

**Village of Gates Mills**  
**MINUTES OF A SPECIAL MEETING OF COUNCIL**  
**February 10, 2025**

A special meeting of the Council of the Village of Gates Mills, Ohio was held at the Village Town Hall Council Chambers on Monday, February 10, 2025 at 5:45 p.m. with Mayor Siemborski presiding. The meeting was livestreamed to the internet.

1. Roll Call starts at 14:09

Councilmembers present: Atton, Broome, Deacon (via Zoom), Press, Steinbrink, Turner.

Other Village officials present were Clerk DeCapite.

Councilmember Turner moved to excuse Councilmember Welsh. Councilmember Press seconded the motion. NOTE: Councilmember Welsh successfully connected to the meeting via Zoom at 6:05 p.m. after over thirty minutes of failed attempts.

Ayes: Atton, Broome, Press, Turner.

Nays: Steinbrink

Motion carried.

Mayor Siemborski stated the purpose of our meeting is to look at our accomplishments in 2024, our priorities in 2025, and discuss some areas where we could work better as a team between Administration and Council and collaborate better with Village organizations and neighboring communities. Oftentimes our regularly scheduled Council meetings are consumed by the business of the day, and we don't have time to talk about the strategic issues and the larger priorities.

At 17:43 Councilmember Turner made introductory remarks. This special council meeting is different than a regular council meeting because the focus is on us - what we accomplished last year, and how we went about achieving our mission. How do we bring about the best in each other and recognize one another's contributions? We are here to take the time to reflect, to create some new connections among us, and to have a better understanding - which can generate some excitement, enthusiasm, and energy.

2. Ice Breakers starts at 20:47

Councilmember Turner asked Council and the Mayor to write answers to:

- What one word or phrase best describes you?
- What are you most passionate about?
- What has been your most fun experience ever?
- What is your least favorite chore?

Answers were discussed in pairs - Siemborski/Broome, Steinbrink/Atton, and Press/Turner. Deacon and Welsh each did this in advance with Councilmember Turner.

At 31:51 Councilmember Welsh connected to the meeting via Zoom. He had been trying to do so for over thirty minutes.

At 34:24 Councilmember Turner asked the pairs to let their partner know what they learned and didn't know before.

At 35:53 Councilmember Turner referred to the Worksheet for Collaboration, Question 1 - Think of a specific time when you were most effective in a Council meeting. What made it so? How did you know?

Atton - The 2024 meeting agendas were boring and he can't recall one excellent discussion of a topic. It's in between meetings when we spend more time together in small groups and kick things around that's important.

Press - agrees - there's a reluctance on Council to engage in debate on issues.

At 38:13 Councilmember Turner moved to Question 2 from the Worksheet for Collaboration - Give an example of a Council meeting last year when members were engaged, open-minded, communicative, and productive.

Turner - She supported a bike path down Gates Mills Blvd and it was defeated by Council. She was effective by presenting the measure, accepting the outcome, and moving on with no ill will.

Deacon - We worked together well on the zoning appeal. Some things we can't talk about because we were in executive session.

Press - Our executive session discussions are the best discussions we have. People seem more willing to engage.

Broome - He also chose the 640 zoning appeal as an example of all Council contributing. When in executive session, Council is grilling the Law Director with their ideas and trying to get his input. We start asking questions and that helps get us talking.

Turner - We get engaged by asking questions. In a council meeting, we don't ask questions of one another - we are making statements about our opinions.

Councilmember Turner suggested there is merit to questioning one another or asking to understand a little bit better where you're coming from as a way to generate conversation in a regular council meeting.

At 48:09 Councilmember Turner moved to Question 3 from the Worksheet for Collaboration - What would you like from Councilmembers to help you be your best?

Turner - I am aware that sometimes I'm not very clear in what I say. If somebody were to say to me "please clarify" or "did you mean", that helps me to clarify what it is that I said. Dead silence is uncomfortable and prompts me to be a little more withdrawn.

Siemborski - Put out a compliment to Mr. Atton that he has been clearer over the last two months indicating which questions are important for decision making and which questions

are for curiosity's sake. That helps the Mayor and the front office sort out what is relevant and should be addressed first.

Atton - We all have different styles, backgrounds, and training. When asked by Councilmember Turner what do you need from us, he replied when I ask a question, I'd like you to say that's a good question or that's a crap question. If you told me it's a crappy question or irrelevant, I'd say can we just talk about that for a moment.

Deacon - She finds that answer judgmental. How you ask the question is as important as the content of the question.

Turner - It's interesting to hear Councilmember Atton acknowledge that the question is important, good or crappy, but how it is posed, with what words, with what tone of voice really doesn't matter.

Atton - The question isn't important. The answer is important.

Press - He likes the way the Mayor goes around the room and asks each individual what do you think. That tends to get people talking.

Steinbrink - While everyone's background is important, what shapes the questions and attitudes more is why people ran for the seat were sitting in now. I ran because I love the village and don't want it to change. Some people are more direct than others. Other people would not be comfortable having such a direct conversation in a public forum with the camera rolling. I feel like government should be boring; the pace of change should be glacial; things should be very well thought out; residents should not be surprised; people expect the government to operate very methodically. I was brand new on P & Z when residents filled the building during 781. If the residents aren't happy with something, they will let you know.

Atton - Word got out. That's why we're supposed to be transparent. That idea took people by surprise and they stopped it before it happened.

Press - I'm like David. I'm here today because of 781 to a large extent. That project was much further down the road than anyone thought and there was no communication to the village at all.

Broome - What they came to P & Z with was not a formal plan at all in any way. They were trying to get an advisory opinion out of us. Not only did we say we don't give advisory opinions, but I could not have been more emphatic to those guys that there's zero chance. It was a dead issue that was going nowhere. While trying to learn why we do this and why we do that for the last year, like David, I find that sometimes all the routine things we do seem rather boring. We have to realize that the operations of the village - safety forces and service dept and everything - run pretty well, and every year that they run and the roads get fixed and the emergency repairs get made, those are accomplishments nevertheless by the Council and the Mayor for making sure that all that happens and that the village operates within budget. What else are we doing here? The most important thing is what do we do to provide for the general welfare of the village, and the answer to that at times may be we don't do anything except keep it going the way it's going right now.

Conversation turned to the zoning charter amendment motion, and Councilmember Turner asked to table it and to agree this is a big issue for everybody around Council. We need to get this resolved; it won't be tonight. What she also is going to take away is that a good council meeting is when we do the small stuff. That's important; even if it's boring, we are doing our job; keep the train running on time. Councilmember Atton stated in corporate life there is an assumption the day-to-day operations are going well - you keep an eye on them, but you don't talk endlessly about them. You talk about the things that

will change the future; not sustain the present. Councilmember Press said the amount of air time that changing the future gets is very small compared to running the train. There are four items that came out of the Comprehensive Plan that we haven't even talked about at Council. Mayor Siemborski advised they are now on the 2025 priorities listing.

At 1:15:47 Councilmember Turner moved to Question 4 from the Worksheet for Collaboration - What does the Mayor do exceptionally well at Council meetings that you would like to see more often? One piece of feedback received - the Mayor asks each Councilmember if they have more to add before calling for a vote.

Turner - Crisp, concise language in his remarks. Can answer questions clearly. Works toward consensus.

Atton - I do get the feeling you have your personal priorities about what we talk about, and they seem to be unchangeable. You're a very determined man. You're a leader. I think Council needs to be inputting to that process, so you might actually change your mind at some point.

At 1:18:22 Mayor Siemborski presented the 2025 Priority Listing he created for the purpose of getting Council input today and going forward. If there are things that aren't on here that you think are priorities, great, please advise. You all helped me put these three priorities together (Safety, Environmental Stewardship, Community Engagement), so I don't see these necessarily my priorities as much as they are priorities for the village that in my role I will then move forward and administer these the best we can with Council's sign off on things at the appropriate time. The other stuff at the bottom is other important things that may not be strategically critical but it's got to get figured out, so it's going to be on the list this year for someone to take care of.

At 1:21:30 Councilmember Press discussed two items to be added to the priorities list - 1) some of the housing in Gates Mills is viewed as dilapidated and we could create a tax abatement program to encourage people to invest in their homes, and 2) Mayfield Schools is one of the negatives for Gates Mills in the external perception of the village versus other communities. Is it a real problem or a perception problem?

At 1:24:43 Councilmember Welsh commented that it's a wonderful pleasure working with you people. My biggest thing in the village is communication. Gates Mills is a place all of us love the same and don't change anything. I can't thank you enough for all the support you've given me.

At 1:26:28 Councilmember Broome commented about his reluctance to use the term master or comprehensive plan. It lent the residents to start thinking that Council was cooking up some big changes, and we're going to transform the place. Maybe contingency plan is the better term - what happens if one of the uses that's currently being put to the buildings in the village changes? Do we not have any idea about what we ought to do? What are the boundaries of what are possible, and how would we get there if these changes were to happen? The school property is owned by the school; they could do with it as they please. Councilmember Press thinks we're more at risk on the livery tavern and the post office.

### 3. Review of 2024 starts at 1:29:43

Councilmember Turner suggested each person give one accomplishment for 2024 rather than three, as time is running out.

Broome - Coming in under budget. The Encore program.

Press - Tree canopy.

Steinbrink- Efficient government surplus.

Deacon - Coming to grips with the Comprehensive Plan and moving forward with tactical plans. How we are going to prioritize all the priorities is a concern. We can't do everything.

Welsh - We own it all now, so we can do what we want. We can say no.

Turner - Weekend staffing at the fire station and the cadet program.

### 4. Summary and Next Steps starts at 1:34:32

Councilmember Turner summarized there were a couple things discussed which we can pick up at another Council meeting. Her hope for tonight was to discuss and learn who we are, why we're here, what we're about, what our styles are, so that we might be more open and show more curiosity and context as we move forward this year. Perhaps we can do these meetings 2-3 times a year. Some communities have meetings of the whole where they get together, talk about topics, and they don't vote. It's a way to understand people's perspectives before you get into a voting meeting. Thank you everyone.

At 1:36:37 Mayor Siemborski suggested by next Tuesday, Councilmembers make revisions to the wording of the draft two question survey on the three elements of zoning change created by Councilmember Press and the Mayor that will be delivered to each Councilmember electronically tomorrow, or say it's not necessary, or tell us you love it. It will be on the agenda next Tuesday.

### 5. Priorities for 2025 starts at 1:37.30

Time being short, the Mayor asked if there were any items on the 2025 Priority Listing to be talked about briefly.

Broome - Salt bin. That's the first he's heard of it. The Mayor replied the roof is caving in. It's going to be a \$400,000 type expenditure. We've put in the budget for this year about \$35,000 - \$50,000 for design and engineering costs. Several communities have received grants for this.

Steinbrink - The top three priorities are all consistent with what we've talked about before. No surprises.

The Mayor expounded on item 3 under Other Important Items, "evaluate repairs needed for the railroad walking bridge". The bridge is 110 years old. The last report done in 2009 concluded that while the bridge was in good shape, here are things that need to get fixed. Nothing has been done. We paid a few thousand dollars to have the report updated including an estimate of cost to repair. It will be a six to seven figure number. Councilmember Welsh suggested private donations. The Mayor stated the Historical

Society applied for state money several years ago. They were not successful. We are going to start that process again with a little more rigor.

Regarding item 5 under Other Important Items, “consider a master plan for the Village Center”, maybe we call that “contingency plan” as suggested by Councilmember Broome. The Mayor said we have a lot of stuff going on, how does it all fit together, and what if something unforeseen did happen.

Mayor Siemborski suggested not having Council Matters as a standard agenda item, but instead have a protocol whereby if you want something on the council meeting agenda, you notify him two weeks in advance. That way there is time to talk about if it’s Council level material, or is it something that can be answered, and if it is, what material do you need. Then we won’t have surprises that we are not prepared for at the end of the meetings. All Councilmembers were canvassed and agreed.

## 6. Adjourn

There being no further business, it was moved by Councilmember Broome, seconded by Councilmember Steinbrink, and unanimously carried, that the special council meeting be adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,



Beth DeCapite, Clerk

Approved:



Steven L. Siemborski, Mayor