

**VILLAGE OF OAKWOOD
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES
2025-9-16**

ATTENDANCE

Johnnie Warren, President
Eloise Hardin, Pro-Tempore
Taunya Scruggs, Ward 1
Paggie Matlock, Ward 3
Mary Davis, Ward 4
Candace Hill, Ward 5

ABSENT

Ross Cirincione, Prosecutor	James Climer, Law Director
Matt Jones, Village Engineer	Sam O'Leary, Assistant Law Director
Roland Walker, Chief Bldg. Official	Erica Nikolic, Mayor
Carlean Perez – Recreation Director	Tom Haba, Service Director
Mark Garratt, Police Department	Dave Tapp, Fire Department
Brian Thompson, Finance Director	

** Arrived after roll call*

Meeting opened at 5:10pm by Warren

Pledge of Allegiance

Roll Call taken

2025-60 A RESOLUTION APPOINTING COUNCILWOMAN ELOISE HARDIN TO THE POSITION OF

Introduced by PRESIDENT PRO-TEM OF COUNCIL AND DECLARING AN EMERGENCY

Council as a whole

1st read 9-16-25

Motion to suspend 2025-60 made by Davis seconded by Matlock

YES VOTE: Warren, Hardin, Scruggs, Matlock, Davis, Hill

MOTION PASSED

Motion to adopt 2025-60 made by Davis seconded by Matlock

YES VOTE: Warren, Scruggs, Matlock, Davis, Hill

ABSTAIN: Hardin

MOTION PASSED

Warren: I'm going to excuse them, but at first I have to announce what we're doing in the end to excuse them. **Davis:** We want them to talk first. **Warren:** Ok, now remember, especially when the executive session we only have two items or whatever's on the agenda. **Hardin:** Yes, but we can always open for public comment. **Warren:** No, you can't, not executive sessions. **Hill:** No, she's saying you can open a public comment before we go into that, so that they're not waiting. **Warren:** Okay, are there any public comments for the residents? We open up the floor for public comment.

Floor open for Public Comments

Melinda Hart, 7327 Free Ave| **Hart:** Hi, my name is Melinda Hart, I live at 7327 Free Avenue in the glorious Oakwood Village. And I just heard something that was remarkable. It's the new day

in Oakwood, so I agree. And I hope that this new day in Oakwood promotes and keeps going the respect that you all have for each other. Because if it's not here, it's now going to be out there either. We elected you all to represent us. Our voice is only here, this is the only time you hear us, except for the ballot box. Which will speak loudly because we will be holding you all accountable. Most of us moved here, I know, Eloise, you've been here for, what, 94 years, right? We love our community; I moved here to retire here to love my community. And when I die on Free Avenue I'm going to (inaudible), but in the meantime I want you to understand that the residents... You all need to know what the residents think about whatever. Nobody ever comes to us and asks us anything. And I know that you're voting your heart, and you're voting your opinion, but you don't even know what we want. You don't even meet with us to know what we want. And we're the ones that elected you. And so, the new day in Oakwood is that we're going to be holding you accountable to us. We want to see some progress, we want to see that, for all these increased property taxes that we're paying, that something in our community gets changed. That somebody comes and asks us, well, what is it that you would like to see in your ward? And you can't do that flat-mented. You can't, you can do that when you have an agenda, and you have an agenda, and you had an agenda, and everybody's got their own agenda. But the agenda does not put the constituents in your ward in priority. May the record reflect that Mrs. Hardin forced me to get up here and speak. **Seruggs:** I just wanted to kind of let you know some of the things that we have done to put in place what you were talking about with getting the residents opinions. And getting our Constituents ideas and thoughts before we make a decision. We do have community meetings every single month that are separate from this that we invite the community out. So, our community meetings take place and have they started at the top of the year. And they've been going all throughout the year on the third Tuesday of every single month for wards one and two. And also, the third Wednesday every single for wards three, four, and five. So actually, today was one of our community meetings that would normally happen and we're also going to still look at tomorrow's. But that's one of the things that we're doing to make sure that we invite our constituent opinions. We also had a gentleman come, one of the residents come, and actually share his ideas and his thoughts. So, we are taking that to heart. We want to know what everyone's thoughts are. When it came to one of those legislations that was for the fireworks. We did go around and have a survey that was available for people to decide whether or not they were interested in that fireworks going forth, but we want to keep that and enhance it. We haven't had a ton of people showing up for those meetings, but we want enhance that, we want make it better. We want more people to kind of come and say, this is a free form for you. To kind of say, hey, we're not in the actual Council meeting, so it's a little more conversational. But we do want to know, and you do want to make sure that our vote does reflect what you desire. **Davis:** It's in the community center, so it's not in Council chambers, it's just open in the community hall. It's always open to everybody, so we love to have more people come. Because we've got a lot, we get some people that bring their concerns there, and we get to talk in between. **Matlock:** And if you missed the day of your ward, you're welcome to come to the next day with the other wards. **Warren:** And just to let you know, for the record, we are just as appalled in having issues about the taxes that you're talking about, the increase. But Oakwood Village has not benefited from one dime of those taxes. All of those taxes are going to the County and the school board. We have not increased the local municipal tax in about eight to ten years from two to two and a half percent in all of the other communities that are at that same rate. But we are victims of that same intrusion on our lives. When my house note, I refinanced, just to be personal about it, I refinance my house because the mortgage company called me for like two years after I lived in it. And I was at 5%, they offered me three, I don't know why, but they did. My mortgage payment went down \$200 a month. And soon as this tax came, it went back up \$200 per month.

But we do all that we can with the revenues that we have. We have open Council meetings so that is a forum for people that have an issue or have a concern about what's going on in Village that they can express it there. And, or as our Council members have said, thanks goodness to the to the newer Council people and more innovative, they have established monthly meetings for the residents to attend. And so, we're all ears for addressing the needs of the residents and beyond that, we have to anticipate them. We have roads that are bad shape that we have to repair and things of that nature. But specific individual items, we're more than happy to do our best to meet those expectations or anticipations. **Hart:** Well, might I add that I've lived in Oakwood now 21 years, and it was only early this year that I even knew about community meetings.

Warren: They just started this year. **Hart:** And I have attempted to come to a meeting last month. I was very very sick, but I got in my car, and I drove up there. No cars, no nothing, I didn't know what happened. We didn't get any notice that there wasn't going to be a meeting. Ironically, that turned out to be good thing because the next day I was admitted to the hospital with COVID. **Matlock:** You know what? I'm going to apologize, last month we were in recess. We didn't have any because we were in recess for that whole month, I know I was on vacation. We were in recess, and we were trying to get together those summer concerts trying to finish up a lot of the Mayor's work that he wanted to have done in the summer. So, it really wasn't a recess because we still worked during the summer. But we took care of a lot of the things that he wanted to have done in the summer he couldn't attend. **Hart:** Okay, but this was a ward 5 meeting. If there's not going to be a meeting, perhaps there's some way that you can let, I don't know how, social media, I do not know how. You can let us know that there's no meeting.

Matlock: Okay. **Warren:** Yes.

Ashley Mosby, 21433 North Lane| **Mosby:** Oh, um, I was just going to ask about the dates again. Because on the calendar on the website the only thing that comes up I want to say is some of the exercise work out class. So, like on the calendar nothing populates as far as the events going on in the community. So, I knew nothing about the communities. **Hardin:** Well, ma'am, let's deal with the obvious elephant in the room. The change has come to Oakwood, and we are all... Kind of holding our breath, praying for just what you said, that we all work together. And this is a time that we will see what we're made of. **Joseph:** If you're looking for those dates, they have them posted on the home page at the banner. So, you'll have to look in the banner, and it'll give you the list of all the dates for the rest of the year. **Hill:** They were also delivered to your door, but it's been, I think we did that at the top of the year. We haven't sent another one, we can send a reminder though for the rest of the year. **Mosby:** The website is fine. **Joseph:** We sent it out in constant contact as well. If you leave your email, then I can put you on the list so you can received those. **Mosby:** Oh, perfect, thank you. **Joseph:** You're welcome. **Hardin:** But for those of us that are a little challenged, we're going to still put a, all kidding aside, those of that are not involved with modern technology, we will still and more than ever during this time of change in the community as it relates to leadership, you will be more than likely bombarded. You need to know; we encourage you to come. But we will be putting information out and our new Mayor is in the audience. This is not to, by any stretch of the imagination, to ignore you. We're all going to work together to make this work. If one fail, we're all going to go down and everybody's watching; this is no secret. So, we ask you to pray for us and understand that one person will not cause us to fail, his death. We're prepared to go forward with the progress, and it's interesting, Gary Gottschalk gave us the Village, I'm getting a little flustered, I'm sorry... **Matlock:** He gave us a vision, he knows where we need to go through to finish out a lot, and that's going to happen. **Hardin:** What's our motto? **Warren:** Proud and progressive. **Hardin:** Proud, and progressive, duh, I'm a little frustrated and a little emotional today. Proud and progressive, we got the proud.

We have to continue the progressive, we can't get stuck. There's no reason in this day and age. So we're going to proceed, maybe not in his vision, he's had an opportunity. And God rest his soul, we will continue as a community. But we got to do it together and you can count on us to do that.

Hart: And the one thing that God hates is pride, so you might want to think about changing your motto. **Hardin:** Very astute, very astute, words are powerful and that's why you have a motto, and that that's a good thought. So, along with the change of administration, maybe that's something we should... The way we got there, we had a contest 89 years ago, not 98, I'm just kidding. But again, God bless you all, please let your neighbors know that we're going to try to continue to make this a very progressive place to live, okay, there's no reason for us not to.

Warren: I'll augment that by saying, let them know that we're going to continue. We don't have to try. We're going continue. I've been working with the Mayor since 1996, for the community and I'm the chair of the Community Economic Development Committee. And we have done the rural work. We've gotten more grants than any of the surrounding communities in Cuyahoga County. There was one year that we were the only one to get grants because the state through everybody else's applications out. Upset with them and gave us the grant for the Forbes Road improvement. And then retained the money that they were going to give to the other people and gave it to us for the, what's that street, Lampson Road improvement? That was back in 2002 and 2003. So we have been highly progressive. We know our vision, and we're just going to carry on to provide the best services that we can, but if there's any additional services or anything that you need, please contact our offices and we will be in our greatest pursuit to make sure that it happens if it's something that we can do.

Morris Morgan, 7343 Free Ave | **Morgan:** I think the Mayor left all of you guys in a wonderful position. Let's come together and continue the practice. Thank you, Councilwoman Hill, for tearing that house down for us. **Hill:** We did that as a team because none of us do anything alone.

Morgan: But it was an eyesore for over 20 years. Yes, it was. **Hill:** Yes it was, but there was no one person. We had to get the money in the budget; we had to move it. **Morgan:** Everyone that was involved, thank you. It does nothing but continue what Gary has taught us; this is our home. We pay a lot of tax dollars, not just to you, Oakwood Village, State, and everybody else. My tax dollars were the cheapest in Cuyahoga County in 2004... **Warren:** And the steel there is still in the top three to five cheapest in 2024. **Morgan:** I understand and believe that, the only thing I'm saying is let's continue what Gary has instilled in us. **Matlock:** And it will be done, I've seen it, I've seen Oakwood since 1972 and you know what I've seen it grow. We played in the rocks and with their help and I have to commend the Council and Mayor Gottschalk. When I came back from college, I'm going to tell you something, Oakwood was building up absolutely beautiful. I mean, we played on the street, I'm telling you, we play in the woods, and we played down by Tinker's Creek. We only had one policeman, one policeman, Barney was his name I can remember. **Morgan:** Look at the progress of where we're at today. **Matlock:** And you want to know something, that's me too. I mean, I'm a homeowner, My parents are still living, thank God, they're homeowners, my sister is a homeowners, and you want to know something? I'll be darned if I let it go down. I love Oakwood, I mean I really love it. I mean I've always had this thing.

Morgan: We have a great tax base, nice place to build... **Matlock:** Exactly, and you have a lot of people who came from Oakwood, who grew up in Oakwood, are talking about trying to come back. **Warren:** There's a lot to have, unfortunately, my son couldn't afford houses, he moved into Bedford Heights off of a Tupelo, but he wanted to move into Oakwood, but he grew up in Oakwood from five years old, and he's 47 now. **Hardin:** Again, thank you so much for coming, but we would be remiss to not give you an opportunity every time you come. We need to know what you all are thinking, all right, thank you so much.

Joseph Laster, North Lane| **Laster:** Good evening everyone, my name is Joseph Laster. I'm a resident 21404 North Lane of the Village Ward 5. We hear a lot of comments and what not. I was born in Oakwood Village, raised in Bedford Heights, and moved back to Oakwood. The improvement that I would like to see, there's trash on the ground or what have you, landscaping issues that need to be done. I like to be active in the community, I guess I have a couple questions. One we're always talking about what we need from you all. What do you all need from us to make Oakwood better? **Matlock:** We were all discussing about getting some programs together. Something like Habitat for Humanity, but it would be Habitat for Oakwood. A lot of us are now retiring, but we're still able to work. And our skills we can bring to the table. If it's lawn, if it's cleaning homes, you know, you have a lot of seniors who are in their homes. My main concern, I want to keep the seniors in their home. Due to the Medicaid and everything out there now, you don't know what their situation may be. But sometimes they need a little help, I know they need help. Some people have skills on electrical; some have skills on plumbing, some have skills doing contract work, just a little bit. You know, just minor things. And since we do now have that new building department, we know that they'll be requesting different things from them. And you know what, they don't have the money. So, we can all collectively get together and build a team. And if so and so need something done at their home, we can go help them. If Ms. So, and Mr. So and so, need their home cleaned, we could go help him. We can go do a general cleaning inside the house. If someone has a problem with electrical and your electrician, maybe you don't have to tag them, they can go and check it out. Maybe perhaps they're electric, or if they have plumbing. You know, stuff like that, that's going to come out. That's something new that we're trying to bring to the table with the community. And that gets us all involved, we're all together, we're in this together, you now, we're in the together. And I have come across a lot of them said they can't mow their lawn. If we can get people to just mow their lawn, you know, that helps them out a lot, helps out a lot of people a lot. You know, we got to help each other. Like he said, that tax bill came out, taxes are high. Unknown Resident: We used to have a guy that cut the lawn for seniors. **Matlock:** Right and see that's what we need to get back into. I know that I love that little group that I assist of the young kids from like Bedford and they were going around. But they have gotten so busy this summer. This summer if you call them it'd be like two it'd be like, two, three, four weeks down the road before they can get to you because... They were swamped, but I was proud of them because they got together and they went out to the senior homes that called them, and they fixed their homes. They did what they needed to do. **Hill:** I'm going to answer your question in a roundabout way. Kind of back to Mr. Morgan's comment about the houses coming down, and I appreciate the thank you. But what precipitated those houses coming was our Councilwoman Davis. Our building department had been so dysfunctional for so many years. We had so many complaints and Councilwoman Davis suggested a company called SAFEbuilt and we had a whole lot of pushback for a while. I think it took us almost two years to get that company in here, to get the contract signed, to get them completely in the building department, move all the employees out, let them get the office redone, refiled, reset, and then we started hiring back our own employees. So, those houses that he was talking about have been on a list to be torn down for many years. Not a year, not two years, many years, they've been a concern. But our building department was so dysfunctional in addressing the matters that they should, that we had to really work hard to get a new contract in here. Because that's really administrative, that's not legislative. But it had gotten so bad in the community with just things falling apart, buildings need to be torn down, it's not safe. So, we got that contract in, we got it signed, we got it passed as a legislative body, we now have a new building department. So, when you ask what do we need, when residents see the new building

department, people are going to come to your doors. They're going to tell you when your grass is too high. They're going to tell you what violations you have on the house, but they're also going to work with everyone. They're not going to come like, hey, we're fining you, we are taking you to court. They're going to come, they're going to tell you what is wrong, and then they're going to give you time and check back in. But we have to start maintaining our properties and our grass and get back to a place where we all want to see the community that we expect. And that is what we ask, just don't take it offensively. We're going to give you times, we going to work with you, but work with us because we responded to residents' comments and requests to replace that building department, and that's what we did. So they're here now, so that's why I would ask.

Laster: Alright, second question, if I may, as we all know, there's going to be some shifts going on. So, is there going to an official, another election, like an emergency election for anything that needs to be filled, or how will any personnel filling positions become? **Hill:** So, in 2024, the community passed a charter amendment to Section 8.03. Which basically said that if the Mayor resigned, passed away, recall, and I think there was one other cause, that there will be a special election within 120 days. So, we're looking at somewhere between December and January. We should have a final date either tomorrow or the next day, you all will get a notification. What happened is what the charter says is that the Council president moves up to the Mayor's seat and fills that seat. The Council Pro-tempore moves up to the Council President which that was Councilman Warren. And then that leaves a vacancy for the Pro-tempore seat which we just filled today with Councilwoman Hardin, and we pulled her out of ward two. So, now that it will create another vacancy and now we'll have to notify the community and fill that vacancy by appointment. **Laster:** So, does the ward chairperson have to live in that ward? **Hill:** Yes, At-Large, do not, ward people have to live in their ward. **Laster:** Okay, so I'm assuming that election will also take place the 120 days? **Hill:** So, by charter, an immediate vacancy we appoint and then that person that we appoint has to run in the very next election for the community to then elect. Now, ward 2 is already in a current election though. **Davis:** This November, there will be an election for Ward 2. **Hill:** So, they're already doing an election. **Warren:** Just to let you know, we have elections every two years. Ward two, three, four, and five run. And then two years later, the Mayor, the Council at large, the Council of large Pro-tempore, and ward one runs. So, ours are staggered, but because of the uniqueness, we have an election that's coming up for wards two, three, four, and five. However, we also now have to add, which will not be in the November election, or it be sometime in January, the election to replace the position of Mayor.

Davis: And you'll get information in the mail or however it's sent to you. **Warren:** As well as probably At-Large, **Laster:** OK. **Scruggs:** I just want to take the opportunity to acknowledge the desire to want to participate. Recreation with love, love anyone that is interesting in participating, and we could create something for you. But we have a lot of things that we would like to work on, and it's community-wide. So, ages crib to cradle, and also, we would love ideas, we will love help. And the most immediate help we would Love would definitely be our Trunk-O-Treat, which is coming up October 25th, 2025. So, please see Ms. Karen Gaither because we would love some support with our Trunk-O-Treat that's coming up right away. **Laster:** Okay, awesome, going back to the one point you made in regards to helping out houses or whatever that needs assisted with. As a business owner, the first thing I see is liability. So, I would like to potentially help and put something together to help with that. I'm not sure exactly where do I need to, I guess, present ideas on what I see in other communities I think will be greatly implemented here. But like I said, the biggest thing is, of course, that liability, so. **Warren:** If it's community development, I can work with you in any respect. But I'm chief of construction for community development for the city of Cleveland. And I sort of oversee like about \$186 million in construction of units going on right now. So anytime we'd be there, that's what I use for to

participate with the development of the Village with the Mayor. **Hill:** We'll run up liability to the Law Director. **Laster:** Sounds good, thank you. **Nikolic:** So, one thing that I intend to do is to initiate community advisory committees from the administration side. So, there'll be different committees that residents will be able to join, sustainability, and I'd love to reach out to you guys. Maybe there's some type of committee that you'd like to see in the community. I'd like to form that advisory committee so residents can communicate directly with me about what they like. Of course, with Council as well. So, we can continue to keep that information flowing and keep these community engaged. So, we are truly working together. **Laster:** Yes, ma'am, sounds good.

Unknown Resident(female): My question is, you were talking about the hierarchy of how it went for the Mayor, and it was changed. So, everybody that gets appointed during that time also have to run for reelection in January? **Warren:** Right now, we only have one appointed position. We didn't have to do it for At-Large because that was an open thing and we had a Council person to take that seat. But for somebody that's appointed, just like with the Mayor... We have a Charter that explains when a person leaves office, what the process and procedure is. And the process in the procedure in the absence of death of the Mayor. The Council president, that current Council president moves to be the acting Mayor or Mayor Pro-tempore or whatever you want to identify that for a period of 90 days. And within the next 30 days, there should be an election for that position. So, anybody that wants to run, including the person that may be holding that seat, anybody that wants to run for Mayor will have the opportunity to run.

Unknown Resident(female): So, that will be the only office that would be... **Hardin:** Let's make it real simple, the only office that requires a special election is that of Mayor. **Unknown Resident:** Okay, thank you. **Hardin:** Any more questions? We thank you for coming to your home, your house, your family. I find it so interesting, most of these people that spoke understand or have reiterated that we are generational here. My son lives here. His son tried to live here; her daughter lives here. So, we have created a family atmosphere. And one of the things I like about us, I know it's not scripted, but we have managed to be neighbors and not be intrusive. Very few communities can do that. We're helpful, but we're not intrusive. So, I think that's been the magic.

Unknown Resident(male): One thing I'd like to say, I don't know if people realize that Oakwood is the oldest black community in Cuyahoga County. **Warren:** Well, they were the first community, and I've been construction most of my life. They were the 1st community to have a subdivision built in the suburb where the homeowners were African-American, and that was ward two. And any other place when you moved into the suburbs, you were buying a house that was formerly owned by a non-minority person in most cases. That transition happened in Oakwood Village in 1965, when they started building Cape Cod.

Tom Liotta, non-resident: Streetsboro| **Liotta:** I am not from Oakwood, but I've worked here for a year, and I've lived in Streetsboro. Their Council can't come close to you people, okay. I've never seen a city, a Village, where so many people love it here. They love the people that represent him, they love the Mayor, and he's gone, okay. I was his friend for 30 years. In fact, I'm the one who got him into being Mayor. And now that he's going, I know one thing for sure, these are set to keep moving. Because you are a lot of bright people, and a lot of wonderful people are behind you. I have no ill thoughts of anybody that's going to take his place. I have not ill thoughts about anybody on the Council. Because when you look at this city, and you talk to these people like I do, they come to the window. And, uh, I remember a guy came to the window and

came around. I said, hey brother, what are you doing? He says, hey, I'm black, I said you're kidding. You know, and it's the truth. You've got to have a clean heart, an open mind, and an open heart to this, for this to happen. You really want to work at this city because, honest to God, 73 years old, I've never seen a city like this. I've never seen a city so well put together. I've never seen a city where the Mayor worries about the flowers around the building, you know, it's just amazing. After being here one year, I hope to stay longer. If not, that's the way it's going to be. But thank you very much.

Unknown Resident(female): I have one last question, so you mentioned the election coming up. Where can I find information about who's running? **Hill:** So, the charter says that the special election time frame of 120 days, a maximum of 120 days. **Unknown Resident(female):** Not the Mayor one, not the special elections. Did you say there's a ward election? **Davis:** Oh, November. **Warren:** The regular election is November. **Hill:** Yeah, that's on the board of elections, that's been there since. So, those individuals had to file in February and then there was a primary in May for wards two and five. And then wards three and four did not have a primary because it was only one person in the race. So, all of our elections are November 4th. So, now everybody's back on the ballot. **Unknown Resident(female):** Okay **Warren:** Just to let you know that for Council members, if more than two people run for the office for that ward, then you have a primary. But if only two people run for that ward, then they don't have a primary. Because at the general election, you have two people running for each position. Okay, anything else? Anybody else? If not, we're going to have to go into an executive session and we thank you for coming. This has to be a closed meeting, but I really appreciate you coming. Especially on a day that's not even the typical Council meeting day. And just to let you know that we're here to serve. I tell people, I told somebody, I said, you know what, I've never been. Council president, and they said, yes, you have. Ever since you've been in Oakwood, I said, no, I served as Council president. When you become Council president that becomes a mindset, just like Mayor or any other position. But when you serve the position, you serve in the people, and that's the purpose, and that's what we do.

Motion to enter executive session to consider the appointment, employment, dismissal, discipline, promotion, demotion, or compensation of the public employers made by Davis seconded by Matlock

YES VOTE: Warren, Hardin, Scruggs, Matlock, Davis, Hill

MOTION PASSED

Enter executive Session at 7:33p.m.

Motion to adjourn executive session to consider the appointment, employment, dismissal, discipline, promotion, demotion, or compensation of the public employers made by Davis seconded by Hardin

YES VOTE: Warren, Hardin, Scruggs, Matlock, Davis, Hill

MOTION PASSED

Exited executive Session

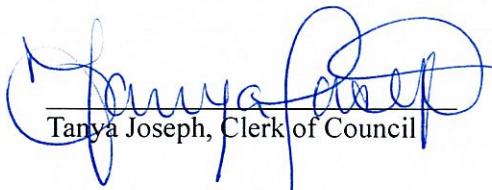
Motion to adjourn made by Davis seconded by Matlock

YES VOTE: Warren, Hardin, Scruggs, Matlock, Davis, Hill

MOTION PASSED

Adjourned at 7:36p.m.

Approved 10.28.25

Tanya Joseph, Clerk of Council

Johnnie Warren, President of Council