

**NORTH RIDGEVILLE CITY COUNCIL  
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MEETING MINUTES  
CITY HALL COUNCIL CHAMBERS – 6:00 P.M.  
AUGUST 4, 2025**

**To Order:**

President Jason Jacobs called the Committee of the Whole meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

**Pledge of Allegiance:**

Led by President Jason Jacobs

**Roll Call:**

Members present: Councilman Martin DeVries, Councilwoman Holly Swenk, Councilman Eric Shaffer, Councilman Bruce Abens, Councilman Clifford Winkel, Councilwoman Georgia Awig, and President Jason Jacobs.

Also present: Mayor Kevin Corcoran, Director of Finance April Wilkerson, Planning & Development Director Kim Lieber, Outside Counsel from Squire Patton Boggs Russell Balthis, and Assistant Clerk of Council Fijabi Gallam.

**New Business:**

O 2025-104 An Ordinance designating the North Ridgeville Community Improvement Corporation as an agency of the City under Ohio Revised Code Section 1724.10; authorizing the execution of an Agreement and Plan for Industrial, Commercial, Distribution, Research, and Development.

(Introduced by Mayor Corcoran; First Reading on 07-07-2025)

President Jacobs remarked that at a recent council meeting, he referred 2025-104 to the Committee of the Whole for further discussion.

Planning and Development Director Kim Lieber and Russell Balthis presented a PowerPoint to City Council. The PowerPoint is attached to the minutes. The following were discussed:

**What is a CIC?**

- It was noted that Russ Balthis had previously addressed the City Council a few months prior, and this presentation served as a refresher. The purpose of the presentation was to discuss the North Ridgeville Community Improvement Corporation (CIC) and the legislation before the Council.
- Mr. Balthis explained that a CIC is a nonprofit corporation established under Ohio law to support economic, industrial, commercial, and civic development.
- CICs can be formed without City action, but the legislation before Council would designate a specific nonprofit as the City's CIC. Designating a CIC grants it additional powers, including the ability to receive property transfers from the City without competitive bidding.

- Once designated, the CIC becomes subject to Ohio's Sunshine Laws, unlike a typical nonprofit. However, private financial information submitted for economic development purposes receives protection from the Sunshine Laws.
- CICs are subject to open meetings and public records laws, meaning their minutes are recorded and documents are publicly accessible.
- It was emphasized that CICs are common in Ohio, with neighboring cities such as Strongsville, Beachwood, Avon Lake, North Olmsted, and Cuyahoga Falls utilizing them. It was noted that North Canton's CIC webpage was well-designed.
- Mr. Balthis shared that he had served on the CIC board in Cuyahoga Falls during his tenure as law director.

### **North Ridgeville CIC**

- During the 2025 budget hearings, Council received a detailed presentation from Mr. Balthis regarding Community Improvement Corporations. Funding to initiate the formation of a CIC was included in the 2025 budget.
- Articles of incorporation for the CIC were filed shortly after the beginning of the year, and the City received confirmation of its official status in March.
- The CIC held its first kickoff meeting in May.
- A majority of the CIC board members were City officials, an intentional decision to ensure alignment with the City's goals.
- The bylaws allowed for a board composition of five to nine members, with a minimum of five required to be City officials.
- The City chose to exceed the minimum requirement to ensure strong representation.
- Board members serve the CIC without pay; therefore, no City official received extra compensation for their participation in the CIC.

### **Why Designate a CIC?**

- Mr. Balthis elaborated on the benefits of designating a CIC.
- CICs were described as adaptable entities that respond to the specific needs of the cities they serve.
- One common use of CICs was to facilitate quicker acquisition of property, allowing cities to act more quickly than traditional government processes typically allow.
- Cities could fund CICs to enable them to make timely offers on available properties.
- CICs were also useful in grant applications, where collaboration between multiple entities could result in higher scores. Cities often applied for grants alongside their CICs to demonstrate cooperation and community involvement.
- The historical context of CICs was shared, noting their origin in the 1960s as a response to economic shifts and the need for cities to engage in economic development.
- CICs were created as a partnership model to bring together business and city leaders in a public, transparent, and efficient manner.
- The creation and designation of the CIC aligned with the goals outlined in the City's master plan. The master plan's economy chapter emphasized the need to proactively preserve or acquire land for use and support small businesses.
- The CIC was identified as a tool that supports these objectives by expanding the City's economic development capabilities.

### **Role of Council & Oversight**

- It was reiterated that while the CIC could act more quickly than traditional city processes, its authority was not unlimited.
- Mr. Balthis explained that the CIC, as a separate legal entity, did not have automatic access to city funds; any funding required approval through the City's normal appropriation process.
- The adoption of an economic development plan was required by law to enable property transfers without competitive bidding.
- Historically, such plans were also required when cities issued bonds under Chapter 165, though that requirement had since changed.
- The plan served as a general statement of intent to collaborate in creating economic opportunities within the community.
- Council retained oversight authority and could request reports and updates from the CIC.
- The CIC could pursue external funding sources such as grants, but any City funds had to be appropriated through standard procedures.
- CICs were subject to audits by the Ohio Auditor, similar to municipalities.
- Sunshine Laws and public records laws applied to CICs in the same manner as they did to the City.

### **Key Powers of the CIC**

- CICs could enter executive sessions for purposes such as property acquisition, consistent with open meetings laws.
- Key powers of the CIC included acquisition and disposition of property and administration of business support programs such as grants and loans.
- Mr. Balthis shared an example from Cuyahoga Falls, where the City provided a \$1 million grant to its CIC to support small business loans for equipment purchases and job creation.
- The CIC also offered gap financing to help businesses close funding shortfalls in investment projects.
- Examples included office space renovations and support for a small law firm relocating to the city.
- CICs were preferred for such programs due to their ability to protect sensitive financial information, which would otherwise be available to the public if handled directly by the City.
- The CIC structure allowed for review of tax returns and bank statements without making them a public record.
- CICs were also capable of managing more complicated deals, like holding property depending on strategic or operational needs.
- In certain deals, realtors, bankers, and other professionals were involved to provide insight and advice to the City.
- CICs were identified as eligible entities for funding opportunities that municipalities could not access, including private and philanthropic investments.
- A Healthy Places grant was cited as an example where the city was required to partner with another entity to apply.
- Foundations such as the Cleveland Foundation often offered grants to nonprofit or economic development entities rather than directly to governments.
- The City and the CIC were expected to open additional funding opportunities beneficial to North Ridgeville.

- CICs in other communities have been used to promote community engagement through events and neighborhood improvement projects. Examples included concert series, the downtown Dora district, and activities designed to attract visitors and stimulate economic development.
- The CIC provided a mechanism for local businesses to donate funds to support community events. The CIC could manage infrastructure and logistics for events using donated funds, with optional support from the City.

### **Economic Development Benefits**

- An ordinance and an agreement with the CIC are needed for the benefits.
- The CIC enables the City to act quickly in property acquisitions, reduces bureaucratic delays, enhances responsiveness in business negotiations, and maintains confidentiality to protect business privacy.
- The CIC was seen as a valuable tool to help North Ridgeville compete more effectively with neighboring cities for projects and grants.

### **Questions from City Council**

President Jacobs inquired about including community members on the CIC, such as representatives from Council or the Planning Commission.

Director Lieber explained that the initial board was composed solely of City officials to establish the CIC's designation and approval. Plans included inviting community members with relevant expertise in banking, real estate, or development to join the board.

Director Lieber agreed with President Jacob's understanding that these community members would serve as general members, not necessarily as elected officials.

President Jacobs asked for examples of grants the CIC could apply for directly.

Mr. Balthis noted CICs could apply for grants from private foundations like the Cleveland Foundation and the Gunn Foundation, which usually don't fund municipalities directly. The Main Street program was a funding source for downtown projects like planters, benches, and public space improvements. CICs were often more successful than cities in securing grants because of their nonprofit status. Some government grants awarded extra points for joint applications by multiple entities.

Councilwoman Awig asked about potential downsides to forming a CIC.

Mr. Balthis explained that property held by a CIC for extended periods could be subject to real property taxation, unlike property held by the City. Communities using CICs for quick property acquisitions need to evaluate whether to retain ownership within the CIC or transfer it to the city to avoid taxation. Another minor drawback was the administrative burden, including the requirement for an annual audit by the State Auditor. These were considered manageable and outweighed by the benefits.

Councilman DeVries wanted to know more about the land acquisition and who would lead the decision-making.

Mr. Balthis clarified that the CIC operates like any nonprofit, with decisions made by its board, which could designate individuals or hire professionals such as realtors.

Councilman DeVries wanted to know if CIC meetings were public and if minutes were recorded and available as public records.

Mr. Balthis remarked that CIC determines when the meetings are held by the board, with a legal requirement to meet at least once annually; bylaws could require more frequent meetings.

Councilwoman Swenk asked about the process for appointing additional board members.

Director Lieber explained that future appointments would be made by the CIC board, not by Council, and would target individuals with relevant expertise in banking, real estate, or development. Removal of board members would follow procedures outlined in the CIC's bylaws. A copy of the CIC bylaws would be provided to City Council.

Councilwoman Swenk asked about who crafted the agreement with the CIC.

Mr. Balthis confirmed that Squire Patton Boggs prepared the agreement, which followed standard legal requirements for CICs. Some language seemed unusual as it closely followed Ohio Revised Code requirements. The agreement was important because the City could not transfer property to the CIC without competitive bidding, a process most CICs adopt for flexibility. Any transfer still requires Council approval, but the agreement allows bypassing public bidding requirements when transferring real property to the CIC.

Councilman DeVries raised concerns regarding the CIC's ability to sell property.

Mr. Balthis clarified that the CIC could do so with approval from its board.

Councilman Shaffer expressed concerns about language in the agreement regarding property tax valuation, maintenance, and increases. He wanted to know if this process supplements the Auditor's ability to complete this task.

Mr. Balthis stated that this language was historical, dating back to the 1960s, and did not grant the CIC any authority over property taxation or valuation. The CIC could not raise taxes or change property values; those functions remained solely with the Auditor.

Councilman Shaffer inquired about the phrase "insuring mortgage payments".

Mr. Balthis noted that the CIC could offer to insure mortgage payments if it had enough funds, whether through Council appropriations, grants, or private donations. Some CICs generated revenue through community events, such as renting space to food trucks, or through interest earned on revolving loan funds.

Councilman Shaffer raised concerns about the City's financial condition and the potential cost of forming a CIC.

Mr. Balthis clarified that forming a CIC did not carry an ongoing financial obligation, and the City was not required to fund it unless it chose to do so.

Councilman Shaffer reminded everyone that Director Lieber had already allocated City funding for the CIC.

Director Lieber noted that the funds that have been used so far were services from Squire Patton Boggs to assist the City in formulating the CIC.

Councilman Shaffer expressed that the CIC concept seemed speculative. He inquired about the failure of a CIC in Stark County.

Mr. Balthis explained that he does not know the reasons, but the community often used its port authority for similar purposes.

Councilman Winkel understood that the CIC was already formed with its bylaws and regulations. Additionally, initial board members such as the Mayor, Law Director, Finance Director, and Planning and Development Director were chosen during the formation process. These positions were linked to the office, meaning future holders of these roles would serve on the board. He clarified that the CIC could request funds from the Council, but it was not dependent on City funding; it could also seek its own funds. Mr. Winkel wanted to know if changes to the agreement with the CIC could be requested by either the CIC, the City's legislative body, or the administration.

Mr. Balthis agreed with Mr. Winkel's understanding and explained that any amendments to the agreement would require the Council's approval.

Mr. Winkel raised concerns about the CIC's authority to sell property. He added that without sufficient funding, the CIC could not act quickly, as it would still require Council appropriation to purchase property.

Mr. Balthis explained that the CIC owned the property it acquired until it chose to transfer it to the City or sell it independently. The CIC's board handles all property decisions. The advantage of quick property acquisition is that the CIC can act faster than the standard legislative process. It was explained that cities often allocated funds to CICs with specific contractual arrangements, ensuring the funds were used for designated purposes such as property acquisition. This setup enabled the CIC to respond quickly to opportunities while maintaining fiscal oversight.

Mr. Winkel commented about the lack of legislative oversight, noting that the CIC was formed outside of Council, its members were chosen outside of Council, and Council had no direct role in property decisions. He said that there is no legislative check from the City Council.

Mr. Balthis provided a story about a community where Council withheld funding from a CIC for a decade after a disagreement, illustrating Council's power as a financial check. He noted that the Council could impose restrictions on appropriated funds, and the CIC could choose to accept or reject those terms.

Councilwoman Swenk wanted to know if an appropriation amendment would be needed to give the CIC funding or legislation. In addition, she wanted to know if there had been any discussions about funding.

Director Wilkerson noted that the appropriation amendment is legislation that will undergo the funding request process. She mentioned that no discussions have taken place yet about including

CIC funding in the upcoming budget. Additionally, there has been no discussion about financing among board members.

President Jacobs asked about the formation of the board and referenced Avon Lake's CIC, which included elected officials and community appointees. He wanted to know why the City of North Ridgeville's CIC was set up differently.

Director Lieber explained that each CIC was structured differently, and in North Ridgeville, the board was composed of administrative officials involved in implementing the master plan and City policy.

Mr. Balthis explained that CIC board structures varied by community and purpose, with North Ridgeville's board composed of administrative officials to align with master plan execution. Many CICs could include administrative officials and community leaders, such as bankers and realtors, depending on the CIC's focus (loans, events, property acquisition). Administrative-heavy boards were common due to the convenience of daytime meetings and the presence of officials at City Hall.

Councilwoman Swenk agreed with President Jacobs and suggested that Council should have a representative on the CIC board, similar to standing committees like Safety or Finance. She believed that the Council should have one appointed board member.

Councilman DeVries raised a question about financial oversight and how it will be tracked and monitored to identify potential liabilities.

Mr. Balthis clarified that once funds were transferred to the CIC, the CIC was responsible for tracking and managing them. In many cities, the CIC treasurer handled financial reporting, sometimes in coordination with the City's finance director. CICs designated by municipalities were audited by the Ohio Auditor of State, not by private auditors. There was no statutory requirement for how often the CIC must report to the City's finance director; most CICs provided financial reports at board meetings.

Councilman DeVries wanted to know what happens if there is a legal liability in the event of a failed deal.

Mr. Balthis remarked that the CIC board would retain legal counsel and handle any litigation independently. This structure allowed the CIC to engage in complex deals while shielding the City from direct legal exposure.

Councilman Abens wanted to know how legal counsel for the CIC would be paid, given that the CIC did not have a formal budget.

Mr. Balthis explained that the City could choose to provide funding to the CIC for legal defense, or the CIC might not have funds available, which could deter litigation. It was noted that CICs are sometimes used as single-purpose entities with limited assets, reducing the likelihood of successful lawsuits.

Councilman Abens expressed concern that lawsuits might still include the City, even if the CIC was the primary entity involved.

Mr. Balthis acknowledged that people often sue everyone, but properly drafted documents should clarify that the City holds no liability, allowing for quick dismissal from litigation.

Councilman Shaffer questioned how the City could justify purchasing real estate while facing financial challenges.

Mayor Corcoran clarified that income tax revenue was split between operations (85%) and capital improvement projects (15%), and land purchases were funded through the capital improvement portion. Operational financial difficulties were separate from capital expenditure, and the two funds did not mix.

President Jacobs opened for public comment regarding the CIC.

Barbara Sponseller, at 36446 Appian Way, addressed the Council with three questions:

1. Whether the CIC would be held accountable for results and evaluated against annual objectives.
2. Concerns about unbalanced influence on the board, noting that only the Mayor was elected, and suggesting inclusion of council members and citizens for more perspectives.
3. How the CIC could be dissolved if it failed to meet its objectives.

Mr. Balthis explained that the CIC, as an Ohio nonprofit corporation, could be dissolved by a vote of its board. Additionally, Council could revoke the CIC's designation as the City's economic development entity through legislative action. It was clarified that dissolving the CIC would involve two steps: the CIC board would vote to dissolve the nonprofit corporation, and the Council could revoke its designation as the City's economic development entity at any time. City Council controlled its designation for economic development purposes.

Director Lieber said the CIC aimed to acquire property aligned with the City's master plan when available. Success would mean acquiring targeted area property at the right time, supporting City goals. Objectives included seeking grants and loans, requiring time and staffing, and enhancing economic development. The CIC also acts as a vehicle for funding sources unavailable to the City. Success metrics include securing new funding for City projects. Director Lieber envisioned the CIC as a tactical group that is an administrative team focused on executing economic development initiatives, not as a political group.

Ms. Sponseller is concerned about removing the competitive bidding process and the potential for undue influence without elected officials on the board.

Mr. Balthis clarified that Council retained authority over property transfers and would need to approve any sale of City-owned property to the CIC. The waiver of competitive bidding applied only to property transfers approved by Council, allowing flexibility in choosing the CIC as the buyer.

Patricia Bork, at 8717 Mosswood Circle, asked how the CIC concept originated and whether the City initiated its formation.

Director Lieber explained that the CIC was recommended by the Director of Economic Development as a strategic tool used by other municipalities, such as Strongsville, to enhance economic development. The CIC was seen as a way to expand the City's capabilities, access new funding opportunities, and support the goals outlined in the master plan. The presentation to

Council was made during the budget cycle to inform Council of the intent to move forward with the CIC, based on feedback received at that time.

Ms. Bork asked whether the law firm involved was exclusively focused on CICs and whether the law firm's expenses were under the CIC expenses.

Mr. Balthis clarified that the firm represented public entities in various public finance matters, including economic development and bond issuances.

Director Lieber noted that the City had budgeted for outside legal services to assist with the initial formation and designation of the CIC, but no long-term legal expenses were planned. She noted that the City's Law Director served as a member of the CIC board.

Ms. Bork raised a question about how property acquisition opportunities are identified.

Director Lieber explained that, as the Director of Planning and Development, who also served on the CIC, she monitored opportunities consistent with City goals and master plan priorities. The City officials serving on the CIC board were described as wearing "two hats," enabling them to act both administratively and strategically.

Ms. Bork asked whether the Council had any authority over how acquired property would be used.

Director Lieber clarified that all property use decisions would still go through the normal Planning Commission and Council review processes. Any development or use of property would require full vetting and, if City funds were involved, formal appropriation.

Bob Meeker, resident owner at 32415 Center Ridge Road, expressed concerns about the direction of the City's development strategy and the composition of the CIC board. Mr. Meeker stated that property owners along Center Ridge Road felt overlooked in favor of development focused on the City Center. He voiced frustration that property owners had not been contacted regarding potential development opportunities and warned that without balanced board representation, property owners could be negatively impacted. Mr. Meeker shared that his property had been for sale for a year without any interest, expressing frustration that its distance from the city center made it undesirable. He noted that nearby areas such as Westlake, North Olmsted, and Mills Creek had greater development potential.

Councilman Winkel noted that additional questions and discussion were needed on Ordinance Number 2025-104.

Moved by Winkel and seconded by DeVries to table Ordinance Number 2025-104 to a future Committee of the Whole meeting for additional discussion.

A voice call vote was taken, and the motion was carried.

Yes – 7

No – 0

**Adjournment:**

Chairman Jacobs adjourned the meeting at 6:57 p.m.

Approved on August 18, 2025.



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Jason R. Jacobs  
PRESIDENT OF COUNCIL



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Nicholas Ciofani  
CLERK OF COUNCIL



# North Ridgeville Community Improvement Corporation

## What is a CIC?

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- Nonprofit established under Ohio Revised Code 1724
- Promotes economic, industrial, commercial and civic development
- Common in Ohio cities to advance economic development goals

## North Ridgeville CIC

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- Presentation to Council in November 2024
  - Articles of Incorporation approved in March 2025
  - Majority of board members are city officials, ensuring alignment with policy goals
  - Board members serve without compensation
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## Why Designate a CIC

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- Unlocks tools city cannot use directly
    - Acquire and prepare land for development
    - Administer incentive programs (loans, job grants)
    - Partner quickly with developers/businesses
  - Allows more nimble, proactive responses to economic opportunities
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## Role of Council & Oversight

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- Council:
  - Approves initial plan and agreement
  - Controls annual funding and can set limits
  - Receives regular reporting
- CICs are subject to audit, as well as the Sunshine Law and Public Records Laws

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## Key Powers of the CIC

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- Acquire, hold and market land
  - Administer business support programs funded by city or outside grants
  - Act as the city's development partner for complex deals
  - Leverage private or philanthropic investment alongside public dollars
  - Promote community engagement through promoting local events and supporting neighborhood improvement projects
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## Economic Development Benefits

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- Moves us from reactive to proactive
  - Increases speed and flexibility in business negotiations
  - Supports job creation, tax base growth and strategic land reuse
  - Better positioned to compete with neighboring cities
- 