Commissioners' Journal
April 23, 2026

The Geauga County Board of Commissioners met in special session on April 23, 2026, at 9:00 a.m. in the Commissioners' Offices located at 12611 Ravenwood Drive, Room B303, Chardon, Ohio.

It is declared and determined that all formal actions of the Board of County Commissioners concerning and relating to the adoption of all resolutions that were adopted in this meeting, and that all deliberations of the Board of County Commissioners that resulted in such formal action, were open to the public and were in compliance with all legal requirements, including section 121.22 of the Ohio Revised Code.

The President of the Board, James W. Dvorak, opened the meeting at 9:00 a.m. by leading the Board and audience in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

The Board held a work session with the Building Department to discuss current fee schedules and proposed changes for residential permits, contractor registration, and commercial permits. Director Dan Spada and Assistant Building Official Michael Davet were present.

Mr. Spada explained that they were there to talk about increases in Building Department fees. To start off, he included the Building Department's proposed tax budget for the next year to show the department's position by line item. Mr. Spada said the last two years have had a very good revenue stream, but the department has also been very busy.

Recent projects have included the Geauga Park Apartments and the HC building out in Middlefield. He did not want to call them anomalies and hoped the trend would continue; however, the department has to guess how many people are going to build something the next year. Mr. Spada said that with that revenue stream coming from these larger projects, the department has always gone with a conservative estimate of a revenue stream of about $750,000.00 annually. Mr. Spada stated that they have been above that consistently for a little while, but as the department moves forward, he is looking forward to hopefully increasing its staff level. The department is dealing with just about 90,000 emails a year. Mr. Spada said they went from people dropping off paper forms to emailing the department, and now that has turned into staff exchanging emails with their plans examiners, and they are overwhelmed with emails. The department is looking at increasing its staff by another administrative assistant to help manage that workload. Adding that staff member and purchasing vehicles to stay in rotation puts the department close to going into the red, against its estimated revenue stream.

Mr. Spada explained that he started with the department in 2012. The first task he was given was to adjust its fees. The department has stayed consistent with a three-year rotation on that, which has given it a really good year, a medium year and then a really close year, and then staff adjust for that third year. Then COVID happened, then short staffing happened, so the department has been a little bit behind on adjusting its fees for the last couple of years.

Commissioner Brakey asked when the last time they increased fees was. Mr. Spada said fees were adjusted in 2019 and then in 2022. Mr. Spada explained that they don't just apply random percentages but rather base the fees on their direct costs.

Ms. Brakey asked to back up, noting that they were estimating revenue at $750,000.00, but when she looked at historical values, it looked like in 2023 they were at $800,000.00, but then in 2024 and 2025 they were over $1,000,000.00. She understood that it is hard to project the number of projects that are coming online and what that revenue could be but asked how often the department is close to that $750,000.00 or closer to that over-a-million number.

Mr. Spada noted that for one thing, the department has had staff issues, meaning it has been hard to maintain staff. So, the department has not been at its targeted expense. Mr. Spada noted that during budget hearings, there will be some explanations for that. Because they have been short on staff, meaning that they have not been utilizing their allotted salary fund, they have been able to take that salary fund and supplement funding for their contracted plans examiners instead of coming back to the Board and asking for additional funding. Mr. Spada mentioned increased fuel costs; they are moving funding around to cover expenses.

Mr. Spada explained that they started tracking new home starts, commercial starts, commercial occupancies, and total permits and inspections to monitor building activity and new business openings. He said that recent trends had been positive, but future activity remained difficult to predict.

Mr. Davet mentioned that on the revenue side, the HC building in Middlefield had a $350,000.00 building permit; it was the twenty-second largest building in the country. Mr. Davet mentioned that subtracting that permit and the permit for the Meijer that opened in Aurora, which he estimated at another $24-25,000.00, would bring revenue back down to $800,000.00. The $750,000.00 is a historical average for the department, but he considered those two projects to be huge anomalies. Ms. Brakey said this addressed her question about whether the department's annual revenue was typically around $750,000.00 and was expected to return to that level after two unusually strong years. She acknowledged the difficulty of projecting revenue. Mr. Spada added that the fees are getting adjusted every three years; the revenue stream is going to fluctuate because the fees aren't consistent across that whole process, so to him, it is more useful to look at the number of permits being pulled and the work being done, but the difficulty is that the permits are based on square footage. The department could have a thousand permits, and they are all small additions, or it could have a thousand permits that are monster buildings, and the revenue streams are going to be very different for both.

Ms. Brakey expressed that she just wanted to make sure they aren't completely underselling what the department's revenue would be and wanted to have that framework going into this discussion of raising its fees. Mr. Davet noted that the apartment complex was huge and that was in 2024; other large projects included the HC building, which was a giant box of square footage, and the Meijer store. He said they do not see another HC building coming but have had some big projects. Mr. Spada noted the Hartville Hardware project, and Mr. Davet added that supposedly there is a Meijer coming to Chardon. Mr. Spada stated that there is the whole property tax concern, and he feels that if people don't have to pay property tax, they will start building on their properties like crazy, because there won't be tax on what they are doing. That could be a positive for the department, but it is uncertain.

Mr. Spada stated that with the potential expense increases, he felt the department was nearing a deficit and they needed to readjust their fees. Historically, they have not gone through and just said they were doing five percent or ten percent. They truly try to look at each permit individually and see how it affects individuals. He discussed the mom and pops that move into the shopping strip plazas; the department does not want to burden them with monster permit fees, as compared to some of the big-box stores that come in.

The department adjusts rates so that projects under a certain square footage, essentially the strip plazas, receive a different rate than that for a monster building. Mr. Spada added that it also has to do with the area that the guys have to cover and how long it takes them, adding that it takes a lot longer to walk around a monster building than it does in a smaller place. Mr. Spada stated that they are in an industry where they want people to come to the department, so staff can look at their projects to make sure that they are structurally sound.

Mr. Spada stated they do not want to become police officers and just start chasing people. He wants people to have good experience with the department and know that staff are there for the good and not to cause issues. Regarding storm damage, the department has had a storm damage permit that ends up being sixty percent of the cost of a regular permit. He distinguished between Mother Nature forcing residents to come to the department and residents deciding that they want to spend money to do something. Mr. Spada stated that FirstEnergy's Illuminating Company (CEI) requires staff to go out and sticker a resident's meter to make sure that it's okay before CEI re-energizes it. It's CEI's requirement that is forcing residents to come to the department; staff will try to help them out. Mr. Spada stated that if it's an addition or a new build, applicants are spending that money, adding that the permits are one percent of the cost. Mr. Davet stated that zoning permits are $500.00, and applicants are coming to the department for a $189.00 building permit.

Mr. Spada explained that what Mr. Davet did was a breakdown of where the department was, residentially and commercially, with the number of permits, the average fees collected, the number of inspections that it takes staff on average to perform that type of permit, and what the total fees were collected for, and then, if the department adjusts its fees to what its proposal is, what that increase would be. He noted that these are estimates based on the amount of square footage of work that is being brought to the department. If the department adjusts these fees, it will receive an additional three hundred thousand dollars. With that, he thinks the department would be able to move forward with replacing its vehicles and looking into potential software. The department has gone from a paper industry to the digital industry within a four-year period, from ninety-nine percent paper to pretty much ninety percent digital. The New World software that the department utilizes through the county works, but there are some hiccups to it. He does not think it was created for the digital era, but modifications have been made. It is okay, but staff

talk to other building departments all the time; they see these other software programs that help them streamline their efficiency. Being mobile and being efficient have helped the department.

Mr. Spada said they are keeping up with the number of inspections they are doing and the number of permits that are coming in, but they are lagging on the administrative side of things.

Commissioner Spidalieri expressed that when he did an expansion, he paid Middlefield much higher fees than what he paid the building department, and it almost feels like they are burdening residents with more fees, more fees, and the building department is really doing all the work, so then it becomes a question of whether it is a revenue stream. Mr. Spada agreed, explaining that when he started with the county and was looking at increasing the fees, he wanted to look at the permit and the number of inspections staff do for a new home and basically cover the department's costs. He noted that it is not cheap; there are vehicles, computer equipment and scanners, printers and everything else, but the department is truly just trying to cover its costs.

Mr. Spada explained the actual proposal, including residential and commercial permits, and noted that one column shows the permits, adding that the State Board of Building Standards collects one percent for every residential and three percent for every commercial job. There was a brief discussion about that percentage providing code books, but now it's a digital subscription that is free; however, that requires a premium edition, at a cost of $99.00 a month.

Mr. Spada pointed out the current fees and the proposed new fees, and they try to round the amount to make it easier to walk in and pay the permit fee as a flat amount versus making change, so they adjusted the fees to round off that one percent and three percent. Mr. Davet went out and obtained some fee schedules from local communities and other building departments to make some comparisons. Mr. Spada explained that they have gone through and tried to adjust based on the number of inspections that they conduct for each one of these permits to cover their costs. These are based on square footage. Some building departments base fees on the cost of the project. A homeowner can have a bathroom that costs $300.00 to remodel or a bathroom that costs a million dollars to remodel, depending on what is put in it. He said that is not fair; it needs to be based on the square footage. Staff are doing the same inspection, whether it's a one-hundred-thousand- or five-hundred-thousand-dollar job. It's the number of steps staff have to take to do it, so the department has decided to stick with square footage.

Mr. Spada explained that they are looking at adding separate fee categories this year for above-ground pools and in-ground pool permits. They are finding that for in-ground pools, staff are returning to the job multiple times, like three times for an in-ground pool as opposed to an above-ground pool, where they are just there once. They wanted to separate that because it seems like the department has had an influx of in-ground pools going in. There are a couple of adjustments that they have made, including solar panels. Mr. Spada stated that solar panel installations have been and are likely to increase. The review part of the solar panels is more time-consuming than some other permits, and so they have separated the solar panels off of their general electric permit, which is what it is currently, because staff are spending more time doing that review; they want to try and adjust accordingly to where the efforts are going. Mr. Spada added that they want to try enticing people to come to the department, so that staff are not chasing them down.

The Board was provided with a comparison of permit fees charged by area jurisdictions. Ms. Brakey noted that fees varied widely, noting the difference in price in Moreland Hills versus Medina County on the same type of permit. Mr. Davet pointed out a fee and then a square footage fee, and Mr. Spada has tried to press that if applicants are adding a small deck or a small addition, the fee is minimal, but for larger homes or projects, the fees will increase, adding that he hoped that made sense. Mr. Spada pointed out the commercial fee comparison and the residential fee comparison, noting a 20,000-square-foot first-floor commercial job; it shows what that cost would be, and then a comparison of that same project everywhere else. Mr. Spada mentioned a call that he took from the superintendent from Geauga Hospitals and that he was going to do a 2,000-square-foot remodel at Ahuja and the permit fee was $70,000.00 and asked if it was a typo. Mr. Spada said that Beachwood paid their salaries and their department for like ten years when they built Ahuja; it was somewhere around a three-million-dollar permit. Mr. Spada said that he feels they are still average, adding that it is rare for a contractor to come to them and complain about fees; often they ask if it is right. Occasionally a homeowner who gets an addition and has never built anything before has a $400.00 permit fee and wants to know what it's for and why they are paying so much. Mr. Davet expressed that he tried to get as many fee schedules as possible from around northeast Ohio, but some were more accessible than others.

Mr. Davet described a phone conversation about the HC permit for that giant building in Middlefield. He did the permit, and it was the biggest one he had done. He was concerned about the caller's reaction to the fee. When he told the caller the amount, the caller asked if that was for everything. Mr. Davet said it included electrical and mechanical. The caller said he had just built one half this size in Garfield Heights, and it was $500,000.00 for the building permit. He was just making sure it was right.

Mr. Spada said that he listened to the discussion that the Board had with Water Resources, and the idea of trying to make a more gradual increase every year versus doing it every three years would be hard, partly because it is very cumbersome to make an increase in New World. Ms. Brakey stated that she prefers smaller, gradual annual increases rather than larger, abrupt increases over several years, while acknowledging that the Building Department differs from the Water Resources because Water Resources has recurring monthly customers, whereas building permits are generally tied to one-time project

Mr. Dvorak noted that materials increase every year. Mr. Dvorak's feeling is that they need to get the fees increased and then look at the idea of gradual increases going forward if the numbers work out. Mr. Spada mentioned the HVAC contractor or the electrician that mails in a check for a job and throwing a new fee at them every year could be a challenge and that the three-year curve handles the situation better. Mr. Spada mentioned helping seniors through a discount, but for them it would be a really hard thing to manage, since knowing it is a senior is hard, as most of them would be a permit through the contractor and knowing if they are truly doing it for a senior.

Mr. Dvorak inquired about remodel permits, using the example of gutting a house and remodeling it and if they are lower than for building new. Mr. Spada pointed out on the fee sheet that it says new dwelling, alterations and additions, and it shows a base fee for the new dwelling compared to alterations, and the price for alterations is smaller because, depending on the type of alteration, they would be performing fewer inspections, and they would not typically charge as much as they would for a new house. There was a brief discussion about the office being open during lunchtime hours and that adding a new staff member will ease the burden on the two office staff members that take turns for lunch to keep the office open.

Mr. Spada explained that if the Board felt comfortable, they would move forward with setting up the public hearings, as there is more of a process that is required to do fee increases, but they would like to try for July to get the fees implemented.

Mr. Dvorak asked about the square footage of the GrowScape building. Mr. Davet noted that they referred to it as the HC Building; it is a mammoth building and was 740,000 square feet, and is the size of about four super Walmart buildings.

Mr. Spidalieri thanked them for the professional help that they always give. He said there are compliments all the time and thanked their staff inside and out. He said that, compared to reports from other counties, they are definitely a breath of fresh air. Mr. Spada and Mr. Davet thanked him, and having worked in the field, it's nice to go out and have conversations and share the old tricks. Mr. Spada explained that they have been working on trying to update forms, add new forms and be able to provide the requirements to help individuals with working through a project that helps them with time management and fielding inspections.

MEETINGS

Tue.,	4/28	The Commissioners will hold session at 9:30 a.m.
Tue.,	5/5	The Commissioners will hold session at 9:30 a.m.
Tue.,	5/5	The Commissioners will hold 2027 Tax Budget Hearings 12:00 – 4:30 p.m., Room B303
Wed.,	5/6	Board of Revision, 12:00 p.m. Auditor's Appraisal Conference Room
Tue.,	5/12	Planning Commission, 7:30 a.m. County Office Building, Room A334, Chardon
Tue.,	5/12	The Commissioners will hold session at 9:30 a.m.
Tue.,	5/12	The Commissioners will hold 2027 Tax Budget Hearings 12:00 – 4:30 p.m., Room B303

Mon., 5/18 Family First Council, 1:30 p.m. County Office Building

Tue., 5/19 The Commissioners will hold session at 9:30 a.m.

Tue., 5/19 The Commissioners will hold 2027 Tax Budget Hearings 12:00 – 4:30 p.m., Room B303

Mon., 5/25 **The County Offices will be closed in honor of Memorial Day. Twenty-four Hour Operations will continue to operate as usual.**

Thu., 5/28 The Commissioners will hold session at 9:30 a.m.

Thu., 5/28 The Commissioners will hold 2027 Tax Budget Hearings 12:00 – 4:30 p.m., Room B303

BEING NO FURTHER BUSINESS TO COME BEFORE THE BOARD

Motion: by Commissioner Brakey, seconded by Commissioner Dvorak to adjourn the meeting at 9:41 a.m.

Geauga County Board of Commissioners

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James W. Dvorak

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Carolyn Brakey, Esq.

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Ralph Spidalieri

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Christine Blair, Commissioners' Clerk

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