Ravenna City Council
Planning Committee Meeting Minutes
October 13, 2026

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

Council present: Council President Rob Kairis, Amy Michael, Paul Moskun, Tyler Marovich, Tim Calfee, Christina West, Carmen Laudato, Matt Harper
Also attending the meeting: Mayor Frank Seman; Police Chief; Jake Smallfield; Service Director, Tim Contant; City Engineer; Bob Finney; Finance Director, Tami Lorence; Council Clerk, Chelsea Gregor; Larry Silenius, Barbara Niemiller

Planning Committee Meeting was called to order at 8:46 P.M. by member, Carmen Laudato

The first item was an Emerald Lake Grant Application.
Ms. Laudato introduced the proposed Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) grant application to assist with purchasing two additional parcels at Emerald Lake, contingent upon receiving grant funding.
Ms. Michael explained that the application continued the City's previous efforts to acquire the property for land preservation and expanded park opportunities.
Mr. Finney clarified that the application covered approximately 10 acres at the front of the property, which could accommodate trailhead parking and other activities. The previously acquired 100 acres would remain restricted as a nature preserve and could not be used for parking.
Ms. Laudato questioned why previous applications had been unsuccessful and whether anything could improve the City's chances.
Mr. Finney explained that the program was competitive and noted that the City had been fortunate to receive its previous grant.
Mr. Kairis pointed out that the current application included a $10,000 City contribution, which could strengthen the request.
Mr. Calfee noted that the property was valued at approximately $410,000 and believed the opportunity was worth pursuing.
Ms. West agreed, while Mr. Marovich added that the acquisition would expand recreational opportunities, programming, and invasive species management.
The committee agreed to advance the application. Because the deadline was November 30, Mr. Kairis recommended placing the item on the October Committee of the Whole and special meeting agendas, provided adequate public notice could be given.

- The item was moved forward.

The second item was an Emerald Lake Dual Agent Disclosure.
Ms. West explained that Neil Hess would represent both the buyer and seller, consistent with the previous property transaction.
Mr. Kairis confirmed that the City would need to sign an acknowledgment agreement, and Mr. Marovich noted that accepting the dual-agency arrangement was necessary to proceed.

The committee agreed to add the disclosure to the October special meeting agenda.

- The item was moved forward.

The third item was 169 Meridian St.

Ms. Laudato introduced the proposed demolition grant application for 169 North Meridian Street.

Mr. Finney explained that the original plan was to rehabilitate the property; however, significant deterioration caused by years of roof leaks and water intrusion made rehabilitation impractical. The owner was seeking assistance through the Portage County Land Bank, with the City serving as the grant applicant. The estimated demolition cost was $44,000, requiring a 25% local match of approximately $10,787.50. The owner proposed using $14,000 currently held in City escrow toward the match, with the grant award anticipated in February 2027.

Mayor Seman stated that the Land Bank needed a signed letter by Friday, but the City had not provided one because Council had not reached a decision.

Mr. Kairis explained that the escrow funds were tied to an existing agreement requiring property improvements and construction of a retaining wall. He emphasized that Council needed to resolve the original agreement and its outstanding obligations before applying the funds toward demolition. He noted that an alternative arrangement had been discussed under which the escrow would be used for demolition, the owner would pay any costs exceeding the $14,000, and the City would retain any remaining balance; however, the owner had not agreed to those terms.

Ms. Michael questioned whether the City should use its resources to assist with demolition of a privately owned investment property. She opposed placing financial responsibility on taxpayers for an investment that had not proceeded as originally planned.

Mr. Kairis clarified that the $14,000 was the owner's money held in escrow, not City funds, and explained that the original agreement had secured property improvements in exchange for consideration of outstanding maintenance fines.

Mr. Finney cautioned that if an agreement could not be reached, the City could eventually face the expense of demolishing the condemned property and might seek reimbursement through property tax assessments.

Mr. Calfee summarized that the proposal would use the owner's escrow funds without requiring additional City funding, although the City would not recover the maintenance fines previously addressed through the agreement.

Mr. Kairis reiterated that the original obligations, including the retaining wall, could not simply be disregarded.

The committee discussed whether the retaining wall served a purpose beyond sight-distance improvements.

Mr. Finney explained that it provided visibility for residents and motorists.

Mr. Kairis questioned whether the obligation to construct the wall should remain if the building were demolished.

Ms. West raised public safety concerns, noting that the condemned building could attract individuals attempting to occupy it and create hazards similar to those at the former Oak Rubber property.

Mr. Calfee also questioned the owner's redevelopment plans and whether the City could ultimately become responsible for demolition.

Mr. Marovich stated that Council originally supported the project because it was presented as an opportunity to preserve a historically significant building. He believed the owner should have

been responsible for conducting due diligence and accepting the consequences of the investment.
Mr. Moskun agreed that investors must evaluate properties before committing funds.
Mr. Kairis acknowledged that the proposed redevelopment could include three commercial units, generate at least $1 million in annual payroll, and produce approximately $25,000 in annual City income tax revenue. He was not opposed to supporting demolition if it led to productive redevelopment without significant City expense but stressed that the existing agreement had to be resolved first.
Ms. Michael suggested terminating the original agreement and negotiating a new arrangement that did not require City funding.
Mr. Marovich agreed that the contractual obligations, previously assessed fees, and consequences of termination needed further review.
The committee also discussed the City's handling of outstanding property maintenance fines and liens.
Ms. Laudato questioned whether the City was adequately protecting its financial interests and recovering outstanding amounts when properties changed ownership.
Mr. Kairis explained that the City often uses unpaid fines as leverage to encourage property improvements rather than pursuing liens, which can involve lengthy court proceedings.
Mr. Marovich noted that liens may also involve legal expenses and requested information from the administration regarding the process, costs, effectiveness, and time involved.
Ms. Laudato requested information on the number of property liens the City had filed or attempted to pursue.
Regarding the existing agreement and proposed demolition, Mr. Kairis stated that the original arrangement was appropriate based on the information available when Council approved it, but the building's deteriorated condition had changed the circumstances. He recommended keeping the agreement in place until a revised arrangement could be presented.
Ms. Laudato stated that the committee would not advance the proposal at this time.
Mayor Seman indicated that he would contact the Land Bank and explain that the matter was too complicated for the City to make a commitment or provide an endorsement at that time.

- The item was for discussion only.

The fourth item was Ward Redistricting.
Ms. Laudato reported that two public open houses had been held to gather input on proposed ward maps. Approximately 20 residents attended the first meeting, while attendance at the second was limited due to several competing community events. No additional maps had been submitted beyond those developed through the ad hoc committee process. Two maps appeared to receive the most support, with Map D offering the least deviation from existing ward boundaries.
Ms. Laudato explained that Map D would place the entire Central Business District in Ward One, which had initially been considered beneficial because one council representative would oversee downtown concerns. However, Mr. Silenius questioned whether that should remain a priority, explaining that most downtown business owners and employees do not live in the district. He noted that placing downtown in one Ward would primarily give apartment residents greater influence in selecting their Council representative. He recommended prioritizing fair boundaries, minimal changes, and appropriate population distribution.
Ms. Laudato agreed that keeping the Central Business District together should not be a primary objective. She noted that all proposed maps met the required population deviation standards, although two maps included a small boundary issue near the former high school stadium.

Ms. Michael suggested presenting the most popular maps to Council.
Ms. West recommended bringing forward all five maps approved by the subcommittee so Council could review the options and hear the public feedback.
Mr. Calfee emphasized the importance of understanding how the maps were selected for consideration and ensuring that public input was appropriately incorporated.
Ms. Laudato commended Professor Mapes and the League of Women Voters for making the process accessible through enlarged maps, visual comparisons, blank maps, and QR codes for online participation. She recommended bringing the maps to a Committee of the Whole meeting for discussion.
Ms. Michael stressed that Council should demonstrate that residents' feedback was being considered.
The committee agreed to advance the discussion to Committee of the Whole.
Ms. Laudato noted that the matter was time-sensitive because Ward elections would take place the following year and residents needed to know their voting districts.

- The item was moved forward.

The fifth item was Bitcoin Operations and the sixth item was Data Center Regulations.
Ms. Laudato provided background on the City's existing Bitcoin mining operation, explaining that the issue came to her attention following an email from Mr. Harner after an earlier Council discussion about data centers. She referenced a Crain's Business article indicating that the operation, which reportedly had approximately 500 servers, had previously discussed expanding to 4,000 servers. Ms. Laudato questioned why the operation had not appeared before the Planning Commission and whether the appropriate use approvals had been issued. She expressed concern that the City had permitted an operation without fully evaluating its impacts or determining whether it complied with the zoning code.
Mr. Kairis explained that the activity was not specifically defined as a permitted use in the City's code at the time and may have been considered under a technology-related use.
Mr. Finney explained that the original tenant was LightSpeed, a telecommunications company that intended to establish a data center. The space was subsequently sold to Tier One, which began the Bitcoin mining operation. Mr. Finney clarified that the permits issued were building permits rather than specific use permits.
Ms. Laudato stated that Bitcoin mining operations should be considered small-scale data centers because of their server and electrical requirements. She expressed concern that allowing such operations without Planning Commission review could establish an inappropriate precedent, particularly since the City had adopted a moratorium prohibiting data center and Bitcoin mining expansion.
Mr. Marovich discussed the technical distinctions between small server operations and large-scale data centers, noting that the industry had evolved rapidly and that the City may not have fully understood the potential impacts when the original permits were issued. He recommended focusing on how the City should address these uses moving forward rather than revisiting past decisions.
Ms. West emphasized the importance of developing a clearer definition of data centers.
Ms. Laudato expressed frustration that Council members were being questioned by residents about the operation but lacked sufficient information to provide answers. She requested legal guidance and a review of the original permits to determine whether the current operation conformed to its approved use.

Mr. Kairis acknowledged the concerns and stated that the City's broader data center initiative would address how these operations were defined. He recommended broadly defining data centers to include facilities whose primary purpose was operating computer servers, which would encompass Bitcoin mining operations. Mr. Kairis believed the existing moratorium would prevent expansion and recommended monitoring the operation to ensure compliance.
Ms. Michael agreed that public concerns about data centers had increased as communities became more aware of their potential impacts, including electrical demand, noise, environmental concerns, and effects on surrounding property values.
Mr. Calfee requested copies of the email from Mr. Harner referenced by Ms. Laudato.
Ms. Laudato clarified that her request for additional information had been made during the public open house rather than through an email.

- The item was moved forward.

Management Update
Ms. Laudato reported receiving a liquor license application involving the Sunoco station across from the City Annex, which was under new ownership. She explained that the City had 30 days to object or request a hearing and expressed concern that limited information was available about the new owners.
Ms. Michael recommended that the Police Department review the ownership information and conduct background research before Council determined whether to object.
Mr. Kairis clarified that the City did not approve liquor licenses but could request a hearing through the Ohio Division of Liquor Control. He emphasized that any objection should be supported by specific reasons rather than requesting a hearing simply to investigate potential concerns.
Ms. Laudato asked Police Chief Smallfield to provide information before the following week's Committee of the Whole meeting.
Chief Smallfield reported that his preliminary research identified limited information about the new LLC ownership. Although the individuals shared a last name with the previous LLC owner, he could not locate an Ohio connection for the new ownership. He agreed to conduct additional research and expected to provide more information within a week.
Ms. Laudato stated that she would be more comfortable proceeding once the Police Department's findings were available.

There being no further business for discussion, the meeting adjourned at 7:20 P.M.

ATTEST:

Clerk of Council	**Carmen Laudato, Chairperson** **Planning Committee**