

Dear Community Members,

As many of you know, we are currently discussing the introduction of paid parking in our village, and I understand that this change is causing concern. Parking has always been a simple, free part of life here, and adjusting to something new can be challenging. But before we make up our minds, I'd like to share why this decision goes beyond parking, and why it's a necessary step for the future of our village.

The proposed parking fees are not a random inconvenience. They are a vital way to generate the revenue needed to maintain the services that keep us safe, our streets well-maintained, and our village strong. Without additional funding, we face hard choices that could affect the stability of our police, fire and EMS departments. No one wants to see our community without the protection and services we depend on every day, especially in the current political climate.

Furthermore, this is not a parking issue. It's about making sure we can continue to afford the services that protect our homes, our families, and our quality of life. As we move forward, we must consider the bigger picture: securing the future of our village and maintaining the public safety services that we all depend on.

Let's continue to work together, as we always have, to find solutions that ensure a safe and thriving village for everyone. Thank you for considering all sides of this issue with an open mind.

Mayor Anne Haynam

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Is the budget really this tight?

Municipal finance is not like most of us associate with home finance where funds can be moved from one line item to another easily. Funds are restricted to certain uses based on how they are received. Our general fund, which supports safety services, is under significant financial stress. Last October Village Council passed legislation for pay-to-park on Village streets as a measure to address the general fund. At the time, I was one of the citizen voices speaking out against the decision. Since becoming mayor and learning the fiscal situation, I understand the picture more fully. We delayed the implementation efforts as we worked through a fiscal efficiency assessment. This year we've made difficult decisions such as folding in the zoning inspector position to the village administrator and most recently eliminating a full-time administrator position that was with us for eight years. We've simply done all that we can at this point and manage to be headed toward having a year-end carry-over of 3 months of expenses (the state recommends 3-4 months carry-over). We've stabilized yet don't have a path toward meeting the needs of our safety services, thus necessitating an "all of the above" strategy.

What are the pressing needs in the Hiram Police Department?

- A) Increase pay rates to be competitive for additional officers as well as maintain our current officers. For example, we pay \$19/hr for part-time officers compared to \$30/hr in Garrettsville while other areas pay \$40/hr.
- B) Purchase 1-2 new police cruisers. We've not been able to keep up with a purchase rotation so now all three vehicles have around 100,000 miles and are regularly out of service for maintenance. Each new vehicle is approximately \$90,000.
- C) Return to 24/7 coverage. We need to add 2 part-time officers that work 25 hours per week. In order to get them, we will need to pay a competitive rate.
- D) Upgrade staff laptops (very specific type) which the state offers 80/20 grants however we need the 20% contribution.

What happens if we don't have a police department?

Responsibilities would move to the Portage County Sheriff Department. Being located in the northern most edge of Portage County, the response to Village needs would most likely be significantly longer as officers are spread throughout the county. Additionally, Chief Gregory has a long track record of understanding the diverse population and working with the College. He mentors our officers accordingly. We shouldn't take this approach for granted.

Did we ask the College for help?

Earlier this year I asked Hiram College President Bohrer for help supporting our safety services as there was a long history dating back to the 1980's of the College providing help. When President Verlotta was in office she reduced the \$75,000 annual contribution to \$30,000 and it was eliminated two years ago. In the spring, I suggested a \$45/semester student fee designated for safety services which was rejected. Then in August, the College made a proposal of \$40,000 with so many provisions that the Village could not accept it (i.e. having the village gift two streets to the College, a land swap resulting in the Village owning the observatory, and police/fire/EMS coverage at College events at no cost). We countered asking for a clean contract - \$50,000 with no "strings" and in year two that amount would increase to \$70,000 and then \$72,000 in year three with the Village supplying EMS to all football games. The College declined and did not make a second offer. I fully recognize that the College has the right to determine their own priorities and respect that preserving our safety services isn't something they can contribute to with other pressing needs on their plate. I hope they will return the sentiment.

Students already pay a parking permit at the College, what are they to do?

There is a misconception around student parking and that village streets coincide with the permit that students already pay. The permit students pay for allows them to park on College owned property only.

Why not just raise taxes on those that work or live in the village?

Village residents pay 2.25% plus those that work outside the village no longer get a full local tax credit. If we were to raise the income tax by 0.25% we estimate it would produce \$65,000 annually. Taxpayers would need to vote in the increase. The full amount would not be realized for 3 years from the time that it's voted in.