



Village of Lawrence
157 N. Paw Paw St.
Lawrence, MI 49064
PH: 269-674-8161 Fax: 269-674-3004
www.lawrencemi.org



Village of Lawrence Regular Common Council Meeting
157 N. Paw Paw St., Lawrence, MI 49064
January 13, 2026

Call to Order: The Regular Common Council Meeting was called to order at 6:01 p.m.

Pledge of Allegiance: Led by President Gritter

Roll Call:

- **Present:** John Gritter, President; David Deloach, Trustee; Alicia Lorenzo, Trustee; Phil Glennie, Trustee; Chuck Rowlee, Trustee
- **Absent:** Annette Crandall, Trustee
- **Also Present:** Donna Spenner, Lawrence Township Supervisor; James Fein, Lawrence Township Emergency Services; Ryan Williamson, Lawrence Public Schools; Rich Glista, Cannabis Administrator; Brian Johnson, DPW Supervisor; Kim Thompson, Finance Manager (via Teams)

Additions to Agenda:

- None

Conflicts of Interest:

- None

Approval of Prior Council Minutes Month Prior:

Motion by Deloach, 2nd by Lorenzo
All Aye. Motions Carried.

Finance Manager Report-Kim Thompson:

- **Status of Bank Reconciliations:** All bank reconciliations for the 2022-2023 fiscal year are complete. Reconciliations for the 2023-2024 fiscal year have begun.
- **"Due To/Due From" Reconciliations:** Completed through the end of fiscal year 2023. A report showing the inter-agency fund transfers ("due to/due froms") for 2022-2023 was provided, noting that some transfers are significant, but all are in balance. These balanced figures have been submitted to the auditor. The auditor recommended holding off on actual bank transfers until audits for subsequent years are complete, as there may be offsetting entries. Kim intends to follow the auditor's advice. An exception may be necessary for some transfers, such as moving money owed by the water fund back to the general fund. This is because the general fund was paying all salaries, and it needs capital to execute transfers budgeted for the current fiscal year.



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- **Audit:** While the 2023 fiscal year audit is underway, work on the 2023-2024 fiscal year has already started. It was discovered that the 2022 fiscal year-end audit was not a "full audit" but rather an "after 65 audit," containing just enough information for state submission. Adjusting entries from this 2022 audit were never entered into the BS&A system. The auditor identified this discrepancy after the 2023 files were submitted. Kim received the 2022 entries, posted them to the system, recreated the financials and trial balance, and uploaded the revised files to the auditor.
- **Budget Workshop:** A budget workshop is scheduled for January 31st from 9 AM to noon. A follow-up session is tentatively booked for Saturday, February 7th, from 9 AM to noon if needed. Kim has decided it would be more effective to attend the workshop in person rather than remotely, especially since it's the council's first full workshop of this type. She will fly in for the January 31st workshop. If the work is not completed, she will stay through the following week to finish up in person on the tentative Saturday session.
- **Budget:** A review of financial statements revealed the need for multiple budget amendments. After the initial report was generated, Brian identified additional necessary journal entries and budget amendments for the funds he manages. A revised spreadsheet with all proposed budget amendments, including those requested by Brian, was sent out separately to the council with the following budget amendment proposals:
 - The Village Manager's salaries cost center is over budget. This is partly due to the 1.5-month overlap where Teresa was paid out for her PTO while Amy was also being paid. Propose a budget amendment to move \$7,500 from the "salaries" line item to the "paid time off" line item. This will more accurately reflect regular salary expenses and properly categorize the PTO payout to Teresa.
 - A budget amendment to consolidate general fund insurance costs is proposed. The insurance line item is significantly higher than in previous years due to increased claims. Insurance costs for the general fund are currently budgeted across multiple departments. A proposal is made to consolidate all general fund insurance costs under Village Administration, with the exception of the DPW, which will retain its separate insurance line item. This involves removing budget amounts from individual cost centers and increasing the budget in the two main cost centers (Village Admin and DPW) that will absorb the insurance premiums.
 - Amendments are proposed to correct street fund cost centers and address a winter maintenance budget shortfall. Timesheet entries for street funds are being posted to one cost center while the budget resides in another. Amendments for Major and Local Streets are proposed to align the budget with actual general ledger entries from timesheets. Brian identified that some salaries were incorrectly charged to winter maintenance outside the winter period; a journal entry will be made to correct this. Even after the correction, the winter maintenance budget is insufficient. Kim assumes the original budget was low because of a lack of accurate historical financial data, and Brian would have



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budgeted more if he had access to better information. This situation also applies to Major and Local Streets.

- Further amendments are detailed regarding Act 51 compliance and state-reimbursed water fund project costs. Certain expenses, like a cell phone, were charged to Major and Local Street funds, which is not permissible for administrative costs under Act 51. Propose budget amendments to move non-compliant Act 51 expenses from Major and Local Street funds (under 51) to the Municipal Streets cost center (204). The Water Fund (cost center 592) incurred project costs that were not budgeted because they were expected to be paid directly by the State of Michigan. The State withheld direct payment due to the lack of audited financials but later reimbursed the village after expenses were submitted. The final proposed amendments adjust the budget to reflect both the unexpected project cost expenditures and the subsequent reimbursement income from the state.
- The council discussed underlying reasons for budget shortfalls, including inflation and stagnant wage scales. Historical budgets have not accounted for rising costs of goods or necessary salary increases, with line items remaining static for years. This is a major factor in why salary cost centers are over budget, as they are based on wage levels from three years ago. The Council acknowledged that budgets would need to increase. Departments are doing research now to prepare for the upcoming budget workshop with the goal of identifying issues ahead of time to make the meeting more effective.
- The Finance Manager advocates for a new "trend analysis" budgeting methodology to improve accuracy. Kim explained that her preferred method, trend analysis budgeting, allows for more accurate decisions by showing actual expenses over the prior three years. This method helps identify trends (upward or downward) and allows for known future changes, like minimum wage hikes, to be factored in. For example, if minimum wage is rising 3%, that multiplier can be applied to the current year's actual costs to create a more realistic budget for the next year. This approach bases decisions on actual numbers rather than past budgets. Thompson believes this will be the first time most of the Council has been directly involved in the budget process, and while this first year will require more explanation, subsequent years will be much faster.

Motion to approve Budget Amendments as presented by Glennie, 2nd by Deloach.

Rollcall:

Aye: Lorenzo, Rowlee, Glennie, Gritter, Deloach

Nay: None

Absent: Crandall

All Aye. Motions Carried.



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- **Taxes:** Residents have until the end of February to pay their property taxes. As of January 6th, 80.7% of property tax payments have been received. A notable increase in payments is anticipated toward the end of the month, which will be reflected in the March meeting report.
- **Equipment Allocation Fund:** Several years ago, the village established the Equipment Allocation Fund to internally charge other funds for equipment usage. A process was implemented via timesheets to log equipment use and allocate rental charges to the appropriate internal funds. However, the actual monetary transfers from those funds into the Equipment Allocation Fund were never completed. The fund balance is now significantly lower than it should be, while other funds (like General, Water, Sewer, Street) are overstated. The purpose of the fund is to create a dedicated reserve for equipment replacement, avoiding large withdrawals from operating funds. If the process had been followed correctly, the account would currently hold over \$300,000, but it only contains about \$20,000. Moving forward we need to identify all historical internal rental costs that were charged but not transferred and ensure that "due to/due from" entries are made to reflect the outstanding obligations to the Equipment Allocation Fund. It is the correct way to operate and provides the necessary savings mechanism for future equipment purchases. Thompson will proceed with the necessary accounting to correct the fund balance, assuming Council agrees to keep the fund active. In fiscal year 2022-23 alone, over \$60,000 in equipment rental charges were recorded but not transferred into the Equipment Allocation Fund. Thompson will have a complete picture of the total amount owed to the fund only after all fiscal year-end reconciliations are complete. A potential issue is that some funds may owe more to other funds than they have available in cash. Decisions will need to be made once the net effect is clear. Thompson is balancing which inter-fund reimbursements to process first, prioritizing critical funds (e.g., Police Department) to ensure their solvency over less critical ones like the Equipment Allocation Fund for now. The current focus is on getting all "due to/due from" accounts accurate and in balance.
- **Water Fund Balance:** An inquiry about the Water Fund's high balance revealed it is significantly overstated because it holds money owed to the Sewer Fund and the General Fund. When customers make online payments for water and sewer services, the total amount is deposited into the Water Fund. A "due to" transaction is created to record the portion owed to the Sewer Fund, but the actual money has not been transferred "in years." The Water Fund is also holding money owed to the General Fund for salary reimbursements. Thompson stated the current balance sheet is misleading because of these unreconciled inter-fund balances. The balances will change significantly once all fiscal years and audits are completed and the "due to/due from" accounts are settled.



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Approval of Bills & Review of Bank Balances Month Prior:

- Several invoices were received after the council packet was assembled and required addition to the approval motion:
 - An invoice from Southwest Michigan Feed, which was mistakenly sent to the township, for \$24.90.
 - An invoice for DDA boom mowing, which must be paid by the General Fund and then reimbursed by the DDA, for \$707.38.
 - The annual contribution to the Van Buren Conservation District, consistent with historical annual contributions, of \$500.00.

Motion to approve current bills and prior month bank balances by Glennie, 2nd by Rowlee.

Rollcall:

Aye: Gritter, Deloach, Glennie, Rowlee, Lorenzo

Nay: None

Absent: Crandall

All Aye. Motions Carried.

Presentations & Guests:

Lawrence Township: Donna Spenner

- Supervisor Spenner provided background on the escalating dispute with the Van Buren District Library, which was triggered by a broken boiler and disagreements over maintenance costs under an outdated contract. She stated that the library's executive director has distributed a letter containing false information with a Facebook post spreading misinformation that was reportedly deleted after comments pointed out that people were "running loose with the facts." The purpose of the discussion is to provide the correct details. The library's budget report for 2024 shows they receive nearly \$2.8 million annually from taxpayers in Van Buren County. The conflict began a year ago when the library's boiler system broke. Spenner asked Dan (the executive director) to share the \$12,000 replacement cost. Dan refused, citing a contract that holds the Township responsible for building maintenance. Upon review, the contract was found to list "the Village" as a party, which is incorrect as the building has always been township-owned, even when the library was located in the old town hall. The Township attempted to remove the Village from the contract and, facing a lack of funds for the boiler, used the library's responsibility for utilities as leverage. It was confirmed that the library was in the Town Hall when the contract was originally written, but the building was always Township-owned, so the contract language was never updated correctly. The Township board motioned to have the Village removed from the contract. When the boiler system's condition worsened, Spenner purchased electric heaters, allowing the library to remain open as long as possible even though the result was higher utility. The Township did not budget for the boiler repair but acknowledges it is their responsibility and plans to include it in the upcoming budget.



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- The library's director is attempting to negotiate a one-sided, open-ended contract with multiple townships, prompting the board to reject his proposed addendum. Mattawan and Antwerp Townships contacted Spenner, confirming that the library's director (Dan) is in negotiations with them to open the contract language. The existing contract is described as entirely favoring the library, with no end date or clause for renegotiation. The director's proposed language seeks a closed-end contract but also demands a new, annual maintenance line item. The Township board rejected the director's proposed addendum because it was still entirely in the library's favor. Spenner emphasized that the director's approach is one-sided, lacks compromise, and avoids an objective, business-focused discussion. Based on the library's finances, Spenner asserts they can afford a \$7,500 annual maintenance fee. Cordes questioned a line in the letter about the library "occasionally" providing a "small, irregular stipend", and Spenner confirmed this was a \$5,000 payment that the library used to make to the Township, however the library would then direct the Township to use that specific money for projects they wanted, such as painting a room. This money was not a genuine contribution for major maintenance items but was instead a "pass-through" fund that the library utilized under the false pretense of giving the Township money. Spenner noted that the library pays zero maintenance costs for any of the seven buildings it operates out of and has not for over 30 years. Cordes raised the issue that library funds are pooled, meaning millage paid by residents of one community (e.g., Lawton) could be used for facilities in another (e.g., Paw Paw or Mattawan), with no transparency. It was brought to the Township's attention that the library director, Dan Hutchins, has been disseminating his narrative via Facebook and the recently distributed letter.
- Township supervisors will be attending the Van Buren District Library meeting on January 27th to present a united front. Spenner has requested that their library board representative, Denise Campagna, attend Township meetings to receive directions from the Board. The current library board is seen as being run by its employee, Director Dan Hutchins, rather than providing oversight. The Supervisors are considering replacing their current representatives on the library board with individuals who will act in the Townships' favor.
- The situation is noted to be very similar to a previous financial dispute with the Senior Services organization. Spenner pointed out a line item on the Library's financial statement: "Fund balance net position beginning of the year, \$43,718,00." The Township is formalizing its own contract demands through its law firm and aligning its strategy with Antwerp Township, which has issued an ultimatum to the library. The Township Board reviewed the Library's addendum and sent their desired contract language to their law firm. The law firm has drafted a new contract which the Board will review and finalize before it is sent to the Library. The lawyer may negotiate on behalf of both the Township and Antwerp. Antwerp Township has given the library a 180-day notice to vacate if a new contract is not negotiated by January 15th.
- The original cost-sharing agreement with the Village was terminated because Village residents also pay Township taxes, and it was deemed unfair for them to pay twice for the new library. The Village agreed with this logic. Under the previous director, David Tate, the Township received consistent annual contributions for maintenance, which were kept in a dedicated fund. These contributions became less consistent and smaller after the new director (Dan Hutchins)



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took over. The library has received several millage increases over the years, with the justification that funds would be used for programming, salaries, and building maintenance. Despite these increases, the distribution of funds for maintenance has been inconsistent, drawing a parallel to the "dèjà vu" of the Van Buren County Senior Services issue. While it's understood that funds are pooled and reallocated based on need (like the Road Commission), there is a concern that some communities consistently receive less than they contribute without future balancing. Spenner confirmed that they are instructing their lawyer, Josh Thall, to request a full financial disclosure from the Library. Spenner recalls the Library Board discussing a large amount of money held in CDs and wants to know the end goal for these funds, especially since it is non-profit receiving millage funds. Non-profits, by their nature, are not supposed to accumulate profit beyond their operational needs. Organizations collecting millage funds have an additional requirement for full financial transparency. A past issue with "Senior Services" was cited as an example where an entity tried to hide financial activities and claimed municipalities had no right to know how money was spent, which is incorrect for millage-funded bodies. While saving money in Certificates of Deposit (CDs) can be responsible, it requires a clear purpose for the surplus funds. A question raised was why does the library need significant reserve funds in investment accounts when it does not own or support any buildings, and the municipalities are responsible for long-term, costly items?

- Spenner stated the main reason for bringing up the topic is to counter false information suggesting townships want to close the library. The reality is that the townships want the library to continue and advance, but they cannot sustain the current high maintenance costs. Spenner mentioned that a new contract, drafted by Josh will be available for review and it explicitly removes language pertaining to the Village. Cordes mentioned that for residents to support funding, there must be transparency and a significant return on the taxes they pay. If their tax money consistently goes elsewhere, it is a problem. It was suggested that if the Library wants maintenance money, it should be required to provide proof and specific justifications, rather than making vague requests. Spenner believes that approximately 90% of taxpayers who voted for the library millage are unaware that the library does not own its building or cover its upkeep. Taxpayers' millage dollars support only the library's internal materials and staff while the Township covers the building's maintenance costs from its general budget, which is also funded by taxpayers. The group concludes that residents are effectively "paying twice" for the library—once through the specific library millage and again through general taxes that fund building maintenance.
- Lorenzo requested data on the total millage money collected from Lawrence Township over the past three years compared to the operational costs of the Lawrence branch. Spenner confirmed that Rich and Matt are working on compiling this data. Thompson noted that obtaining the branch's specific running costs would likely require a FOIA request to the library.
- Spenner is focused on stopping the spread of false information, which was likened to as "scare tactics" designed to make the Township leadership look like the villain. The Township will prepare a formal statement for the Thursday meeting with factual data and dollar amounts to counter misinformation. This will be added to the Board minutes and published on the website.



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The Library is projected to receive roughly \$211,000 this year and about \$320,000 next year from the millage. This data will be included in the statement.

Lawrence Township Emergency Services: James Fein

- James Fein, the medical assistant chief, is reporting in place of Bill, who is out due to illness.
- December Call Statistics for the Village:
 - Medical Calls: 141
 - Fire Department Calls: 36
- Year-End Call Statistics for the Village, Township, and Arlington Township:
 - Total Fire Calls: 576
- A Cadet program for Fire and EMS has been started, with two students from the Tech Center already participating in the fire program and more expected for EMS.
- Two new probationary hires will begin fire academy next week and are expected to graduate in May or June to become firefighters for Lawrence Township.
- The department has acquired and certified a second medical truck, which passed state inspection last week. Truck 1710 will be the main truck for calls within the Village and Township. Truck 1780 (the former Chief's truck) will be a secondary medical truck equipped for both medical aid and fire, primarily used for road and highway accidents. It also serves as a backup for in-town calls. Truck 1780 was newly equipped with a plow. The plow will be used to clear the station area before the regular plow service arrives and to clear driveways for residents, particularly the elderly, to allow ambulance access during storms.
- The department is working on a plan to ensure access to lake cottages during the winter for residents who live there year-round.

Lawrence Public Schools Superintendent: Ryan Williamson

- The district is considering taking back its transportation role from the ISD, with Superintendent Williamson beginning supervisor credentialing coursework.
- After reviewing data and receiving input from students and the football community, the athletic directors from Lawrence and Bangor have met to discuss a co-op program, potentially starting next school year. The primary goal is to continue offering football. There are approximately 32 cooperative sports agreements locally, including Kalamazoo United (Christian/Hackett) and River Valley/New Buffalo, providing a model. A Key Goal is to establish a Junior Varsity (JV) team with the rationale to stop the cycle of freshmen competing against seniors, getting discouraged, and quitting, which harms program sustainability. A return to 11-man football is also a long-term goal, as it would provide more opportunities for more students. Participation numbers are particularly low in grades 7-10 with roughly 30 players projected to start next season. That number is expected to drop due to injuries and attrition, which is not a sustainable position.
- A new, large interest in a varsity soccer program is creating additional challenges for football participation numbers, which were already low. Bangor is in a similar situation.
- The district is addressing facility needs and planning for a future no-mill-increase bond. A needs assessment identified significant plumbing and electrical concerns in district facilities. The



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elementary building dates to 1953 and the high school to 1961, with various additions over the years. The district is eligible for a no-mill-increase bond as early as May 2027, and planning for this has begun.

- The district is launching before/after school care beginning Monday, January 19, 2025. The program is funded by a grant secured through the ISD and will be run by Abby Michael.
- Using leftover bond money from a roof project, 12 classrooms have received new LED lighting, which is more cost-effective than replacing old ballasts and fluorescent tubes. An additional pallet of lighting is available to upgrade another 12 classrooms during spring break.
- The district is resuming the "Safe Routes to School" grant application process.
- 70 students from the boys' basketball, girls' basketball, and cheerleading teams traveled to Detroit to participate in an event on the Detroit Pistons' home court. The event was a positive experience, exposing many students to a large city environment for the first time. Bus driver Marne Santo was thanked for her long hours.
- Lawrence Elementary School established a new chapter of the National Honor Society and inducted its first class of 20 students last week. Superintendent Williamson credited the elementary teachers, particularly Courtney Bily, for envisioning and executing this initiative.

Cannabis Administrator: Rich Glista

- Glista presented an analysis of increased tax revenue from cannabis businesses. The analysis compares the 2019 pre-cannabis property values (inflation-adjusted to today) with the current property values to determine the additional tax revenue generated.
- The total additional tax revenue across all entities (school, county, library, etc.) is over \$356,000 annually. This property tax revenue is in addition to the annual revenue from retail businesses. It was noted that people often ask about the financial benefits and sometimes believe the amount is even higher than it is.
 - Lawrence Public Schools receives almost \$150,000 in additional funds.
 - Village Operating receives an additional ~\$45,000.
 - Village Police and Village Street each receive an additional ~\$15,000.
- The Village receives over \$100,000 annually in unrestricted revenue from its two retail businesses. This is often referred to as "adult use excise tax" from the 10% sales tax on marijuana. For every ~\$54,000 a municipality with a retailer receives, the County receives a matching amount. The County is estimated to receive a total of \$700,000-\$800,000 annually in unrestricted funds from all retailers within its borders. The Township currently does not receive any of this retail revenue because it does not have any retail cannabis businesses.
- For the upcoming budget meeting, the Village can expect to budget approximately \$80,000 in restricted license fee revenue for the year. Legitimate expenditures for these restricted funds include:
 - Cannabis administrator salary.
 - Legal fees related to cannabis ordinances and issues.
 - Police and Fire department funding.
 - Printing and publishing costs for ordinance changes.



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- A portion of the village's insurance premium.
- Zoning administrator fees.
- Contribution to school drug prevention, substance abuse, and mental health programs (The Township contributes \$5,000 annually for this).
- Housing initiatives to support the workforce of cannabis businesses.
- Road maintenance for roads that service cannabis businesses (e.g., the weed problem in the business park).
- Park funding, justified by the increased population and use related to the industry.

Glista has offered to attend the budget meeting to provide suggestions on budgeting these funds. He clarified different sources of cannabis-related funding and their restrictions. Funding for the police and fire departments is a legitimate use of restricted license fee revenue, with the original assistant fire chief position having been funded by it.

- Glista reiterated the distinction between two primary revenue streams:
 - License Fees: Approximately \$80,000 for this year, but likely more in the fund from previous years. This money is restricted and must be spent on cannabis-related expenses.
 - Retail Excise Tax: Approximately \$108,000 annually. This money is totally unrestricted and can be spent however the Village chooses.
- The Federal Government is initiating the process to reschedule marijuana to a Schedule 3 drug. This does not make it fully legal Federally but recognizes its legitimate medical uses. Primary effects of rescheduling include:
 - Tax Relief: Businesses will be able to deduct standard business expenses (salaries, utilities) which were previously disallowed, potentially offsetting recent tax increases.
 - Banking Access: It will open banking services, allowing businesses to use bank accounts, checks, and credit cards, reducing reliance on cash-only operations.
 - Interstate Commerce: It opens a door for potential future interstate commerce, which could benefit Michigan due to its low cannabis prices.
 - Research & Development: It will allow universities nationwide to conduct more comprehensive research on the medical uses, benefits, and drawbacks of cannabis. This could include R&D to breed out offensive "sulfur" or "skunky" odors.

Reports:

President's Report:

- A formal resolution is read aloud to recognize Gary Barton for his outstanding contributions to the Village of Lawrence. The resolution acknowledges Gary Barton's leadership, dedication, vision, and years of service which have significantly contributed to the progress and well-being of the Village of Lawrence. His contributions include financial investments, volunteerism, and active engagement in community improvement efforts. He played a significant role in fostering growth and development by offering his time, experience, and expertise to initiatives that enhance residents' quality of life. The resolution states that his support for community



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programs, local development projects, and civic endeavors has cultivated cooperation and pride throughout the village. It is resolved that the Council of the Village of Lawrence officially recognizes and commemorates Gary Barton for his contributions to the village's growth, development, and vitality. It was further resolved that a copy of the resolution, adopted on January 13, 2026, be presented to Gary Barton as a token of appreciation.

Motion to approve the Resolution acknowledging Gary Barton's contributions to the Village of Lawrence by Glennie, 2nd by Lorenzo.

All Aye. Motions Carried.

Village Manager:

- Code enforcement complaints have trended down from 13 when the officer started, which is typical for this slower time of year, allowing for focus on larger issues. Key properties currently being addressed include:
 - 205 W St. Joseph-permits have expired and work has ceased
 - 301 Main St.-continue to monitor
 - 725 N. Paw Paw-condemned and family is wanting to potentially sign over property to the Village. The residents, a husband and wife, have been safely relocated to Blueberry Hill in Lawton. The stability of the structure was the primary and their safety was the primary concern of the Village which initiated involvement. The owner's family made mention to sign over the property to the village, likely to avoid the costs of abatement and demolition. A key concern is whether the village could recoup the costs of demolition and potential abatement (asbestos/lead) from a future sale of the vacant lot. Multiple alternatives to the village taking ownership were suggested:
 - A new house could be constructed on the lot after demolition.
 - An investor could be found to purchase the property.
 - A realtor could be engaged to list the property "as is," potentially attracting contractors or individuals looking for a flip house.Cordes will contact the family with information for local realtors as a first step prior to any action by the Village to assume ownership.
- Cordes presented proposed 2026 Holiday Office Hours dates. A typo was identified in the proposed schedule for December. "December 2th" in the Council Packet should be "December 24th."

Motion to approve the proposed 2026 Holiday Office Hours schedule with a verbal amendment to correct the December date by Deloach, 2nd by Lorenzo.

All Aye. Motions Carried.
- The Village is undergoing a Law Enforcement Information Network (LEIN) audit for the Police Department. The IT provider, The Tech of Southwest Michigan, has a secondary user agreement with the police department that requires them to meet specific federal standards, which they have failed to maintain. Identified compliance failures by The Tech include:
 - Not maintaining current fingerprinting for their employees.



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- Not maintaining updated background checks for their employees, despite significant staff turnover.
- Not meeting other unspecified federal requirements.

A Zoom meeting was held December 3rd with Chief Bianco, Interim Chief Cordes, and Amy to outline the necessary corrective actions for The Tech. An email from Interim Chief Cordes on January 5th outlined the required tasks, due by January 23rd, and has received no response. The Tech's failure to complete their portion of the audit questionnaire (roughly 72 questions remaining) puts the Village at risk of failing the audit, which would result in the police department losing LEIN access and being unable to function.

The Village attorney is reviewing the contract with The Tech, including questions about its validity since The Tech was recently bought out by a parent company. Cordes proposed to hire a new vendor, Clark Technical, on a temporary basis to pass the critical LEIN audit. A draft agreement has been prepared to hire Clark Technical Services to complete the necessary IT work to pass the audit. Clark Technical estimates the work will take approximately 8 hours at a cost of \$520.

Motion to approve moving forward with a LEIN audit contract with Clark Technical Services for the estimated \$520.00, pending lawyer review, by Glennie, 2nd by Lorenzo.

Rollcall:

Aye: Gritter, Lorenzo, Glennie, Deloach, Rowlee

Nay: None

Absent: Crandall

All Aye. Motions Carried.

- The Village was awarded Safe Routes to School (SRTS) funds in 2021 but lost them in 2024 due to a lack of progress, which was complicated by staffing changes at the Village, the school, and the Michigan Fitness organization. A new project team is in place, including representatives from the ISD, Lawrence Public Schools, the village, and AR Engineering. The project is restarting, but much of the previous work (walking audits, surveys) can be reused for the new application. The original surveys already include the junior high and high school, which are now eligible. The goal is to submit the new application by the February 16th deadline. It is uncertain if the ISD can be included in the new grant, but the inclusion of the junior/senior high school provides a strong alternative. A significant potential benefit of the grant is the ability to use some funds to upgrade existing sidewalks along the designated routes to be ADA compliant, addressing issues like tree root damage. The recent project meeting was very positive, with all parties aligned and moving forward. While the amount of grant funding has gone up, so has the cost of materials. Cordes will have an update by the next Council meeting.

Police Department:

- Cordes included Interim Chief Cordes's report, which differs in format from the previous format used by Chief Bianco. Cordes's reports will break down information by line item and track hours



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to show where time is being spent, moving away from the previous paragraph-based style, as well as included detailed "calls for service" data with dates and addresses. The report structure will cover topics such as the CJIS audit, training, special events, and future plans.

Community Development:

- Did not meet. Next meeting is Thursday, February 5 at 6 PM at Village Hall.

DDA:

- The DDA is actively seeking a new market manager, as Jan Petersen has completed her term but is assisting with the interview process. There are currently a couple of interested candidates for the market manager position.
- The DDA has received no new applications for facade grants and is struggling to effectively inform the public about their availability.
- An individual has volunteered to create metal sculptures for the Village. This prompted a discussion about a previously donated metal oxen sculpture that could not be displayed because some felt it was unsafe due to having too many sharp corners, which could cause injuries.
- A conversation is underway regarding the Park's Christmas tree.
 - One viewpoint favors purchasing a temporary cut tree each year to preserve open park space.
 - Another viewpoint, attributed to the DDA and Dale, supports planting a permanent, proper Christmas tree.
 - Various alternatives to a live tree were suggested:
 - A carved wooden tree that remains on display year-round.
 - A large, metal-structure tree, similar to one in St. Joe.
 - • The group discussed the logistics and costs of a permanent tree.
 - Johnson noted that the DDA authorized planting a tree, but this action requires further approval as the DDA cannot unilaterally make decisions on park property.
 - It was requested to hold off on planting the tree until a comprehensive park plan is developed, especially with upcoming projects like a pickleball court and a grant-funded park redo.
 - Cordes emphasized considering the long-term placement of the tree in light of all planned park changes.
 - A potential supplier, Badger Christmas farm, was identified. Badger could provide an overgrown Fraser fir (12-15 feet tall) that is too large for typical residential use. They would be responsible for transplanting and maintaining the tree's shape, relieving the DPW of trimming duties.
 - Potential locations for the permanent tree were debated.
 - The current location of the temporary tree mount.
 - The center of the park where the fountain is located could facilitate a "walk-through" experience with a new diagonal sidewalk.



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- The discussion concluded with a general agreement to accept the tree, but with the final location still to be determined.
- The DDA is considering providing financial assistance for various needs at the Old Town Hall.
 - The hall needs help with rising insurance costs.
 - The DDA is discussing helping to fund an HVAC system upgrade to make the building more usable in extreme temperatures.
 - The DPW needs to address damage to the basement steps, possibly caused by a tow truck.
- The wrapping of the park pavilion with metal, a project by Orla Bontrager, has been delayed. It was originally scheduled for December, then pushed to January. Orla Bontrager has confirmed it is the next project at the top of his list.
- The Ox Roast Committee is experiencing a decline in membership, reverting to its core group. Darold is reportedly venturing into a different business and changing his line of work. Samantha Webb has stepped back citing her busy schedule. The growing volunteer base is now back to its core members.

Joint Parks & Recreation:

- Lorenzo raised concern about the DDA's allocation of \$75,000 for two pickleball courts while the community is also fundraising for the Kids Palace playground reconstruction. The current Park Master Plan prioritizes the playground redevelopment first, with pickleball courts as the second step. Lorenzo questioned if the \$75,000 could be better used for the playground and suggested the playground should be completed first. Thompson speculated the pickleball court funding was considered because it seemed like a more manageable, self-contained project compared to the larger scope of the playground. It was noted that the DDA's budget discussion about pickleball likely occurred before the council was aware of the grant details and matching funds required for the playground. It was agreed that this is a valid question to bring back to the DDA for reconsideration, indicating the budget allocation is still open for discussion.
- There are some concerns about how to begin the fundraising effort for the matching portion of the Park Grant. It is believed that a dedicated fundraising committee needs to be formed to focus on these efforts. An attempt to join the Pfizer matching donation program was unsuccessful. Pfizer's representative stated that the Village did not qualify because it is not a 501c3 entity, despite being provided with the Village's EIN. Thompson clarified that government municipalities are legally considered 501 nonprofits, just a different subsection than private 501c3 nonprofits. However, some corporate matching programs, like Pfizer's, may exclusively donate to private nonprofits and not public entities. A significant conflict arises when a government entity tries to manage a private 501c3. To operate as a 501c3, the organization must be a separate entity from the Village or Township, with no overlap in management or resources like insurance. The government body must be "hands-off." a village trustee, could be part of a separate 501c3 as a private citizen ("Alicia"), but not in their official capacity as a trustee. For the Parks and Rec committee to have its own governing board, it would need to be



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formally established as a "commission," not a committee, as it is currently appointed by both boards.

- The donation website link is live and donors should be able to specify "Parks and Rec Donation" when contributing. Lorenzo will do a test run to ensure the link is working correctly before adding to Village website.
- Parks and Rec will meet on Sunday, January 18 at 6 pm.

LDFA:

- The LDFA's primary budget item is reimbursing the Village Water Fund for infrastructure at the industrial park. This relates to a loan originally from the VBEDC for matching funds for the second water tower, which the County paid, and the Village then paid back to the County. The LDFA had committed to covering these matching costs and authorized a payment of \$100,000 to the Water Fund. After the \$100,000 payment, a balance of approximately \$80,000 remains. The LDFA plans to pay off the remaining balance next year.

Planning Commission:

- Did not meet in December. Next meeting is Monday, January 26 at 6 PM at Village Hall.

Public Services/DPW:

- The DPW report covered salt purchase, ongoing water issues, sidewalk coordinates, and the finalization of the water tower inspection contract.
 - Salt was purchased from the Road Commission.
 - Brian's conversation with Myndset regarding their water issues is still ongoing.
 - Chris Leach is reported to be doing well at the job.
 - The Dixon contract for water tower inspections has been finalized and signed by all parties. Due to weather, the inspections will not occur until the spring, and the State has been notified of this timeline.
 - There will need to be a sidewalk ordinance discussion in conjunction with insurance coverage.
 - Tree work continues. Joe provided a price for the tree work but was delayed in starting because he had to finish a prior project. The onset of snow and winter weather further slowed the process.

Citizen Police Committee:

- Meetings scheduled upon request.

ZBA:

- No Meeting Held.

New Business:

- None



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Old Business:

- None

Public Comment:

- None

Council Comment:

- None

Motion to Adjourn:

Motion by Deloach, 2nd by Rowlee
All Aye, Motion Carried.
Meeting Adjourned at 8:45 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted:



Amy Cordes, Village Manager



John Gritter, Village President