

Learn More about the Theft Investigation

Hilliard City Council members are committed to preserving the integrity of the ongoing criminal investigation regarding theft of funds in the Hilliard Parks and Recreation Department. While this is a complex matter, we are obligated to our residents and to the community to support the investigation, and we are committed to doing so.

Because we know this is of great concern to the community, Council has created this dedicated page to provide residents with background on this situation and to share the most up to date information available on the investigation.

The public's confidence in our city operations is of the utmost importance to Council, and we will take steps to ensure anyone convicted of actions to deceive or defraud our city and citizens is held responsible and makes restitution. We will be diligent in working to recover funds that were stolen.

Further, Council will evaluate and recommend appropriate measures to ensure accountability in the City of Hilliard's financial systems. We intend to deploy needed resources to establish clear lines of compliance and build in protocols that strengthen our financial infrastructure. Council will keep Hilliard residents informed as details are available and permitted to be shared. We are grateful for the patience and understanding of the community as the investigation proceeds.

Timeline of Events

- Hilliard City Council (Council) members were notified by City of Hilliard Communications and IT Director Doug Francis on November 1, 2017, that an investigation of the theft was underway due to a potential loss of cash.
- Director Francis at the same time also informed Council that in a related matter, Hilliard Parks and Recreation Deputy Director Heather Ernst had resigned her position.
- Council members requested, at the next regularly scheduled Council meeting on November 20, 2017, Chief of Police Robert Fisher and Law Director Tracy Bradford provide a full briefing on the matter and subsequent investigation. A representative of Ohio Auditor of State Dave Yost's office also briefed Council on their parallel investigative work.
- On November 21, Council issued a news release to inform Hilliard residents of the situation and the Hilliard city administration held a news conference.
- Director Bradford informed Council that she had a conflict of interest from representing both Council and the city administration in this matter, and in response, Council began reviewing options for representation. On December 11, 2017, Council announced the hiring of special counsel.
- On December 22, 2017, Chief Fisher notified Council that a former employee of the city had been charged with felony theft in office following the department's thorough investigation. That legal case now will proceed to prosecution of the individual charged.
- On Thursday, March 1, 2018, Franklin County Prosecuting Attorney Ron O'Brien returned an indictment against former City of Hilliard Deputy Director of Recreation and Parks Heather Ernst on eight felony counts, as a result of an in-depth investigation by multiple agencies. An arraignment is scheduled for March 16, 2018.

If you have questions or would like to share information with Council, please contact Council Aide Lynne Fasone at lfasone@hilliardohio.gov or (614) 876-7361, Ext. 789.