By Rich Weiss and Ray Robinson Staff Reporters The residents of East Cleveland received another dose of bad news last Thursday at the regularly scheduled council meeting at city hall. On this night, East Cleveland Finance Director Jack Johnson proposed a list of cost savings options that included a Fire Department merger with the City of Cleveland, Police Department cuts, and a reduction of services at the Helen S. Brown Center. The same proposal included turning over East Cleveland Building Department responsibilities to Cuyahoga County, turning over MLK Civic Center to Boys & Girls Clubs, and turning over management of Forest Hills Park to Cuyahoga County Metro Parks. The proposal estimates these mergers and changes combined with license and permit fee increases will yield a savings of approximately $2.5mil for the City of East Cleveland in the first year. All of these compromises are centered on Ohio's new fiscal ranking system for cities on which East Cleveland was downgraded last month from the designation of "fiscal caution" to "fiscal watch"—one step short of "fiscal emergency." During the short time these state designations have been in place, East Cleveland's ranking slipped because city revenue did not meet the satisfaction of state auditors. But if East Cleveland were to adopt the proposed changes East Cleveland Council President Dr. Joy Jordan wonders, "What's left to attract future residents to our city? Regionalism has its merits—we have partnered on water and sewer for cost savings, but what makes us a city? Parks, recreation, civic centers…to give those up…" Jordan pointed out, "East Cleveland has lost many of our resources here under Mayor Norton including our post office and Huron Road Hospital. We've lost businesses because of the economy, but also because of the shortfall of the red light program." East Cleveland's red light camera program narrowly survived last November's vote after Mayor Gary Norton Jr. threatened police and fire department cuts to make up for the camera revenue. While voters across the nation overwhelmingly rejected red light programs, East Cleveland bucked the trend. The red light camera program revenue was estimated to bring in $1.7mil in 2012, but according to Council President Jordan, "We haven't captured the revenue from the red light camera program that was predicted--we only recovered a total of $115,000" This, and the lack of implementation of Council budget recommendations, resulted in the slipping of East Cleveland's ranking, according to Jordan. How should East Cleveland navigate the pressures of the new state designation? According to Jordan, "The answer is not taking all our resources away that make us a community." Nathaniel Martin, Councilman-At-Large was caught totally off guard by the proposed cuts. "I am shocked and totally dismayed," Martin exclaimed. "It was sprung on us without anyone on this council being notified, advised or anything else for that matter. The key point is that we are willing to negotiate with all parties involved. Right now, Mayor Norton is having these talks and discussions and we are completely in the dark. And this is just wrong. We need to hear what the MetroParks and all of the other entities are proposing and make the best decision possible that will benefit the city and the residents of East Cleveland. I beg the mayor to sit down with council so we can work these issues out." Former Mayor Eric Jonathan Brewer, who steered East Cleveland's budget away from the "fiscal emergency" designation for two years said, "The only thing Gary's plan shows is that he wants to get paid for doing nothing."