MEETING MINUTES

Committee of the Whole Meeting Minutes

September 22, 2026

Board Members:	Mayor Koomar (President), Ms. Pacetti (Vice President) Ms. Elder, Mayor Gallo, Ms. Harper, Mr. Love, Ms. McPherson, Mr. Sleasman, Mayor Weiss, Ms. Smith Whigham
Present:	Mayor Koomar, Ms. Pacetti, Ms. Elder, Mayor Gallo, Ms. Harper, Mr. Love, Ms. McPherson, Mr. Sleasman, Mayor Weiss
Staff/Other:	Shawn Becker, Nick Biggar, India Terry, Janet Burney, Nick Davison, Scott Ferraro, Michael Fesler, George Fields, Bob Fleig, Ida Ford-Marshall, Anthony Garofili, Michael Gettings, Fiona Gibbons, Kenneth Green, Sharon Jenkins, Carl Kirkland, Charles Morgan, Holly Mothes, Teresa Muti, Joe Shaffer, Kay Sutula, Wendy Talley, John Togher, Carolyn Young
Public:	Carren Woods, Tim Juka (Oswald Companies), Umut Asker, LaShaun Lindsey, Nick Castel, Alex Johnson, Roland Robinson, Loh, Rico Dancy, Mr. Rhoades Zulu, Jenna Thomas

I. Call to Order

Mayor Koomar called the meeting to order.

II. Roll Call

A quorum was present. Ms. Whigham was absent.

III. Approval of Minutes

Ms. Harper moved, and Mr. Love seconded to approve the minutes of August 18, 2026, Committee of the Whole meeting. Ms. Pacetti noted that the minutes had been received the night before and asked for time to review them. The item was removed from the agenda.

IV. Safety and Security Update

Presenter:

- Michael Gettings, Deputy Chief of Police – Transit Police

Deputy Chief Gettings presented the Fall 2026 Safety and Security Update on behalf of Chief Jones. Updates included:

- Crimes are up slightly, driven by larceny/theft of lost property; violent crimes are down 33%.

- Quality-of-life offenses are mostly down; smoking, loitering, fare evasion, and trespassing citations are up due to proactive enforcement of the updated Code of Conduct.
- Hotspot saturation patrols have significantly reduced downtown incidents; officers conducted 3,978 coach checks from January through August.
- Operator barrier extensions were added on coaches where people had been reaching around the barriers.
- Partnerships continue with Downtown Cleveland Alliance, Cleveland Police, and CMSD, and command staff visibility has increased.
- The updated Code of Conduct is posted at riderta.com/codeofconduct; suspension/expulsion procedures are in a public education phase before enforcement.
- Riders are encouraged to save the safety text line, 216-575-3937, and 24-hour dispatch, 216-566-5163.

Ms. Pacetti asked about outreach partner NEOCH (Northeast Ohio Coalition for the Homeless) and asked that posted Code of Conduct language be concise and user-friendly; Deputy Chief Gettings noted a condensed version is posted on vehicles. Mayor Weiss asked about staffing. Deputy Chief Gettings and Ms. Ford-Marshall reported 98 budgeted positions with 75 filled, 8 frozen positions, three officers in the academy, and approximately 20 candidates in the pipeline, noting that recruiting challenges are regional and national.

V. Tax Revenue Considerations – Ballot Initiative

Presenters:

- Mayor Paul A. Koomar, Board President
- India Terry, General Manager, Chief Executive Officer

Mayor Koomar stated that at the July meeting, the Board asked Ms. Terry to meet with the corporate and civic communities and key government entities, including Cuyahoga County and the City of Cleveland, to gather more information on the ballot initiative. He noted that she had updated him the previous week and that those conversations had been very positive.

Ms. Terry stated that staff have been conducting educational briefings on RTA's finances with community stakeholders, riders, business owners, philanthropic and advocacy groups, and sister agencies as part of the journey to the ballot box in 2027. RTA has not been to the ballot since 1975, which has left room for speculation about how it has "limped along" for 50 years. Conversations have included the appointing authorities for the Board, with positive discussions with Mayor Bibb and County Executive Ronayne about convening stakeholders at a higher level. The Board approved May 2027; staff presented a range of 0.25% to 0.50%, and the staff recommendation remains 0.50% to be transformative. She noted that November 2027 is also an option depending on what the partners decide. She thanked riders and the community for showing up during the service cut discussions and stated that she accepted staff's request to hold off on service cuts for another eight to ten months, into 2027 after the ballot initiative, largely because of their input. She noted that the Board is not expected to set the percentage today and asked General Counsel Burney to explain what action is needed.

Ms. Burney explained that the packet contains a draft resolution submitting to the electors of Cuyahoga County the question of increasing the Authority's existing 1% Sales and Use Tax by a blank percentage. Under Section 3 of Resolution 2026-43, adopted July 7, 2026, the Board committed to adopting a resolution no later than September 22, 2026, stating the specific rate. She advised that the Board would need to make a formal decision during the Board meeting.

Mayor Koomar stated that when the agenda was set the previous Thursday, his understanding was that the item would be held for additional information, which is why no resolution was included in the Board packet. He noted that a great deal had happened operationally in the last six weeks and that stakeholders want more information to educate voters and give the initiative the best chance of success, and that being told the Board must act was news to him.

Ms. Burney clarified that there is no additional resolution; the Board's action can be taken by motion under the Board agenda item. She advised that even if the Board decides to take no action, it must vote to do so for the sake of transparency and consistency with the commitment made in Resolution 2026-43. Mayor Koomar stated that he disagreed; Ms. Burney maintained her recommendation as legal counsel.

Ms. Terry confirmed that there is no resolution to move forward today and encouraged the Board to discuss the reasons for the hold in a public forum, which is intended to build a larger consensus among community stakeholders on the percentage and timing. Mayor Koomar noted that he had taken the lead from management that more information gathering would benefit the process. Ms. Terry stated that staff are about 40 of 70 stakeholder conversations into the process, including CEO-to-CEO and agency-wide briefings, with the goal of getting the appointing authorities on board. She reiterated that 2027 is pivotal and that the staff recommendation remains 0.50%.

Ms. Elder asked what additional information is needed to get the initiative over the finish line, noting that discussions with the City and County sound positive. She stated that it is imperative to move forward in May 2027, citing the prior finance presentations on timing, and that waiting until November could put the Authority at the fiscal cliff. She stated that moving forward in May shows the public that the Board is serious about reliable, consistent, clean transit for everyone.

Ms. Terry responded that the information needed depends on the audience. Questions from Board members have included what 0.25% versus 0.50% provides, while community questions focus more on return on investment and "why now," as well as paratransit, BRT, rail cars, Brook Park, and downtown. Staff is working with AdCom, the Authority's marketing partner, on visuals of what a more robust system would look like, and the City of Cleveland is gathering questions from council members. She stated that staff will provide more information, but at some point, the Board will need to make a final determination.

Mayor Koomar stated that he and Ms. Pacetti had asked, following Mr. Gautam's retirement, what a 0.50% increase would specifically deliver. He requested the assumptions behind the projections, how long the 0.50% would last, and a specific list of what it would fund, such as increased frequency, new lines, ridership growth, or restoring park-and-rides, which is the value proposition sought by the County and City. He noted that Mr. Sleasman has also requested those financial details.

Mayor Weiss stated that some financial questions still require vetting, including the revenue impact of the 0.25% spread and whether a rate between 0.25% and 0.50% is possible, which it is. He stated that the cost of a May ballot had not been thoroughly discussed beyond a memo, that the Board is committed to moving forward, and that it is a judgment call as to when the Board and administration are comfortable.

Ms. Harper stated that while the Board has the privilege of discussing projections for years out, riders only care whether their service is being cut. She described the packed bus she took to the meeting and stated that the Board has not discussed enough the cost of delays and the goodwill that could be lost with the public. She noted that Ms. Terry had said that if new funding is not secured in May, service cuts would return in August and may be deeper. Whether the rate is 0.25%, 0.30%, 0.40%, or 0.50%, it is an investment in Cleveland's future, and Cleveland can't wait.

Mayor Koomar stated that Ms. Terry has committed to no service cuts through August 2027, and that discussions have explored whether capital deferrals could give the Authority maximum options in 2027. He agreed the initiative must be in 2027 but noted that the County and City see both May and November as options and that the approximately $1.5 million cost of a May special election could work against the effort. Based on what he has heard, he does not believe finances require May and that there is latitude to go in either May or November.

Ms. Terry stated that staff can provide information, from a financial rather than political standpoint, on what would need to happen for the Authority to go to the ballot later in 2027.

Mr. Togher stated that staff are working through the 2027 budget process. Currently, 5% of sales tax revenue is set aside for the capital program, reduced from 10% by a resolution passed last year; that reduction sunsets in 2028. Extending it would require a new resolution and would provide approximately $14 to $15 million annually.

Ms. Terry noted that timing also affects when revenue would be received. Mr. Togher confirmed that sales tax revenue from a May ballot would begin in January 2028, and from a November ballot in July 2028. Ms. Terry added that if the initiative fails, it would be unrealistic to return to the ballot within a few months; agencies typically wait years and adjust their strategy. She stated that 2028 should be avoided due to a crowded ballot and the presidential election, making 2027 the best opportunity.

Ms. Pacetti asked which timing Ms. Terry believes would give the initiative the highest likelihood of success, and Mayor Koomar asked her to also address voter turnout differences between May and November, including the suburban vote.

Ms. Terry stated that there are pros and cons to both. Turnout will depend on reaching voters who may not use transit themselves but have family members who do; for example, a suburban voter may not see the value of paratransit, an unfunded mandate, until a relative needs it for dialysis or a medical appointment, and that message has not yet fully penetrated. May is best financially because revenue arrives earlier and staves off service cuts, but the question is whether enough education has occurred; November may bring a more robust voter base. She stated that a vote for transit is a vote for what the system can look like in the future, as the 1975 vote was. She would love to go in May, but if the City or County leadership still has questions, those must be resolved first, and she would need firm commitments up front before recommending a later date in 2027.

Mr. Love asked Ms. Pacetti to reflect on a meeting she attended two weeks earlier with representatives of COTA regarding how they shaped their civic value proposition.

Ms. Pacetti stated that she attended the meeting with County and City representatives to hear from the Central Ohio Transit Authority and its public and private sector partners about their process. She noted that Columbus's situation is very different: it is in an exponential growth scenario, and its effort incorporated community feedback over several years, which Cleveland does not have. She believes there is tremendous support for public transit in Cleveland and a

committed Board, but most County residents are not privy to these discussions, and when asking people who are financially strapped to pay more, the Board must be well informed. She stated that alignment is needed among City, County, private sector, foundation, and grassroots partners around a vision for transportation; that the communications presentation was well done but still lacks a unifying message on what the increase is for; and that more consensus building is needed, which makes her nervous with April approaching.

Ms. Terry added that some regions divide levy revenue among infrastructure and transportation "buckets," but Cleveland's infrastructure is largely built and needs repair and investment, and focusing on transportation offers the quickest return on investment. She noted that in successful initiatives, the campaign is usually led not by the transit CEO but by a stakeholder such as the mayor's office, the county, an advocacy group, or a rider coalition, with an all-hands-on-deck approach. She has heard many questions from stakeholders but has not heard "no," and those partners need to commit fully so RTA is not on an island at the ballot box.

Mayor Gallo stated that although the primary is in May, early voting begins about a month earlier, leaving roughly six months, and discussions with stakeholders on the amount are still ongoing. She stressed the importance of building a coalition and buy-in in the inner- and outer-ring suburbs, noting that endorsements from mayors and community leaders influence voters. She expressed concern about spending the forecasted amount on a May election and failing because the message had not reached the community and stated that November 2027 would provide about five more months to get the message out. She agreed that the initiative needs to go on the ballot next year.

Mr. Love stated that, given the reality of the region, the outcome depends on non-riders and infrequent riders, and the value proposition must be structured with that in mind.

Mr. Sleasman stated that the Board decided on May 2027.

Ms. Harper agreed, noting that some Trustees had wanted to go in November 2026 but accepted that more time was needed, and the Board decided on May. She stated that there will always be more information and messaging to refine, but the risk to the Authority grows the longer the Board waits, and the Board has heard the same financial presentations for two years. If the revenue is to be divided between infrastructure and service, that is all the more reason to go for 0.50% and not less, to avoid repeating the process in 10 to 15 years. She stated that the Board said it would vote on this today, that it should do what it said it would do, and that continued delay puts strong existing support at risk. She urged the Board to give people something to rally around.

Ms. Pacetti responded that much has changed since the vote for May: the special election was found to be significantly more expensive, input from the diverse set of partners the Board committed to consult is still in process, and the requested presentation comparing 0.25% and 0.50% was not yet presented due to the transition. She stated that the Board cannot rely only on riders and those in the room, since most voters have not been part of these discussions. She believes the parties are not far apart, but it is very important to go forward with broad-based, cross-sector support rather than go in May and fail, and failure is not an option.

Ms. Harper responded that failure is a possibility either way and raised the risk of organizational turnover at RTA, the City, and the County between May and November 2027. People who are ready to fight for the levy now could leave, and delayed pay increases at RTA could lead staff to look elsewhere, requiring new people to be brought up to speed on the message. She stated that she is aligned with Mr. Sleasman and sees significant risk in delaying, both internally and with voters.

Mr. Sleasman stated that at a recent service public hearing, the Mayor of Solon praised the route #41, and that the Authority is not giving people something to latch onto and support. He stated that messaging and "what's in it for you" conversations will happen during the campaign, and that he is confused as to why the Board would not go all out as soon as possible. He urged the Board to do what it said it would do: go for 0.50% in May and lead on it.

Ms. Terry thanked the Board for the debate, noting that this is what a Board does. She stated that the Authority's service strategy does not change between 0.25% and 0.50%; robust BRT corridors, more frequent rail, and one-seat rides remain on the agenda regardless. The difference is in how often buses arrive, the number of operators, transit police, and mechanics, reliability, and the Authority's ability to be a partner in development such as the Public Square transformation, Brook Park, downtown, and the airport. She cautioned that a line-by-line service plan for each increment will not be available before May or November 2027, but the strategic plan outreach through the first quarter will continue to refine it. She stated that there is no magic service plan that can guarantee a win, and the Authority needs the Board's investment and faith.

Ms. Burney recalled that in the finance presentation by then Deputy General Manager of Finance Rajan Gautam, a 0.25% increase was projected to provide about 10 years of stability, while 0.50% was projected to provide about 50 years of stability plus approximately $25 million in service improvements, including maintaining paratransit and increasing frequency, which drives reliability and ridership. She offered for staff to return early next month with additional information and a refresher.

At Ms. Terry's request, Mr. Togher explained that in 2018–2019 the State of Ohio changed how it administered sales tax, removing the Medicaid Managed Care portion and costing RTA approximately $20 million per year. The State provided a one-year reprieve in 2019, but the loss was never recovered and was masked by COVID. In addition, the Board requires a one-month operating reserve of approximately $30 million. A 0.25% increase would generate a little over $20 million, much of which would go toward filling that gap, which is why it yields about a 10-year scenario. He noted that paratransit, now the Authority's largest unfunded mandate, did not exist in 1975, and its costs grow every year as the County's population ages, which is why staff continues to recommend 0.50%.

Mr. Sleasman asked for clarification on what the Board must vote on. Mayor Koomar confirmed that no action is taken in the committee; the matter would be addressed in the Board meeting.

Mayor Koomar moved to adjourn the Committee of the Whole; seconded by Mr. Sleasman. The motion carried.

VI. Adjournment

Mayor Koomar motioned to close the Committee of the Whole, Mr. Sleasman seconded, the motion carried.

John J. Togher
Interim Secretary/Treasurer

Kenneth Green
Interim Board Administrator