



City of Gahanna

200 S. Hamilton Road
Gahanna, Ohio 43230

Meeting Minutes

Charter Review

*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, February 26, 2026

6:30 PM

Council Chambers, City Hall

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

The Charter Review Commission met in Regular Session on Thursday, February 26, 2026, in Council Chambers. Chair Ethan Barnhardt called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. and led attendees in the Pledge of Allegiance. The agenda was published on February 20, 2026.

Present 7 - Ethan Barnhardt, Jamie Belisle, Edward A. Hill Jr., Richard Maxwell, Raymond J. Mularski, Karen Reynolds, and Carrin Wester

B. ADDITIONS OR CORRECTIONS TO THE AGENDA.

None.

C. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES.

[2026-0041](#)

Charter Review Commission Minutes 2026-02-12

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

Yes: 7 - Barnhardt, Belisle, Hill, Maxwell, Mularski, Reynolds and Wester

D. PUBLIC COMMENT.

None.

E. NEW BUSINESS.

- 1. Our Gahanna - Strategic Plan Presentation
Sarah Bongiorno, PlanningNEXT**

Chair Barnhardt introduced Sarah Bongiorno of Planning NEXT and Senior Director of Administrative Services Miranda Vollmer. He stated that Planning NEXT and City staff facilitated the Our Gahanna Strategic Plan and Economic Development Plan update, which were adopted at the end of 2025. He explained the plans represent extensive community input and the City's strategic direction and felt it would be important to understand what was heard during the community engagement process, so that the Commission's recommendations are grounded in the community's vision.

Sarah Bongiorno provided a summary of the strategic planning process. It began in the fall of 2024 and was adopted in the fall of 2025 and was a community-informed approach. It included three rounds of engagement with the community and city staff. There were over 1,800 participants and 9,100 pieces of input that were read and considered when putting the plan together. Ms. Bongiorno defined the strategic plan as a long-term framework that outlines a roadmap for the city's future that is intended to act as a guide for the city's decision-makers. In highlighting the importance of planning, Ms. Bongiorno stated a few reasons why it's necessary. First, general planning represents good stewardship of land, resources, and tax dollars. Also, communities do better with a road map that includes clear metrics for success, tracking accountability, and ensuring a plan can be implemented. She felt that strategic plans should be continually referenced and are meant to be living documents, rather than created and shelved.

Ms. Bongiorno outlined the plan elements. The plan begins with a vision, *"Cultivate a community where people, neighborhoods, and opportunities connect and thrive,"* which is a high-level aspiration statement. Then, the mission statement, *"Serving our community with pride and purpose,"* was crafted for city staff by directors and a core team. Bongiorno then introduced the values, which are *Vibrancy, Connections, Stewardship, and Community*, and defined each. Bongiorno elaborated on the goals developed through the strategic planning process. They are as follows:

- 1) **Elevate our Unique Places:** Vibrant, inclusive, and connected places that reflect community identity, support livability, and foster pride.
- 2) **Serve our Community:** High-quality municipal services that

are effective, collaborative, and responsive.

- 3) **Connect our Community:** A welcoming and accessible community that fosters a sense of belonging, promotes active living, and celebrates shared experiences.
- 4) **Celebrate our Identity:** Distinctive and vibrant places that elevate community pride and strengthen regional recognition.

Ms. Bongiorno provided the City of Bexley as an example of a city that has charter provisions pertaining to strategic planning. In Bexley, the Mayor is responsible for preparing a strategic plan that is presented to City Council. City Council reviews and adopts the plan after providing an opportunity for public input. Then, the Mayor must issue an annual progress report on how the City is achieving its goals and objectives. Finally, updates are reviewed and adopted by City Council and opportunities for public input are provided. A second example of a city with specific charter provisions regarding strategic planning was the City of Buffalo, which defines its strategic plan and is updated every four years. There is a dedicated Office of Strategic Planning that is responsible for preparing the plan and its corresponding budgets and reports.

Chair Barnhardt expressed curiosity about the City of Bexley and wondered if Ms. Bongiorno had any anecdotes on how it has worked for the City to have the strategic planning process worked into their charter. Ms. Bongiorno offered to follow up with additional information.

Commissioner Hill thanked Ms. Bongiorno for her presentation and inquired whether there was a recommendation to incorporate the Strategic Plan into City Charter. Ms. Bongiorno explained that while there was not a specific ask to do so, she hoped that the Strategic Plan would be considered when making decisions, as it is meant to be integrated into all of the city's processes.

Chair Barnhardt remarked that City of Bexley integrated their strategic planning process into their City Charter in 2001, and appreciated Bongiorno's efforts to obtain information about how it has functioned since then. He expressed his thanks to Bongiorno, Planning NEXT, and city staff for their work.

2. John Glenn College of Public Affairs Local Gov't 101 Presentation Judith Ann Zimomra, J.D., M.P.A., Senior Lecturer

[2026-0042](#)

Judith A. Zimomra Bio

Chair Barnhardt introduced Judith Zimomra, Senior Lecturer at Ohio State University's John Glenn College of Public Affairs who has been recognized locally and nationally for her work. Ms. Zimomra was invited to provide an academically informed overview of municipal governance in Ohio.

Ms. Zimomra introduced herself to the Commission and informed all that she was there as someone who appreciates good governance and not as a paid consultant. She thanked the Commission members for performing their civic duty and serving the community. Ms. Zimomra noted that while she has a law degree, she did not intend to provide legal advice. Rather, Ms. Zimomra hoped to generate ideas to consider during the Charter review process. She remarked on the different possibilities of local government structure, such as Mayor-strong, or City Manager-based, and noted that she would not try to sway the Commission's opinion. She said communities next door to one another could have entirely different forms of government that work best for them.

Ms. Zimomra began by discussing counties in Ohio. She stated that wherever someone is standing in Ohio, whether in a township, city, or village, they are also standing in one of Ohio's 88 counties. Franklin County is currently the largest county in Ohio by population, followed by Cuyahoga County, then Hamilton County. The three counties house Columbus, Cleveland, and Cincinnati, respectively. The three smallest counties are Vinton, Monroe, and Morgan.

Ms. Zimomra introduced cities and villages, the difference between the two being population. When the census is conducted every 10 years, communities with a population of 5,000 and less are designated as villages until the next census. Cities are designated as such if their population exceeds 5,000. Cities and villages have commonalities, though. They have a taxing authority, a distinctive boundary, and can add land through annexation. De-annexations and mergers can happen, though rare. Cities can share boundaries and may abut one another. Ohio has 247 cities, with a total of 931 municipalities. The majority of

Ohio's municipalities are small villages. Ohio has over 1,300 townships, the largest of which has a population of 60,000 people. Townships and cities cannot be within another's boundaries while both being primary governing structures. They can share services, such as joint fire districts. Zimomra remarked on the growth happening within Central Ohio. Some cities have land to grow into, while others must consider increasing density as there is little land to annex. Gahanna has tripled in population since 1970.

Ms. Zimomra reviewed different types of governance structures. Seven cities in Franklin county operate as a City Manager form of government, including Dublin, Hilliard, New Albany, Pickerington, Upper Arlington, Westerville, and Worthington. Nine cities in Franklin County, including Gahanna, operate with a Mayor form of government. Ohio is known as a home rule state, which means that the local government has the authority to make their own rules. A city's ordinances cannot exceed the authority of state statutes. Cities have two options for how they can operate. One is called a Statutory City, and the other is a Charter City. Statutory Cities receive their guidance from the Ohio Revised Code with very specific rules around elected officials. Zimomra briefly mentioned a Commission form of government, which is very rare and would be difficult to provide even a single example of in Ohio.

Ms. Zimomra then highlighted differences between City Manager and Mayor forms of government. City Manager forms of government have a council that passes ordinances. The City Manager has no legislative authority. Rather, it implements the laws passed by the Council. They cannot act in conflict with the legislative body. City Managers are appointed by Council, not elected. Employee salaries are fixed by the legislative body for the City Manager to administer. Most cities must have contracts with their City Manager, and in the event of separation, a separation agreement. The City Manager is also typically responsible for signing contracts within a certain dollar limit. Zimomra referenced a recent study conducted by the National League of Cities that examined how local governance structures were changing, whether the size of City Councils was growing or contracting, and what changes were being made to the makeup of Councils regarding districts, wards, and at-large members. The Charter Review process can consider whether current practice continues to be best for the City, or whether changes should be made. The method of electing and appointing Mayors also varies

between cities in Ohio.

Chair Barnhardt offered Commission members the opportunity to ask questions.

Commissioner Mularski asked if, under the City Manager form of government, City Council members hold full-time roles, considering they control more of the government. Ms. Zimomra stated that very large cities, such as Cleveland, have full-time council members as well as their own staff.

Chair Barnhardt recalled that Ms. Zimomra had experience working on Charter Review Commissions. He asked if she could elaborate on some of the best practices she witnessed through her experiences. Ms. Zimomra explained that many cities look at other cities as examples of what they do or do not want to embody. It is also valuable to learn from the residents what is working and what is not working, and to consider where the city has opportunities to change and grow. Chair Barnhardt asked about best practices opportunities for Charter Commissions to engage with the public. Zimomra highlighted avenues such as podcasts, direct mailings, surveys, farmer's markets. She acknowledged that Charter changes are one of the most challenging areas to engage residents in.

Vice Chair Wester asked Ms. Zimomra if she could expand on her statement that trends are not showing Charter Commissions overhauling the foundation of the Charter, but are focused on best practices. Zimomra explained that she felt cities, especially post-pandemic, have more priorities than they have time and resources to handle. Officials then have to focus on the most high-priority areas identified.

Chair Barnhardt thanked Zimomra for her time.

3. Work Plan and Prioritization Framework

[2026-0043](#)

City of Gahanna Charter Review Commission Process Architecture - Draft Received via Chair Barnhardt

Chair Barnhardt introduced the agenda item regarding discussion of a proposed work plan and prioritization framework. He explained that he had prepared the draft framework as a starting point to guide the

commission's process moving forward. He noted the commission's tight timeline and limited in-person meeting opportunities and stated that a structured framework would help focus discussions on appropriate topics and support clear and defensible reasoning for any recommendations forwarded to City Council and the voters in November. He invited feedback, refinements, and general discussion from the commission.

Vice Chair Carrin Wester thanked Chair Barnhardt for preparing the framework and stated that she believed it looked good. She emphasized the importance of gathering input from elected officials, administration, and the public early in the process due to the tight timeline. She noted that if the commission chose to draft several amendments, work in May and June would likely focus heavily on the details of those amendments.

Commissioner Mularski asked how the prioritization matrix would apply to proposed amendments and whether the matrix would evaluate each proposal individually. Chair Barnhardt responded that he envisioned using the matrix primarily for substantive issues involving governance, authority, or elections. He explained that technical or housekeeping items, such as amendments required to comply with state law, would likely not require scoring and could proceed by agreement of the commission. He stated that the matrix would provide a structured way to explain and document why a proposal ranked as a priority, including considerations such as governance impact and feedback received through public engagement.

Commissioner Belisle asked how the commission envisioned gathering proposals during Phase Two of the process and how the group would address ideas as they emerged. Chair Barnhardt explained that the commission would gather ideas throughout the engagement process while hearing from the mayor and administration, City Council, and the public. After collecting those ideas, the commission would review the full list and begin prioritizing the potential charter amendments.

Commissioner Belisle asked whether discussion of specific proposals would occur later in the process. Chair Barnhardt responded that he generally preferred to wait until the commission had compiled a full list of ideas before prioritizing them, though commissioners could discuss concepts as they arose. He suggested the commission might narrow a larger list of ideas down to a smaller number of key priorities.

Commissioner Belisle stated that she agreed with that approach. Vice

Chair Carrin Wester also expressed agreement. She noted that she had reviewed minutes from the 2021 Charter Review Commission and observed that the commission had maintained a working draft of proposed amendments while gathering input. She suggested that commissioners introduce potential amendments along with their initial thoughts and set them aside while the commission continued to receive presentations and additional information.

Chair Barnhardt noted that Mr. VanMeter had already posted one submitted idea to the commission's online system and suggested that commissioners continue adding ideas there so that the group could maintain a running list of potential charter amendments.

Commissioner Edward Hill asked whether the prioritization matrix should include a category evaluating alignment with the City's strategic plan. Chair Barnhardt agreed that such alignment could serve as an additional consideration, noting that the strategic plan served as a key guiding document supported by recent public engagement. He stated that he could revise the framework to incorporate that element before the next meeting. Commissioner Belisle supported the suggestion and stated that alignment with the strategic plan could serve as an important factor when evaluating proposals. Chair Barnhardt stated that he would revise the draft to incorporate the strategic plan criteria and redistribute it before the next meeting. He suggested that the commission could consider adopting the framework as a guiding document once the revisions were complete. Commissioner Belisle asked whether the commission intended to vote on the framework immediately or after revisions. Chair Barnhardt responded that he preferred to bring the revised version to the next meeting for possible adoption.

City Attorney Tamilarasan asked whether the commission intended for each commissioner to score proposals individually using the rubric or whether the commission would complete the scoring collectively. Chair Barnhardt stated that he preferred individual scoring so that commissioners could reflect their differing perspectives. He suggested that the commission could then combine or average the scores to create a collective prioritization. Commissioner Dick Maxwell confirmed that the individual scoring would ultimately produce a collective result. Chair Barnhardt confirmed that understanding. City Attorney Tamilarasan stated that she and Mr. VanMeter could prepare scoring forms for the

commission if needed. She also reminded the commission that any documents created in that process would constitute public records and would need to be retained. Chair Barnhardt stated that he was comfortable with that approach if the rest of the commission agreed. Commissioner Belisle indicated that she had no issue with that. Vice Chair Wester then asked whether any commissioners had concerns about public records requirements or questions about how to manage those records. Commissioner Mularski responded that the commission should assume that everything constituted a public record. Chair Barnhardt agreed and stated that it served as a good rule. City Attorney Tamilarasan offered to answer any questions about public records, open meetings requirements, or transparency issues either during meetings or in individual discussions.

Commissioner Belisle suggested that commissioners submit proposed amendments directly to the shared drive or to the Clerk rather than through group emails in order to avoid reply-all responses. Chair Barnhardt agreed that reply-all email exchanges could create problems. City Attorney Tamilarasan supported that recommendation and explained that substantive discussions among a majority of commissioners through email could violate the Open Meetings Act. She recommended that commissioners submit proposals directly to Mr. VanMeter so that he could distribute them without email discussion among commissioners. Vice Chair Wester asked whether commissioners should submit proposals to the Clerk and then avoid discussing them at the next meeting. Chair Barnhardt explained that the commission would likely compile ideas first and then revisit them collectively after completing the primary information-gathering process. City Attorney Tamilarasan advised the commission not to focus on drafting detailed amendment language too early. She stated that commissioners could present conceptual ideas and identify problems they wished to address, and she could later draft formal language if the commission voted to proceed.

Commissioner Maxwell asked whether commissioners would score proposals individually using the rubric and then combine their scores to reach a collective prioritization. City Attorney Tamilarasan confirmed that commissioners could present proposals in various forms, including draft language, a redlined document, or a general concept that she could later translate into proposed charter language. Commissioner Mularski

remarked that attorneys often handled all aspects of drafting.

Chair Barnhardt asked whether the commission had any further discussion. Hearing none, he stated that he would revise the framework and return it to the commission at the next meeting for possible adoption. He thanked the commissioners for their feedback.

Commissioner Reynolds asked for clarification about how the commission would track submitted proposals and how members would review them. Chair Barnhardt stated that commissioners could review ideas as they appeared but should avoid substantive discussion until the commission had compiled a complete list. Commissioner Reynolds asked when the commission would have a full list available. Chair Barnhardt stated that he expected the commission to have a more complete list by the end of April or by the second meeting in April after hearing from most stakeholder groups. Commissioner Belisle confirmed that commissioners would be able to view proposals in real time on the shared drive. Chair Barnhardt confirmed that the commission would maintain a living library of ideas.

Clerk VanMeter explained that he had uploaded the proposal already submitted to the commission's online system, Legistar, where the public could access it by searching for the Charter Review Commission. He asked whether the commission preferred to maintain one running file containing all proposals or separate files for each submission. Chair Barnhardt stated that he preferred a structure that allowed the commission to easily view individual potential amendments but acknowledged that a single running file could also work if necessary. City Attorney Tamilarasan recommended maintaining individual files for each proposal so that the commission could track when each submission arrived and avoid accidentally omitting information when updating a single document. Clerk VanMeter stated that he would follow up outside the meeting to determine the most appropriate logistical approach. Chair Barnhardt indicated that maintaining individual files likely represented the easiest solution. The City Attorney agreed, and both indicated they would discuss the matter further to determine the most practical arrangement.

4. Commissioner Discussion on Current City of Gahanna Charter

[2026-0028](#)

Charter Review Commission Onboarding Materials

Chair Barnhardt introduced the agenda item regarding commissioner discussion of the current City of Gahanna Charter. He explained that the item had appeared on the previous meeting's agenda and the commission had chosen to bring it back for discussion. He stated that he wanted to provide each commissioner an opportunity to share thoughts or updates that had emerged during their review of the charter and described the discussion as an initial opportunity to begin gathering ideas for consideration. He invited Commissioner Hill to begin.

Commissioner Hill stated that he found the 28-page document interesting and explained that the presentations and discussions earlier in the meeting had influenced his thinking. He said he intended to reread the charter in light of those discussions. He noted that he had identified several areas that warranted additional review, including language related to public safety, specifically fire and police, as well as wording concerning diversity and inclusion. He stated that some of the language might benefit from additional clarity and said he would like another opportunity to review the charter with the context provided during the meeting. Chair Barnhardt thanked Commissioner Hill and agreed that allowing additional time for review and reflection could prove valuable.

Commissioner Reynolds said that she appreciated the earlier presentations about the City of Bexley and the information provided by Judy Zimomra regarding how other charter commissions operate. She explained that she initially focused primarily on reviewing Gahanna's charter internally but now planned to examine how other communities approached charter amendments, including examples such as Bexley and Denver. She expressed interest in how other cities incorporated community feedback into charter processes and stated that she intended to review the charter again through that perspective because community impact represented an area of particular interest to her.

Commissioner Maxwell stated that he had read the charter thoroughly but felt that he lacked sufficient context to identify potential changes. He said that he preferred to hear from individuals working within city government to understand what aspects of the charter might hinder or limit operations and what changes might benefit the city. He added that the document appeared well written overall and indicated that he would wait to hear input from additional stakeholders before forming stronger opinions.

Commissioner Belisle stated that she agreed with many of the points already raised. She explained that her initial review reflected her own experiences and perspective but noted that additional information presented during the meeting had already influenced her thinking. She stated that she intended to consider the charter again after hearing more public feedback and additional presentations and indicated that her initial impressions from a first reading carried less weight at this stage in the process.

Commissioner Mularski stated that he generally agreed with the observations already shared. He recommended that commissioners communicate any specific concerns, particularly those related to public safety, to the administration so that appropriate officials could respond. He suggested that commissioners submit questions to the Clerk of Council so that the Clerk could forward them to the appropriate department leaders, such as the Chief of Police, to provide additional information. Chair Barnhardt agreed with that suggestion and stated that if potential charter changes affected public safety operations, the commission should invite appropriate officials to provide additional context regarding operational impacts.

Vice Chair Wester stated that she agreed with the general observations shared by the commission and expected additional ideas to emerge as the process continued. She noted that she supported a suggestion previously raised by Commissioner Mularski regarding the mayoral primary. She explained that conducting a primary election when only two candidates appeared on the ballot cost the city money and indicated that eliminating that situation could make sense. Vice Chair Wester also stated that she reviewed the charter for inconsistencies and identified residency requirements for elected offices as a potential outlier. She explained that the mayor must reside in the city for two years before the filing deadline, council members must meet a fifteen-month residency requirement before the election, and the city attorney must reside in the city only at the time of filing. She suggested that the commission might consider whether those requirements should become more consistent. Vice Chair Wester also noted that the city attorney section referenced political parties and political party offices twice. She stated that she did not approach the section with any bias but observed that the language appeared unusual compared to other sections of the charter and requested additional context regarding its purpose.

Chair Barnhardt responded that he had also noted the residency inconsistencies involving the mayor, council, and city attorney positions during his review of the charter. He explained that he compared Gahanna's provisions with those in other peer communities and found greater consistency in those charters. He stated that the commission could add the issue to its list of potential items for consideration. Vice Chair Wester stated that she would submit her observations in writing to the Clerk of Council. Chair Barnhardt expressed support for that approach. He also noted another item from his review involving the charter requirement that the organizational meeting occur on January 2 unless that date fell on a Sunday. He observed that the language did not address situations where January 2 fell on a Saturday. City Attorney Priya Tamilarasan noted that under that provision the meeting would occur on a Saturday. Chair Barnhardt stated that the language could benefit from additional flexibility so that city officials would not need to hold an organizational meeting on a Saturday if the date fell on a weekend. He suggested that adjusting the language could simplify scheduling and reduce logistical challenges. Chair Barnhardt thanked the commissioners for their comments and acknowledged the time they spent reviewing the charter. He stated that he appreciated their participation and input.

5. Upcoming Meeting Calendar Updates

Chair Barnhardt reviewed the upcoming meeting schedule and noted that stakeholder engagement remained an important part of the commission's process. He stated that the mayor and her administration would attend the March 12 meeting and that City Council would likely attend the April 9 meeting. He noted that this schedule left the March 26 meeting open and asked commissioners to suggest potential invitees or ways to use that meeting for additional engagement.

Vice Chair Wester suggested offering the City's legal department an opportunity to present. City Attorney Tamilarasan responded that, as an ex-officio non-voting member of the commission, she could contribute as issues arose and did not require a dedicated presentation. She suggested inviting members of other City boards and commissions that appear in the charter, noting that they could offer useful insight regarding their roles. She added that the commission could invite those groups with

sufficient advance notice. Vice Chair Wester agreed with that suggestion. Chair Barnhardt asked Clerk VanMeter to help coordinate outreach to the various boards and commissions to determine who might attend the March 26 meeting. Clerk VanMeter indicated that he would assist.

Commissioner Hill asked whether the commission had decided whether members could participate virtually if they could not attend in person. City Attorney Tamilarasan stated that the commission met the statutory requirements to establish a virtual participation policy because members did not receive compensation and did not hold elected positions. However, she explained that the current building might lack the logistical capacity to support that arrangement. She suggested that the commission could consider the option after moving to the new building but noted that it did not appear feasible at the present location. Chair Barnhardt asked whether the new building might provide the necessary technological capability. City Attorney Tamilarasan stated that hybrid meetings might become possible and deferred to Kevin Schultz for additional information. Senior Director of Operations Kevin Schultz explained that the City's current system supported live streaming but did not necessarily support video conferencing within the Council Chambers. He stated that conference rooms in the new facility would support video conferencing, but the Council Chambers setup might present similar challenges as the current room. He added that video conferencing capability and live streaming required different technologies. He stated that he would follow up to determine whether the new Council Chambers could support that functionality beginning with the May meeting. Commissioner Hill clarified that he raised the question only to ensure clarity and did not advocate for virtual participation. Chair Barnhardt thanked him for raising the question and noted that the commission had discussed the issue at the previous meeting.

Vice Chair Wester asked whether the commission could extend an invitation to City Councilmembers to attend the March 26 meeting if they remained available. She stated that the idea arose during the February 16 Council meeting and explained that she preferred to maximize engagement opportunities during March. Chair Barnhardt stated that he supported extending that invitation and said that Councilmembers could attend either the March 26 or April 9, 2026 meeting. He noted that the arrangement could help distribute discussion across both meetings.

Commissioner Mularski asked whether anyone would attend the March 12 meeting. Chair Barnhardt confirmed that Mayor Jadwin and her administration would attend. Mayor Jadwin noted that if City Council attended the April 9 meeting, the March 26 date could still present scheduling challenges due to the upcoming move to the new facility and other related activities.

City Attorney Tamilarasan asked a question about the meeting calendar. She observed that the proposed calendar scheduled meetings on the second and fourth Thursdays during the first several months but shifted to the first and third Thursdays beginning in May. She asked whether that change occurred intentionally. Vice Chair Wester responded that she did not believe the change had been intentional. City Attorney Tamilarasan asked whether the commission intended to maintain the second and fourth Thursday schedule. Commissioner Reynolds stated that the potential move scheduled for the April 23, 2026, meeting might have influenced earlier planning. City Attorney Tamilarasan noted that the commission had since resolved that issue. Mayor Jadwin confirmed that the commission could still meet on April 23rd. City Attorney Tamilarasan asked whether the commission intended to schedule meetings on May 14 and May 28. Clerk VanMeter stated that the commission had already approved the May 7 and May 21 meeting dates during the organizational meeting. He explained that those dates were proposed to avoid the final week of May due to Memorial Day and expected travel and vacation schedules. Chair Barnhardt stated that the approved calendar and meeting invitations remained acceptable as scheduled. Commissioner Dick Maxwell confirmed that the meetings occurred every two weeks.

F. UNFINISHED BUSINESS.

1. Public Engagement Process Discussion

Chair Barnhardt followed up on the public engagement process. He explained that the commission had previously considered forming a subcommittee to develop public engagement ideas but, after consulting with the City Attorney, chose instead to conduct the discussion in an open meeting. He noted that the City's Communications Director attended the meeting to assist with questions and invited commissioners who had previously discussed engagement ideas to share their thoughts.

Vice Chair Wester stated that she agreed with comments previously made by Judith Zimomra regarding the balance between encouraging public engagement and ensuring that the public had sufficient information to provide meaningful feedback. Drawing on her background in public communication, she said that the commission first needed to determine what type of information it sought from residents and how best to obtain it. She emphasized that the most important immediate objective involved ensuring that residents knew about the commission's meetings. She noted that the City's communications team had already done an effective job promoting meetings and explained that meetings streamed live and appeared on the City's YouTube channel. She stated that the commission should continue focusing on public awareness until the commission identified specific amendments or topics that required input.

Commissioner Hill agreed with Vice Chair Wester's comments and suggested that the commission engage the public during existing community events such as festivals and farmers markets. He stated that the strategic planning process had successfully used that approach and recommended that the commission mirror those outreach efforts while ensuring that commissioners had sufficient information available to inform residents.

Commissioner Karen Reynolds stated that the discussion felt somewhat early in the process but said that she learned more during each meeting. She emphasized the importance of educating residents about the charter and how the City of Gahanna operates before requesting detailed feedback. She explained that informing residents about the charter would help avoid situations in which the commission received complaints or suggestions outside the commission's authority. She suggested using a survey to gauge whether residents understood the charter and to invite input about potential improvements without overwhelming the public.

Commissioner Belisle stated that she had not prepared detailed comments but questioned whether a survey asking residents if they understood the charter would provide meaningful information. She stated that most residents likely did not know the charter's contents. She cautioned against overwhelming residents with multiple surveys and suggested that the commission continue refining its approach over the next several meetings as the process became clearer.

Commissioner Hill added that he had observed outreach methods that could prove effective. He described one approach as information displays for the public to interface with details of what was being collected so people could see the phases. The other approach was direct outreach, where organizers contacted individuals or groups directly to gather feedback.

Commissioner Maxwell stated that the commission primarily needed to ensure that residents knew when and how meetings occurred. He said that residents who cared about the issues would find ways to participate if the commission made meetings accessible.

Commissioner Mularski stated that residents needed clear information about meeting times, locations, and participation opportunities. He said that residents should know that they could attend meetings and provide comments. He explained that the commission should ask residents whether they wanted to propose charter changes but should not ask the public to evaluate each individual amendment. He noted that voters would ultimately decide on charter amendments at the ballot box. He then deferred to Miranda Vollmer for additional input regarding communications.

Chair Barnhardt stated that the charter review process might appear opaque to the public and suggested creating a stronger call to action. He proposed producing a short video explaining the charter review process, the meeting schedule, and ways residents could participate. He suggested that a video message might engage residents more effectively than written posts.

Commissioner Hill added that residents often became interested in government when they received clear invitations to participate. He stated that the commission should focus on informing residents about the charter review process and establishing simple and accessible ways for them to engage. He then invited Miranda Vollmer to provide guidance.

Miranda Vollmer, Senior Director of Administrative Services, explained that she attended on behalf of the City's communications team and Mayor Jadwin to offer suggestions. She described how the communications team already promoted upcoming events each week

through social media posts that highlighted meetings scheduled for the following week. She stated that the team could create additional posts specifically reminding residents about charter review meetings and highlighting meeting topics. She also explained that the team could promote opportunities for residents to submit video comments and could include reminders in the City's monthly newsletter. She noted that the team could also highlight specific charter topics scheduled for discussion so that residents who cared about particular issues would know when to attend. She stated that the communications team could explore the possibility of producing a video explaining the commission's work and introducing the commissioners.

Vice Chair Wester thanked Senior Director Vollmer and stated that some charter amendments might involve technical or administrative updates that would not generate public interest. She explained that amendments with a high public impact, such as those affecting transparency, accountability, or resident rights, would likely generate greater engagement. She suggested highlighting those topics to encourage meaningful public participation.

Chair Barnhardt summarized the discussion by stating that the commission would likely use a combination of communication strategies. He stated that the commission should remain attentive to new opportunities for outreach and should continue encouraging public participation.

Commissioner Belisle suggested that commissioners identify several community leaders within their networks and personally invite them to attend meetings. She stated that those individuals could then share information within their own networks, helping to expand awareness through grassroots outreach.

Chair Barnhardt agreed and noted that the Our Gahanna strategic plan process had relied heavily on network outreach by steering committee members. He stated that he would personally invite five individuals to attend upcoming meetings and encouraged similar outreach from other commissioners.

G. CORRESPONDENCE AND ACTIONS.

None.

H. **POLL MEMBERS FOR COMMENT.**

None.

I. **ADJOURNMENT.**

With no further business before the Charter Review Commission, Chair Barnhardt declared the meeting adjourned at 8:15 p.m.

Jeremy A. VanMeter
Clerk of Council

*APPROVED by the Charter Review, this
day of 2026.*

Ethan Barnhardt