



**Ravenna City Council
Planning Committee Meeting Minutes
January 12, 2026**

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

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

Also attending the meeting: Mayor Frank Seman; Law Director, Frank Cimino; Police Chief, Jason Smallfield; Service Director, Tim Contant; City Engineer; Council Clerk, Chelsea Gregor; Larry Silenius, Cliff Soudil, Barbara Niemiller, Joseph Osborne, Peter Martin, Brian Breiday

Planning Committee Meeting was called to order at 7:30 P.M. by member, Carmen Laudato

The first item was an item accepting \$441,249.53 in Adult Use Cannabis Tax Funds.

Ms. Laudato explained that when the City previously considered medical and recreational cannabis, a portion of the excise tax was expected to benefit the City. However, due to ongoing changes at the state level, Council had enacted a moratorium while awaiting clarity. She expressed appreciation that the State had finalized the process and confirmed that the payment included backdated funds.

Ms. Lorence clarified that the funds cover the period beginning July 1, 2024, through the present and that the City will now receive monthly payments averaging approximately \$25,000. She noted the funds were directly deposited by the Ohio Department of Taxation and are already in the City's account.

Mr. Kairis added that retail operations did not begin until late summer, meaning the distribution reflects roughly 16 months. He also noted that changes in THC limits and other regulatory factors could impact future revenue.

Mr. Calfee cautioned that revenue levels may fluctuate, particularly since a cannabis dispensary has since opened in Streetsboro, which could affect customer traffic in Ravenna.

Ms. West explained that Ravenna's dispensary offers multiple product lines, while Streetsboro's facility sells only its own branded products, which may influence sales volume.

Ms. Michael remarked that despite regulatory changes, consumer demand is likely to continue. She asked whether the funds would be directed to the General Fund.

Mayor Seman noted that the amount closely mirrors what the general fund previously contributed toward the Sunbeau Valley Farm property purchase and confirmed the funds will be placed into the General Fund.

Ms. Lorence stated that guidance from the Auditor of State recommends depositing the revenue into the General Fund unless a special fund is specified.

Ms. Michael suggested that replenishing the General Fund strengthens the City's financial position and opens discussion for potential land banking or future development investments.

Ms. West emphasized the importance of demonstrating to residents, particularly as an income tax issue is on the ballot, how much the City is contributing toward safety buildings and suggested allocating some cannabis revenue toward that purpose.

Ms. Laudato agreed that future allocations warrant intentional discussion but cautioned that the revenue amount may fluctuate. She also noted that pricing changes in Michigan's recreational market could influence Ohio sales.

Mr. Kairis suggested establishing a dedicated revenue line within the General Fund for tracking purposes.

Ms. Lorence confirmed that although an ordinance is required to formally accept the funds, the money has already been deposited.

- The item was moved forward.

The second item was Design Review Commission changes.

Ms. Laudato thanked Mr. Kairis for preparing a color-coded comparison spreadsheet outlining proposals from the Community and Economic Development (CED) Committee and the DRC.

Mr. Kairis explained that green-highlighted sections indicated agreement between proposals, while gray sections identified areas of conflict requiring Council resolution. He also pointed out a timing discrepancy in one section that may unintentionally create conflicts between application timelines and general DRC review authority.

Ms. Laudato emphasized the importance of balancing historic preservation with business friendliness. She expressed concern about extending review timelines from two weeks to four weeks, stating that unnecessary delays could appear arbitrary to businesses and hinder economic development, and supported maintaining the original two-week timeframe. Ms. Laudato also thanked Larry Silenius, who attended the meeting and previously spent time reviewing the DRC process with her. She noted that she had reviewed meeting minutes and sought additional insight due to reported disagreements within the DRC.

The discussion then turned to membership requirements, particularly the role of a "specialist" and residency standards.

Ms. Laudato expressed reservations about requiring a specialist as a voting member and suggested such a person might serve better in an advisory capacity. She supported narrowing the residency requirement from Portage County to the City of Ravenna.

Mr. Kairis clarified the differences between proposals: The CED proposal requires all members to reside in or own property in Ravenna and does not mandate having a specialist, while the DRC proposal requires at least one specialist, and allows one specialist to reside outside the city.

Mr. Silenius confirmed that the DRC had discussed limiting membership strictly to Ravenna residents and was open to removing the property ownership alternative.

Ms. West expressed concern that overly strict residency requirements could make it difficult to recruit qualified and passionate members. She supported allowing either residency or property ownership within the city.

Ms. Michael agreed that members should be Ravenna residents and supported Ms. Laudato's suggestion that any specialist serve in an advisory rather than voting role.

Ms. Laudato formally proposed eliminating the Portage County residency standard and replacing it with a requirement that members reside in the City of Ravenna.

Mr. Marovich stated that making a specialist an advisory, non-voting member could encourage more objective input, as the individual would not be responsible for final decisions and could speak freely from a professional perspective.

Ms. Michael agreed, suggesting the specialist serve in an advisory capacity, providing feedback without voting authority.

Mr. Marovich added that nothing prohibits the Design Review Commission (DRC) from seeking outside expert input when needed.

Ms. West sought clarification, asking whether the current code requires two specialists.

Ms. Laudato clarified that the code allows for specialists but does not require them. She emphasized that the City invested \$12,000 toward the development of \$30,000 in design guidelines, suggesting that strong written guidance may reduce the need for mandated specialists.

Mr. Kairis responded that a specialist might better understand and interpret the guidelines, which may not be written for a non-expert.

Ms. Laudato disagreed, stating the guidelines include visual examples and are accessible.

Mr. Calfee suggested adopting the DRC proposal, which would require members to reside in or own property in Ravenna while allowing one specialist to reside within Portage County.

Ms. Laudato expressed a desire to move the legislation forward without further delay and proposed requiring all members to reside in or own property in the City of Ravenna.

After discussion, the committee agreed to eliminate the Portage County residency standard and require DRC members to live in or own property in Ravenna.

Mr. Kairis suggested adopting the Community and Economic Development (CED) proposal, which allows for specialists but does not require them.

Ms. Michael supported removing the requirement, noting the existence of established guidelines and the ability to consult experts when necessary.

The committee ultimately agreed to adopt the CED proposal, eliminating the requirement for two specialists and removing the county residency provision. Specialists would not be required, and all members must reside in or own property in Ravenna.

Ms. West added that appointed members who live in the city would naturally be invested in representing their community and could bring valuable expertise even if not formally designated as specialists.

Council next addressed proposed timeline changes under Section 14.34.03 and 14.34.04.

After discussion, the Committee agreed that the DRC must meet within four weeks of receiving an application. If requested by the applicant, the meeting must occur within two weeks and subsequent meetings would occur at two-week intervals if requested by the applicant. The previous 30-day appeal provision would be removed and the committee agreed that DRC meeting minutes would serve in place of a detailed annual report.

The committee discussed whether to retain the requirement that the DRC conduct a site visit before issuing a certificate of approval. Although the DRC proposed removing the requirement, members expressed concern about eliminating it.

Ms. Laudato noted that site visits provide context that cannot always be captured in plans or photographs.

Ms. West agreed the requirement should remain and the committee decided to retain the site visit requirement.

Ms. Laudato and Ms. West agreed to move the legislation forward.

- The item was moved forward.

The third item was an agreement with Zupka to perform GAAP conversion services.

Council discussed authorizing an agreement with Zupka for GAAP conversion services after the prior firm, Charles E. Harris, exited the business.

Ms. Lorence explained that GAAP conversion is required to prepare financial statements for audit, which must be filed with the state by May 30th. She stated that two bids were received; Zupka's three-year proposal totaled \$47,430, compared to the previous three-year cost of approximately \$36,230. Ms. Lorence noted that the first year carries higher costs due to onboarding.

The committee agreed to move the authorization forward for the next meeting to meet audit deadlines.

- The item was moved forward.

The fourth item was a cannabis dispensary moratorium.

Council briefly discussed the expired city-wide moratorium on cannabis dispensaries.

Ms. Laudato reviewed the history, explaining it was enacted due to uncertainty in State regulations following voter approval of recreational cannabis.

Mr. Kairis clarified that the moratorium expired in May and that the City currently lacks specific zoning restrictions for adult-use cannabis. He suggested reintroducing proposed code amendments modeled after medical marijuana regulations.

Ms. Laudato expressed concern about allowing dispensaries in the central business district, citing historic preservation goals. The committee agreed to table further discussion until the following month to allow additional input, including from Ms. Michael and city staff.

- The item was for discussion only.

Management Update

There being no further business for discussion, the meeting adjourned at 8:43 P.M.

ATTEST:

Clerk of Council

**Carmen Laudato, Chairperson
Planning Committee**