



City of Gahanna

Meeting Minutes

Charter Review

200 S. Hamilton Road
Gahanna, Ohio 43230

Ethan Barnhardt, Chair
Carrin Wester, Vice Chair
Jamie Belisle
Edward A. Hill, Jr.
Richard Maxwell
Raymond J. Mularski
Karen Reynolds

Jeremy A. VanMeter, Clerk of Council

Thursday, May 21, 2026

6:30 PM

Council Chambers, City Hall

A. CALL TO ORDER: Pledge of Allegiance & Roll Call.

Chair Ethan Barnhardt called the Regular Meeting of the Gahanna Charter Review Commission to order on Thursday, May 21, 2026 at 6:30 p.m. and led members in the Pledge of Allegiance. The agenda was published on May 18, 2026.

Present 6 - Ethan Barnhardt, Jamie Belisle, Richard Maxwell, Raymond J. Mularski, Karen Reynolds, and Carrin Wester

Absent 1 - Edward A. Hill Jr.

B. ADDITIONS OR CORRECTIONS TO THE AGENDA.

C. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES.

[2026-0105](#)

Charter Review Commission Minutes 2026-05-07

A motion was made by Wester, seconded by Belisle, that the Minutes be Approved. The motion carried by the following vote:

Yes: 6 - Barnhardt, Belisle, Maxwell, Mularski, Reynolds and Wester

Absent: 1 - Hill

D. PUBLIC COMMENT.

Jim McGregor, 180 Academy Court, Gahanna, OH - Mr. McGregor introduced himself to the Commission as a resident of about 50 years and former Mayor from 1983-2001. He recalled participating in five Charter Review Commissions as Mayor. He highlighted the importance of the Charter as the City's founding document that should have a strong structure. He felt it should not be cluttered by trivial items. He described

many challenges that had been faced by previous Charter Review Commissions, including one proposal that opened the selection of Police Chief and Vice Chief to merit selection. Mr. McGregor centered his comments on the proposal to change how wards are designed, from registered voters to the census data. He felt the current year was not the appropriate time to make such a change. He noted the political makeup of wards has changed over time, and felt the system was working the way it should. He felt the Charter should be free of political intrigue. He emphasized that each paragraph of the Charter should be meaningful and should focus on critical items. Mr. McGregor closed his remarks by thanking Mr. Barnhardt for his bravery in taking on the role of Charter Review Commission Chair.

Michael Schnetzer, 104 Academy Woods Drive, Gahanna, OH - Councilmember Schnetzer thanked the Commission for their time. He recalled speaking to the Commission on March 26, when he raised the issue of extending the interval of Charter Review Commission from 5 to 10 years. His intent in bringing the issue to the Commission was to reduce the risk of codifying potentially unintended consequences. He cited the recent mayoral primary issue as an example of such unintended consequences. He stated his concern over a potentially unintended consequence regarding Article 4, specifically a proposal to change the metric for drawing boundaries from registered voters to the total number of residents. He stated that in his line of work, municipal underwriting, he is required to work with population data from federal sources. The data is used in ratios such as bonded debt per capita, tax burden per capita, income per household, and more. He stated the current metric is a hard administrative count that is updated at least yearly, while census population data is an enumeration rather than a count. It is official, but is not free from measurement issues and estimation tools. He recalled that during the 2020 census, COVID-19 was ongoing, which disrupted operations, causing significant coverage errors. He cautioned against using 2020 data as a basis for a late mid-cycle redrawing of ward boundaries, as the next update would take place during the November 2029 ward election. Mr. Schnetzer proposed three possible solutions for the Commission to consider. First, the Commission can leave the current language in place. Second, the Commission could change the metric to residence without further guidance. Third, the Commission can define the metric, identify the source data, and set an effective date tied to the 2030 census, and specify the threshold or dispersion criteria for when ward

boundaries should be redrawn. He considered the third option as being most consistent with best practice that best eliminated the risk of unintended consequences. Mr. Schnetzer closed his remarks and thanked the Commission for their service to the community.

E. UNFINISHED BUSINESS.

1. Proposal Inventory Review and Deliberation

[2026-0050](#)

Draft Charter Amendment Proposals for Charter Review Commission 2026

Chair Barnhardt introduced the topic, stating that the Commission would review the proposed Charter amendment language prepared by City Attorney Tamilarasan. Chair Barnhardt recalled the process, noting that the Commission had received proposals from Councilmembers, board and commission members, individual commissioners, and members of the public. Educational sessions had been conducted, and the Commission had scored and deliberated on proposals to determine those that should have ballot language drafted. He set the intention for the meeting, which was to identify questions, concerns, and provide feedback regarding the proposed ballot drafts, and to ensure the proposed language aligned with the Commission's previous discussions.

3.01 - Election and Term of the Mayor

Chair Barnhardt invited feedback from Commissioners on the proposed language regarding the mayoral primary. Mr. Maxwell inquired as to how the changes would be proposed to voters on a ballot. City Attorney Tamilarasan explained that the changes are presented to the Board of Elections, which has their own format that would be displayed at the polls. Chair Barnhardt remarked that voters may read the reasoning behind the changes, and that language is therefore important for the Commission to discuss. Mr. Mularski stated he understood that columns 2 and 3 on the proposed document would be presented on the ballot. Clerk VanMeter and City Attorney Tamilarasan agreed to confirm how the information would be published with the Board of Elections. Mr. Maxwell suggested that the cost-savings be added to the reasoning language to change the mayoral primary language of the Charter. Commissioners agreed that the reason for the revision is due to cost incurred by the city.

Vice Chair Wester requested clarification on the evening's process, and whether the Commission had to advance an item simply because it was drafted. Commissioners agreed that it is not necessary to advance an item simply because it has been drafted. Chair Barnhardt further elaborated that the language would be fine-tuned, followed by a vote on each item to move it forward to the ballot or not.

The Commission concurred that the reasoning for this change should include to reduce "associated significant expense," as well as to align with the Ohio Revised Code.

Chair Barnhardt brought section 3.02 to the Commission's attention, which outlined residency requirements. The Charter states that the candidate for mayor shall be a continuously qualified elector of the municipality for two years immediately prior to the date of primary election. He wondered if there is a need for language clean-up if there is no primary election. City Attorney Tamilarasan explained that the date of the primary would be fixed regardless, so the timeframe would remain the same.

3.04 Executive Administrative Powers

Chair Barnhardt explained that the purpose of this change is to embed the strategic planning requirements into the Mayor's executive duties. City Attorney Tamilarasan noted there were different versions of text that were included in discussions. She used the original proposal from administration to draft the language, but was receptive to changes requested by the Commission.

Chair Barnhardt valued the simplicity of the proposed draft. He noted that it is still subject to appropriations by Council, and the only prescriptive piece is the report to Council by the Mayor. He felt checks and balances were in place in the proposal.

Vice Chair Wester requested clarification. She noted that the proposal states the Mayor shall cause to be prepared and submitted to Council a strategic plan for the City that provides the public an opportunity to comment on the plan. She wondered if verbiage indicated that there shall

always be a strategic plan, and Chair Barnhardt confirmed that to be the intention. Ms. Wester then requested clarification regarding the requirement of a report that the Mayor must issue to Council. She clarified that it would be an annual report, and when the Mayor determines that an update is needed, Council would adopt the update and there would be a public review process. Chair Barnhardt confirmed, adding there would have to be funds appropriated to engage in an update, making it a collaborative effort.

Mr. Mularski added that Council could pass legislation stating their desire for an updated strategic plan, so updates could be initiated by either party. Mr. Mularski stated his appreciation for the flexible wording of the proposal.

Ms. Belisle proposed a hypothetical situation in which the Mayor or Council do not want to have a strategic plan in place. Chair Barnhardt replied that the bodies would have to work together through the language. Commissioners discussed their understanding of the intention, which was that the strategic plan simply needed to exist. Chair Barnhardt added that strategic plans are long term documents, and each plan would be applicable for about ten years. Ms. Belisle expressed her belief that the Charter was not the appropriate place to include a strategic plan. Chair Barnhardt and Mr. Mularski highlighted the value of not having the strategic plan defined, so that the intensity of which it is engaged with can be determined depending on the needs of the community. Ms. Wester added that there would not necessarily be a cost implication with the way it is proposed in the draft ballot language. She reiterated the intention of the strategic plan being a guiding document, adding that it there have often been other plans prior to the most recent Our Gahanna strategic plan. Chair Barnhardt added that incorporating the strategic plan into the Charter adds a layer of accountability. Ms. Belisle expressed concern about the verbiage. She noted the current plan is anticipated to be in place for ten years, and that the Charter would state that the strategic plan can be updated as needed. However, the Mayor would be required to provide a report to Council each year, and is therefore bound to have another strategic plan after the current Our Gahanna strategic plan runs its course.

Vice Chair Wester expressed her understanding of Ms. Belisle's concerns. However, she added that the language requires a certain level

of collaboration, noting that she would not be in favor of language that was more specific than what was proposed.

Qualifications for Mayor, Council, Department of Law

Chair Barnhardt introduced this issue as aligning the public office conflict prohibition and having all three offices governed by the same disqualification standard removing anomalous carveouts.

Mr. Mularski appreciated the streamlining of conflicts of interest. He noted that there were not changes to the qualifications proposed, and confirmed whether that should be the case. Commissioners concurred the residency requirement changes had been struck during the last meeting.

Ms. Belisle shared her appreciation for the language as drafted.

City Attorney Tamilarasan informed the Commission that it is permissible to do a concise statement of what the changes would be on the ballot provided by the Board of Elections. A brief explanation of changes could be provided, with the full language of the proposed changes provided at each polling location. She noted there may be cost considerations that could be discussed at a later time.

4.02 - Composition and Term

Chair Barnhardt introduced the item as ward language for a registered voter basis to a resident population basis. City Attorney Tamilarasan noted there is a code section tied to the Charter amendment that defines how the wards are balanced, which dictates the frequency of rebalancing and the method to be used. Tamilarasan directed the Commission's attention to Gahanna Code Section 105.01, which defines the division of wards. It states that the City of Gahanna "redistricts its wards in a manner equitably balanced as to present population and voter registration statistics provided by the Franklin County Board of Elections in the City of Gahanna records to prepare for the election of councilmembers to be elected from wards in the regular municipal election in 2013 and every four years thereafter."

Vice Chair Wester read a prepared statement reflecting on the topic. She stated that the purpose of the initial proposal to change the language regarding ward compensation was unclear to her, and she questioned its necessity. However, with additional context from the City Attorney, and upon learning that the City of Gahanna is the only city of five similar suburbs that use the ward system, she recommended considering the word "population" rather than "resident," reference the decennial census as a source of population data, and require a 20% threshold in disparity between wards be met in order to warrant boundary changes. She recognized the good faith of the proposal, but noted that, in her opinion, the current language does not align with other municipalities that use wards for the purposes of elections. She stated that regardless of political affiliations or leanings, guard rails must be in place to ensure any changes are data driven and are not politically motivated.

Chair Barnhardt shared his appreciation for Ms. Wester's remarks and inquired as to whether she suggested mirroring Hilliard's language as a benchmark. Wester remarked that there is variation between cities, though there is consistency with the use of population and references to the decennial census. Vice Chair Wester shared a proposal with Commissioners. It stated that the geographical definition of the areas will be balanced based on population as determined by the federal decennial census beginning in 2030 and then only if there is a disparity of 20% or more in population between the largest and smallest wards. This will be established by ordinance taking effect 60 days prior to the petition filing deadline for the election of members of Council by wards to remain effective for the term of the positions. Wester cited Hilliard and Grove City as sources. She noted that redrawing wards is a substantial task. Because census data is an estimate and cannot be aligned perfectly, she incorporated a 20% disparity as a trigger to have the boundaries redrawn. Most wards range between 8,100-9,200 residents, so a 20% diversion would be approximately 1,600-1,800 people.

Ms. Belisle inquired about the current parameters for redistricting. City Attorney Tamarasan stated that some code interpretations state it should be done every four years; however, it was not clear that the city was required to do so, and it had not been done since 2013. She stated that it was appropriate to be included in the Charter, and stated it could have an effective date of 2030. However, she recommended 2031 as a timeline to venture into redistricting, because census data would be

gathered in 2030 and the following ward election would take place in 2033. Tamilarasan also noted that Code Section 105.01 would need to be brought into compliance if the Charter amendment passes.

Vice Chair Wester also noted that Gahanna is a landlocked community and would not anticipate significant population growth. She felt evaluating the ward structure was not necessary to do more than once every 10 years.

Chair Barnhardt supported amending the draft based on Ms. Wester's research and notes. He felt it aligned with Council President Weaver's original suggestion and added that Ms. Wester's proposal provides additional rationale.

4.12 - Legislative Procedure

Chair Barnhardt introduced this proposal as removing Robert's Rules of Order carryover clause regarding quorum, aligning the consequence for improper voting abstention with the due process framework in section 4.07.

Mr. Mularski asked for clarification on the removal of a Robert's Rules of Order rule. City Attorney Tamilarasan recalled that it was part of Councilwoman Bowers' presentation during an early Charter Review meeting. She stated that the language "a quorum to transact" and "a lesser number may adjourn from time to time" is outdated Roberts Rules of Order language. Additionally, less than four members of Council would not transact business because it would not be a quorum. Mr. Mularski clarified that they could still meet and discuss, but not about Council business.

Chair Barnhardt acknowledged that the language is clean-up, though he expressed uncertainty about its necessity. He added that if the language is left in its current state, if a councilmember did not state their abstention, they could consider themselves removed from City Council. City Attorney Tamilarasan confirmed, noting that section 4.07 provided procedures for removal of a councilmember from office.

City Attorney Tamilarasan clarified language regarding the quorum. She

noted that if a quorum was not present at a meeting, the language allowed the members present to legally vote to adjourn the meeting and end it, so that a quorum could be reached in the future. Therefore, the language regarding the removal of Robert's Rules of Order carryover language could be left within the Charter.

4.11 - Special Meetings

Chair Barnhardt introduced the proposal, which would allow the City Attorney to call special meetings. Vice Chair Wester stated that through her research, no other Charter within Franklin County mentioned the City Attorney as having the authority to call a meeting. She inquired if the City Attorney knew why that was the case, to which City Attorney Tamilarasan said she did not have a specific answer, though she was aware of codified rules allowing the City Attorney to call a special session. Ms. Wester explained that the proposal concerned her, considering that no other community in Franklin County permitted it within their charters.

Commissioners concurred that the drafted language was acceptable, though they expressed uncertainty about the necessity of the amendment.

Administrative Departments

Chair Barnhardt introduced proposed amendments to the Administrative Departments section of the Charter, explaining that the changes would align the Charter with the intent of the 2021 amendment by eliminating requirements for specific departments and allowing greater flexibility for administrative reorganization.

Vice Chair Wester expressed support for updating outdated department references but questioned whether the proposed list of functions was sufficiently inclusive, noting that some current departments, such as Administrative Services and the Mayor's Office, were not specifically identified. Discussion followed regarding whether the Charter should focus on governmental functions rather than departmental structures. Commission members generally agreed that the proposal appropriately identifies the City's core governmental functions while allowing flexibility in how those functions are organized. Wester noted that core Administrative Services functions, including finance, human resources,

and information technology, are addressed within the proposed language.

Chair Barnhardt noted that the proposed language identifies the required functions while allowing flexibility in organizational structure. He further noted that the Finance Director role remains specifically identified due to its fiduciary responsibilities.

City Attorney Tamilarasan clarified that the Department of Finance section is repealed in the proposed redline, while the Director of Finance designation remains because the Chief Financial Officer role is required by the Charter and City Code.

Vice Chair Wester raised concerns regarding references to "Department Directors" and whether such terminology was consistent with the goal of removing department designations. After discussion, members acknowledged that the language distinguishes between department directors and the Director of Finance, though some noted the terminology could potentially cause confusion. It was also noted that the proposed amendment was intended to better align the Charter with the City's current organizational structure. The Commission discussed how the proposed Administrative Departments amendment could be summarized for voters. Members agreed that the amendment is intended to eliminate references to specific departments and instead focus on administrative functions and authority. Several members noted that the volume of removed language and the complexity of the amendment would benefit from a concise, plain-language explanation emphasizing streamlining and organizational flexibility.

Article X - Department of Law

Chair Barnhardt introduced proposed amendments to Article X, Department of Law, noting that the revisions address internal consistency, vacancy procedures, grammatical cleanup, and reporting requirements.

At Vice Chair Wester's request, City Attorney Tamilarasan reviewed the rationale for the proposed changes. She explained that revisions were intended to address inconsistencies regarding the commencement and

expiration of appointments made to fill vacancies in the office of City Attorney and to eliminate potential gaps in service. The Commission also discussed election timing and vacancy scenarios. City Attorney Tamilarasan explained that an appointee would be required to run at the next municipal election if filing deadlines permit. If a vacancy occurs after filing deadlines have passed, the proposed language would allow the appointee to serve until the next available election at which a successor could be elected. City Attorney Tamilarasan clarified that the proposed vacancy language is intended to prevent a situation in which an appointed City Attorney could serve nearly a full four-year term without standing for election. Members discussed various vacancy scenarios and agreed that the language is intended to ensure appointees run at the next eligible municipal election when possible.

City Attorney Tamilarasan then identified several additional proposed revisions, including changing the annual reporting requirement from the first meeting of the year to the last meeting of the year, revising language to state that the City Attorney shall "prepare or review" legal documents rather than prepare all documents, and standardizing terminology by replacing "in behalf" with "on behalf."

Vice Chair Wester requested clarification regarding proposed changes to language governing the City Attorney's duty to defend police officers and other City officials and employees. City Attorney Tamilarasan explained that the current Charter language appears inconsistent because it grants the City Attorney authority to serve as legal counsel for City officers and departments while separately requiring Council authorization before defending officials or employees other than police officers. She stated that the proposed amendment removes that inconsistency and addresses potential conflicts in representation. Vice Chair Wester expressed uncertainty regarding the original intent of the existing language and discussed the possibility that the provision may date back to earlier Charter amendments. The Chair and Vice Chair requested additional historical research regarding the provision's origin and prior amendments. City Attorney Tamilarasan reviewed the Charter amendment history and noted that in 1986 the Law Director position was renamed City Attorney and the office's qualifications, powers, and duties were established. She further noted that the 2006 Charter amendments primarily involved removing gender-specific references and references to the Village.

The Commission generally agreed that the remaining proposed revisions appeared to be housekeeping and consistency changes. City Attorney Tamarasan also noted that she added the Mayor to the list of officials authorized to request written legal opinions, reflecting the City's current practice. The Commission concluded discussion of proposed amendments to Article X. Members expressed support for changing the City Attorney's annual report from the first regular meeting of the year to the last regular meeting of the preceding year, noting that the change is more practical and allows the report to be presented by the attorney most familiar with the matters being reported.

Article XI - Planning Commission Attendance Requirements

The Commission reviewed proposed amendments regarding Planning Commission member attendance. Members generally agreed that the Charter should be less prescriptive and that attendance requirements should be established through the Planning Commission's own rules of operation rather than fixed percentages or specific absence thresholds in the Charter.

City Attorney Tamarasan proposed revised language authorizing the Planning Commission to establish its own rules of operation, including attendance requirements. The Commission supported removing the proposed percentage-based attendance standard and did not support requiring annual adoption of attendance rules at an organizational meeting.

Article XI - Planning Commission Powers and Duties / Repeal of Board of Zoning and Building Appeals

The Commission discussed amendments transferring the duties and jurisdiction of the Board of Zoning and Building Appeals to the Planning Commission and repealing Article XII. Members emphasized that the rationale accompanying the amendment should clearly state that appeal rights are not being eliminated but are being transferred to the Planning Commission. Discussion focused on operational efficiency, reduced costs, and the benefit of assigning these responsibilities to a body that meets regularly and maintains subject-matter expertise. The Commission

agreed that the explanatory language should reinforce that the Board's functions are being transferred rather than abolished.

Article XXII - Charter Review Commission

The Commission reviewed a proposal to change the Charter Review Commission convening cycle from every five years to every ten years. Members discussed the need for additional explanatory language to clarify the purpose of the amendment and avoid the perception that opportunities for Charter review or public participation are being reduced. Discussion included the importance of explaining the rationale while maintaining a neutral, non-biased description of the proposed change.

Article XXIII - Non-Discrimination Clause

The Commission discussed proposed amendments to the Charter's non-discrimination clause intended to align the Charter with the City's existing Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) statement.

Commissioner Belisle and Vice Chair Wester raised concerns regarding whether expanding and specifically enumerating protected categories could increase the City's exposure to litigation, particularly in light of recent legal disputes involving protected classifications and First Amendment issues. City Attorney Tamilarasan stated that she believed the proposed language was consistent with federal guidance and the City's existing EEO statement.

The Commission discussed the removal of language requiring compliance with applicable federal, state, and local laws and whether the replacement phrase, "or any other status protected by law," provided equivalent protection. Members expressed support for restoring the original compliance language as an additional safeguard.

City Attorney Tamilarasan indicated that the language was not strictly necessary because Charter provisions must already comply with applicable law, but agreed to restore the phrase "in accordance with applicable federal, state, and local laws" in the draft language for further consideration. She also agreed to verify that the proposed language

remains consistent with federal EEOC guidelines.

Completion of Amendment Review

The Commission completed its review of the proposed Charter amendments. Chair Barnhardt thanked City Attorney Tamarasan for her work preparing the revisions and noted the short timeframe in which the work was completed.

F. NEW BUSINESS.

None.

G. CORRESPONDENCE AND ACTIONS.

[2026-0061](#)

Charter Review Commission Correspondence Received via Clerk

None.

H. POLL MEMBERS FOR COMMENT.

Vice Chair Wester expressed appreciation for the Commission's respectful, thoughtful, and collaborative discussions throughout the Charter review process. Chair Barnhardt echoed those remarks.

I. ADJOURNMENT.

With no further business before the Commission, Chair Barnhardt adjourned the meeting at 8:43 p.m.