

Ways & Means Committee Minutes

Honorable Council
City of Newark, Ohio
December 15, 2025

The Ways and Means Committee met in Council Chambers on December 15, 2025 with these members in attendance:

Beth Bline, Chair
Bradley Chute, Vice-Chair
Mark Labutis

We wish to report:

1. **Ordinance No. 25-48** An ordinance levying an additional income tax of one-half of one percent for the purpose of raising general operating revenue specifically dedicated to police and fire protection, on all salaries, wages, commissions and other compensation earned by the residents of the City of Newark; on all salaries, wages, commissions and other compensation earned by non-residents of the City of Newark for work done and services performed or rendered in the City of Newark; on the net profits earned on all businesses, professions, or other activities conducted by the residents of the City of Newark; on the net profits earned on all businesses, professions and other activities conducted in the City of Newark by non-residents and on the net profits earned by all corporations doing business in the City of Newark as the result of the work done or services performed in the City of Newark; requiring the filing of returns and furnishing of information by employers and all those subject to said tax; imposing on employers the duty of collecting the tax at the source and paying the same to the City of Newark; providing for the administration, collection and enforcement of said tax; declaring violations thereof to be a misdemeanor, and imposing penalties therefor, and declaring an emergency.

Tim Hickman, Safety Director – Thank you Madam Chair, that was a lot to say, and good evening. Yeah, so in short, this is a safety levy. It's one half of one percent, and all the money generated from this will go specifically to police and fire. The necessity of this, I think, was well documented in the conversations that were had in the Finance Committee, and comments from the Mayor, and comments from the Chairman of the Finance Committee, so I don't think I need to bore you with repeating a lot of those things. This money is desperately needed. The Police and Fire Department had to cut between 23 and 28 percent from their operating budget. There's only so much that you can cut from an operating budget, and then your next step is you got to start looking at your personnel. We've had a lot of forward momentum in our safety forces. We have top-notch people, we have top-notch equipment, we have top-notch training, and we need to keep that. So, the passage of this levy is vital to that. So, having said that, if there're any questions I can answer for the Committee, please.

Ms. Bline - First, why emergency?

Director Hickman - Because there's a filing deadline with the Board of Elections.

Ms. Bline - So you're filing an emergency to be sure that it's put on the ballot?

Director Hickman - In the May, yes, we'd like to get it on the May primary ballot.

Mr. Chute - What is the filing deadline?

Ms. Bline - February 4th.

Mayor Hall – That would be the partisan or any issues deadline.

Doug Marmie, 6th Ward Councilman - If you don't do the emergency, and even if you waive the two-day reading rule, then it sits for 30 days before it can be enacted, so that would not meet the deadline. If you have the emergency, as soon as it is passed, it goes into effect as soon as the mayor signs it.

Mayor Hall - It's 90 days before the election, so that's why.

Mr. Chute - Yeah, I thought the filing deadline was in February, I was just confused why we had to do it right now. So, thank you. I don't know if this is to you or to the mayor, but I'm curious, was there any thought to address an income tax that would, you know, sort of support the entire enterprise and not just safety forces? We have heard that the budget constraints are an enterprise-wide issue with the City of Newark, so I realize we tried that before, but I wondered, you know, if there was any discussion about that again, you know, in trying to make that case a little better, that we need this revenue across the entire city.

Director Hickman - Yeah, well, first of all, this is in response to feedback that we got from the voters. So, the concern that the voters had with the previous levy was the fact of the lack of specificity and where that money's going. We got some feedback that said, well, I would be in favor if the money was going to police and fire. If I knew that money was going there, I'd be more prone to vote for it than just putting it into the general fund. So, that's one of the reasons. Secondly, keep in mind that the money that's generated from this will not fund police and fire, okay? They will still need to be funded from the general fund. So, this will help relieve some stress off the general fund.

Mr. Chute - Well, and to that point, the specificity point, there's still not a great deal of specificity in this. I mean, we're not saying that if we fund this levy, then we're not going to shut down the firehouse, so we're not going to make sure, you know, the police department's at full uniform strength. I mean, we're saying, hey, this is going to help, but this isn't necessarily the cure-all, right?

Director Hickman - Well, I don't think I understand the question.

Mr. Chute - Just back to the point of why there wasn't more, why aren't we discussing, you know, addressing a more comprehensive solution? Because to your point, it sounds like this might not be the entire fix. This might help for a couple years, but is this going to fix the problem that we have enterprise wide?

Director Hickman - Well there's no guarantees. I mean I can't stand up here and make any promises about where exactly this money will be spent. I mean other than it will go to police and fire. I mean there're a lot of moving parts and pieces to that and we've had discussions with the chiefs, with the mayor, with the administration on some different ideas. So, there's a lot of planning that goes into this. So as things develop I think we'll be able to provide a clearer picture as to where it would go.

Mayor Hall - I can probably make a comment on that. Really, I'd say if we want a quarter percent, absolutely it's not a fix. I think the half percent plus the projected additional revenues because of population increases in housing, we look pretty optimistic about that moving forward. You know, really, it does. Again, as Director Hickman really said, levies that passed were more specific this last November. Police, fire, streets and roads and bridges, things that, it would seem like the voters are a little hesitant about general fund. That word general a little bit. And they're a little concerned about that. It isn't a complete rearrangement of funds in some ways, as much as it may seem. But, you know, we just have to, we need to pass it if we want to pave streets and keep things going on. This money doesn't go to pave streets, it goes to police and fire. But we may say, well, all the services across the city are equally important. I'm not sure there's anything more important than police and fire. And, you know, I'm not, there's several very important, that isn't saying anything. Because what is safety? Is it also paving streets so the cruisers and the transport units can get through and things like that? But

again, because the general fund is still going to have to bail out police and fire a little bit like it does the streets, because license plate permissive tax and gasoline excise tax isn't enough. License plate permissive tax, for instance, went up four times on the revenue. The percentage went from 5 to 20% at the same time costs of asphalt went up four times. So, it's looking at trying to let the voters feel more comfortable to vote positive for something that the city needs that will help everything. I mean, the real estate side, we're not going to go, we'd like to get this passed and you're not going to go back anytime soon to do another. And there's only certain areas we can raise revenue. I mean, income tax is a big one of those, obviously. But again, it's like I'm saying, we're trying to get the population a little up and get more residents living here and get more jobs. Newer apartments attract people that have a higher income, generally. There's a little higher rent. So, they're going to pay a little higher income tax at the end of the day. So, it's kind of a very complex coupled thing. A lot of them are 2.5%. We're looking at 2.25%. That's a little less. And rightfully so. I think it's good at that.

Mr. Chute - Thank you, Mr. Mayor.

Michael Houser, 1st Ward Councilman - I just have a quick question. So, would it be fair to say whether or not we keep the same language as the previous levy or maintain the language or reuse this language, the net effect on the budget is going to be essentially the same? Would that be fair to say?

Mayor Hall - Well, I don't know you could quite say that. I mean, really, to be honest with you, we have a half a percent going to police and fire now. They'll be guaranteed a 1%. Now, that's not enough to do the budget as needed, but I would say the future is uncertain in everything. So, it does put more heavy weight that we need to. I mean, this administration and council believes in what we believe in today, but I don't know if five or ten years from now, you know, does everybody cut way back on police and fire? I have no idea. But they're guaranteed at least that 1%. But we put focus there anyway. I don't know that it's a whole big shifting, to your point, I'd say, a little bit. But, you know, we need to have the voters understand and feel comfortable with what they're voting on.

Spencer Barker, 5th Ward Councilman - Thank you. And this is maybe a broader question for the two of you. Are we looking at a more simplified messaging? Because, if what Beth read goes on the ballot, nobody's going to understand it. That's part of some of the feedback I heard, is that they didn't understand the language. They were confused by it. So, is there a simplified language plan that we're considering?

Mayor Hall – Yes. It's like anything else. There will be some very firm, concise bullet points to explain to voters exactly what this is.

Ms. Bline - Yeah. Moving forward, this may be an opportunity to gain further trust and interaction with the public, saying we are specifically focusing on safety. This is where this money is going to. Now, as Council, this will give us the opportunity to focus on the other things that are very important to our voters as well.

Brandon Metzger, Fire Chief - Madam Chair, members of the committee, I appreciate the time to be able to speak to you this evening. On behalf of the largest division in the city, in terms of trying to be a student in the game, in terms of historically where we've been, being prepared and planning for today, but also looking for a strategic plan moving forward. I see no other way to ensure that we have sustainability in the services we provide without some additional revenue coming in to the safety forces specifically in the city. So, I appreciate all the concerns that have been brought up and discussed. I can't say that I don't have some of my own as well, but on behalf of the fire department and our firefighters, I trust in this. I'm simply here just to ask for your support to get this legislation out, to get it on the ballot to the voters. Thank you.

Mayor Hall - I think the City is moving in great direction and everybody seems to be on board with that. It costs money to do that. I would say to make it attractive, to attract more people and more

businesses and more employers, and not to grow exponentially, but just you have to grow a little bit. I surely do analysis of other cities across the state, whether I visit them or talk with everyone, and there're a number of cities that have declined in population for years. I'm not sure, that's a tough place to get into. I would tell you, it doesn't resolve too much of anything and work well. So, we work really hard to just have steady growth to solidify the city and keep it moving. Columbus has 900,000 people. Their income tax collections are \$900 million a year. We have 51,000 people. Ours is income tax collection about 30 million. So, it's not even proportionate, nearly. They're nearly two to one to us. But that's because that high gross paycheck from all those big corporations, and they have been two and a half percent for quite a few years. So, I want people to remember, the income tax in a municipal collection is earned income, not unearned income. Unearned income would be investments, interest, dividends, etc. Earned income, W-2 income, Schedule C income, some of the things. So, it is a more preferable tax to fixed income, retired people. Obviously, property taxes affect everyone that owns property, but income tax effects of those are actively working. To take that half a percent and translate that into dollars, which I think's a little easier to understand, for every \$25,000 worth of earned income, it's an extra \$10 a month. \$25,000 of their income, \$10 a month more. \$50,000, \$20 a month more. And just being honest, there's a lot of people that spend way more than that on coffee every month. It's why your Starbucks and River Road and everybody's rolling. But this is to put money back into your community that you love and live at, and to keep it healthy and strong. We've gained a little edge on paving streets, and you've seen when we balance the budget, but now we're going to rescind on that a little bit. Those are things that are going to suffer just a little bit. Our biggest cost, like any business, is wages. But you want professional people doing these jobs. When you want a medic to pull up and handle a situation that someone's having a health condition, I think you want somebody that has the amount of training we put into them and the professional job they do. When you have police respond to an active situation, you want the right professionals, and I'll tell you, we have that. And if you don't offer the proper wages, you won't get that. So, it does cost money to do things professionally in the right way, but this city is doing it, and we want to continue to do it that way.

Motion to send to full Council by Mr. Labutis, Second by Mr. Chute, Motion passed 3-0

2. **Resolution No. 25-83** A resolution providing for the submission to the electors of the City of Newark, Ohio, of the question "Shall the Ordinance providing for a one-half of one percent additional levy on income specifically dedicated to police and fire protection within the general revenue fund of the City be passed?" and declaring an emergency.

Mr. Marmie - I do have a question, and it's up to the committee, but can we include earned, the word earned in there? Earned income?

Tricia Moore, Law Director - Sure, I was just talking to Spencer. We can make it more specific, maybe perhaps easier to read. We can work on that language.

Ms. Bline - Yeah, thank you for saying that because that will help with our senior community. Thank you very, very much.

Motion to send to full Council by Mr. Labutis, Second by Mr. Chute, Motion passed 3-0

Meeting stands adjourned.

Beth Bline, Chair