



THE *Independence* POST

March 2026



IMPORTANT Numbers

POLICE/FIRE EMERGENCIES	911
Police Anonymous Tip Line	216.524.9699
Animal Control	216.524.3940
Building Department	216.524.1019
Chamber of Commerce	216.573.2707
Clerk of Courts	216.524.7719
Communications	216.525.8851
Community Services	216.524.7373
Council Clerk	216.524.1008
Council Meetings	216.328.1477
Economic Development	216.524.4131
Engineering Department	216.524.1374
Facilities Services Department	216.524.9200
Finance Department	216.524.4131
Fire Department	216.524.4001
Human Resources	216.524.4131
Independence Fieldhouse	216.524.0088
Library	216.447.0160
Maple Shade Cemetery	216.524.9191
Mayor's Office	216.524.4131
Outdoor Pool	216.524.3711
Parks & Recreation	216.524.3262
Police Department	216.524.1234
Post Office	216.524.9614
Service Department	216.524.9191



Cover photo courtesy of the City of Independence.



Independence receives Arbor Day Foundation Tree City and Growth Awards, details page 8

CITY Council

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ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW BOARD

1st & 3rd Thursday each month, 3 PM
Norman Casini Chairperson

CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION

1st Thursday each month, 9 AM
Peter Nelson Chairperson

COUNCIL

2nd Tuesday each month, 5:30 PM caucus (may vary), meeting follows.

PLANNING COMMISSION

1st Tuesday each month, 5:30 PM
William Gutermuth Chairperson

BOARD OF ZONING APPEALS

3rd Thursday each month, 5:30 PM
Pasquale Monteleone, Jr. Chairperson

A MESSAGE FROM *Mayor Gregory P. Kurtz*

Dear Neighbors,

I'm happy to share that the City of Independence has received the Tree City USA Award from the Arbor Day Foundation for the 25th year in a row, and for the third year, we've also earned the Growth Award. These honors go to cities that show strong commitment to caring for trees and involving the community in tree-related activities.

Daylight Saving Time starts on Sunday, March 8. That same day, the Kiwanis Club of Independence is hosting its 68th Annual All-You-Can-Eat Pancake Breakfast at Independence High School from 9 AM - 1:30 PM. Since we'll all lose an hour of sleep, let the Kiwanis Club make you a hot breakfast.

Whether you are a seller or a shopper, the place to be on Saturday, March 14, is the Semi-Annual Community Garage Sale at the Independence Fieldhouse from 9 AM - 2 PM. You will find great deals on furniture, home decor, sporting goods, jewelry, baby and children's clothing, adult clothing, books, games, art, musical instruments, electronics, and more! Details on page 6.

This edition also features a story about the Grendel Family's basketball legacy.



Let's hope the Farmer's Almanac and weather forecasters are right, and that spring arrives on time—March 20!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Greg".

Mayor Gregory P. Kurtz

CITY Directory

Gregory P. Kurtz, Mayor
kurtzg@independenceohio.org

Vern Blaze
Finance Director

Gregory J. O'Brien
Law Director

Robert Butler
Police Chief

Steve Rega
Fire Chief

Jessica A. Hyser
Economic Development Director

Donald Ramm
City Engineer

Michael Gero
Building Official

Alla Lora
Communications Director

Angela T. Zidanic
Clerk of Courts

Michael Bergstrom
Human Resources Director

Emily Thomas
Community Services Director

Tom Walchanowicz
Parks & Recreation Director

Ron McKinley
Service Director

David Snyderburn
Facilities Services Director

Dennis Zdolshek
Procurement Coordinator

City Hall General Email address
cityhall@independenceohio.org



Spring Forward!

DAYLIGHT SAVING TIME

Sunday, March 8

Remember to:

- Turn your clocks ahead one hour on Saturday night before you go to sleep.
- Check the batteries in your smoke detectors.
- Update your emergency contact information at the Civic Center.

SEASONAL *Events*

HOMETOWN HERO BANNER RENEWALS Starts Monday, March 2 at 9 AM

Renewals will be available after new banner registration closes and last season's renewal wait list enrolls.

Renewal Instructions:

- Bring banner AND renewal fee (\$40 cash, check, or credit card) to the Civic Center Community Services Front Desk.
- Due to high demand, space cannot be held to be paid at a later date; both banner AND payment must be turned in to secure your renewal.

A team member will reach out after renewal is secured to confirm banner placement.



**2026 Semi-Annual
COMMUNITY GARAGE SALE**
Saturday, March 14, 9 AM – 2 PM
Set Up: Friday, March 13 after 4 PM
No Early Shoppers Please!
**Doors open Saturday, March 14
at 8 AM for vendors.**
Independence Fieldhouse
6354 Selig Drive

- **Residents:** \$10 per table – 2 table max.
Resident registration began February 10
- **Nonresident:** \$15 per table – 2 table max.
Nonresident registration began February 23
- Cash or check payable to City of Independence

The Parks & Recreation Department and Independence Kiwanis Club are again teaming up to sponsor the Community Garage Sale. Proceeds benefit the Dorothy Ornas Scholarship Fund.

Register online or call 216.524.3262

Bring extra tables and you will be charged \$10 each.



Independence Local Schools
CULTURAL FAIR
 Thursday, March 19
 6 – 7:30 PM
 Civic Center



Food! **Festivities!**



Learning! **Fun!**



- 70 different countries presented by 2nd and 6th grade pairs of students
- Cultural cuisine samples provided by local restaurants
- An array of customs and traditions shared by attendees
- Join us for an evening of fun and learning during the Independence Local Schools Cultural Fair!

All are welcome to attend this free event!

JOIN US!

Thank You Sponsors!



KIWANIS *Korner*

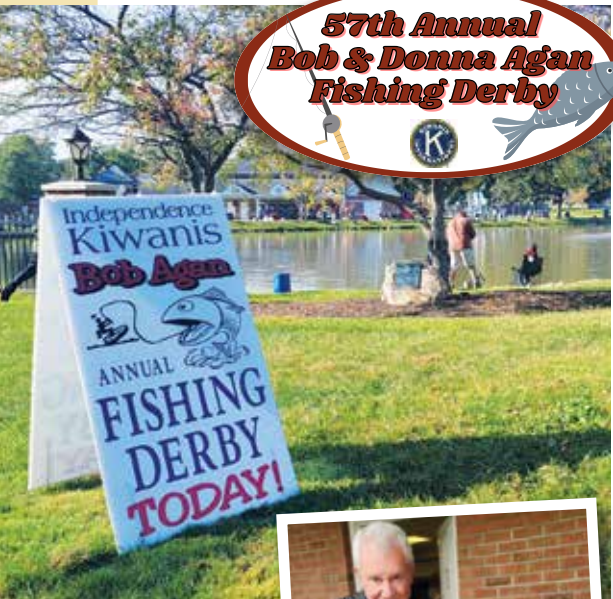
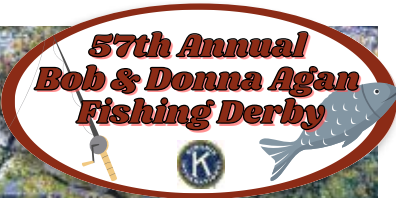
**68th Annual
KIWANIS CLUB
OF INDEPENDENCE
PANCAKE BREAKFAST**
Back by Popular Demand!
Sunday, March 8
9 AM – 1:30 PM
Independence High School
6002 Archwood Road

All-You-Can-Eat!

- \$10 Adults / \$5 Children 12 & under

Tickets available for order (including day of event)
Online: IndependenceKiwanis.com/Event/Pancake-Breakfast
Email: IndependenceKiwanis@gmail.com
Phone: 216.524.6297

Featuring LIVE entertainment.
Tickets printed courtesy of
Vodrazka Funeral Home.



**Mark Your Calendar, 57th Annual
BOB & DONNA AGAN FISHING DERBY**
Saturday, May 9, 9 AM - Noon
Registration at 8:30 AM
Fishing begins at 9 AM
North side of Elmwood Pond

- Free for Independence boys and girls aged 3-15
- **Bring:** Fishing pole, baits of choice and fishing pail



The pond will be freshly stocked with perch, bluegill, crappie, and channel catfish. **NO FISHING PERMIT UNTIL 9 AM.**

Win prizes for the largest fish caught of each fish listed. Many other free prizes are offered.

The fishing derby will be held regardless of weather conditions. Come dressed for the weather that day.

Parents and/or family members are invited to join the fun with their children!



300 CLUB WINNERS MARCH

- \$100 Gil Freilino
- \$75 Toni Muntean
- \$50 Joe Tartabini

SEASONAL *Events*

NATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER Thursday, May 7 7 AM: Independence High School/Middle School Flagpole, 6001 Archwood Rd.

- **Leader:** Kaylee Rauch, Youth For Christ/
Campus Life
- 440.610.9755

10 AM: Cornerstone of Hope Center, 5905 Brecksville Rd.

- **Leader:** Ty Morgan
- 216.524.3787

11:30 AM: Independence Civic Center, 6363 Selig Dr.

- **Theme:** Prayer for the City, Residents, and
Business Community
- **Leaders:** Clergy of Independence Churches
- 216.524.7373

NOON: *Church Bells will ring,
reminding all to stop and pray*

5:30 PM: Memorial on Public Square, 6652 Brecksville Rd. (next to Old Town Hall)

- **Theme:** Prayer for Essential Workers, Health
Care Workers, First Responders, and Military
- **Leader:** Pastor Michele Thompson, Chaplain for
Independence Police and Lead Pastor at Rockside
Church

The National Day of Prayer exists to mobilize unified public prayer for America.

In 1952, Congress established the National Day of Prayer as an annual event celebrated on the first Thursday of May. On May 7, there will be events throughout the day at various locations around the City of Independence. Residents, students, and business people are encouraged to participate and pray for our nation and region at one or more of the events listed here.



MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID TRAINING

Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) teaches you how to identify, understand, and respond to signs of mental health and substance use challenges.

**Saturday, March 28
9 AM - 5 PM**

**Independence Civic Center
6363 Selig Drive
Independence, OH, 44131**

FREE for Independence Residents & Residents' Guests
Training is for adults only.

We highly encourage parents, coaches, first responders, school personnel, members of the business community, members of the faith community, and any adult in the Independence community to attend this training.

Registration Required
Register online at www.independecephio.org
or call 216.524.7373

Offered by: **INDYAlive!** Trained by: **MHFA** Collaborative MI IA-3

SEASONAL *Events*

RECYCLING DAY

Saturday, March 28, 9 AM - Noon
Independence Fieldhouse, 6354 Selig Drive

**Must show proof of residency & separate items for proper disposal.*

Details in the March-April Community Spotlight, pg 12 & 13



INDEPENDENCE RECEIVES 25TH CONSECUTIVE TREE CITY USA AWARD

The Arbor Day Foundation has bestowed two coveted awards on the City of Independence for 2026.

For the 25th consecutive year, the City was named a Tree City USA and for the third consecutive year Independence attained Growth Award status. The Tree City USA and the Growth Award are presented annually to cities exemplifying key aspects of communitywide arbor and tree care.

Tree City USA communities demonstrate higher levels of tree care and community engagement.

L-R: Ryan Knaack, Nate Sebek, Alec Jendre, Ryan Wancata, Parks and Recreation Manager/Arborist, Certified Parks and Recreation Professional (CPRP), ISA Certified Arborist



SERVICE *Department*

Call the Service Department at 216.524.9191 for information and registration

COMPOST DELIVERY

Compost is the breakdown of organic matter (leaves, grass, branches, etc.). The Service Department delivers compost **free of charge** to Independence residents on a first-come, first-served basis.

GUIDELINES FOR COMPOST DELIVERY:

- Residents must sign up annually.
 - Call the Service Department at 216.524.9191 to be placed on the compost delivery list.
 - Provide your name, address, and phone number.
- The Service Department will call to notify you of the delivery date. If no one answers, a voicemail message will be left. **You must return the call to confirm your scheduled delivery.**
- **You must sign a waiver that includes the location of the compost delivery.** The Service Department will only deposit compost onto a driveway or other hard surface and **will not deliver compost to back yards.**
 - There must be someone from the household available to sign the waiver when the compost is delivered.

A compost pile is located outside the Service Department for residents who want to pick up their own compost. The Service Department **DOES NOT** load private vehicles, so please bring your own shovel.

CHIPPER SERVICE

Branches that are one inch or more in diameter and not more than four feet in length, should be neatly placed at the curb with the ends facing the street for branch/chipper pick-up. Chipper service is available year-round. Branches less than one inch in diameter may be placed with your other yard waste.

Residents must call the Service Department at 216.524.9191 to request chipper service.



YARD WASTE COLLECTION

Yard waste collection will begin on Monday, April 6 (weather permitting) on your regular rubbish day.

Yard waste consists of leaves, grass, shrub clippings, plant material, branches under one inch in diameter, etc. All yard waste must be placed away from or on the opposite side of your trash and recycling carts. Yard waste may be placed in one of the following:

- **City yard waste Toter cart**
- **Standard 35-gallon garbage cans** not weighing more than 50 lbs.
- **Open cardboard boxes** (no larger than 2' x 2' x 2')
- **Open 35-gallon paper yard waste bags***

*Paper yard waste bags can be purchased at Ace Hardware, Costco, Drug Mart, Marc's, Sam's Club, and other area retailers. **PLASTIC BAGS OF YARD WASTE WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED.**

The Service Department **does not pick up LOOSE GRASS CLIPPINGS or LEAVES** from tree lawns.

The leaf truck does not operate in the Spring.

Yard waste carts can be purchased for \$95.00 from the Service Department office at 216.524.9191

LOGS AND STUMPS

Logs and stumps may be placed on your tree lawn on your regular rubbish day. Logs and stumps **weighing less than 50 pounds** may be left whole. Logs and stumps **weighing more than 50 pounds** must be cut into manageable pieces for Service Department employees to lift.

TREE CONTRACTORS

Tree contractors hired to remove or trim trees must register with the Building Department. The contractor is responsible for the disposal of all tree material including branches, stumps, and logs. The Service Department will not pick up tree material when a contractor has been hired for the removal or trimming. Contractors usually include a disposal fee in their price when they are hired.

FAMILY Focus

GRENDL FAMILY LEGACY

The First Family of Independence Basketball

There are common threads that weave through the fabric of the Grendels, arguably Independence’s first family of basketball. The threads are *effort*, *potential*, and *accountability*. The tapestry these threads create continues to come to life on the court during the season.

The tailor is Dave Grendel, a former Independence Vice Mayor, School Board member and local attorney, and one of the greatest basketball players in Independence High School history. The seamstress is Dave’s wife, Carrie, who was challenged to get her husband and sons ready on game days. Carrie made sure son, Matt, maintained his routine of eating a grilled cheese sandwich and taking a nap before he played.

As one of Dave’s apprentices, Matt, an IHS star in his own right, stepped back into the spotlight last May when he returned to his alma mater as the Blue Devils’ varsity basketball coach – and the school’s Dean of Students. Like his father, Matt is a member of the Blue Devils’ Athletic Hall of Fame.

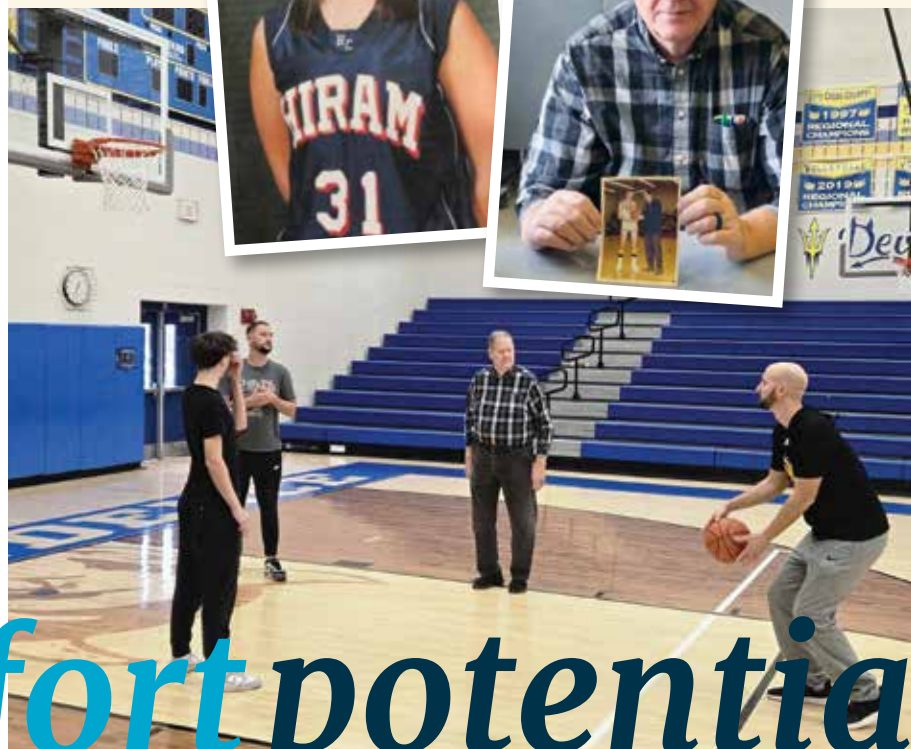
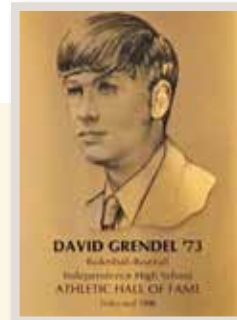
Dave’s son Dan, a 2006 IHS graduate, and daughter Katie Dombroski, a 2004 IHS graduate, were also high school basketball standouts. Katie went on to have collegiate success at Hiram College. Not to be outdone by her father and brothers, Katie achieved success as a middle school basketball and volleyball coach. She coached the Blue Devils middle school girls basketball team for three seasons and Nordonia’s middle school girls basketball team for four seasons.

Now, Dave’s grandson, Kameron Grendel, is waiting in the wings as the first of nine grandchildren who are or will be playing basketball. Kameron is a member of the Blue Devils’ junior varsity basketball team.

The Golden Age

Dave Grendel starred for the Blue Devils in the 1970s during Northeast Ohio’s golden age of high school basketball. He was basketball royalty in the Cleveland area. Dave became just the second player in school history to score 1,000 career points, the first being Dan Potopsky in 1952. Dave was on a first name basis with the sports writers who covered the Blue Devils for The Plain Dealer, Cleveland Press, and two local weekly papers. He enjoyed signing autographs for younger players after games.

Dave went on to play collegiate basketball at Capital University and Case Western Reserve University, where he attended law school and received his law degree. He earned All-American honors in 1977 while playing basketball for the Spartans. When his playing days ended, Dave began his coaching career. He coached freshman and junior varsity basketball while his sons were in high school.



effort potential

Cut From The Same Cloth

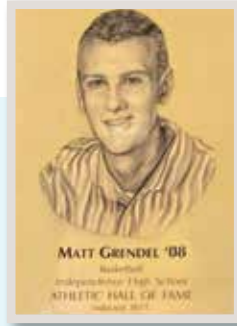
Dan and Matt both followed in their father's basketball footsteps with great success. As a 2006 Independence High School graduate, Dan was a solid player for the Blue Devils averaging about 10 points per game as a senior co-captain. Matt, a 2008 graduate, holds several Blue Devils basketball records including most points in a game (46), free throws made in a game (23) and points in a season (581). He averaged 26.4 points and eight rebounds per game as the Blue Devils' senior captain and earned the team's most valuable player award. He was selected to the second team All-Ohio, first team All-Northeast Ohio, and first team All-Chagrin Valley Conference.

Matt went on to enjoy a stellar collegiate basketball career at Lake Erie College in Painesville. Prior to accepting the Blue Devils' head coaching position last May, Matt served as the head varsity basketball coach at Painesville Riverside High School since 2017. Dave served as the team's statistician.

Matt's coaching resume includes significant accomplishments. Under his leadership, Riverside won the Western Reserve Conference title two out of the last three years. During the 2022-2023 season, his team set a school record for wins, finishing with an impressive 21-4 record.

In addition to his coaching success, Matt brings a strong educational background to Independence. He earned his bachelor's degree in education at Lake Erie College and later earned a master's in educational leadership degree from Cleveland State University. Matt is also a licensed kindergarten through grade 12 intervention specialist and has more than a decade of teaching experience.

"I think I benefited from being two years younger than Dan," Matt said. "He would be critical of my game but like my dad he saw the potential of what I could be as a player. The criticism was tough to hear but I wanted to be better than both Dan and my dad. Mom and dad were always our biggest supporters. They held us accountable and to a higher standard."



Big Changes

The Grendels can't talk about basketball and their individual legacies without acknowledging the many ways the game has changed in the past 50 years. "When I played there were no high school sports for girls," Dave said. "We didn't have the three-point scoring line so 1,000 career points meant something."

As a varsity basketball coach, Matt has embraced technology and uses it to help his players learn from mistakes and improve their game.

"We use Hudl which is a software program that provides us with video and data after each game," he said. "Our players are accountable for watching games and Hudl is helpful for us to talk a game and watch their performance. It's a great coaching tool."

The threads of *effort*, *potential*, and *accountability* have served the Grendels well as they continue to make headlines on the basketball court for the Blue Devils - one stitch at a time.



l accountability

'THE VOICE' AT Rocket Arena



JIM RILEY PROVIDES 'VOICE' TO IHS HOOPS CONTEST PRIOR TO CAVALIERS GAME

The Independence Blue Devils varsity basketball team enjoyed the unique opportunity to play at Rocket Arena prior to the January 26 Cleveland Cavaliers-Orlando Magic game. The Blue Devils fell 51-39 in non-conference contest against the visiting Normandy Invaders.

Among the highlights of the evening was the in-game announcing by Jim Riley, "The Voice of Independence." Riley was asked by Blue Devils Coach Matt Grendel to accompany the team to Rocket Arena and be the in-game announcer. "It was a great experience," Riley said. "I enjoyed the game and announcing in such a large arena."

FIRE Department

SEVERE WEATHER



Ohio Severe Weather Awareness Week 2026 runs from March 15 to 21. The statewide tornado drill is set for Wednesday, March 18, at 9:50 AM. The Ohio Emergency Management Agency and the Ohio Committee for Severe Weather Awareness are organizing this week to share safety tips about tornadoes, floods, and thunderstorms.

As part of the drill, Independence will turn on the Emergency Warning system and residents will hear the tornado warning siren at 9:50 AM.

You can receive notifications by text, phone, or email. Choose the options that work best for you so you are always prepared. Visit www.cuyahogacounty.gov/ready/readynotify to sign up.

Notifications can include emergency events, county government news, building closures, water boil alerts, safety messages, and other important updates.

Here is how our Emergency Siren Warning system works during a weather emergency:

ALERT: The sirens will sound continuously for three minutes. This happens when a tornado warning is issued for the Cuyahoga Valley Region or when a confirmed report of a very dangerous weather situation threatens residents' safety. Please take cover and stay updated using a weather radio, commercial radio, TV, or other sources.

The ALL CLEAR is given when the National Weather Service lifts the tornado warning for Cuyahoga County. The City also tests the Emergency Warning system on the first Saturday of each month at noon. During the test, the sirens sound for one minute: 30 seconds on, 15 seconds off, repeated twice. Remember, the siren is meant to alert people outdoors to seek shelter and listen for more instructions. It's a good idea to have a weather radio for indoor alerts.

POLICE *Department*

BACK ON THE BEAT

Retired Officer Brian Dalton Returns To IPD Part-Time

Seems as though retired Independence Police Officer Brian Dalton needed a hobby. Officer Dalton, who retired from the IPD in December 2024 after serving the community for 31 years, is back on the beat as a part-time officer as of January. Mayor Gregory P. Kurtz swore in Officer Brian Dalton as a member of the Independence Police Department in 1993. He repeated the swearing in ceremony in January.

“Officer Dalton worked until his very last day then he retired,” Mayor Kurtz said of Officer Dalton. “He’s the real deal, just an old school cop. His insight and capacity to deal with people exemplifies itself in everything he does. We’re happy to have him back with the IPD on a part-time basis.”

During his career, Officer Dalton served as a patrolman and bicycle officer. He assisted the detective bureau, mobile field force, and Caribbean Task Force. Officer Dalton also served three years in the U.S. Air Force.



BUILDING Department

For your convenience and in accordance with building department news, Planning Commission agenda/results and Board of Zoning agenda/results will appear with the monthly building department article when applicable.

PLANNING COMMISSION

February 3, 2026

Cole BF Portfolio LLC, Bonefish Grill, 6150 Rockside Place – proposed addition of decorative light-emitting diode (LED) lighting on building. *Tabled.*

ARCHITECTURAL BOARD OF REVIEW

February 5, 2026

Flynn Restaurant Group, Applebee’s, 4191 Rockside Road – proposed and updates changes to entrance. *Tabled.*

Andre Calabretta, 6491 Poplar Drive – proposed addition to rear of dwelling. *Approved.*

Leon and Luba Potapchuk, Lake Charles Drive, parcel 563-19-050 – proposed new single family dwelling. *Tabled.*

ECONOMIC *Development*

BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT

RAMSEY FAMILY CHIROPRACTIC CENTER: 30 Years of Serving Independence

“Some places shape our futures long before we realize it. Independence, Ohio, was one such place for me.” – Dr. Jennifer Ramsey

Growing up in Bainbridge and competing in track and field, Dr. Jennifer Ramsey always looked forward to racing at the Independence track – a venue reserved for those advancing toward state championships. Independence became synonymous with aspiration and achievement, a connection that stayed with her through her track and field career at Bucknell University.

After returning to Cleveland for work, chronic headaches led her to her first chiropractor. The relief she experienced sparked a dramatic career shift from hospitality to healthcare. Her path took her to Cleveland University in Kansas City, where she met her husband, Dr. Buddy, who was recently out of the Marine Corps. They each earned their Doctorate of Chiropractic degrees and obtained their Ohio licenses in 1996 – 30 years ago.



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In 1997, they purchased a five-year-old Independence practice, establishing Ramsey Family Chiropractic Center. Here, they've raised their sons and built a family-centered practice serving patients from pre-natal care through their 90s.

Dr. Buddy's career took him globally from 2000-2016, working with Olympic and extreme athletes and serving at Ground Zero during 9/11 recovery. Now available full-time, he specializes in helping athletes return to play quickly and treating non-emergency injuries.

While many patients initially seek relief from headaches or back pain, most stay when they discover chiropractic care supports the nervous system, improving immune function, brain function, mood, balance, and peak performance aging.

They've invested in training 12 associate doctors to bring effective care to their communities. Their current associate, Dr. Nichole Cavins, brings eight years of experience. She expands their hours and ability to serve Independence residents.

In 2023, they founded the SMILE Project to build up the Northeast Ohio chiropractic community and give people more health choices at the community level.



6525 Brecksville Road
Independence, Ohio 44131
216.573.2600



Ready to experience natural, drug-free healthcare? Call today—they typically see new patients within a day. Learn more at www.ramseychiro.com and www.smileprojectinc.org.



96-2026

CITY COUNCIL News

Council Meeting February 10, 2026



MAYOR GREGORY P. KURTZ'S REPORT

There are two pieces of legislation on tonight's agenda related to the purchase and delivery of unleaded fuel and diesel fuel for City vehicles through

the Joint Municipal Improvement Consortium. Due to a prolonged stretch of colder-than-normal temperatures, significant snowfall, and icy conditions during the first six weeks of 2026, City crews used up to 1,500 gallons of fuel per 24 hours. These ordinances need to be approved to ensure the City does not run out of fuel.

Similarly, Ordinance 2026-26, authorizing the purchase of snowplow cutting edges, is time sensitive. Given the frigid winter season, it is estimated that \$50,000 in snowplow cutting edges should be purchased and used during calendar year 2026. These cutting edges wear out on a snowplow, and replacement is determined by snow events that require plowing.

The agenda also includes a resolution to update Resolution 2026-2, which sets the rules of order for the 2026-2027 Council. This is a standard procedure. However, I want to highlight Article III, Rule 11, which covers public participation. It states in part:

"All persons wishing to provide comment to Council shall place their name on a sign-up

sheet prior to the start of the meeting. Before making any comment, the individual shall place their name and address in the record. There shall be a limit of three (3) minutes per individual for comment, which may be extended at the discretion of the Mayor."

I strongly believe residents should have the chance to speak at the beginning of Council meetings. However, when someone repeatedly shares false or misleading information and makes personal attacks on the administration team, it does not help anyone or change the actual facts.

For example, Ordinance 2026-9 would designate the Concordia Oaks neighborhood as a Tax Increment Financing (TIF) district. The 30-year TIF will allow the City to collect the increase in property taxes from future homeowners and place the funds into a special account to be used to pay for public improvements. These are taxes the homeowners would pay regardless of a TIF and would generate an estimated \$400,000 for the Independence Local Schools (I.L.S.) and \$170,000 for the City annually.

At the end of the 30 years, the schools would have captured \$11.3 million and the City, \$3.1 million. The City funds would be designated for improvements that benefit or serve downtown and the City Campus. A common example of this is using a TIF to finance infrastructure improvements. No TIF funds would go to Petros Homes.

The City has used TIF to finance the high-quality infrastructure our residents have enjoyed for more than 20 years. In that time, the City collected more than \$30 million to finance infrastructure that otherwise would have cost Independence taxpayers more.

TIFs differ from abatements because they do not change the total amount of money a taxpayer pays. A TIF instead changes how that money is distributed once it is collected.

Cuyahoga County is changing the formula it has used for decades to distribute residential TIF funds with lifespans of more than 10 years to communities.

The County's decision will affect only the portion of TIF money that would go to the

Independence is a vibrant community that carefully balances quiet, charming neighborhoods with bustling business districts. The city's collaborative nature and superior location attracts and maintains a robust business community — which in turn provides the foundation for safe, harmonious living with an abundance of high-quality services and amenities for its residents. Whether it's your home, headquarters, or place of work,

INDEPENDENCE WORKS HARD

to instill an experience that never leaves you.

City, which could be significantly reduced and/or redirected to communities outside Independence.

The City cannot afford to lose up to \$3.1 million over the next 30 years. The I.L.S. district would be unaffected.

I strongly support Ordinance 2026-9, which will be on the March 10 Council agenda.



FINANCE DIRECTOR VERN BLAZE'S REPORT

Both new and incumbent Members of Council are getting into the “thick of things” here in early 2026 with this evening’s Legislative Agenda.

The 17 of 20 Ordinances on this evening’s Legislative Agenda that are requesting Council’s approval of some \$7.2 million in expenditures highlights both Council’s important oversight role in approving large expenditures, but also the importance of finances in general to the operations of the City.

Be it day-to-day operating expenditures (substantially personnel costs – wages, salaries, and benefits), expenditures for departmental capital purchases (e.g. police vehicles, ambulances, fire trucks, snow plows, garbage trucks, off-road equipment, etc.), special projects (e.g. a new roof on the Service Department building here in 2026), or infrastructure projects (roads, various sewers, water lines, sidewalks, etc.), no matter what the City intends to do, money and finances are the impetus for any and all of that to happen.

The importance of money and finances and its central role to an effectively operating governmental entity is why the Finance Committee of Council and other Members of Council who are also attending, is holding a series of meetings with Mayor Kurtz, Finance Director Blaze, and members of the Administrative Team to thoroughly review proposed 2026 operating expenditures.

Brunswick’s 27-year City Manager Skip Trimble once said, “If you know the finances and you can relate to people, you can run any City.”

That’s how important money and finances are for a local government to be run properly – it all

starts there, both with the management of those funds, and most importantly in the budgetary process, with how those funds are allocated.

The uber successful, long-time CEO of Berkshire Hathaway, Warren Buffet, has been quoted a number of times in the past by the Finance Department, stating that his primary role at Berkshire Hathaway was to “allocate capital.”

Mayor Kurtz, Member of Council, and Finance Director Blaze are also going through their own process of allocating capital by the allocation of public tax dollars via the 2026 Annual Appropriations Ordinance.

What the rest of 2026 will look like as far as the allocation of those public tax dollars will come into focus more as we fast approach the end of March deadline to have a 2026 Annual Appropriations Ordinance adopted and submitted to the Cuyahoga County Budget Commission.

Standing Committee Reports



Matthew Benkner PUBLIC BUILDINGS & LANDS COMMITTEE

I would like to extend a sincere thank you to Jim Riley for giving up his Saturday morning to take me around and show me the publicly-owned buildings and lands throughout our City. Touring these sites made one thing abundantly clear: we, the taxpayers, own a significant amount of real estate here. And I mean a significant amount.

A couple of issues have come up over the last month regarding taxpayer-owned land that I would like to address.

First is the land next to the high school where the proposed new primary/middle school would be built. Because this is taxpayer-owned land, City Council will need to vote on whether to lease it to the school district. That is the full extent of Council’s involvement in this matter. I do not believe it is my place to tell fellow taxpayers how they should vote, especially given the financial commitment involved for each household. I have no issue voting to approve the lease before the

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matter goes to the ballot. Doing so is not an endorsement one way or the other; it simply ensures that voters know this portion of the process has been addressed regardless of how the vote turns out.

The second matter involves Carlo's Barbershop. At our recent Economic Development Committee meeting, Carlo and Nick shared their desire to expand into the long-vacant storefront next door - an eyesore that has remained unused for years. More specifically, they would like to purchase the building and renovate it. Since the building is taxpayer-owned, Council has the authority to vote to sell it, provided there are no legal or procedural obstacles.

Carlo and Nick expressed interest in purchasing this building for years but have not received meaningful consideration. The Mayor has reminded Council on several occasions that we must operate at the "speed of business." If we truly believe that, then we must be willing to act decisively when legitimate opportunities arise. Carlo's Barbershop is a staple of our downtown and should be treated as such. Not every business in our City is a multimillion-dollar employer. The small businesses that make up our downtown are essential to preserving the character and charm of our community.

Adjacent to Carlo's Barbershop is what can generously be described as a parking lot - also owned by the taxpayers. This property will be discussed at our Public Buildings and Lands Committee meeting on February 26 at 5:30 PM in the caucus room at City Hall. You are welcome to attend in person or via Zoom. The lot is in serious need of repaving, as anyone who has parked there can attest. It is the only true public parking lot downtown, and if we want people to enjoy our downtown businesses, we need to ensure there is safe and accessible parking. Improving downtown begins with making it functional.

Lastly, I have received several messages regarding the possibility of installing a restroom along Hemlock Trail. The previous Council had plans drawn up but did not move forward. After review at our upcoming meeting, I believe we can present this

proposal to the full Council for consideration. Hemlock Trail serves as a gateway to the towpath and provides access to our beautiful National Forest. Many who walk it know about the hidden waterfall tucked within Hemlock Forest. A restroom facility would be a meaningful and practical addition to this well-loved community asset.

I will sign off by asking for your feedback and ideas, as I always do. This City Council only truly works if you participate, make your voices heard, and hold us accountable. I was called illiterate by a fellow resident this past week. I will try to do better.



Kevin Day
FINANCE COMMITTEE

On tonight's agenda is Ordinance 2026-3 Brecksville Road Streetscape/Waterline Improvements Project for \$5.8 million. The project is focused on Brecksville Road from

Rockside Road to Rockside Woods Boulevard. A critical part of the project is replacing the water mains and preparing the area for resurfacing in 2027. Ordinance 2026-19 was related to this project as well.

Ordinance 2026-9, establishing Tax Increment Financing (TIF) from the Concordia Homes Development. A TIF is a financing tool that allows the City to capture increases in property taxes to fund public infrastructure costs. Since this is a residential TIF instead of the typical commercial TIF, I have recommended the legislation designate those funds be used for projects in that specific area. There was no action taken and I look forward to continued discussion.



Stephanie Rodriguez
COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

As chair of the Community Services Committee, we will hold our first meeting on Thursday, March 12 at 3 PM. Our agenda includes

an overview of 2025 and 2026 projects, programs, and operations for both the Parks

and Recreation Department and Community Services. I have asked both directors to inform us of their cost efficiency efforts to ensure that our dollars are stretched to reflect fiscal responsibility as well as maintaining high quality facilities and programs. We will also review community feedback. Lastly, an invitation was extended to our City arborist, Ryan Wancata, to give us insight into our current tree planting efforts in relation to the Tree Commission.

The Finance Committee has had several meetings with Mayor Kurtz, Finance Director Blaze, and the Department Directors/Chiefs to work toward a fiscally responsible 2026 Operating Budget/Appropriation. Everyone has the difficult task of continuing to provide excellent services for our community while ensuring good stewardship of our tax dollars. By doing this, the Finance Committee and Council can better plan for capital improvements for the next five years. Council just passed a \$5.8 million water main replacement project for Brecksville Road just north of Rockside Road. With limited expendable income, water main replacement must be completed in phases. Brecksville Road's aging water main replacement continues to be a top priority.

As we move into March, the Finance Committee looks to fine tune the operating budget so Council can adopt it into legislation by the deadline. Chairman Day, Vice Mayor Togliatti, and I will focus on our five-year Capital Improvement Plan. The task will not be easy as we determine priorities for our aging infrastructure, various departmental needs, and "wants." With our operational budget coming in the range of 60-64% of our revenue, the limited funds can only go so far. Hence the need for "tightening the belt" of our operational budget. The question Council will wrestle with is needs vs. wants. Please keep us and all our City officials in prayer as we work together in this endeavor.

Council passed 16 pieces of legislation in February. Council engagement within committees has been robust. I know myself and my colleagues are committed to work with Mayor Kurtz, Finance Director Blaze, and Department Directors/Chiefs to continue to provide premier City services and programs while honoring our responsibility to the residents for accountability and transparency.



Rebecca Somnitz
**ECONOMIC GROWTH
& DEVELOPMENT /
COMMUNICATIONS &
MARKETING COMMITTEE**

February has arrived, and this winter has certainly presented its challenges. I would like to extend my sincere thanks to our hardworking Service Department for their continued efforts to keep our roads safe and clear. I also appreciate the Community Services and Parks and Recreation Departments for providing activities that help keep our community engaged and connected during the colder months.

January 27: Economic Growth and Development Meeting

Thank you to Economic Development Director Jess Hyser for delivering a thoughtful and comprehensive presentation that gave the committee a clear understanding of her department's current initiatives and strategic direction.

During the meeting, the committee requested an appraisal of the barbershop building in the center of town, as there is an interested buyer. We also resumed discussions regarding the downtown parking lot, continuing conversations that began under the previous City Council. With a prospective buyer interested in rehabilitating the barbershop building and Council expressing interest in improving the parking lot, I am hopeful we can begin to make meaningful progress in revitalizing our downtown. I believe residents will welcome visible improvements that enhance their ability to utilize and enjoy our downtown area.

February 5: Board of Zoning Appeals

Due to an unexpected midterm resignation on the Board of Zoning Appeals (BZA), we conducted an additional round of interviews to fill the open position. I would like to thank all of the residents who applied and participated in the interview process. Independence is lucky to have so many diversely skilled residents willing to volunteer their time.

Mark Zuppo was selected to serve on the BZA. Mark brings extensive zoning and planning expertise, including prior experience as Planning

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and Zoning Director for Howland Township, Ohio and as City Planner for the City of Dublin, Ohio.

February 6: Special Council Meeting

Independence Local Schools (ILS) presented to Council for the second time regarding their proposal for a new PreK-8 school. I appreciate ILS keeping Council abreast of their progress and answering Council's questions. A project of this magnitude will require significant time, collaboration, and diligence from all parties involved, including School Administration, City Council, City Administration, and our community. It is essential that we approach this process thoughtfully to ensure the best possible outcome. As part of the Safety Committee, I'm pleased that our Police and Fire Chiefs have met with School Administration to provide expertise.

At some point, City Council will need to vote on amending the shared use agreement between ILS and the City of Independence to allow the construction of the proposed new school on the soccer fields adjacent to the high school. I believe it is important to review and update the shared use agreement before the May ballot providing voters with as much information as possible and ultimately letting voters decide if they want a new school on that land.

February 10: City Council Meeting

City Council meetings can be watched live on the City's YouTube channel, and recordings are also available for later viewing.

Highlights include:

Ordinance 2026-3: This project has been in development for multiple years and I would like to thank City Engineer Don Ramm for his dedication and hard work in bringing it to this stage while answering Council's questions as we take this project across the finish line. This is a significant project with significant funding, but one I believe is both necessary and beneficial to our community.

Ordinance 2026-22: Fireworks- thank you to everyone who contacted me with their thoughts on the December fireworks. This Ordinance approved July 3 fireworks.

Resolution 2026-15: This resolution approved updates to the Council Rules, including the

addition of Communications and Marketing to the Economic Growth and Development Committee. As Chair of this committee, I look forward to collaborating with the Communications team and gaining a deeper understanding of their current strategies and future initiatives.

To close out my update: I had the opportunity to visit Sweets and Geeks during its soft opening. I believe it will be a welcome addition to our community! Independence is their fifth location. The store's mission is to be, "valued as the neighborhood's favorite candy and game store," and offers a unique selection of international snacks alongside candy, toys, board games, and trading cards. They strive to create a fun and engaging shopping experience, "inspiring friends and family to spend more time together." Welcome to Independence, Sweets and Geeks!



Sarah Szweda
SAFETY/RULES
& ORDINANCES
COMMITTEE

I would like to thank everyone who contacted me regarding the Tax Increment Financing (TIF) and fireworks legislation. Council approved a \$33,000 expenditure for July fireworks only. The TIF legislation continues to be reviewed by Council. Residents expressed concerns that the TIF would take funding from the MetroParks and library specifically. Our Economic Development Director stated during our regular February Council meeting that with the TIF, those entities would still receive a "carve out." Those amounts over 30 years are: \$1.9 million for the county, \$672,000 for the MetroParks, \$723,000 for the library, \$3.1 million for the City, and \$11 million for our schools. Council has also asked that this TIF money be designated for specific purposes, such as Stone Road and the center of town.

The empty storefront in the center of town next to the barbershop is free of the reindeer prop from Santa's window display that hung there all last summer. I share residents' concerns that a little bit of window dressing can improve the look of the area while we work toward a permanent solution for that

space. The Economic Development Committee is working on the possibility of the barbershop purchasing the City-owned building it now occupies, a move years in the making. A purchase order has been generated for an appraisal company to complete the next step in this process.

The hope is downtown will become an area where our families can spend a Saturday morning enjoying breakfast in the center of town, getting a haircut, or maybe grabbing a slice of pizza in the afternoon and perhaps stopping in to Sweets and Geeks, the new candy, novelty, and gaming store opening in the former CVS space.

We want to make the center of town an attractive destination for our residents, so I am asking residents to share with me their desires for the center of town. I am confident that together, we can revitalize this area and create a robust, mixed-used space that will become a vital part of our community.



Anthony Togliatti
UTILITIES & SEWERS
COMMITTEE

The Utilities Committee held two meetings over the past month.

The first was a joint meeting of the Streets and Sidewalks

Committee and the Utilities Committee to review the upcoming reconstruction of Brecksville Road between Rockside Road and Cornerstone of Hope. This significant infrastructure project includes water main replacement, storm sewer upgrades, widened sidewalks, and installation of new decorative streetlights. Ordinance 2026-3 authorizes the acceptance of the \$5.8 million bid from Catts Construction to complete this work.

While I fully support necessary infrastructure improvements such as water main and storm sewer replacement, I have expressed concerns since the project was expanded to include widening a short stretch of Brecksville Road from Vista Springs north to Cornerstone of Hope by two feet. In my view, the additional cost associated with widening this limited portion of road does not clearly justify the benefit. As stewards of taxpayer dollars, we have a responsibility to ensure that every added expense delivers a clear and measurable public benefit.

Additionally, I have concerns about whether the pedestrian components of the project meet what many residents consider our community's "Independence standards." While the widening has been presented as a safety enhancement, there is minimal accident history along this corridor. At the same time, portions of the sidewalk will remain directly adjacent to the curb, separating pedestrians from traffic by only a six-inch curb. Posted signs along this stretch of road designate the outside lanes for truck traffic, meaning pedestrians in these sections will be walking immediately next to passing trucks and may be forced to walk in the roadway during snow events.

From previous major road projects, we have learned that greater separation between vehicular traffic and pedestrian sidewalks significantly improves pedestrian safety. When investing nearly \$6 million in a roadway reconstruction, I believe we should prioritize designs that maximize long-term safety for residents and visitors alike.

The Utilities Committee also met to review the City's natural gas and electric aggregation program and received a presentation from the Northeast Ohio Public Energy Council (NOPEC), our current municipal energy aggregator. Ordinance 2026-28, on tonight's agenda, would continue the City's membership with NOPEC. Independence has participated in NOPEC for more than 20 years, and the program continues to provide residents with competitive energy supply options.



Dale Veverka
STREETS & SIDEWALKS

The Streets and Sidewalks Committee has a key issue that we've been working on for a long period of time. Ordinance 2026-3 is a Brecksville Road

Streetscaping Improvements project with Catts Construction. It is about a nearly \$6 million project plus the cost of the paving. It's an ODOT paving project we need to make sure we take advantage of. As the three returning Councilmembers are well aware, and at the Streets and Sidewalks Committee meeting, we made every effort to make sure that all of our

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four new colleagues are well up to speed on that particular piece of legislation. It's one of the key items from the Streets and Sidewalks Committee.

I will be supporting Ordinance 2026-28 for the continued membership in NOPEC. For those of you that may be unfamiliar, NOPEC is involved with dozens of communities in Northeast Ohio. NOPEC provides residential customers with good pricing for electricity and natural gas. One of the advantages of NOPEC is if I resident chooses to leave NOPEC there is no charge for leaving. NOPEC pricing has always been very close to the most economical price. Additionally, in the past when NOPEC could not provide a good price they sent residents to a provider able to provide a more reasonable cost when they could have quite easily kept customers paying at a higher rate. NOPEC has also provided various grants along the way that have been helpful to many communities through Northeast Ohio. For these reasons, I wholeheartedly support continuing with NOPEC for three years. If customers choose to leave NOPEC for a slightly cheaper rate, they should make sure they read the fine print because many other suppliers charge a substantial fee for leaving.

Please remember your Valentine on February 14.

Directors' Reports



Michael Bergstrom
HUMAN RESOURCES
DIRECTOR

Hello, everyone.

The Human Resources Department has the following updates:

February 2026 is American Heart Awareness Month. Here are some resources related to this initiative:

- <https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/education/american-heart-month>
- <https://www.heart.org/en/healthy-living/healthy-lifestyle>
- <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/departments/heart>
- <https://www.uhhospitals.org/services/heart-and-vascular-services>

Earlier this month, I had the opportunity to meet with the newly appointed Career Specialist for the Independence Local Schools, Rachel Barbiaux. Rachel is working on some great initiatives for the Independence Schools related to employment opportunities for students, and we will be collaborating on programs in the future to help students gain valuable experience in the workforce.

If there are any City of Independence residents who are currently enrolled at the college level and need assistance related to mentoring, whether it be resume assistance/structuring, job search or interviewing skills, please send an email to humanresources@independenceohio.org placing "Mentoring Assistance" in the Subject Line of the e-mail.

I hope everyone has a healthy and safe remainder of the month.



Michael Gero
BUILDING OFFICIAL

The Building Department continues to utilize electronic plan review submittals for commercial projects. This process significantly reduces paper usage, shortens plan review times, and expedites the issuance of permits. Please feel free to contact the department by phone or email with any questions regarding this system.

During the past month, the Building Department transmitted four sets of construction drawings for plan review. We registered 197 contractors, bringing the total number of registered contractors for 2026 to 231. Twenty (20) commercial permits were issued, and 19 commercial construction inspections were completed.

Plans were approved for an 8,285-square-foot alteration to an existing tenant space on Rockside Road, and a 1,718-square-foot tenant build-out on Brecksville Road. An occupancy permit was issued for a 1,565-square-foot tenant build-out on Rockside Road.

In the residential sector, the Building Department issued 11 residential permits and conducted 31 residential construction inspections. Plans are being reviewed for two

single-family dwellings located on Concordia Drive. An occupancy was issued for a 442-square-foot addition to an existing dwelling on East Pleasant Valley Road. There are currently six (6) dwellings under construction at various stages throughout the City.

We encourage anyone considering a potential project to contact the Building Department (216.524.1019) for assistance or guidance. Our inspectors continue to remain active in the field, addressing property maintenance and construction-related issues to enhance the overall appearance and safety of the community.



Don Ramm
CITY ENGINEER

The Engineering Department reports the following activities for last month:

Four (4) Right-of-Way permits were issued for residential conduit and fiber installations.

Ordinance 2026-3 on tonight's agenda will authorize a **\$5.82 million** contract to **Catts Construction** for the **Brecksville Road Streetscape Project**.

- This project includes major water main replacement on Brecksville Road from and through the Rockside Road intersection, north toward Rockside Woods Boulevard North.
 - The project could get underway early in March and will be active throughout the entire 2026 construction season.

Catts Construction is working on **Brecksville Road** and **Hillside Road** to perform road pavement repairs caused from recent watermain breaks.

Completed the bid book and schedule for the **2026-2027 Street Striping Contract**.

- The bid opening for this contract is scheduled for February 20.
- The Engineering Department hopes to make an award recommendation in time to be considered on the March 10 Council Meeting.

In connection with our **Sewer Maintenance & Repairs Contracts**, **Ordinance 2026-16** and **Ordinance 2026-17** request authorization to extend the contracts for **C&K Industrial Services** and **United Survey Inc.** for an additional one-year period.

Letters of Interest and Qualification Statements were solicited for engineering design services in connection with the **Brecksville Road Resurfacing Project** for the section from Rockside Road north to our north corporation limit.

- Four (4) submittals were received.
- **Ordinance 2026-19** authorizes a contract with **E.L. Robinson** in a not-to-exceed amount of **\$108,681.70**.
- **The Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT)** will provide **\$840,000** toward the construction portion of the resurfacing project, which is programmed by ODOT for summer of 2027 construction.

Cuyahoga County is continuing progress on the **Rockside Road Bridges Project**.

- Most of the current work is beneath the bridges.
- The **Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad** has no scheduled excursions until early March, while the Rockside Road Boarding Station's parking lot is closed.
- Traffic across both bridges will continue to be reduced to one lane in each direction until late in the year.

Lastly, we prepared for and attended a **Joint Streets & Sidewalks and Utilities & Sewers Committee Meeting** to discuss various ongoing and upcoming projects.



Emily Thomas
COMMUNITY SERVICES DIRECTOR

As Community Services continues to offer our ongoing regular programs, activities, events, and services, we are already gearing up for a busy spring and summer and want to ensure you save the dates for the following:

- Mental Health First Aid Training – Saturday, March 28
- Summer Playground & IDEA Camp Registration – Monday, March 30
- Memorial Day Services – Monday, May 25
- Summer Concert Series & Market on the Square – Begins Friday, June 5
- City-Wide Garage Sale – Thursday, June 18 – Saturday, June 20

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- **Sunday Market on the Square** – Begins Sunday, July 5
- **Community Band Concerts** – Wednesdays, June 17 and 24
- **Home Days** – Friday, August 7 and Saturday, August 8

We look forward to the wonderful – and warmer – spring and summer seasons ahead!



Steve Rega
FIRE CHIEF

On this evening’s agenda is Ordinance 2026 –22, which authorizes the hiring of American Fireworks Company for this year’s July 3 fireworks displays.

Ordinance 2026–23 authorizes the purchase of a new Ford Explorer Interceptor and related aftermarket equipment for the Fire Department. This purchase is identified on the department’s five–year capital plan, and it will replace a 12–year–old vehicle that will be repurposed to another department.

Ohio’s Spring Severe Weather Awareness week is March 15–21. On Wednesday, March 18 at 9:50 AM, a statewide tornado drill will be conducted. Our city Emergency Warning System will be activated. As a reminder, the sirens are activated whenever a TORNADO WARNING is issued near our community, and it is intended to notify those individuals that are outside to seek shelter indoors. Once inside you should turn on a TV or radio to find out about current weather conditions.



Tom Walchanowicz
PARKS & RECREATION DIRECTOR

Thanks to this long stretch of cold weather, Elmwood Pond has had its longest streak of ice skating since the mid–1980s!

We’ve had nearly three–and–a–half weeks of skating so far, and I’d like to thank all the staff involved in the snow removal efforts. In addition to clearing more than 10 inches of snow from the acre–sized pond using small equipment – a challenging task – the team also applied a light misting of water to maintain

excellent skating conditions throughout the season. I’d also like to thank Jim Riley for generously lending his large spotlights, which helped illuminate the pond for night skating.

I would like to thank the Finance Committee for allowing us to explain our budget and discuss potential adjustments. While this process may take more time, it ensures a clearer understanding of how our department operates and the needs we are addressing.

The Fieldhouse will host some larger events this month. The first being the Ben Vitron Memorial Duals wrestling tournament February 14. This tournament brings together several high school wrestling teams to compete in head–to–head duals throughout the day. Stop out to support your local Independence High School wrestlers! The second event is the 2026 North Coast Classic Pickleball Shootout, hosted by the Independence Kiwanis Club. It will take place on Saturday, February 28, 2026, at the Fieldhouse. The event begins at 9 AM with a round–robin tournament featuring multiple indoor courts and offers men’s, women’s, and mixed doubles divisions for various skill levels. The third event is the Kiwanis Club’s Community Garage Sale on Saturday, March 14, 2026, from 9 AM to 2 PM at the Fieldhouse. Vendors can reserve tables to sell household goods and other items, with resident spaces costing around \$10 and non–resident spaces around \$15.



Robert Butler
POLICE CHIEF

Recently, the Independence Police Department was awarded a federal grant totaling over \$300,000 specifically designated for our police fleet. Maintaining a modern, reliable fleet is not merely a matter of logistics; it is a fundamental requirement for officer safety and rapid emergency response. Each year, we must refresh some of our vehicles to ensure that the tools our officers rely on are always ready for service. Because of this successful grant application, the City will be almost fully reimbursed for the costs associated with our annual fleet replenishment.

This grant achievement provides us with a unique strategic opportunity. By leveraging these federal funds, I am currently exploring the possibility of refreshing an additional cruiser and adding a police motorcycle to our fleet this year. My goal is to accelerate the modernization of our equipment and reduce the average age of our vehicles, ensuring we stay ahead of maintenance cycles while expanding our operational capabilities.

I look forward to discussing this proposal with City Council as we work together to ensure Independence remains a safe and well-equipped community. This grant is a testament to our commitment to finding innovative ways to enhance public safety while remaining responsible stewards of our City's resources.



Ron McKinley
SERVICE DIRECTOR

The winter snowstorms during January made it a very busy month for the City snowplow crews, who worked many hours and several days in a row around the clock.

The crews did a great job salting, plowing, and keeping all City streets and sidewalks clean and safe from the snow during the storms, reducing accidents.

Senior Snow Removal contractors were sent out six (6) times:

- November 28, 2025
- December 14, 2025
- January 1, 2026
- January 15, 2026
- January 25, 2026
- January 28, 2026

Crews assisted with the large water leak on lower Hillside Road on January 27 to January 28, scraping driveway aprons from ice buildup.

Christmas lights and decoration removal started in January.

The chipper is out during the winter months. Currently more than 200 Christmas trees were picked up and chipped during January.

Maple Shade Cemetery burials: Three (3) in January.

SERVICE DEPARTMENT TOTALS IN JANUARY:

Rubbish: 241.36 tons
Recycling: 60.58 tons



Dave Snyderburn
FACILITIES SERVICES DIRECTOR

The Facilities Services Department has legislation on tonight's agenda for the replacement of an emergency generator that services both the administration and police wings of City Hall. The original generator was installed when City Hall was constructed in 1981. This large Catt generator has served the City for 45 years, but components must be rebuilt and replacement parts are becoming scarce or are no longer manufactured.

We have been experiencing loss of utility power regularly during severe weather conditions. Our building generators are most important during harsh conditions to keep the City up and running. I want to thank the administration, Council, and our residents for supporting this legislation.

OK, winter, it's closing time!

LEGISLATION

Ordinance 2026-3 An Ordinance accepting the base bid of Catts Construction Inc., for the Brecksville Road Streetscape Improvements Project. *Enacted 6 yes / 1 no (TO).*

Ordinance 2026-11 An Ordinance accepting the bid of Englefield Oil Inc., for the purchased and delivery of unleaded fuel and diesel fuel for City vehicles through the Joint Municipal Improvement Consortium. *Enacted 7 yes / 0 no.*

Ordinance 2026-20 An Ordinance authorizing the purchase and delivery of unleaded and diesel fuels for City vehicles from Ports Petroleum Company through the Joint Municipal Improvement Consortium January 2, 2026 through February 4, 2026. *Enacted 6 yes / 1 no (VE).*

Ordinance 2026-14 An Ordinance authorizing the disposal of unusable property held by the City's Police Department. *Enacted 7 yes / 0 no.*

Ordinance 2026-15 An Ordinance authorizing the purchase of ammunition through the State of Ohio Cooperative Purchasing Program for the Police Department. *Enacted 7 yes / 0 no.*

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Ordinance 2026-16 An Ordinance authorizing Changing Order No. 1 to the City's 2025 Sanitary and Storm Sewer Maintenance and Repairs contract with C&K Industrial Services. **Enacted 7 yes / 0 no.**

Ordinance 2026-17 An Ordinance authorizing Change Order No. 1 to the City's 2025 Sanitary and Storm Sewer Maintenance and Repairs contract with United Survey Inc. **Enacted 7 yes / 0 no.**

Ordinance 2026-18 An Ordinance amending Section 1143.02(B)(3) – Recreational and Ornamental Structures of the Codified Ordinances of the City of Independence. **Enacted 7 yes / 0 no.**

Ordinance 2026-19 An Ordinance accepting the proposal of E.L. Robinson Engineering of Ohio Co. for engineering design services in connection with the State Route 21 Brecksville Road Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) resurfacing project as part of CUY-21-08.22. **Enacted 7 yes / 0 no.**

Ordinance 2026-22 An Ordinance authorizing the hiring of American Fireworks Company for professional services for the July 4 fireworks display 2026. **Enacted 7 yes / 0 no.**

Ordinance 2026-23 An Ordinance authorizing the purchase and delivery of a new 2026 Ford Explorer Interceptor for the Fire Department. **Enacted 7 yes / 0 no.**

Ordinance 2026-25 An Ordinance authorizing the renewal of the City's current major software support maintenance agreements for 2026 and declaring an emergency. **Enacted 7 yes / 0 no.**

Ordinance 2026-26 An Ordinance authorizing the purchase of snowplow cutting edge(s) for the Service Department. **Enacted 7 yes / 0 no.**

Ordinance 2026-28 An Ordinance repealing Ordinances 2023-10, 2023-28, 2024-22, and 2025-24 authorizing the City of Independence to withdraw in the Northeast Ohio Public Energy Council (NOPEC) and declaring an emergency. **Enacted 7 yes / 0 no.**

Ordinance 2026-29 An Ordinance authorizing the purchase of one (1) new diesel-powered generator with automatic transfer switch for City Hall and the Police Department. **Enacted 7 yes / 0 no.**

Resolution 2026-14 A Resolution amending Resolution 2026-2 providing for the adoption of Rules of Order for Council 2026-2027. **Enacted 7 yes / 0 no.**

Resolution 2026-15 A Resolution affirming and documenting the appointment by Council of Mark Zuppo as a citizen member of the Board of Zoning Appeals. **Enacted 6 yes / 1 no (DA).**

Independence City Council meets the second Tuesday of every month. The public is invited to attend in person at City Hall or virtually via Zoom. Virtual attendants must pre-register on the City's website: independenceohio.org/government/city_council.

The March City Council meeting will be on Tuesday, March 10, and will start immediately after the Caucus meeting concludes.

Please confirm Caucus and Council Meeting times by calling the "Council Meeting Line" at 216.328.1477 or check the website www.IndependenceOhio.org.



CHARTER *Review Commission*

2026 CHARTER REVIEW COMMISSION APPOINTEES

In accordance with Article XIII of the City's Charter, a Charter Review Commission must be appointed every four years in January to review the Charter for revisions, updates, or recommendations.

The Commission is composed of eleven qualified electors. Each Councilperson and the Finance Director appoint one member, while the Mayor appoints three members, including one Councilperson. Here are the members of the 2026 Charter Review Commission:

2026 Charter Review Commission Appointees

Councilperson Stephanie Rodriguez
Nicole Clark
Laura Corn
Pamela Dengler
Brian Fisher
Jim Harmath
Deb Hudnall
Gloria Letostak
Maria Moyett
Mike O'Neil
Peter Panizzutti

- City Council and the Commission must meet within 30 days of receiving the 2026 Charter Review Commission report to discuss proposed amendments.
- Meetings of the Commission are open to the public and the first meeting was held on Monday, February 23 in the Building Department Conference Room (6335 Selig Dr.) at 6 PM.
- The Charter Review Commission must meet regularly and present the Commission's written recommendations to Council at least 180 days before the next General Election. This year's deadline is May 6, 2026.
- To place any Charter amendments on the November 3, 2026 General Election ballot, the City must submit a ballot proposal to the Cuyahoga County Board of Elections no later than September 4, 2026, 4 PM.



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March 2026

*time subject to change

Sunday 1	Monday 2	Tuesday 3	Wednesday 4	Thursday 5	Friday 6	Saturday 7
		Planning Commission 5:30 PM*		Architectural Board of Review 3 PM		
8 Daylight Saving Time Begins 	9	10 Caucus 5:30 PM Council begins immediately afterward	11	12 Community Services Committee Meeting 3 PM	13	14
15	16	17 Happy St. Patrick's Day! 	18	19 Architectural Board of Review 3 PM Board of Zoning Appeals 5:30 PM	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29 Palm Sunday 	30	31	Please confirm Caucus and Council Committee Meeting times by calling the "Council Meeting Line" at 216.328.1477 or check the website www.IndependenceOhio.org			