

RECORD OF PROCEEDINGS
Minutes of Village of South Amherst
REGULAR MEETING
February 23, 2026

CALL TO ORDER

The council meeting was called to order by Mayor Scott Jones at 7:00 p.m.

LORD'S PRAYER AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

ROLL CALL

Councilmember Michele Jeffers	P	Fiscal Officer Michelle Henke	P
Councilmember Robb Koscho	P	Records Clerk Laurie Beran	P
Councilmember Mark Leshinski	P	Law Director Matthew Mishak	P
Councilmember Jeanne Maschari	P	Utility Admin. David Valentine	P
Councilmember Anthony Savage	P	Assistant F.O. Wendy Kolmorgen	P
Councilmember David Troike	P		

(EA – excused absences)

APPROVAL OF AGENDA February 23, 2026 Amendment(s): Body cameras & tasers.

Councilmember Savage moved to approve the agenda as amended. Councilmember Jeffers seconded the motion.

Jeffers x Koscho x Leshinski x Maschari x Savage x Troike x Motion carried.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES February 9, 2026

Councilmember Maschari moved to approve the minutes as presented. Councilmember Koscho seconded the motion.

Jeffers x Koscho x Leshinski x Maschari x Savage x Troike x Motion carried.

VISITORS

Firelands Local School District: Superintendent Mike Von Gunten & Treasurer Keri Angney spoke on Tax Implications

Superintendent Von Gunten reviewed the district's financial position, beginning with a breakdown of revenue sources. Approximately 45% of funding comes from the local community, 38% from the state, and just over 7% from the federal government, with additional non-tax revenue generated through interest income and reimbursements for students with special needs. A long-term comparison of revenues and expenditures shows that while the district operated with revenues exceeding expenditures for several years, it helped in part by temporary COVID-era funding—this changed around 2024, when expenditures began to surpass revenues. Staffing continues to be the district's largest cost, and while retirements and resignations are reviewed carefully for potential reductions, further cuts risk the loss of academic programs because most programs are tied directly to individual staff members. The district currently spends the third lowest per pupil in the county, while neighboring districts spend significantly more.

The presenter then summarized recent local and statewide developments. In November 2024, the district's 1% earned income tax request failed by a 60–40 margin, and at the same time, property owners across the county experienced major tax increases due to reappraisals. The state budget passed in June 2025 allowed counties to “piggyback” expanded Homestead and Owner-Occupied tax credits, which both Lorain and Erie counties adopted. This decision reduced revenue to the district by approximately \$432,000 per year.

Several new pieces of state legislation were reviewed in detail. House Bill 129 modifies the 20-mill floor calculation by incorporating the district's substitute levy—originally created from older emergency levies—into the millage floor. This change is expected to result in an estimated \$2 million annual revenue loss beginning around FY 2028–29. House Bill 309 grants county budget commissions new authority to adjust a district's revenue if they determine “too much” is being collected, though implementation procedures remain unclear. House Bill 186 introduces an inflation-based adjustment system that prevents

the sharp property tax increases seen in recent years but also limits the district's ability to keep pace with inflation. It also phases out the 10% Non-Business Credit, shifting funds to expand the Owner-Occupied Credit to over 15% by 2029; this change most significantly affects agricultural and rental properties. House Bill 335 similarly caps growth on inside millage, further restricting revenue tied to rising property values.

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The district will continue to seek efficiencies, use attrition where possible, and share costs through partnerships, but Mr. Von Gunten emphasized that meaningful cuts now almost always require eliminating programs. Charter and private school subsidies—now exceeding a billion dollars statewide—further strain public school funding. The district's existing renewal levy, passed in 2020, will approach its expiration later this decade; renewing it would maintain current funding but will not close the gap between revenues and expenditures. Ultimately, the district may need to return to voters for additional revenue, despite the historical difficulty of passing both income and property tax measures.

During questions, the presenter explained that public districts in Ohio have only two revenue-generating options—property or income tax levies—and that both have been repeatedly unsuccessful for this district. While additional legislation is expected at the state level, the impacts are uncertain. The Ohio Constitution has been interpreted by the courts as requiring equitable school funding, but despite repeated rulings, the legislature has not enacted a comprehensive fix. When asked how the local council can assist, the superintendent recommended advocating to state legislators in support of public education and monitoring proposals to eliminate property taxes, which currently fund about 45% of the district's budget and would have significant consequences for all local governments.

Dawn Howell & James Smith 218 Charles St.: Ms. Howell spoke on behalf of the Beautification Committee

The Beautification Committee has begun planning events and programs for the year, including an upcoming collaboration with Community and Economic Development Director Penny Becker to organize a community picnic in celebration of the nation's Semiquincentennial this July. The concept is an old-fashioned family gathering at the village park featuring picnic-style food, simple games, a dunk tank, music, and other family-friendly activities, with most items to be donated. Because park improvement projects are also scheduled, the committee brought the proposal to council early to ensure coordination. The proposed event date is June 27, with a rain date of July 11, chosen to avoid competing with major regional Fourth of July celebrations. Research is underway into national Semiquincentennial programs, and the organizers are seeking council's approval for outreach on behalf of the village, as the lead planner is a volunteer rather than an employee. While no federal funding opportunities have been found so far, some national programs may offer promotional support and visibility for additional community engagement efforts.

Chad Arcaba 6240 Russia Rd.

MAYOR

LCPH District Advisory Meeting

Councilmember Koscho volunteered to attend the meeting on Thursday, March 26 @ 6 p.m. to be held at Carlisle Township Hall.

Citation Process

A recent Mayor's Court case highlighted the need to clarify the village's citation process, especially since some matters must go to the Board of Zoning Appeals. The Ordinance Committee was asked to revisit and clearly outline the procedure to help prevent future violations, especially seeing that with spring around the corner violations of tall grass, weeds, etc. are likely to increase.

LAW DIRECTOR

Employee Educational Assistance Agreement

Councilmember Maschari requested the law director to review the Employee Educational Assistance Agreement to confirm that we have the legal authority to recover associated fees if an employee does not meet the required time commitment.

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FISCAL OFFICER

Payment Listing 2/6-2/19/2026

Presented to council. Councilmember Leshinski received clarification on the Atlantic invoice regarding a Storz Fitting - which is a quick connect for fire hydrants.

Financial Reports

The following Financial Reports for February 2026 were presented to council: Revenue Summary, Fund Summary and Appropriation Summary.

Beautification Budget

A committee meeting was held to review the beautification budget and available vendors. The current annual budget is \$1,500, previously divided into separate line items for flowers, seasonal decorations, and miscellaneous community signage. It was suggested that the budget be simplified into a single dollar amount rather than item-specific allocations. Questions were raised about whether the existing line items should be updated and whether an overall increase is needed, especially with upcoming 250th celebration expenses. The committee discussed potential projects—including planter boxes, park entrance improvements, and town hall decorations—and noted that the \$1,500 budget may be stretched thin given the scope of planned beautification efforts.

Councilmember Maschari moved to set the budget not to exceed \$2,000.00 with line items stated as:

Flowers, plants, Soil & Mulch	\$900.00
Tools & Equipment	\$500.00
Decorative/Seasonal Items	\$200.00
Miscellaneous (signs, events)	\$400.00

Councilmember Jeffers seconded the motion.

Discussion: Clarification was given that the \$2,000.00 is only for the 2026 budget.

Jeffers x Koscho x Leshinski x Maschari x Savage x Troike x Motion carried.

SAFD Training Reimbursement Grant

The fire department received a \$11,700 reimbursement award from the Ohio State Fire Marshal for training completed last year. Because this is a reimbursable grant for training already conducted, revenue appropriations can be increased later if the department determines the funds need to be utilized

Playground Revitalization Project

At the previous meeting, council discussed allocating \$80,000 in capital appropriations for a playground equipment project. Because the project cost is near the public-bidding threshold of approximately \$79,000 and only one vendor has submitted pricing, the fiscal officer and Councilmember Maschari advised that the village must either obtain at least two estimates or place the project out for public bid to ensure compliance, particularly if site-preparation costs are included in the total project value. Although Diggers have offered to donate labor and equipment for site preparation, it was noted that donated work may still be included in the overall project value when determining whether bidding requirements apply.

Council agreed that at least one additional estimate is needed for the playground project, both for comparison and to ensure proper documentation for audit purposes. Staff will obtain multiple quotes, including verifying that proposals include turnkey installation similar to the initial quote. A suggestion was made to contact a local builder who previously assisted with playground installations. Discussion also covered site preparation and demolition: Diggers will handle removal of existing equipment, while staff

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will cut and recycle the old structures, which no longer meet safety standards and have little resale value. Updated quotes will be brought to the next meeting.

Body Cams & Tasers

Council reviewed the proposal for new police body cameras and Tasers. The body cameras, priced at \$7,649.60 per year for 10 units, and the Tasers, at \$10,407.96 per year for 10 units, operate together as an integrated system. It was noted that this equipment is long overdue, as body camera footage is increasingly necessary for documenting incidents and resolving disputes that arise in court. Recent situations involving unruly individuals highlighted the value body cameras would have provided. A motion was made to approve the purchase of the 10 body cameras and 10 Tasers.

Councilmember Maschari moved to approve the purchase of body cameras and tasers. Councilmember Savage seconded the motion.

Discussion: The fiscal officer noted that the expense will come from the General Fund and be allocated to the police budget for proper tracking. She will prepare the required appropriation adjustments for the next meeting. Questions were raised about the number of units, and it was clarified that the department currently has ten officers, and each device must remain assigned to a specific officer because both the cameras and Tasers are fitted, serialized, and linked to individual user credentials through Evidence.com. The equipment is part of a subscription program that secures and stores all footage externally, with body cameras replaced every two years and Tasers serviced or replaced as needed. The annual cost reflects the subscription and equipment package.

Jeffers Koscho Leshinski Maschari Savage Troike Motion carried.

RECORDS CLERK

Revised Village Calendar: Audit, Ordinance, Safety

Councilmember Savage moved to revise the 2026 Village Calendar for Audit, Ordinance & Safety Committee Meetings. Councilmember Koscho seconded the motion.

Discussion: Audit meetings to be held 1st Wednesday of the month at 4:30 p.m.

Ordinance meetings to be held 2nd Wednesday at 6:30 p.m.

Safety meetings to be held 3rd Wednesday at 6:30 p.m.

Jeffers Koscho Leshinski Maschari Savage Troike Motion carried.

January Construction Report

B/Z	ADDRESS	DESCRIPTION	B/Z	ADDRESS	DESCRIPTION
B/Z	411 Annis	Addition	B	109 Maroy	Re-roof, siding
B/Z	115 Buckeye	Pole Barn	B	218 Charles	Re-roof

UTILITY ADMINISTRATOR

Street/Service

Trash Cans

A reminder was issued to residents that trash cans may be placed at the curb no earlier than noon the day before pickup and must be removed by noon the day after pickup, in accordance with village ordinance. Numerous early set-outs have been observed, particularly on Mondays and Tuesdays. Residents were asked to comply with the rules, as cans left out too long, especially on windy days—can blow into the street and create hazards. Residents were also reminded not to place bulk trash at the curb outside of designated pickup times.

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Engineer RFQ

A meeting was held with K.E. McCartney & Associates to explore their potential service as the village's engineering firm. A draft Request for Qualifications was provided in the meeting packet, outlining required expertise in waterlines, stormwater, roads, and sewer systems. With no concerns raised, the RFQ will proceed.

DEPARTMENTS

FIRE

Billing

A motion is recommended for a resolution to be drafted for the SAFD to seek estimates for reimbursement billing.

Councilmember Koscho moved to have a resolution written approving the SAFD to seek estimates for reimbursement billing. Councilmember Savage seconded the motion.

Jeffers Koscho Leshinski Maschari Savage Troike Motion carried.

ORDINANCES

Ordinance 1852-26 (Emergency) An Ordinance to Approve Current Replacement Pages to the South Amherst Codifies Ordinances and Declaring an Emergency

Councilmember Koscho moved to approve Ordinance No. 1852-26 as an emergency. Councilmember Savage seconded the motion.

Jeffers Koscho Leshinski Maschari Savage Troike Motion carried.

Ordinance 1853-26 (Emergency) An Ordinance Fixing the Rate of Compensation for Part-time Members of South Amherst Village Fire Department Effective 1 February, 2026, and Declaring an Emergency

Councilmember Troike moved to approve Ordinance No. 1853-26 as an emergency. Councilmember Maschari seconded the motion.

Jeffers Koscho Leshinski Maschari Savage Troike Motion carried.

RESOLUTIONS

Resolution No. 772-26 (Emergency) Supporting Local Townships in preserving Rural Character While Promoting Responsible Infrastructure Development

Councilmember Savage moved to approve Resolution 772-26 as an emergency. Councilmember Maschari seconded the motion.

Jeffers Koscho Leshinski Maschari Savage Troike Motion carried.

Resolution No. 773-26 (Emergency) Creation of a Special Fund for Donations Received by the South Amherst Fire Department for Needed Upgrades

Councilmember Koscho moved to approve Resolution No. 773-26 as an emergency. Councilmember Savage seconded the motion.

Jeffers Koscho Leshinski Maschari Savage Troike Motion carried.

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Resolution No. 774-26 *(Emergency)* Stipend for Auxiliary Firefighters Attending Mandatory Training to obtain Firefighter I Certification

Councilmember Koscho moved to approve Resolution No. 774-26 as an emergency. Councilmember Jeffers seconded the motion.

Jeffers Koscho Leshinski Maschari Savage Troike Motion carried.

Resolution No. 775-26 *(Emergency)* SAFD Annual Scholarship Fund for Training Above & Beyond Firefighter I

Councilmember Savage moved to approve Resolution No. 775-26 as an emergency. Councilmember Leshinski seconded the motion.

Jeffers Koscho Leshinski Maschari Savage Troike Motion carried.

APPROPRIATIONS

Ordinance No. 334-26 2026 Permanent Appropriations

Councilmember Troike moved to approve Appropriation Ordinance No. 334-26. Councilmember Koscho seconded the motion.

Jeffers Koscho Leshinski Maschari Savage Troike Motion carried.

MISCELLANEOUS

Grant Update – Keep America Beautiful

The project (paint village hall roof) qualifies, since the program encourages volunteer involvement. After contacting the county, it was confirmed that the project is eligible because it involves Village Hall, a key village property. Volunteers can participate in basic support roles while contractors handle the actual work. This information was shared with council, and Councilmember Leshinski will take the lead as it falls under Buildings and Grounds. Council would need to authorize the project, and the county contact is available to help with the application if needed.

County Community Development

Council discussed an email from County Community Development regarding potential county involvement in future sewer and water projects. Councilmember Maschari explained that a recent newspaper article raised questions about how much authority a village might grant the county through an “urban agreement” referenced by the county. Council agreed that more information is needed before considering any commitments. Councilmember Maschari will follow up with Mr. Greenspan for details and plans to report back at the next meeting. Council expressed interest in having him attend a meeting to answer questions before forming any committee or making decisions.

Guest Speaker(s)

Councilmember Savage suggested that Drew Siley, Vice President of Development for Liberty Development, attend a council meeting in March to answer resident questions and speak with the fire chief and safety personnel regarding the proposed New Russia Township development. Mr. Savage also suggested that Commissioner Jeff Riddell attend a future meeting to discuss county initiatives and issues relevant to village residents. Council agreed that procedures are needed for approving guest speakers and noted concerns about holding large-attendance meetings at the fire station due to equipment displacement and fire code limits. A formal process for scheduling guest speakers will need to be established.

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Councilmember Maschari moved that guest speakers must be approved at council meetings prior to scheduling. Councilmember Jeffers seconded the motion.

Discussion: Councilmember Savage asked for clarification on what defined the discussion.

Councilmember Maschari stated that the request would go before council and then it would be scheduled a minimum of 2 weeks from the current meeting date.

Jeffers Koscho Leshinski Maschari Savage Troike Motion carried.

Councilmember Maschari moved to have the councilperson that makes the speaker requests is the person who coordinates the date and logistics of the meeting. Councilmember Koscho seconded the motion.

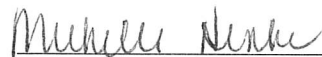
Jeffers Koscho Leshinski Maschari Savage Troike Motion carried.

VISITORS

Chad Arcaba –asked for an update on prior questions related to the county’s possible shift from a rural to urban designation and how that might affect the village. Council clarified that no documents have been received, and no decisions have been made. The law director noted he previously researched aspects of the issue, but no written opinion was produced due to potential litigation considerations. Council will gather more information, including through planned discussions with county representatives, and the topic can be discussed at a future meeting.

ADJOURNMENT 8:23 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Fiscal Officer Michelle Henke



Mayor Scott Jones