes elsewhere because she believes improving the city is worthwhile.

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Larry Silenius then spoke, stating that the proposal would not significantly increase the cost of living in Ravenna, but rather the cost of working in the city, with minimal impact on residents. He added that, compared to state, federal, and property taxes, the city income tax is relatively small.

Cliff Soudil stated that after recently spending time as a patient in the local hospital, he was grateful for the presence of essential services, including the hospital and the fire department. He emphasized that while these services require funding, the cost is minimal compared to the importance of having proper equipment, facilities, and proximity to save lives. Mr. Soudil noted that although the improvements could have been made years ago, the city did not have the financial ability at that time, but it does now. He also warned that failing to act could expose the city to potential lawsuits because the current building is not properly equipped to accommodate female firefighters or police officers, and urged that the issue be addressed immediately.

ORDINANCE NO. 2025-132 AN ORDINANCE AUTHORIZING THE APPROPRIATION OF \$23,000.00 FROM FUND 677 AND FURTHER AUTHORIZING THE MAYOR TO ENTER INTO A CONTRACT WITH HELMLING EXCAVATING TO PERFORM THE OAKWOOD AND DIAMOND STREET EMERGENCY SEWER IMPROVEMENTS, AND DECLARING AN EMERGENCY.

Mr. Moskun explained that the matter had been discussed, was considered critical, and needed to be addressed as soon as possible.

Mr. Kairis clarified that the appropriation represented an additional amount needed, not the total cost of the emergency repair, and Mr. Moskun confirmed this was correct.

There being no further comments or questions.

- Motion to waive three separate readings by Mr. Calfee, 2nd by Ms. West- **All Ayes**
- Motion to adopt emergency clause by Mr. Calfee, 2nd by Mr. Marovich- **All Ayes**
- Motion to pass Ordinance No. 2025-132 by Mr. Calfee, 2nd by Ms. Wood- **All Ayes**

Ordinance 2025-132 was adopted.

Mr. Kairis announced that Ordinance 2025-132 had been approved and that there was no further business on the agenda. He thanked those in attendance for their patience and for sharing their candid opinions regarding the safety and City Hall buildings.

- Motion to adjourn at 7:20 pm by Ms. Wood, 2nd Mr. Marovich- **All Ayes**

ATTEST:

Clerk of Council

Council President