

MINUTES REGULAR COUNCIL MEETING

7:01 p.m.

January 6, 2026

Pursuant to Codified Ordinance Chapter 107 and ORC Section 121.22, notice of the following meeting was given on January 2, 2026.

Swearing In – Judge Cornachio swore in Mayor Fiala, Council members Anderson, Carr, Garry, Kary, Luciano, Sievers and Tomaselli.

ROLL CALL

Council Members Present: Anderson, Carr, Garry, Kary, Luciano, Sievers and Tomaselli

Others Present: Mayor Fiala, Law Director Lucas, Service Director Knecht, City Engineer Lannon, Fire Chief Ungar, Police Chief Schultz, Chief Building & Zoning Inspector Keller, Parks & Recreation Director Keller, Finance Director Hoffman, Clerk Novak

The meeting was led in Prayer and Pledge of Allegiance by Councilman Garry.

ORGANIZATIONAL BUSINESS

COUNCIL PRESIDENT 2026

Motion made by Mr. Anderson and seconded by Mr. Garry to nominate Councilman Carr as Council President.

Roll Call 7 yes
 0 no

Motion carried 7 to 0

There were no other nominations.

Motion made by Mr. Anderson and seconded by Mr. Garry to elect Councilman Carr as Council President.

Roll Call 7 yes
 0 no

Motion carried 7 to 0

COUNCIL VICE PRESIDENT 2026

Motion made by Mr. Carr and seconded by Ms. Sievers to nominate Councilman Tomaselli as Council Vice President.

Roll Call 7 yes
 0 no

Motion carried 7 to 0

There were no other nominations.

Motion made by Ms. Sievers and seconded by Mr. Anderson to elect Councilman Tomaselli as Council Vice President.

Roll Call 7 yes
 0 no

Motion carried 7 to 0

PLANNING COMMISSION MEMBER FROM COUNCIL

Motion made by Mr. Carr and seconded by Mr. Tomaselli to nominate Councilman Kary to be the Council representative on the Planning Commission.

Roll Call 7 yes
 0 no

Motion carried 7 to 0

Motion made by Mr. Tomaselli and seconded by Mr. Anderson to elect Ken Kary to be the Council representative on the Planning Commission.

Roll Call 7 yes
 0 no

Motion carried 7 to 0

CLERK OF COUNCIL

Motion made by Mr. Tomaselli and seconded by Ms. Sievers to appoint Alisa Novak as Clerk of Council.

Roll Call 7 yes
 0 no

Motion carried 7 to 0

DEPUTY CLERK OF COUNCIL

Motion made by Mr. Tomaselli and seconded by Mr. Garry to appoint Cheri Lory as Deputy Clerk of Council.

Roll Call 7 yes
 0 no

Motion carried 7 to 0

COUNCIL APPOINTMENTS

Motion made by Mr. Tomaselli and seconded by Ms. Sievers to appoint Councilmen Bob Carr and Dan Anderson to the Volunteer Firefighters' Dependents Fund Board.

Roll Call 7 yes
 0 no

Motion carried 7 to 0

Motion made by Ms. Sievers and seconded by Mr. Anderson to appoint Councilmen John Tomaselli and Ken Kary to the Volunteer Peace Officers Dependents Fund Board.

Roll Call 7 yes
 0 no

Motion carried 7 to 0

Motion made by Mr. Tomaselli and seconded by Ms. Sievers to appoint Paul Korst and Birkett Gibson to the Income Tax Board of Review.

Roll Call 7 yes
 0 no

Motion carried 7 to 0

MAYOR'S APPOINTMENTS (Confirmed by Council)

Directors

Director of Finance – Cher Hoffman

Director of Law – Mike Lucas

Director of Public Service – Dan Knecht

Motion made by Mr. Anderson and seconded by Mr. Garry to confirm the Mayor's appointments for Director of Finance, Director of Law and Director of Public Service.

Roll Call 7 yes
 0 no

Motion carried 7 to 0

Board and Commission Members

Mayor Fiala appointed the following members to the boards and commissions:

Planning Commission – Mike Wildermuth

Zoning Board of Appeals – Mike Yutzy

Design Review Board – Abigail Fellows, Paul Garcia

Board of Building Code Appeals – Tom Ruple

Sign Review Board – Kate Minton, Nick Brown

Motion made by Mr. Tomaselli and seconded by Ms. Sievers to confirm the Mayor's Board and Commission appointments.

Roll Call 7 yes
 0 no

Motion carried 7 to 0

Approval of Minutes

Motion made by Mr. Anderson and seconded by Mr. Garry to approve the Regular Council Meeting Minutes of December 16, 2025.

Roll Call 6 yes
 0 no
 1 abstain (Luciano)

Motion carried 6 to 0

STANDING AND REGULAR COMMITTEE REPORTS – Mr. Carr asked Council to reach out to him regarding any changes to their current committee assignments.

CORRESPONDENCE: No correspondence.

PUBLIC PORTION:

David Coulter, Lakeshore Boulevard, Willoughby - Mr. Coulter stated he operates several YouTube channels under the banner of Dr. Dave Media Group, which is satirical in nature which criticizes and ridicules First Amendment auditors on YouTube. Recently, an individual known as George, whose real name is Shade George Ghanayem from Chicago, Illinois, spoke at the Council meeting on December 2, 2025. Mr. Coulter stated that Mr. Ghanayem also runs a YouTube channel and has taken exception to his videos criticizing his work. He stated that in retaliation, Mr. Ghanayem has made false accusations against him and his associates, alleging crimes they have not committed. These accusations, submitted anonymously via email to the Mayor, Police Chief, City Council members, and the local FBI office. The list of accusations include, but not limited to, cyber terrorism, exploitation of a minor, possession of weapons of mass destruction, distribution of illicit animal content, making death threats, pandering obscenity, and filing false police reports. These claims are preposterous. Furthermore, Mr. Ghanayem created a Facebook page accusing him of being a terrorist and other defamatory terms, and he has contacted multiple residents in Mr. Coulter's apartment community. This caused concern among some residents, who then reached out to the building owner, leaving him understandably alarmed. Consequently, Mr. Coulter stated that he had to explain the situation to his landlord. In summary, Mr. Coulter stated that Mr. Ghanayem disagrees with his YouTube content and is attempting to have him evicted and arrested. Mr. Coulter asked that his statement be entered into the official record.

PUBLIC HEARING

Mr. Carr reopened the public hearing that was put into recess on October 21, 2025 (see attached). He asked if anyone wished to speak for or against the proposal. No one spoke.

Motion made by Mr. Tomaselli and seconded by Ms. Sievers that all ordinances and resolutions be read by caption only and that as to legislation not containing an emergency clause, the rules requiring that ordinances and resolutions be read on three separate days be waived.

Roll Call 7 yes
 0 no

Motion carried 7 to 0

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:**ORDINANCE NO. 2025-129 – Tabled - Amended 1/6/2026**

An ordinance amending Chapters 1103, 1131, 1141, and 1155 of the Codified Ordinances of the City of Willoughby, Ohio titled, “Definitions”, “One Family Residential Districts”, “Business Districts”, and “Use Specific Regulations”, respectively, and declaring an emergency.

Motion made by Mr. Anderson and seconded by Mr. Garry to remove Ordinance No. 2025-129 from the table.

Roll Call 7 yes
 0 no

Motion carried 7 to 0

Motion made by Mr. Anderson and seconded by Mr. Garry to amend Ordinance No. 2025-129 as follows:

1. Delete all language under the original Ordinance that identifies short term rental as permitted by conditional use in any of the One-Family Residential Districts.
2. Modify and limit the original Ordinance language so that short term rental is permitted by conditional use in Downtown Business (D-B) but only in its Sub-District A and Sub-District D-2 and above the first floor; and
3. Delete all limitations and permit revocation criteria as to short term rental parking under Codified Ordinance 1155.04(ww), paragraph (6) and paragraph (7)C. of the original Ordinance.

Roll Call 7 yes
 0 no

Motion carried 7 to 0

Motion made by Mr. Anderson and seconded by Mr. Garry that the rules of Council requiring three separate readings be suspended and that Ordinance No. 2025-129 be declared an emergency measure as amended.

Roll Call 7 yes
 0 no

Motion carried 7 to 0

Motion made by Mr. Anderson and seconded by Mr. Garry to adopt Ordinance No. 2025-129 as amended.

Roll Call 6 yes
 1 no (Tomaselli)

Motion carried 6 to 0

ORDINANCE NO. 2025-130 - Tabled

An ordinance replacing Chapter 195 of the Codified Ordinances of the City of Willoughby, Ohio, titled, "Transient Guest Tax", in its entirety.

Motion made by Mr. Tomaselli and seconded by Ms. Sievers to remove Ordinance No. 2025-130 from the table.

Roll Call 7 yes
 0 no

Motion carried 7 to 0

Motion made by Mr. Tomaselli and seconded by Ms. Sievers to adopt Ordinance No. 2025-130.

Roll Call 7 yes
 0 no

Motion carried 7 to 0

ORDINANCE NO. 2025-131 - Tabled

An ordinance amending Chapter 779 of the Codified Ordinances of the City of Willoughby, Ohio, titled, "Transient Guest Registration"; specifically, Section 779.01 titled, "Register Required; Exceptions" and Section 779.03 titled, "False Registration".

Motion made by Mr. Garry and seconded by Mr. Tomaselli to remove Ordinance No. 2025-131 from the table.

Roll Call 7 yes
 0 no

Motion carried 7 to 0

Motion made by Mr. Garry and seconded by Mr. Tomaselli to adopt Ordinance No. 2025-131.

Roll Call 7 yes
 0 no

Motion carried 7 to 0

NEW BUSINESS:**ORDINANCE NO. 2026-1**

An ordinance amending Chapter 452 of the Codified Ordinances of the City of Willoughby, Ohio, titled, "Parking Generally"; specifically, establishing Section 452.02 titled, "Parking of Commercial Vehicles, Trailers, Recreational Vehicles and Boats".

Motion made by Mr. Anderson and seconded by Ms. Sievers to adopt Ordinance No. 2026-1.

Roll Call 7 yes
 0 no

Motion carried 7 to 0

RESOLUTION NO. 2026-2

A resolution requesting the Lake County Auditor to make advance payments of taxes to the City of Willoughby, Ohio, and declaring an emergency.

Motion made by Mr. Tomaselli and seconded by Mr. Garry that the rules of Council requiring three separate readings be suspended and that Resolution No. 2026-2 be declared an emergency measure.

Roll Call 7 yes
 0 no

Motion carried 7 to 0

Motion made by Mr. Tomaselli and seconded by Mr. Garry to adopt Resolution No. 2026-2.

Roll Call 7 yes
 0 no

Motion carried 7 to 0

RESOLUTION NO. 2026-3

A resolution authorizing Amendment No. 3 to the contract between Biohabitats, Inc. and the City of Willoughby modifying the cost of services and project scope of work necessary to the Chagrin River Floodplain Restoration and Trail Connection Project, and declaring an emergency.

Motion made by Mr. Anderson and seconded by Mr. Garry that the rules of Council requiring three separate readings be suspended and that Resolution No. 2026-3 be declared an emergency measure.

Roll Call 7 yes
 0 no

Motion carried 7 to 0

Motion made by Mr. Anderson and seconded by Mr. Tomaselli to adopt Resolution No. 2026-3.

Roll Call 7 yes
 0 no

Motion carried 7 to 0

PENDING LITIGATION STATUTORY REQUIREMENT:

Council review and approval of findings and conclusions of fact per the denial of approval for EAS #13-5-25, as outlined in Council Resolution No. 2025-83 on August 12, 2025.

Motion made by Mr. Anderson and seconded by Mr. Garry to approve the findings and conclusions of fact.

Roll Call 6 yes
 0 no
 1 abstain (Luciano)

Motion carried 6 to 0

MAYOR'S REPORT – Mayor Fiala thanked all members of Council for their election and re-election. He congratulated Mr. Luciano on his election; he is looking forward to working with him. Mayor Fiala stated he is pleased to welcome Dan Knecht as the new Service Director. He stated that Mr. Knecht brings a wealth of experience, having served as the Service Director for the City of Euclid since 2016. Mr. Knecht is a Willoughby Hills resident and a graduate of Willoughby South High School. Mayor Fiala stated he is happy to welcome Abigail Fellows to the Design Review Board. He stated Ms. Fellows is an architect who works for the Cleveland Restoration Society, which is an ideal fit for the work the City will be undertaking on the board. In her role with the Cleveland Restoration Society, she serves as one of the program directors for the Heritage Home Program. He stated the City is hopeful to launch a Heritage Home Program to help revitalize some of the post-World War II bungalows, particularly in Ridge Acres.

DIRECTOR'S REPORTS

Law Director Lucas – No report. Mr. Lucas asked Council to sign the Findings and Conclusions of Fact and provide it to the Council Clerk.

Service Director Knecht – Mr. Knecht stated he appreciates the residents' patience during this challenging winter. He realizes that leaves remain, and the Service Department will work to collect them as soon as the weather allows. He stated he looks forward to working with Council and the Directors and meeting more residents.

City Engineer Lannon – No report.

Fire Chief Ungar – No report. Chief Ungar welcomed and congratulated Mr. Luciano and Mr. Knecht on their new positions with the City.

Police Chief Schultz – No report.

Chief Building and Zoning Inspector Keller – No report. Mr. Keller thanked Council for the passage of Ordinance No. 2026-1.

Parks & Recreation Director Keller – Ms. Keller stated that while many are hoping for warm weather, she needs colder temperatures this weekend for the Chilloughby event. The event will feature 20 ice sculptures, which will melt quickly if it's too warm. The event runs from 4 to 7 p.m. this Saturday in downtown Willoughby, with street closures in place. The first Lake County drone show will take place at 6:45 p.m., and the best viewing spot will be in front of City Hall.

Regarding the Osborne Park construction project, she stated Mark Haines Construction expects to finish survey work in early January and begin around January 19th. Phase one was originally scheduled for completion in December, 2026. After receiving an additional \$3 million grant, the timeline may extend by about six months.

Finance Director Hoffman – Ms. Hoffman thanked Council for the passage of Resolution No. 2026-2.

COUNCILMEMEN REPORTS

Ms. Sievers – Ms. Sievers congratulated Mr. Luciano and Mr. Knecht.

Mr. Kary – Mr. Kary congratulated Mr. Luciano and Mr. Knecht.

Mr. Tomaselli - Mr. Tomaselli thanked Council for the vote of confidence in the Vice President role. He congratulated Mr. Luciano and Mr. Knecht.

Mr. Luciano – Mr. Luciano expressed his gratitude to the residents of Ward 5 for entrusting him with the responsibility of serving as the Councilperson. He stated he is committed to working diligently on behalf of Ward 5 and the entire City. He also extended his sincere thanks to everyone who supported his campaign including family and friends. He stated a lot of people donated their time and resources. He thanked the City officials who met with him prior to the election and provided valuable insight into departmental operations. Since being elected, he stated he has received tremendous support from the Council Clerk, Human Resources, the IT Department, fellow Council members, and staff, which has made onboarding a smooth process. He stated he has a Ward meeting scheduled for tomorrow at 6 p.m. at the Willoughby Public Library.

Mr. Garry – Mr. Garry welcomed Mr. Luciano and Mr. Knecht.

Mr. Anderson – Mr. Anderson welcomed Mr. Luciano and Mr. Knecht.

Mr. Carr – Mr. Carr thanked Council for the vote of confidence in continuing as Council President.

The Regular Council Meeting adjourned at 7:42 p.m.

Date approved 1/20/26


Robert E. Carr, President


Clerk of Council


Robert A. Fiala, Mayor

LEGAL NOTICE

Pursuant to Chapter 1115.03(f) of the Codified Ordinances of the City of Willoughby, Ohio notice is hereby given of a Public Hearing to be held by the Council on Tuesday, October 21, 2025 at 7:05 p.m. in the Municipal Building, One Public Square, Willoughby, Ohio.

Said hearing will be held on the following proposed text changes to the Planning and Zoning Code:

Amend Chapter 1103 titled "Definitions", specifically Section 1103.03 titled "Definitions of General Terms" adding definitions for "Hosting Platform", "Short Term Rental", and "Transient Guest"; Chapter 1131 titled "One Family Residential Districts", specifically Section 1131.03 titled "Schedule of Permitted Uses" adding schedule of permitted uses for Short Term Rental; Chapter 1141 titled "Business Districts", specifically Section 1141.03 titled "Schedule of Permitted Uses" adding schedule of permitted uses for Short Term Rental; Chapter 1155 titled "Use Specific Regulations", specifically Section 1155.04 titled "Use-Specific Regulations" adding standards and requirements for Short Term Rental.

BY ORDER OF THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF WILLOUGHBY

Alisa Novak
Clerk of Council

Publish: October 3, 2025