

Shaker Heights City Councilman Rob Zimmerman will not seek fifth term

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Shaker Heights City Councilman Rob Zimmerman, who will have served 16 years -- eight of those as the representative on the city Planning Commission alongside three different mayors -- made the announcement with more than a month to go until the Aug. 4 filing deadline at the Cuyahoga County Board of Elections. There are three of seven at-large council seats appearing on the November ballot. Photo courtesy of Benesch Friedlander Coplan & Aronoff

By **Thomas Jewell**, [special to cleveland.com](https://www.cleveland.com)

SHAKER HEIGHTS, Ohio -- City Councilman Rob Zimmerman took a moment at the end of the June 28 council meeting to announce that he will not seek re-election to a fifth term in November.

"I have been honored to serve for four terms," Zimmerman said. "Sixteen years is a long time. For me, that is the right amount of time. And I have devoted that time to keeping Shaker the special community that it is."

Zimmerman, who served eight of those years as council's representative on the city Planning Commission alongside three different mayors, made the announcement with more than a month to go until the Aug. 4 filing deadline at the Cuyahoga County Board of Elections.

"I believe Shaker still stands apart for its beauty, talented residents, services, housing, history and overall quality of life," Zimmerman said. "And I'll continue to work for the next six months to keep it that way."

The decision guarantees that at least one new council member will come on board next year, with three of the seven at-large seats appearing on the Nov. 2 ballot.

Reached for additional comment after the meeting, Zimmerman said he believes that "elected offices are rented from the public and not owned by the occupants. It just felt like after 16 years, the time was right to turn back the keys."

Zimmerman, originally from Beachwood, where his mother still lives, is currently the only council member residing in the easternmost section of Shaker. He lives in the Mercer neighborhood with his wife, Lisa, and their daughters, Talia and Lilli.

Asked what he would do with suddenly more free time in 2022, Zimmerman said he plans to "devote myself to my family and law practice (he is a partner at Benesch Friedlander Coplan & Aronoff, specializing in civil litigation and [government relations](#) law), and stay involved in the community. I'm not done yet with public service." Although many things have changed since he was first elected to council, Zimmerman noted that "one constant is the commitment of the residents to the success of the community. In many ways, Shaker is not just a place to live. It's a way of life."

Much accomplished

At the time he initially ran for council in 2005, "I felt our infrastructure was aging and needed improvement, particularly the streets," Zimmerman said of what has become "a [more planful](#) approach to street repairs and repaving," with more than \$1 million going into local roadways each year.

"We also needed to invest more in our parks, with Thornton Park and Horseshoe Lake ([dam excluded](#)) as prime examples," Zimmerman added. "We did that, but with any older community, there is always more to do."

The most obvious change has been ongoing work in creating a "[new downtown](#)" for one of the nation's original "[garden cities](#)."

"While in no way can I take credit for the Van Aken District, I'm glad I had input into the zoning and [planning aspects](#) of the development," Zimmerman said.

He also pointed to the selection of a new mayor upon Earl Leiken's departure in 2018 to become [chief of staff](#) for Cuyahoga County Executive Armond Budish.

"There was no playbook for such a thing, so we had to write one," Zimmerman recalled.

"It was a particular challenge, because two members of council applied for the job and two others had expressed interest in running for it outright.

"While some personal relationships were dented along the way, I like to think I contributed to a process that was fair and in the best traditions of Shaker."

Leiken's successor, Mayor David Weiss, who also served on the Planning Commission throughout the formation of the Van Aken District, spoke briefly on behalf of the city

after Zimmerman's public announcement, adding that there would be more to say at a [later date](#).

"I can't even begin to express our appreciation for your hard work, dedication, due diligence and thoroughness, with the numerous contributions you have made," Weiss told Zimmerman.

As an afterthought, Zimmerman said his announcement did not come as a result of council's decision earlier that night not to raise members' pay from the current \$10,440 annual salary. That rate that will now continue beyond Jan. 1, 2024, part of a regular procedure set forth in the city charter.

"That had nothing to do with it," Zimmerman quipped.

Going forward, Zimmerman said the constant challenge for Shaker will be continuing -- "for the money" involved -- to provide a high level of service and amenities to residents.

"There is so much more I'd like to do, particularly in the area of infrastructure and public works," Zimmerman said afterward. "But there are only so many dollars to go around. At some point, there will have to be a more serious pooling of resources through regional collaboration. Some improvements have been made, but the challenge is not yet met."

As for any advice for his successor on council, Zimmerman added: "Listen to the residents and your colleagues. There is so much talent to draw on. Also, check any personal agenda at the door -- we're here to do the people's business and not our own.

"And to the residents of Shaker Heights, thank you for the privilege of allowing me to serve." *Read more from the [Sun Press](#).*